UNIVERSITY OF EXETER

Graduate School of Education

Psychology of college higher education student persistence: A mixed methods exploration of the role of personal tutors during COVID-19 campus closures

Doctoral thesis

Isabel Hallam
12-10-2022

Psychology of college higher education student persistence: A mixed methods exploration of the role of personal tutors during COVID-19 campus closures

Submitted by Isabel Caroline Hallam, to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education, [October 2022].

This thesis is available for Library use on the understanding that it is copyright material and that no quotation from the thesis may be published without proper acknowledgement.

I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that any material that has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University has been acknowledged.

(Signature) ……   …………………………………………

Abstract

Non-traditional students are more likely to withdraw from their studies without completing an undergraduate qualification than their peers. This research explores the utility of Tinto's (2017b) psychological model of student persistence to explain non-traditional students' persistence at a college higher education provider in the southwest of England, the University Centre. Further, the research investigated the role of personal tutors in fostering persistence during the COVID-19 campus closures. This mixed methods study consisted of 13 longitudinal focus groups with ten college higher education students during the first campus closures between April and October 2020, and an online survey to determine the generalisability of the focus group findings regarding student experience, persistence and tutorial to a wider student population (n=64) during the second campus closure between December 2020 and May 2021. The research found that the nature of college higher education students, typically being mature students, parents, working alongside their studies and from non-academic backgrounds, gave them a determination and resilience to persist with their studies during the COVID-19 campus closures. Students felt they mattered to their personal tutors and other University Centre staff, this mattering grew within relationship-rich tutorial practices and helped students to persist. What is more, whether a student had a weekly tutorial was the only significant factor predicting those who contemplated withdrawal and those that did not during the academic year. Students' goals were initially present-orientated and student-focused to finish their studies, but with growing self-efficacy and exposure to future possibilities during their studies, students began to develop different possible-selves for their future. Recognising the limitations of the case study approach, this research recommends college higher education providers foster students' persistence by recognising the role of their pasts, presents and futures, and giving staff, particularly personal tutors, time and space to develop rich relationships with their tutees so students recognise they matter.

Table of contents

List of tables

List of figures

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to my supervisory team of Professors Anna Mountford-Zimdars and Chris Boyle, and Dr Shirley Larkin. They have demonstrated relentless belief in me and my research from the start, giving me freedom to explore ideas and guidance to keep me on track. Anna's enthusiasm and encouragement enabled me to grow in confidence as a researcher and writer, thank you.

As a practitioner researcher I am grateful to my employer, the University Centre, for firstly co-funding my doctoral studies but also affording me the freedom and space to research a topic that was, at times, contentious. I extend my deepest gratitude to my participants, especially the ten students who gave their time and honesty during the focus groups, without whom none of this would have been possible. Individual thanks go to my line managers Alastair Wilson and Anna Neale for their support both in practical terms, but also for checking-in on me, allowing me to bore them about my research, and reminding me that I need to take a break occasionally. Thanks go to my PhD-buddies at the University Centre, Alison Milner, Sam Smith and Katy Joy, we have ranted and raved about our research in equal measure and step over the finishing line almost together.

And of course, my family. Dan's unwavering support, everything from feigning interest as I once again mutter aloud about which statistic to use or how to write about a particular theory, to his practical support with the children and house because I am constantly either working or PhD-ing has made this whole thing possible. To Felix, Jasper and Edie, I have not been the most present parent these last few years. You have tolerated me always at my computer but hopefully you have seen that dedication and persistence are positive qualities. An honourable mention also goes to Sniff, my office-dog, faithfully sitting in her bed under my desk, waiting for me to finish a section before she gets a walk. Special thanks go to my parents, you instilled a determination and passion for social justice in me, and I've come a long way from the dyslexic and reluctant teenager, thank you. We can now all spend more time together.

Isabel Hallam

1. Introduction

This research initially set out to appreciate the role of personal tutoring in fostering college higher education students' persistence with their studies. However, as primary data collection got underway, the UK was disrupted by the coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic. With higher education (HE) campuses closing nationwide and transitioning to online learning, academics were raising concerns about students' persistence, continuation and retention (Husbands & Day, 2020). I took a pragmatic decision to re-orientate the research to take account of the COVID-19 pandemic and campus closures by exploring student persistence during this period.

In early 2020, the spread of the coronavirus COVID-19 began to have repercussions for higher education providers in the UK. In the first two weeks of March, in accordance with Government guidance students with flu-like symptoms began to self-isolate and not attend lectures. Many higher education providers announced plans to close their campuses and pivot learning from in-person toward online or remote teaching from Monday 16 March (Office for Students, 2020e). On 18 March, the UK Government announced that schools and colleges would close to all learners accept vulnerable children and young people, and children of key workers. Tighter restrictions were introduced from Friday 20 March including the closing of bars and restaurants and restricting all non-essential travel (Embury-Dennis, 2020). Over the next two years, higher education providers followed Government guidance to be either teaching in-person, online or using hybrid methods during campus closures, with a second national campus closure from 1 December 2020 until mid-May 2021. This research explores the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on college higher education students' persistence, and the role of personal tutoring in fostering that persistence.

The Association of Colleges (AoC) report that there are 165 UK further education (FE) colleges registered as higher education providers with the Office for Students, teaching approximately 140,000 higher education students (AoC, 2019, p. 9). This sector of higher education provision is referred to as college

HE by the AoC (2018, p. 1) and this term will be used throughout this thesis, but some literature uses the terms college-based HE or HE in FE. Unlike most universities, 62% of college higher education providers have less than 500 students (AoC, 2018, p. 2) and often a higher percentage of non-traditional students and those from underrepresented groups, such as students with disabilities and those from low participation in higher education neighbourhoods (AoC, 2018, p. 16). As Brewster (2016, p. 118) notes non-traditional higher education students are concentrated in less-prestigious newer higher education providers which emphasise teaching, such as college higher education. This combination of factors creates a unique teaching and learning environment within college higher education for those professionals working with and supporting students.

I am an academic and professional services practitioner at the University Centre, the college higher education provider which is the subject of this organisational case study. I have a multi-faceted role as a psychology and education lecturer, personal tutor and programme leader, and a member of the University Centre leadership team responsible for student development, personal tutoring and wider teaching, learning and assessment projects. The University Centre has over 700 students undertaking Level 4, 5 and 6 undergraduate studies in a broad range of cognate areas. Most programmes are Foundation Degrees, but there are also Bachelor's degrees, certificates and diplomas in higher education, and a growing number of higher and degree apprenticeships. Over 56% of the University Centre's students are from the two lowest HE participation neighbourhoods (POLAR quintiles) which is an indication of deprivation, 67% are over 21 years old, 24% have a disability (Office for Students, 2022), and 99% are commuter students (▮▮▮▮, 2021b). In 2017, the University Centre was awarded Gold in the Teaching Excellence and Students Outcomes Framework (TEF), however, according to 2020 organisational metrics, there were wide disparities in student satisfaction, continuation and attainment across the 35 undergraduate programmes. Student satisfaction rates in the 2020 National Student Survey ranged from 51.72% to 100% across programmes with a mean of 82.58%. Ahead of the subject level TEF that was due to commence in 2019/20, there was an organisational

Isabel Hallam

emphasis on understanding the disparities between programmes. Focusing on the student continuation metric, this research sought to explore one aspect that could have been contributing to these disparities, the role of personal tutoring in college HE.

Tinto (2017b) observes that 'the prevailing view of student [continuation and] retention has been shaped by theories that view student retention through the lens of institution action'. This prevailing view tends to reflect a sociological understanding of student retention, as will be demonstrated within the review of the continuation and persistence literature. However, building on Tinto's (2017b) model of student persistence which sought to address in the imbalance in theories and research related to student retention by laying out a conceptual model of student persistence as seen through 'the eyes of students', this thesis will focus on a psychological understanding of student persistence. My focus on the psychological understanding of persistence, does not intend to shift blame or responsibility for students' continuation to the student. Instead, it extends Tinto's (2017b) proposition that by better understanding students' psychology of persistence, higher education providers can further promote students' persistence behaviours by supporting their sense of belonging, self-efficacy, perception of the curriculum, goals and motivation. Thus, throughout this thesis, emphasis will be placed on the psychological understanding of conceptions discussed. Primarily using a psychological lens to explore the field of student persistence does not negate the value of differing perspectives including a sociological lens, it simply provides a framework and boundaries for this thesis and research investigation.

1.1   College Higher Education

Parry (2012) proposes that college higher education (HE) is poorly understood "by ministers, civil servants, journalists or the rest of us" (p. 118), with Esmond (2012) observing that college HE is on the boundary of, or 'outside', higher education. Parry (2012) contends this poor understanding of college HE is partly due to the relatively small numbers, with just one in 12 higher education students studying at a college, the range and levels of programmes offered in

college HE, and the relative importance placed on higher education within colleges that are predominantly focused on pre-tertiary further education courses.

The Further and Higher Education Act 1992 established a unitary sector of HE, with a single funding structure and quality assurance framework for technical colleges, art and teacher training colleges, polytechnics and universities (Parry & Thompson, 2002). The Act also extended degree awarding powers to polytechnics and some other HE providers, allowing them to adopt university titles. Since 1992 there has been a rapid expansion and diversification of higher education in the UK, including the introduction in 2001 of Foundation Degrees which are vocationally orientated two-year programmes, frequently taught in further education colleges and validated by universities (Esmond, 2012). 59% of all Foundation Degrees are taught in college HE and 82% of Higher National Certificates (HNCs) and Diplomas (HNDs) (AoC, 2019, p. 10). These changes to higher education in the UK have taken place in parallel to the widening participation agenda initiated by the Dearing Report, National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (Dearing, 1997).

Over the last thirty years, higher education in the United Kingdom has undergone a transformation in the number, diversity and academic orientation of undergraduate students through widening participation policies (Williams, Wray, Farrall & Aspland, 2014). Accepted applications through the universities admissions system have risen from 271,000 in 1994 to 533,000 in 2018 (Bolton, 2018). Widening participation initially referred to the access and participation of HE students from disadvantaged backgrounds, however over the years the concept has come to embrace students from other underrepresented groups (Brewster, 2016). Thompson (2017) considers that the longstanding widening participation agenda now has an emphasis on social mobility, as illustrated by the United Kingdom Government's Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) 2015 Green Paper plans to "drive social mobility by further increasing higher education participation by those from disadvantaged and under-represented groups" (BIS, 2015, p. 8).

Today, higher education providers are not just assessed on who is able to access higher education, but also the outcomes of students' studies. Teaching focused metrics include the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF) which considers information about students' entry qualifications and characteristics, and their continuation of studies, degree attainment, progression into employment, and satisfaction (Office for Students, 2020g). Thus, although continuation data, which represents the collective results of students' individual decisions to persist, is the focus of this investigation, it is just one student outcome metric that high education providers are measured against. Alongside metrics for a provider's entire student body, the TEF also considers the differential outcomes for students from demographic groups, those that the Office for Students consider to be underrepresented as part of providers' Access and Participation Plans (Office for Students, 2018a).

In 2018, the Office for Students clarified which students were considered as from underrepresented groups. Underrepresented students are those who share the following characteristics that data shows have gaps in equality of opportunity in relation to access, success and/or progression: students from areas of low HE participation, low household income or low socioeconomic status; Black, Asian and minority ethnic students; mature students; disabled students; and care experienced students and those who are care leavers (Office for Students, 2018a). In the University Centre that is the case study organisation of this research, 90% of students are from at least one underrepresented group, which is broadly representative of our diverse local population (███, 2019).

Blythman, Orr, Hampton, McLaughlin and Waterworth (2006) explain that diverse student populations, and particularly those from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, arrive in HE with differing understandings and alignments to HE providers' processes. I would argue these differing understandings and alignments to HE processes create problems for all college HE students. College HE students rarely take traditional routes into HE, many have been out of formal education for ten or twenty years, are the first in their family to undertake tertiary education, or they need considerable study or mental health

support to enrol and remain on programme (Thomas, 2015). Additionally, Quinn et al. (2005) recognised that there was a wide spectrum and complex interplay of reasons why 'working-class students' leave their course before completion. Obviously, not all underrepresented students would identify themselves as 'working-class' but there may be some cross-over between these student groups. Thus, college HE students are likely to arrive at their HE provider without a strong idea of what to expect or an understanding of processes involved in HE study, nor the knowledge and skills to start studying at that level, thereby influencing their capacity to persist with and complete their studies.

1.2   Persistence

Student persistence can be described as the "quality that allows someone to continue in pursuit of a goal even when challenges arise" (Tinto, 2017a, p. 2). It is the student-centred equivalent of the higher education provider-centred concepts of *retention* and *continuation* (Mortenson, 2012, p. 35).
Thomas (2011) explains that in the UK, student retention has a narrow definition of completion rates, those students who continue with their course until they obtain their qualification with no more than one year away from their studies. In contrast, continuation is the measure of whether a student is still enrolled at the same provider, has completed their programme of study or has enrolled at a different higher education provider one year and 14 days after they have started their studies (Office for Students, 2020c). UK higher education providers' student non-continuation rates ranged from 0% to 32.3% in 2019/20 (HESA, 2022). Due to the financial, reputational and social mobility implications of non-continuation, once higher education providers have enrolled students, their priority shifts to reducing non-continuation and withdrawal, and boosting retention (McKendry, Wright & Stevenson, 2014; Reason, 2009; Rose-Adams & Hewitt, 2012; Thomas, 2011).

In contrast to the UK's focus on higher education providers improving student retention, in the United States attention is on students' persistence to complete their programmes of study (Troxel, 2010). Mortenson (2012, p. 35) acknowledges the terms retention and persistence are often used

synonymously but distinguishes between them by saying retention is an "institutional perspective" yet persistence is a "student-initiated decision". Bean and Eaton (2001, p. 73) summarise that institutional "retention rates are the collective results of individual decisions" to persist. Literature on student retention and persistence seeks to understand the complex interplay between students' backgrounds, skills and dispositions, and the support initiatives put in place by higher education providers to enable students to complete their undergraduate studies (Troxel, 2010). Bean and Eaton (2001) report most student retention research explores sociological conceptions, including social capital (Fearon, Nachmias, McLauglin & Jackson, 2018; Smith & Lucena, 2016) and social identification (Wilkins, Butt, Kratochvil & Balakrishnan, 2016). However, drawing on a model of student persistence presented by Tinto (2017b), the current research primarily focuses on students' psychological dispositions of persistence, motivation, goal orientation, self-efficacy, belonging and perceptions of the curriculum, and how personal tutors can foster persistence in their tutees.

Defining persistence, Tinto (2017a) notes that it can be another way of talking about motivation and is the "quality that allows someone to continue in pursuit of a goal even when challenges arise" (Tinto, 2017a, p. 2). Models of student persistence acknowledge the interaction of factors that impact on a student's capacity to persist with their studies to completion. Tinto's 2017 model simplifies earlier models that incorporate college communities (Tinto, 1997), institutional environments (Bean & Eaton, 2001), peer environments (Reason, 2009) and learning opportunities (Graham, Frederick, Byars-Winston, Hunter & Handelsman, 2013), by taking a student-centred view of persistence. Tinto (2017a) explains that when faced with challenges in their studies, students must want to persist, yet motivational desire to persist is malleable. Recognising that students' individual experiences can enhance or diminish motivation, Tinto (2017b) proposes a model of student motivation and persistence representing the interaction of goals, self-efficacy, belonging and the perceived worth or relevance of the curriculum (Figure 1).
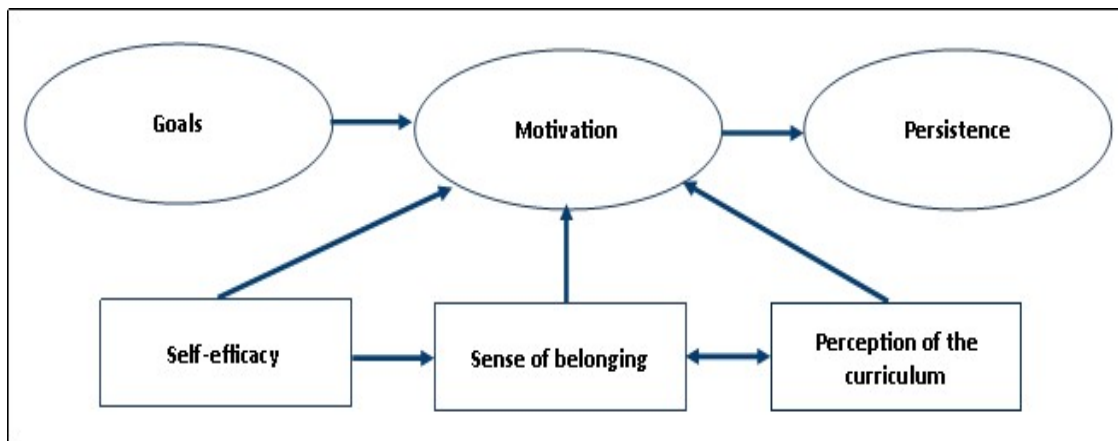
Figure 1. A model of student motivation and persistence adapted from Tinto (2017b).

Capps (2012) explored the experiences of 28 adults studying at a community college in the US regarding the personal and organisational factors influencing their persistence. Participants who persisted credited their personal or spiritual responsibility, or supportive family members, and frequently mentioned teachers or advisors who had deeply affected their decision-making regarding whether to continue with their studies. When asked about their relationship with advisors, participants had mixed experiences. Some made a strong personal connection with their advisor and benefited personally and academically from the interactions. However, those students that were unable to persist often cited job loss, failing health or relationship break-down as the causes (Capps, 2012). Some who had left college explained that the dismissive attitudes of some advisors, who appeared to not care or have time, contributed to their reasoning for leaving. Interestingly, Capps (2012) reports that students who expressed responsibility for their own persistence, expected less from advisors. Capps (2012) is particularly pertinent to the current research investigating UK college higher education students' persistence, due to the similarly diverse student populations in US community colleges and the focus on advising. However, it should be noted that the term *advisor* is ambiguous when transferred to a UK context. It could refer to a personal tutor with a greater remit for academic outcomes than pastorally focused personal tutors, or be more akin to a professional services study support role. Capps (2012) does not make clear the responsibilities of the advisors referred to by the participants in their interviews but alludes to this more professional services role.

Isabel Hallam

Tinto's (2017b) model of motivation and persistence highlights the importance of goals, self-efficacy, sense of belonging and perception of the curriculum as contributing factors. Theory and research underpinning each of these factors will be discussed in relation to diverse college higher education student populations and the support HE providers can offer to foster persistence. I am conscious of the absence from Tinto's (2017b) model of the psychological and educational constructs of resilience, grit and engagement. There is evidence to support the association between student persistence and resilience (Hartley, 2011; Simons, Beaumont & Holland, 2018), grit (Flanagan & Einarson, 2017; Muenks, Wigfield, Yang & O'Neal, 2017) and engagement (Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie & Gonyea, 2008; Skinner, Pitzer & Steele, 2016). Although not included in Tinto's (2017b) model, their relationship to student persistence is explored in this thesis.

1.3   Personal tutoring

Research (Calabrese et al., 2022; Thomas, 2012; Thomas, Hill, O'Mahony & Yorke, 2017) and UK policy (Office for Students, 2018b) continues to advocate the importance of personal tutoring in higher education in the UK to enhance the student experience and increase student retention. However, the diversity of personal tutoring provision between, and within, higher education providers creates challenges for evaluating evidence, provision and outcomes.

Higher education personal tutoring systems were originally devised as a means of acting in *loco parentis* for students who were not legally adults, but tutoring has evolved over the years towards centralised, professionalised and personalised support (Grant, 2006, p. 12). Earwaker (1992) and Owen (2002) describe three models of tutorial support: the pastoral model - traditionally referred to as the Oxbridge model - with tutors assigned to students for the duration of their course to guide them on pastoral and moral issues as well as give academic support; the professional model which advocates the immediate referral of students to professional counsellors, housing officers, disability advisors and other professional advisors; and the curriculum model. The curriculum model aims to "provide support through the actual course that

students follow. Helping and supporting students then appears not as some extra-curricular activity for which time has to be found, but as a normal part of the course" (Earwaker, 1992, p. 115).

The model of personal tutoring used in the case study University Centre is one of integrated personal tutoring which combines the three recognised models of personal tutoring (Earwaker, 1992; Owen, 2002). The integrated model deploys personal tutors to support individual students, with academic tutoring embedded in programme structures, and additional support from professional services teams (Thomas, 2006, p. 27). As such, personal tutoring is timetabled as part of the curriculum and delivered by academic staff, and students are also supported by the study, wellbeing, disability and employability professional services teams based in the Student Support Hub. The integrated model of personal tutoring (Thomas, 2006, p. 27) relies on academic staff to act as both pastoral and academic tutors to groups of students.

In the University Centre, due to programme cohort sizes, generally one academic member of staff acts as personal tutor for an entire cohort. Their role is to deliver the centralised tutorial curriculum in their weekly timetabled session, provide individual pastoral and academic tutoring to students within the timetabled session and at other mutually convenient times, and liaise with the Student Support Hub to refer and support student for professional support. Being a personal tutor is often seen as a 'bolt-on' role carried out by the programme leader or other academic members of staff, rather than a separate professional role with distinct values and skills (Lochtie, McIntosh, Stork & Walker, 2018, p. 48). Walker (2020a) calls for a professionalisation of personal tutoring, with the widespread use and promotion of professional standards which emphasise the relevant skills, competencies and behaviours. In the UK, a professional framework is overseen by UK Advising and Tutoring (UKAT, 2019) and seeks to address the fundamental tensions and contradictions within personal tutoring in contemporary higher education (Walker, 2020a).

One of my roles at the University Centre is to lead this integrated tutorial programme, including managing the Student Support Hub. I achieved UKAT

Recognised Senior Advisor within the professional standards framework in 2020 in recognition of my organisational leadership of tutorial provision in the University Centre. I remain the only college HE practitioner to receive the Senior Advisor standard, perhaps illustrating the lack of capacity, importance or visibility of personal tutoring in college HE. Through this research, I will investigate the experiences of college higher education students persisting with their studies during COVID, and the role of personal tutors in fostering that persistence, and subsequently be able to implement evidence-informed organisational change to the integrated personal tutoring model to support students' persistence with their studies.

1.4   COVID-19 campus closures

Most UK higher education providers transitioned their in-person teaching to online learning from Monday 16 March in response to the COVID-19 pandemic (Office for Students, 2020e). For many teaching and lecturing staff, pivoting learning to online delivery will have involved becoming familiar with new computer packages, adapting their pedagogical approach, reviewing formative and summative assessment plans, and continuing to support their students' learning and pastoral needs (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2020). At the same time staff were also setting up their working-from-home space, and potentially home-schooling children, caring for sick loved ones and taking care of their own physical and mental health (Flaherty, 2020; Mercer & Kythreotis, 2020).

At the University Centre, our pivot to online learning using MS Teams was swift during the first campus closure in Spring 2020, but how this was implemented varied across curriculum department. Research by Pearson and Wonkhe (2020) in June/July 2020 with university students in England and Wales identified 34% of respondents found learning online challenging, 35% struggled with managing their own time in the absence of campus timetables, and 29% felt isolated.

1.5   Aims

This two-phase mixed methods research aimed to explore the utility of Tinto's (2017b) psychological model of persistence for UK college higher education students, and to enable personal tutors at the University Centre to adopt tutoring practices that foster persistence in our college HE students. Thereby improving the outcomes for students in terms of their continuation to completion of their studies and grades achieved.

Using an appreciative inquiry lens, I sought to appreciate the psychological aspects of students' persistence and the role of personal tutoring in fostering persistence during the COVID-19 campus closures. By doing so, I aimed to celebrate positive tutoring practice and motivate colleagues who are personal tutors to adopt practices that students have reported as contributing to their ability to persist with their studies when challenges arise.

1.6   Objectives

To achieve these aims the research has five specific objectives:

1. To synthesise the psychology of student persistence and higher education personal tutoring theory and research literature to inform the methodological approach and data collection tools.
2. To collect rich qualitative data through longitudinal online focus groups with undergraduate student participants during the first COVID-19 campus closures in mid-2020.
3. To analyse the qualitative data to identify themes related to the psychology of persistence and the role of the personal tutor.
4. To use the themes identified to develop an online survey to test the generalisability of those themes to the wider college HE student population following the second national campus closure in May/June 2021.
5. To synthesise the findings from the focus groups and survey with previous theory and literature to make recommendations to the University Centre about tutoring practices that contribute to college HE students' persistence.

2. Review of the literature

In the academic year 2018/19, the symbolic target of 50% of young people participating in UK higher education, originally posited by Prime Minister Tony Blair in 1999, was reached (Department for Education, 2019a). In 2018/9, 50.2% of young people aged 17-30 years entered higher education, the single biggest group were 18-year-olds with 28.7% starting undergraduate study. This headline grabbing statistic has been heralded as a success for widening participation initiatives that have prompted increased enrolment of disadvantaged students (Coughlan, 2019; Kershaw, 2019). However, there has been little press coverage about the numbers of students who leave higher education before they are able to complete their undergraduate qualifications.

Thomas and Quinn (2006, p. 21) identified 20 different terms used to refer to students staying in and completing their higher education studies within an acceptable timeframe, and those who do not. Some of the terms place responsibility on the student, for example, 'persistence', 'withdrawal' and 'student success', while others are more organisationally focused including 'graduation rates' and 'retention'. Further definitions imply blame, such as 'drop out' or 'failure', and others, including 'student mobility' or 'stop out', indicated an element of choice. Thomas (2011) explains that in the UK, the commonly used term student 'retention', and its opposite 'attrition', have narrow definitions regarding completion rates, those students who continue studying until they obtain their qualification with no more than one year away from their studies. Adding to this definition, Webb and Cotton (2018) explain that retention usually refers to a student staying at one provider for their entire undergraduate studies. The broader term 'continuation' encompasses students completing their studies at their initial provider, or having studied at multiple providers, with no more than one year away (Webb & Cotton, 2018). This broader continuation definition encompassing participation at multiple higher education providers is used in the official statistics compiled by the Office for Students (OfS) and Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) for continuation metrics, or continuation's opposite measure, 'non-continuation'. UK higher education providers' student non-continuation rates range from 0% to 62.9%. The mean non-continuation rate for

young students, aged under 21 at the start of their course, on a first degree is 6.8% and 15.7% on other undergraduate programmes, however 13.6% of mature students on a first degree and 15.4% on other undergraduate programmes are unable to continue with their studies to completion of their courses (HESA, 2020). Thomas (2012) observes that students are most likely to consider leaving higher education during the first year of their studies, particularly in the first semester and after Christmas. Those who consider leaving cite at least one of these common reasons for leaving: academic issues, feelings of isolation and/or not fitting in, and feeling that they will not be able to achieve their future aims and aspirations (Thomas, 2012).

The Office for Students (OfS) was established in January 2018 as an independent regulator and competition authority for the higher education sector in England. The OfS has four primary student objectives concerning participation, experience, outcome and value for money (OfS, 2019d). The outcome objectives include considerations of student continuation rates, and in 2019 the OfS demonstrated that they have regulatory powers related to poor continuation rates by refusing registration to five providers. The registration refusal reasons cited for four of the five providers included Condition B3: Quality, whereby the Office for Students:

> 'takes the view that the college's continuation rate data (evidencing the number of students who continue from the first into the second year of study) shows that the college has failed to demonstrate that it delivers successful outcomes for all of its higher education students' (OfS, 2019c).

The refusal of OfS registration for providers with poor continuation rates has highlighted the increased organisational risks of students who withdraw from their studies before completing their courses. Before the OfS regulatory powers to refuse registration were exercised, continuation rates were a provider level problem with associated financial risks – a student who does not continue with their course is a student who is not paying their tuition fees. There were added reputational and social mobility implications (Rose-Adams & Hewitt, 2012; McKendry, Wright & Stevenson, 2014; Reason, 2009; Thomas, 2011), but the

financial consequences dominated for teaching-focused providers, including college higher education, whose main source of income is student tuition fees (Webb & Cotton, 2018).

The University Centre within this organisational case study currently has a continuation rate of 83%, and an associated non-continuation rate of 17% (OfS, 2020a). Using the University Centre's Access and Participation Plan (███, 2019) data to examine the continuation rates for different disadvantaged groups at the University Centre between 2016-2018 demonstrates that contrary to national trends: students from deprived areas have higher continuation rates than those from more affluent areas (84.7% compared to 82%); and younger students have 82.7% continuation compared to 84% for mature students. However, disabled students have considerably lower continuation rates, 84%, at the University Centre than their non-disabled peers, 90%. This disability continuation gap of -6pp is considerably larger than the national disability continuation gap of -0.9pp. There were low numbers of students from a Black and minority ethnic background therefore there is no continuation data disaggregated by ethnicity. Due to the OfS's focus on continuation rates, the University Centre put in place plans to improve continuation for all students, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, including an enhanced tutorial commitment (███, 2019).

I will utilise the definition of continuation used by the Office for Students and the Higher Education Statistics Agency during this thesis and apply it to the concept of student persistence. Thus, I am considering that continuation is an expression of students' ability to persist with their studies to the completion of their course, at their original provider or another, with no more than one year away from their studies. To apply the conception of continuation to the persistence of students in a UK college higher education provider it is first necessary to explore the theoretical and research context that has preceded our current understanding of these ideas.

2.1   Student continuation and persistence

Higher education providers and researchers have been intent on finding the answers to how and why students withdraw from their studies, and conversely what enables students to continue, for decades. The language used to describe students who withdraw from their studies changed during this period reflecting the prevailing theory and social attitudes. For consistency, during this section I will use the term 'continuation" for students who remain at their initial or a subsequent higher education provider until they complete their studies and 'withdrawal' to describe the actions of students leaving higher education, whether or not they complete their qualification at a later date and/or at another higher education provider, unless referring to specific terminology used in research and theoretical literature.

Tinto (2006) reports that when the issue of student withdrawal first garnered attention in the 1960s it was typically considered from a psychological perspective, with an individual student's continuation or withdrawal seen as reflecting their own attributes, skills and motivation. They paraphrase this period's theory and research as "students fail, not institutions" (Tinto, 2006, p. 2). The notion of blaming the student for their perceived failing is reinforced in Tight's (2019) observation that students withdrawing from their studies may have been considered mentally ill, as depicted in Ryle's (1969, p. 14-15) seminal text 'Student Casualties'. I would argue that this emphasis on the individual's failings has parallels to the medical or deficit model applied to our societal understanding and approach to disability at the time. The medical or deficit model of disability problematises the student's failing within that individual, often pathologising it (Madriaga & Goodley, 2010). To counter this individual deficit approach to understanding student withdrawal from higher education, theoretical models explaining student withdrawal were proposed in the 1970s from a sociological perspective, most notably from American researchers William Spady and Vincent Tinto.

The sociological perspective situates the issue of student continuation and withdrawal within a societal and organisational realm, the basic tenet being that a student's withdrawal results from a mismatch between the higher education

provider's academic and social environments, and the student. This shifting of emphasis towards the higher education provider, implies that if the provider makes changes to their academic and social environment, they can affect changes in student continuation and withdrawals. Despite this sociological approach, the language used at the time continued to suggest a deficit approach as the models presented by Spady (1970) and Tinto (1975) both seek to explain 'student dropout'.

Spady (1970) initially distinguishes between those who withdraw from the higher education provider they initially enrolled at and complete their degree at another provider, and those who withdraw and never complete their degree. Tinto (1993, p. 8) uses the terms 'institutional departure' and 'system departure' respectively to distinguish between these two withdrawals. This distinction has traditionally been more central to the US higher education sector due to their two-year associate and four-year bachelor's degree programmes, whereby students regularly move to a second provider for their final two years to complete their bachelor's degree (Melguizo, Kienzl & Alfonso, 2011). However, moving to a different higher education provider and transferring academic credits, institutional departure, does occasionally occur in the UK. Rose-Adams and Hewitt (2012) refer to this phenomenon as 'hidden retention', as the initial provider is not always aware of the student's enrolment and completion of their studies at a second or subsequent provider, so may assume system departure. In the UK this data is now collated by the Higher Education Statistics Agency and incorporated into the Office for Student's current definition of continuation, so although the provider might not know the outcome of withdrawals for individual students, they will receive data reflecting the whole student body.

Reviewing research literature regarding student withdrawal undertaken in the 1950s and 1960s, Spady (1970) observes that research studies rarely distinguished between voluntary withdrawals and those who have been asked or directed to withdraw by the higher education provider. In the research considered by Spady (1970) directed withdrawals occurred in highly selective US higher education providers who asked students to leave if they were not achieving a high enough grade-point-average (GPA). In today's neoliberal market-driven UK higher education sector, directed withdrawals usually only occur when a student breaches the provider's code of conduct in their learning

or social behaviour, or because they have not achieved enough academic credits to progress onto the next year of study. However, Jevons and Lindsay (2018) observed that students at a business school in a research-intensive university in Australia who were excluded from university due to their consistent record of academic failure, often cited a range of reasons for their poor academic progress in their appeals. The most common reasons students cited for their poor academic progress were the need to work, physical and mental health difficulties, financial problems, family and/or relationship challenges, and wider financial disadvantage. Jevons and Lindsay (2018) contrast their findings of internal or personal reasons for poor progress leading to the university excluding the student, with the 'person-environment fit' explanations of voluntary withdrawal highlighted by Willcoxson (2010). This research suggests that although directed withdrawals or exclusions from university are often considered in the research as different from voluntary withdrawals, the underpinning reasons might be more similar than often portrayed.

Acknowledging the difficulties in categorising students who withdraw but pursue their studies at another time or provider, and those who withdraw voluntarily or are asked to leave, Spady (1970) reviewed research literature from the 1950s and 1960s to present a model of student dropout. He observed that the prior research literature lacked "theoretical and empirical coherence" (Spady, 1970, p. 64), suggesting the need to move beyond describing withdrawals from higher education toward a conceptual understanding that assumes withdrawal involves an interaction between the individual student and their higher education environment. The sociological model of the dropout process presented by Spady (1970) is based on Durkheim's (1951) 'social integration' account of the social nature of suicide (Figure 2).
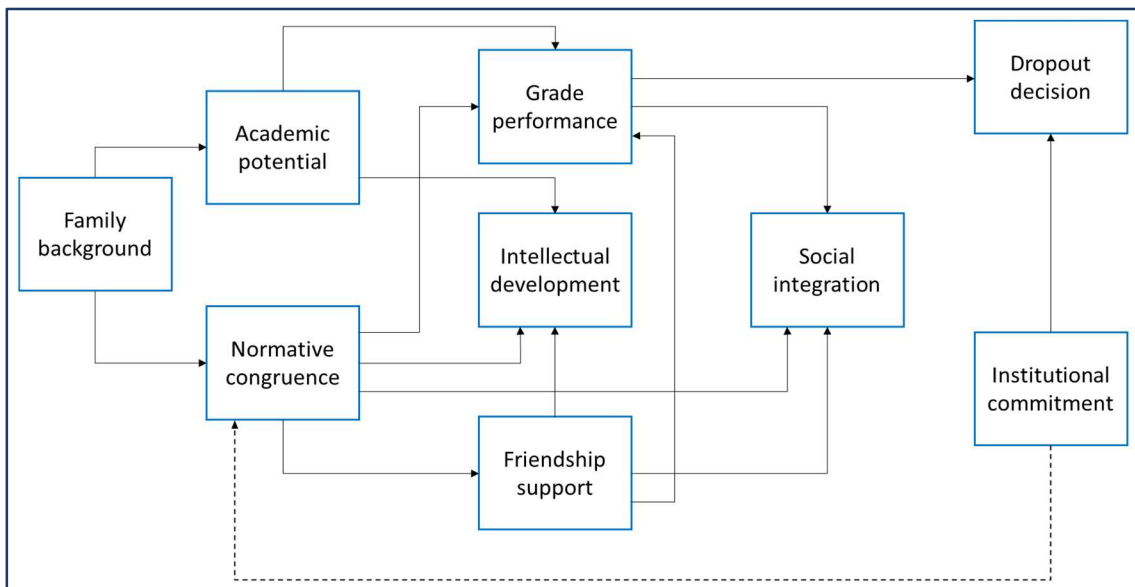
Figure 2. An explanatory sociological model of the student dropout process adapted from Spady (1970).

Spady (1970) explains that the student's socioeconomic and academic family background are known to influence the student's chance of successful completion of their undergraduate studies. However, the interactions between the student and their higher education environments results in the student's own disposition, attitudes, interests and skills being exposed to demands from their academic lecturers, professional services staff and student peers, and that these interactions further influence a student's continuation or withdrawal. Spady (1970) suggests that the interactions give students an opportunity to assimilate into the academic and social systems of their higher education provider. However, they caution that if the rewards of such assimilation appear insufficient, the student may withdraw. Spady (1970) observed that assimilation into the higher education system creates 'normative congruence', and this can be facilitated by 'friendship support'. More contemporary research reiterates the value of friendship for supporting students to persist with their courses (Bowles & Brindle, 2017; Castles, 2004; Kember, 1999), but not necessarily friendship's role in the assimilation into higher education that Spady (1970) calls normative congruence. Noting that normative congruence and friendship support resemble the social components of Durkheim's (1951) suicide thesis, Spady (1970) applies this thesis to student dropout.

Spady (1970) proposes the impact of normative congruence and friendship support is mediated by satisfaction with the higher education experience, which is reflected in grade performance, and commitment to the social system of the higher education provider (institutional commitment). Together, these four variables of normative congruence, friendship support, satisfaction with the experience and commitment to the provider, influence social integration. According to Durkheim's (1951) suicide thesis insufficient social integration increases the likelihood of suicide, thus when applied to student continuation, it suggests that social integration is key to the decision as to whether to continue or withdraw from studying. What is more, Spady (1970) theorises that the four variables that contribute to higher education social integration are influenced by consistent and intimate interaction with others, holding values and orientations reflecting the social collective, and compatibility to the immediate social system of the higher education provider.

Spady (1970) intended the model to synthesise some of the consistent research findings from the 1950s and 1960s. However, Spady (1970) observes there are some studies' findings that cannot be accounted for using the model. He notes that the model fails to account for Gurin et al.'s (1968, cited in Spady, 1970) findings that family and cultural background influence academic potential and normative congruence. Further, Spady (1970) recognises that the concept of normative congruence is nebulous and difficult to operationalise, in that it incorporates a student's goals, orientations, interests and personality dispositions, as well as the consequences of interactions between these student attributes and the social environment of the higher education provider.

The model of student dropout presented by Spady in 1970 was the first theoretical interpretation and explanation of student continuation and withdrawal. Tight (2019) believes Spady's (1970) work has influenced almost every exploration of the topic since, but it has not been without its critics. Tinto (1975) credits Spady (1970) with having first applied Durkheim's (1951) suicide theory to student withdrawal but observes that as a descriptive model it has its limitations in terms of predicting which students will consider withdrawing. These predictions would enable the higher education provider, the student and their support network to put interventions in place to enable the student to continue with their studies towards achieving their qualification. Tinto (1975)

embraces Spady's (1970) use of Durkheim's suicide analogy and attempts to modify it using work from social psychology to create a predictive theory of dropout based on cost-benefit analysis.

Tight (2019) observes that although Spady's (1970) and Tinto's (1975) application of Durkheim's suicide thesis to student continuation and withdrawal maybe considered odd, others have also applied models reflecting finality to the topic. For example, McLaughlin, Brozovsky, and McLaughlin (1998) used Elizabeth Kubler-Ross' 1969 research on death and dying to describe the changing perspectives higher education providers, academics and professional services staff have regarding continuation at an organisational level, and Bean (1980) compare student continuation with organisational employee turnover using a causal model developed by Price (1977, cited in Bean, 1980).

I would contend that the finality of these suicide, death and employee turnover analogies is inappropriate in the contemporary UK higher education sector. Students are occasionally encouraged to take a break in learning or suspension in studies to support their health and well-being, and others make a pragmatic decision to do so themselves. Rose-Adams and Hewitt (2012) interviewed 17 Open University students who had withdrawn from their studies, they concluded there was little evidence of crisis, anxiety or negativity about their decision, as all had rational and pragmatic reasonings for leaving. The positive reasons given included to take up employment, undertake non-undergraduate learning, or to care for themselves or another. The finality analogies are also challenged by Rose-Adams and Hewitt's (2012) findings that ten of the 17 who had withdrawn had already returned to higher education or intended to do so in the future. Six of the 17 participants had in fact re-enrolled at another higher education provider to continue their undergraduate studies, most citing the desire to have in-person teaching as opposed to the distance learning offered at the Open University. Rose-Adams and Hewitt (2012) refer to this as 'hidden retention', as these six students would show on the Open University's records as having withdrawn but be recorded by the Higher Education Statistics Agency and the Office for Students as having continued, assuming they resumed their studies within a year. However, the generalisation of Rose-Adams and Hewitt's (2012) research to the wider higher education sector is weakened by the Open University curriculum which is designed as modular study whereby academic

credits can be 'banked' in contrast to enrolling on a typical undergraduate programme at other providers. This banking of academic credits and modules facilitates transfer to another higher education provider using the accreditation of prior learning scheme with greater ease than most curriculum designs (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education [QAA], 2004).

Where I believe the finality analogies of suicide (Spady, 1970; Tinto, 1975), death and dying (McLaughlin, Brozovsky & McLaughlin, 1998) and employee turnover (Bean, 1980) do have some merit in the current UK higher education sector relates to student finance arrangements. Regulations introduced in 2012 mean that students are eligible for student finance for their tuition fees and potentially a maintenance loan for the duration of their course plus one extra year, unless they already hold a higher education qualification (Gov.uk, 2019d). This effectively means individuals get one chance at higher education in England, they are unlikely to be able to withdraw mid-way through a course and receive a full tuition fees loan for an alternative course later. Thus, although ten of Rose-Adams and Hewitt's (2012) participants intended to re-enrol in higher education later they may have found that student finance regulations prevented this, and their higher education journey would have come to an end without them able to complete their desired qualification.

Although Tinto (1975) draws on Spady's (1970) application of Durkheim's suicide analogy, his own schema of student dropout emphasises the interaction between the student and their environment, seeking to explain why dropout decisions differ between individuals (Figure 3). Tinto (1975) accentuates the importance the student's individual attributes and pre-college schooling, as well as the family background that Spady (1970) includes. Furthermore, Tinto (1975) makes a clear link between social integration and commitment to a higher education provider (institutional commitment), recognising that this integration is based on social and academic interaction. They stress that a student's goal and institutional commitment are continuously modified by the longitudinal interaction process between themselves and the academic and social systems of their higher education provider.
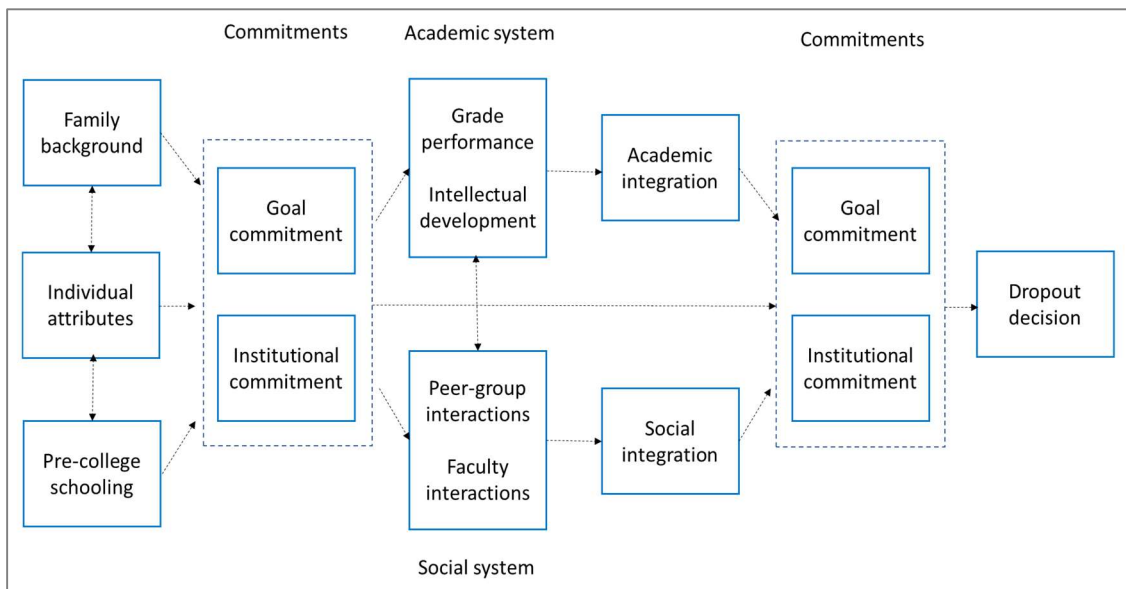
Figure 3. A conceptual schema for dropout from college adapted from Tinto (1975).

Tinto (1975) proposes that the final stage of their conceptual schema, the dropout decision, is based on a cost-benefit analysis. Thus, the student will decide to withdraw if they perceive the direct and indirect costs of staying in higher education in terms of time, finances, dissatisfaction, and academic failures will be outweighed by the benefits of leaving. This cost-benefit analysis accounts for a range of external forces that may affect a person's decision to stay in higher education. Bowles and Brindle's (2017) systematic review of journal articles related to student continuation and withdrawal published since 1999 revealed a range of factors that could be utilised in students' cost-benefit analysis.

Based on the work of Cross (1981, p.99), Bowles and Brindle (2017) categorises these continuation and withdrawal factors into situational, dispositional and institutional, each factor could be a facilitator (benefit) or barrier (cost) in Tinto's (1975) cost-benefit analysis. Situational factors included financial, interpersonal and personal; dispositional factors included demographics, student behaviour, goal achievement, social engagement, personality, and lifestyle and habits; and institutional factors included characteristics of the institution, institutional staff, availability of support and services. Aljohani (2016) conducted a similar review of research on student retention, giving narrower categories for withdrawal reasons, which can be

incorporated into Bowles and Brindle's (2017) categories: situational - the student-provider fit; dispositional - the students' academic abilities, the students' integration into the provider's academic and social systems, and their educational and occupational goals and commitments; and institutional - institutions' policies and rules.

None of the models of student persistence address in detail the temporal aspect of withdrawal across undergraduate study. Tinto (2006) observes that the concept of integration presented in models is critical in the first year of study, and practical interventions stemming from persistence models often focuses on improving the first-year experience. However, the phenomenon referred to in the literature as the sophomore or second-year slump is rarely addressed in the theoretical models. The phrase 'sophomore slump', implies sophomores in the US college system, or second year UK undergraduates, are likely to struggle with motivation in their studies. As long ago as 1956, Mervin Freedman was challenging the term. Freedman (1956) observed there was not much evidence for the much-touted 'sophomore slump', however it persists today and there is evidence to support its utility. Yorke (2015), reviewing 7000 module marks at a UK higher education provider, found that 32% of students received a mark of 60% or above in the second year, compared to 36% in the first year and 46% in the final year. The data observed by Yorke (2015), is supported by research from Loughlin, Gregory, Harrison and Lodge (2013) and Willcoxson (2010). They suggest that students' grades do slump in the second year of study, in tandem with their engagement and motivation, and this has implications for their persistence and withdrawal from their studies. Webb and Cotton (2019) contend that there are a range of inter-related influences on second-year students, not all of them negative. Broadly speaking, second year students have a deepening social integration and more positive perceptions of their teachers but found their courses less enjoyable and contemplated withdrawal more (Webb & Cotton, 2019).

Reviews of literature by Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie and Gonyea (2008), Aljohani (2016) and Bowles and Brindle (2017) all emphasise the student integration, social engagement and interpersonal factors as key factors in the continuation or withdraw decision-making process. This reflects the theory and research shift in the 1980s and 1990s, when emphasis moved to understanding the impact of

student integration, involvement and engagement on continuation and withdrawal. Key theorists and researchers in this period were John Bean and colleagues and Alexander Astin.

2.2   Student integration, involvement and engagement

In 1982 John Bean developed a 'causal model of student attrition' based on Prince's (1977, cited in Bean, 1982) employee turnover model. Bean's later work with colleagues explores the continuation and withdrawal of non-traditional students (Bean & Metzner, 1985) and the psychology of student retention (Bean & Eaton, 2000, 2001). What is common about Bean and colleagues' work is the shift from the sociological focus of Spady (1970) and Tinto (1975), back to a psychological perspective. Bean and Eaton (2000) observe that the sociological grounding of Spady and Tinto's models emphasising the social and academic systems within which students make decisions about continuing or withdrawing widely influenced researchers in the field. However, the subsequent research in the 1970s and 1980s only gave a 'tangential role" to psychological theory (Bean & Eaton, 2000, p. 48).

Bean and Eaton's (2000) assumption, in the application of psychological thinking to student continuation and withdrawal, is that leaving higher education is a behaviour and that behaviour is psychologically motivated. Working backwards from the behaviour of leaving, a psychological perspective holds that the outcome of leaving is preceded by actions, and actions are preceded by cognitive processes, which are processes influenced by and influencing oneself. Bean and Eaton (2000) present a psychological model of college student retention (Figure 4) that recognises the students' characteristics, the interactions within the environment, and the psychological processes, psychological outcomes and intermediate outcomes for the student which influence their attitudes, intentions and ultimately their behaviour. Specifically, Bean and Eaton (2000) cite attitude-behaviour theory (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) as central to their model's approach to understanding the processes that lead to behaviour change. Although Fishbein and Ajzen have since worked independently and jointly to develop their 1975 model, the core element of attitudes, which they describe as "a person's disposition to respond favorably or

unfavorably with respect to a psychological object, … concept or behavior"
(Fishbein & Ajzen, 2011, p. 77-78) remain.
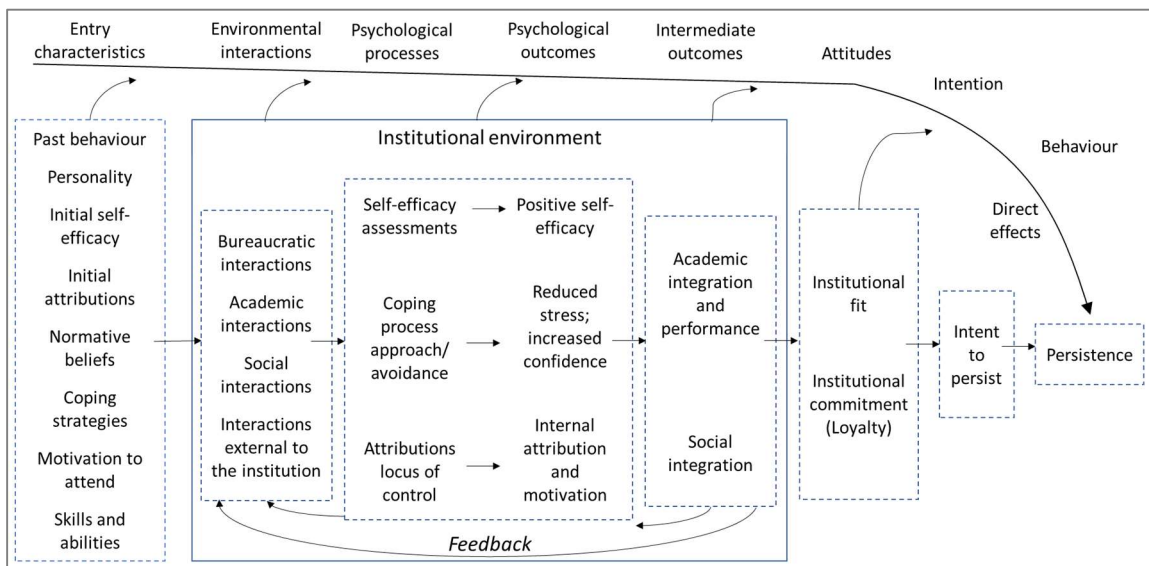
Figure 4. A psychological model of college student retention adapted from Bean and Eaton (2000)

Bean and Eaton (2000) develop Tinto's (1975) conception of social and
academic integration, explaining that the notion of "goodness of fit" (French,
Rogers & Cobb, 1974, p. 316, cited in Bean & Eaton, 2000) can be applied to
the self-assessments in the academic and social environment, the assessment
of that environment, and the adjustments needed to achieve goodness of fit.
Bean and Eaton (2000) also evaluate the usefulness of several other
psychological conceptions in understanding student continuation and
withdrawal in their presentation of the psychological model of college student
retention including: the approach/avoidance model of coping (Eaton & Bean,
1995), self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1986, 1998); attribution theory (Weiner,
1986).

Whilst Bandura's self-efficacy theory and Weiner's attribution theory will be
discussed later, it is useful to expand on Eaton and Bean's (1985)
approach/avoidance model of coping as this relates directly to withdrawal
behaviours. Eaton and Bean (1995) explain that coping is adaptive behaviour
used to deal with life's challenges, and approach and avoidance are contrasting
behaviours used to manage stressors within the environment. They contend

that adapting to higher education is a stressful yet important activity, indeed both Tinto (1975, 1993) and Bean and colleagues (1982, 1985) have incorporated aspects of adaptation into the social and academic integration aspects of their models. Using confirmatory factor analysis on data gathered from a questionnaire of 262 undergraduate students in the US, Eaton and Bean (1995) demonstrated that certain approach/avoidance variables had statistically significant effects on academic and social integration, and indirect effects on student attrition. Thus, they concluded that approach/avoidance constructs were beneficial for explaining variance in integration, intent to continue or withdraw, and attrition in their model. The nature of the sample in this study challenges its validity due to the self-selecting sampling approach which likely reduces the number of avoidance-coping students. Further, the validity and reliability of self-report questionnaire to collate data on psychological constructs such as approach/avoidance behaviour can be weakened unless measures are taken to mitigate response bias, socially desirable answering of questions and whether the participants have the insight to accurately portray their situation (Dodorico-McDonald, 2008). Although this final issue is accounted for in that Eaton and Bean (1995) were seeking students' perceptions of their own behaviour, rather than an accurate portrayal of it.

In 1984, Alexander Astin presented a higher education developmental theory of student involvement. Astin (1984) refers to student involvement as "the amount of physical and psychological energy that a student devotes to the academic experience" (1984, p. 297). They draw parallels between their conception of involvement to the Freudian notion of 'cathexis', in which people invest psychological energy in objects and people other than themselves, such as families, friends, studying or their job (Astin, 1984). Reflecting Bean and colleagues' (1982, 1985, 2002) emphasis on the importance of the actual behaviours related to involvement in higher education, Astin (1984) presents three pedagogical theories that relate to student involvement: subject-matter, resource and individualised theory.

Astin (1984, p. 520) explains that subject-matter theory necessitates students to be exposed to the "right subject matter" to be involved, learn and develop. They imply a correlation between those lecturers with the greatest knowledge and scholarly expertise, and pedagogical ability. Astin (1984) observes that the

subject-matter theory assumes the student has a passive role, favouring highly motivated students who are avid readers and good listeners. This passive role in learning reflects classical conditioning within behaviourist theories, in which the teacher "knows and gives" and the student absorbs without questioning (Romyn, 2001, p. 2). Astin (1984) explains that resource theory posits that when adequate resources are brought together, learning and development takes place. They suggest this is often applied in discussions about student-teacher ratios, with the notion that the lower the ratio, the greater the learning. Astin (1984) contrasts this with their final discussion about individualised theory. According to individualised theory, no single approach to subject matter, teaching or resources is appropriate for all students, rather the individual needs of students are best met by flexibility and borrowing what is useful from other pedagogical approaches to meet individual needs. Astin (1984) observes this individualised or eclectic theory is adopted in most student advising environments and in self-paced instruction. In practice, individualised learning is very expensive and logistically difficult to implement in higher education subject curricula but can be useful in student support or advising and personal tutoring.

Drawing on subject-matter, resource and individualised theories to explain student involvement, Astin (1984) asserts that involvement requires a curriculum that elicits sufficient effort from students to learn, thus they suggest that student involvement resembles motivation. Motivation is commonly understood from a dualistic perspective of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, with intrinsic motivation defined as "doing something for its own sake" whereas extrinsic motivation is in the pursuit of an instrumental goal (Reiss, 2012, p. 152). Ryan and Deci (2000b, p. 70) explain that the construct of intrinsic motivation relates to the "natural inclination toward assimilation, mastery, spontaneous interest, and exploration that is so essential to cognitive and social development". Individualised pedagogical theory is promoted in Astin's (1984) conception of involvement as motivation. The emphasis on the active participation of students in the learning process and need to elicit sufficient student effort to bring about learning alludes to intrinsic motivation. Astin (1984) uses the term involvement because they believe it reflects the behavioural mechanisms and processes that facilitate student development, rather than the more abstract psychological construct of motivation. More recent literature has

developed Astin's (1984) involvement conception and considered whether the term 'engagement' is more appropriate.

Skinner, Pitzer and Steele (2016, p. 2100) describes classroom learning engagement as "students' constructive, enthusiastic, cognitively focused participation in learning activities" that contribute to their learning experience and performance. Skinner, Pitzer and Steele (2016) observe that engagement in learning of this type can be a marker of academic motivation and a protective factor against negative academic outcomes. They cite a range of studies from the 2000s which demonstrate benefits to behavioural, emotional and/or cognitive engagement in terms of academic outcomes. One of these studies, Green et al. (2012) was a longitudinal study of 1,866 high school students in Australia to test the self-system model of motivational development proposed by Skinner, Furrer, Marchand and Kinderman (2008) and Skinner, Kindermann, Connell and Wellborn (2009). The model posits that there is a dynamic relationship between an individual experience of context, self, engagement and outcomes. Green et al. (2012) discovered that attitudes towards school positively predicted class participation and the completion of homework, and was negatively associated with absenteeism. Further, class participation and homework completion positively predicted performance in tests whereas absenteeism negatively predicted performance in tests. Skinner, Pitzer and Steele (2016) concluded that the studies conducted by Green et al. (2012) and others demonstrated that not only was engagement a predictor of academic attainment but also withdrawal from studies. Skinner, Pitzer and Steele (2016) used their findings to present a model of motivational resilience (Figure 5).
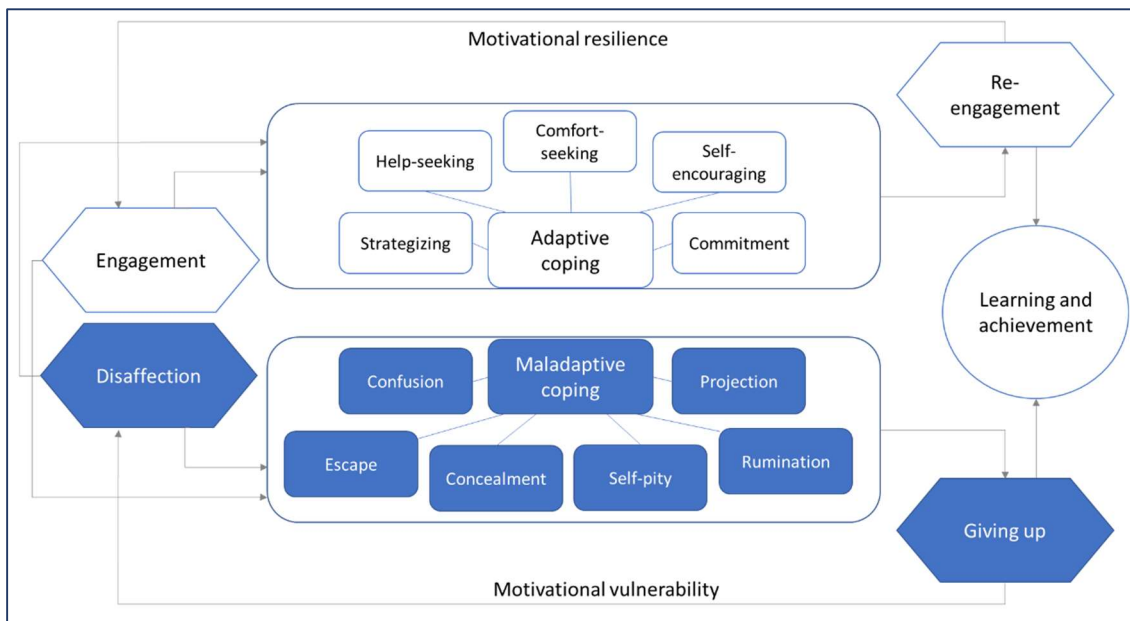
Figure 5. A model of motivational resilience adapted from Skinner, Pitzer and Steele (2016).

The process model that Skinner, Pitzer and Steele (2016) presented proposes that engagement might act as a protective coping factor for students, and that their adaptive or maladaptive coping strategies for dealing with academic stress can shape their persistence and re-engagement with learning. To test the model, Skinner, Pitzer and Steele (2016) conducted a longitudinal study with 880 late elementary and early middle school pupils and their teachers in the US, in contrast to Green et al.'s (2012) study with high school students. This potentially challenges the generalisability of Skinner, Pitzer and Steele's (2016) model to higher education students due to their different cognitive developmental stages. However, Skinner, Pitzer and Steele (2016) found that the model was a good fit to the self-report data from both children and their teachers indicating that it was profiles of coping strategies, adaptive or maladaptive, rather than individual ways of coping that were central to engagement and persistence.

Together and separately Nick Zepke and Linda Leach have researched higher education student engagement (Zepke, 2015; Zepke & Leach, 2005, 2010; Leach & Zepke, 2011) and implemented interventions to enhance engagement (Leach, 2016). Zepke and Leach (2010, p. 168) use definitions of engagement as "students' cognitive investment in, active participation in and emotional commitment to their learning" and "students' involvement with activities and

conditions likely to generate high quality learning". Their review of student engagement literature proposes ten actions to improve student engagement in higher education: enhance student's self-belief; enable students to work autonomously, enjoy learning relationships with others and feel they are competent to achieve their own objectives; recognise that teaching and teachers are central to engagement; create learning that is active, collaborative and fosters learning relationships; create educational experiences for students that are challenging, enriching and extend their academic abilities; ensure institutional cultures are welcoming to students from diverse backgrounds; invest in a variety of support services; adapt to changing student expectations enable student to become active citizens; and enable students to develop their social and cultural capital (Zepke & Leach, 2010). There is commonality between some of Zepke and Leach's (2010) proposals for student engagement actions and factors influencing students' decision to withdraw (Bowles & Brindle, 2017; Boyd & McKendry, 2012; Camara-Zapata & Morales, 2019; Cameron, Roxburgh, Taylor & Lauder, 2011; Masika & Jones, 2016; McKendry, Wright & Stevenson, 2014; Richardson & Randloff, 2014; Skinner, Pitzer & Steele, 2016; Tight, 2019; Webb & Cotton, 2018).

The commonalities between Zepke and Leach's (2010) proposals for improved student engagement and the student continuation and withdrawal literature focus on five themes: students' self-belief and self-efficacy; active, cooperative and collaborative learning; the relationship between students and academic staff; support for students; and inclusive welcoming learning environments. These five themes in turn have cross-over with the psychological conceptions of persistence that are present in the final model to be discussed in this review of the literature, and the model that will form the theoretical framework of the current research, Tinto's (2017b) model of motivation and student persistence.

2.3   Psychological conceptions of student persistence

The final model of student continuation and withdrawal I will describe, analyse and apply to the UK higher education sector is Tinto's (2017b) model of student motivation and persistence. This model forms the theoretical structure of this

thesis as it provides a student-centred analysis of the psychological conceptions involved in student persistence.

Zepke and Leach (2005) observe that Tinto's (1975) original model of student dropout has been revised several times but the integrative intent of those revisions by Cabrera, Castaneda, Nora and Hengstler (1992) and Braxton (2000) remained. They argue that these revisions still imply that the student is to assimilate to the higher education provider rather than the provider changing to accommodate diverse student populations (Zepke & Leach, 2005). In contrast, Tinto's own 2017 model takes a student-centred view of persistence, simplifying earlier models that sought to incorporate college communities (Tinto, 1997), institutional environments (Bean & Eaton, 2001), peer environments (Reason, 2009) and learning opportunities (Graham, Frederick, Byars-Winston, Hunter & Handelsman, 2013).

Defining persistence, Tinto (2017a) notes that it can be another way of talking about motivation and is the "quality that allows someone to continue in pursuit of a goal even when challenges arise" (Tinto, 2017a, p. 2). They explain that the motivational desire to persist is malleable and mediated by a student's individual experiences (Tinto, 2017a). Tinto's (2017b) model posits that a student's self-efficacy, sense of belonging and perception of the curriculum they are studying interact with each other and motivation, and motivation itself is further influenced by a student's goals. These factors in turn influence the student's capacity to persist with their studies (see Figure 6).

Tinto (2017b) observes that the model presented is not intended to elucidate a full model of student motivation and persistence, rather they intend to shift the focus to individual student's persistence and thus prompt higher education providers to consider how they promote student persistence to enable a greater number to achieve their goals of completing higher education study.
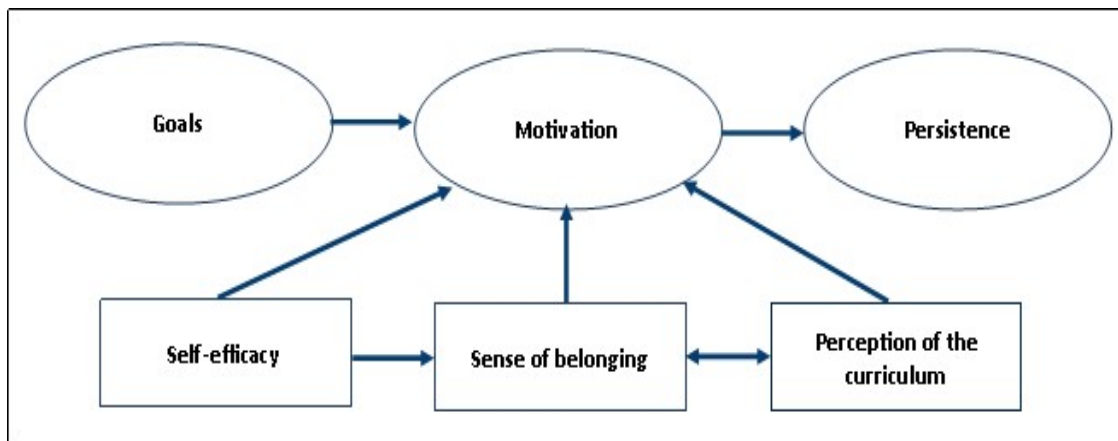
Figure 6. A model of student motivation and persistence adapted from Tinto (2017b).

I will present the individual conceptions that make up Tinto's (2017b) model but first need to revisit the cognitive-behavioural perspective on behaviour change. Behaviour change theories have been central to earlier student persistence models, including Bean and Eaton's (2000) citation of Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) reasoned action attitude-behaviour theory which facilitates their understanding of the processes that lead to students choosing to continue with or withdraw from their studies.

The theories of reasoned action (Fishbein & Ajzen,1975) and planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) are two of the most widely cited cognitive models of behaviour change. Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behaviour builds on the earlier theory of reasoned action and considers that a person's attitudes towards the behaviour, subjective norms and perceived behaviour predict behavioural intention and ultimately behaviour. Armitage and Conner's (2001) meta-analysis of studies related to the theory of planned behaviour demonstrated that intentions were the strongest predictor of behaviour, and attitudes were the strongest predictors of intentions. Applying this to student persistence and Tinto's (2017b) model suggests the involvement of prior experience in shaping an individual's attitudes. Attitudes are described as individual's behavioural beliefs weighted by the outcome evaluation in terms of the "cost incurred by performing the behavior" (Ajzen, 1991, p. 191). Prestwich, Kenworthy and Conner (2018, pp. 34-37) describe modern approaches to behaviour change models as theory integration, they cite the work of Fishbein et al. (2001) and Michie et al. (2005). Fishbein et al. (2001) and Michie et al.

(2005) agree on eight domains that explain behaviour change and why some people perform a given behaviour and others do not: skills; social/professional role and identity or self-standards and sanctions; beliefs about capabilities or self-efficacy; beliefs about consequences or anticipated outcomes; motivation and goals or intentions; environmental context and resources or environmental constraints; and emotion regulation or emotional reactions. Michie et al. (2005) add an additional four domains: knowledge; memory attention and decision processes; behavioural regulation; and nature of the behaviour. It is noticeable that four of the conceptions from Tinto's (2017b) model of student persistence - social/professional role and identity (sense of belonging), self-efficacy, motivation and goals - are reflected in Fishbein et al. (2001) and Michie et al.'s (2005) domains of behaviour change.

Having identified that Tinto's (2017b) conceptions of student persistence are reflected in psychological models of behaviour change, I will explore the conceptions of self-efficacy, sense of belonging, perception of the curriculum, goals, and motivation that make up persistence. I will discuss the underpinning theories of the concepts and how research studies have investigated them and how useful this will be to explore the persistence of college higher education students.

2.3.1 Students' self-efficacy

Self-efficacy is one of the three 'selves' of optimism, which although often used interchangeably in everyday language are distinct notions: self-confidence, self-esteem and self-efficacy (Hefferon and Boniwell, 2011, p. 104). Hefferon and Boniwell (2011, p. 104) distinguish between the three selves by explaining that self-confidence is associated with being certain about your abilities, whereas self-esteem is described by Hewitt (2009) as rooted in four ideas of acceptance, evaluation, comparison and efficacy by oneself and others. Drawing on seminal work by Albert Bandura, Hefferon and Boniwell (2011, p. 104) explain self-efficacy as "the expectation that one can master a situation, and produce a positive outcome based on beliefs about our personal competence or effectiveness in a given area".

Applying theories of self to learning, Zepke and Leach (2012) observe that there is a dominant constructivist view that students construct their own knowledge, which assumes they are agents of their own learning and able to achieve their own goals. Yorke and Knight (2004) discuss how learners with malleable self-theories recognise that with more effort, one can achieve more, and that practical intelligence or capability, is the capacity to behave effectively in everyday life. They applied the notions of malleable self-theories and practical intelligence to higher education by surveying 2,269 undergraduate students and 70 academic staff in UK universities. Yorke and Knight (2004) noted that when both the student and the teacher have malleable self-theories the ideal conditions for learning ensue. This results in supportive formative feedback using cognitive scaffolding techniques reflecting Vygotsky's (1978) ideas of a zone of proximal development and the use of a more knowledgeable other, and a student who is receptive to feedback, is likely to use it to good effect. Yorke and Knight's (2004) study illustrates that learners with malleable self-theories tend to stay engaged with their learning independent of their performance as they see challenges as opportunities for learning.

Self-efficacy is a malleable theory of self, which is future-orientated and domain specific (Bong and Skaalvik, 2003). Maddux (2009) explains that although the term self-efficacy was coined by Albert Bandura in 1978, many researchers had previously inquired about the relationship between the similar notions of personal competence, human behaviour and psychological well-being. Bandura (1978, 1989) discusses self-efficacy as part of Social Cognitive Theory, explaining that "expectations of personal efficacy determine whether coping behavior will be initiated, how much effort will be expanded, and how long it will be sustained" when faced with adversity (Bandura, 1978, p. 139). Bandura (1978) explains that self-efficacy is influenced by sources of efficacy: performance accomplishments, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion and emotional arousal. In 2012, Bandura updated the language used to describe the sources of efficacy, now referring to performance accomplishments as mastery experiences, vicarious experiences as social modelling, verbal persuasion as social persuasion and emotional arousal as physical and emotional states. Maddux (2009) adds imagined experiences to those sources of efficacy, but

notes imagined experiences are unlikely to have as strong an influence on self-efficacy as actual mastery experiences.

Since Bandura's 1978 article, hundreds of research studies have been published exploring aspects of self-efficacy in psychology, sociology, medicine, healthcare, education and other fields (Maddux, 2009). Despite the methodological questions raised about the initial research that led to Bandura's (1978) conception of self-efficacy (Tryon, 1981; Vancouver, 2012), theoretical challenges (Beauchamp, Crawford & Jackson, 2019; Jackson, Hill & Roberts, 2012) and observations that self-efficacy does not always lead to competency (Kardong-Edgren, 2013), Maddux (2009) concludes that the notion of self-efficacy remains compelling for many in psychology and related fields of research.

In an educational context, the notion of academic self-efficacy is defined as "perceived capability to fulfil academic demands" (Bandura, Pastorelli, Barbaranelli & Caprara, 1999, p. 259), involving learners' beliefs about managing their own learning, mastering academic subjects, and fulfilling their own and others' academic expectations (Bandura, Pastorelli, Barbaranelli & Caprara, 1999). Meta-analysis of studies exploring academic self-efficacy have demonstrated that it is a strong predictor of academic performance and persistence outcomes (Multon, Brown & Lent, 1991) and Grade Point Average attainment (Richardson, Abraham & Bond, 2012). Similarly, Bartimote-Aufflick, Bridgeman, Walker, Sharma and Smith (2016) found that self-efficacy strongly correlated with learning outcomes, and that value, self-regulation and metacognition, locus of control, intrinsic motivation, and strategy learning use were also related to academic self-efficacy.

During their meta-analysis Bartimote-Aufflick, Bridgeman, Walker, Sharma and Smith (2016) observed several conflicting definitions of self-efficacy were evident in the literature, with not all citing Bandura's seminal 1978 text. Studies that pooled self-efficacy within other motivation variables were excluded from their meta-analysis as they did not distinguish between related factors. These definition discrepancies were also evident in the methodologies used in the studies Bartimote-Aufflick, Bridgeman, Walker, Sharma and Smith (2016) reviewed, with the most common measure of performance being a one-off task

set by the researchers, rather than an ecologically valid measure of on-going course related academic attainment. Bartimote-Aufflick, Bridgeman, Walker, Sharma and Smith (2016) recommend that those researching self-efficacy should pay more attention to the core Social Cognitive Theory of Bandura (1978, 1989), and consider the distinctions offered by Bong and Skaalvik (2003) between self-efficacy which is domain specific and future orientated, and self-concept which is characterised by being relatively stable and past orientated. I have applied a similar criterion when reviewing the following studies of academic self-efficacy in higher education students, mindful of Bartimote-Aufflick, Bridgeman, Walker, Sharma and Smith's (2016) observations on theory and methodology.

Stagg, Eaton and Sjoblom (2018) investigated the self-efficacy of 44 undergraduate students with and without dyslexia. The students completed scales to measure sources of efficacy and academic self-efficacy, with eight students undertaking interviews to explore their self-efficacy beliefs. Non-dyslexic undergraduates scored significantly higher (p = <0.001) than dyslexic students for past achievements, social persuasion and physiological state sources of efficacy. Thematic analysis of the interview transcripts identified the importance of 'ability awareness', 'impact of school', and 'observing others' for both dyslexic and non-dyslexic students (Stagg, Eaton & Sjoblom, 2018). The results imply that students who have seemingly 'overcome' their learning disability to gain a place at university have lower self-efficacy than those without dyslexia, therefore personal tutors need to be conscious that those with dyslexia, and potentially other perceived disadvantages, would benefit from interventions to build self-efficacy.

Young-Jones, Burt, Dixon and Hawthorne (2012) questioned whether academic advising impacted on student success. Self-efficacy was one of six interpretable factors that significantly related academic advising to student success. A point of note when considering diverse student groups, is that Young-Jones, Burt, Dixon and Hawthorne (2012) observed that first-generation students, those who do not have a parent or grandparent who had attended higher education, had significantly lower levels of self-efficacy than second-generation students. Other researchers have found a similar pattern of first-generation students and those

from other disadvantaged backgrounds having lower academic self-efficacy than their peers (Satici & Can, 2016; Vuong, Brown-Welty & Tracz, 2010).

To investigate the relationship between academic self-efficacy and student persistence, Gore, Leuwerke and Turley (2005) surveyed 257 first year freshman students at an American university. They combined four standardised scales including the College Self-Efficacy Inventory (CSEI) (Solberg, O'Brien, Villareal, Kennel & Davis, 1993) which asks students to rate their confidence in completing class, social and roommate tasks. Scale scores were compared to academic Grade Point Average scores and student persistence, as measured by being still enrolled after two years. Gore, Leuwerke and Turley (2005) found no difference in college self-efficacy scores recorded at the beginning of the first semester between students who were continuing with their studies two years later and those who had withdrawn, however there was a significant difference in CSEI scores taken at the end of the first semester, particularly on the class tasks sub-scale. This suggests that students have unrealistic perceptions of their academic abilities when starting higher education that are adapted in line with their experiences during the first semester. This would be consistent with Bandura's (1978) observation that mastery experiences are a strong source of academic self-efficacy.

McLaughlin, Moutray and Muldoon (2008) explored how self-efficacy influenced nursing students' commitment to continue with their studies. They found that despite occupational self-efficacy significantly predicting students' final attainment grades, there was no significant difference in academic nor occupational self-efficacy scores taken early in the first year of study between students who withdrew, 47 of the 350 sample, and those who remained on programme. Carroll, Ng and Birch's (2009) in-depth interviews with active, delayed and withdrawn distance post-graduate students support the assertion that self-efficacy does not impact on continuation. However, they put this down to the fact that their sample consisted of post-graduate students who had already successfully undertaken higher education study.

Synthesising research on the academic self-efficacy of higher education students and its influence on students' persistence and continuation with their studies demonstrates clear relationships. Academic self-efficacy and academic

attainment are correlated (Bartimote-Aufflick, Bridgeman, Walker, Sharma & Smith, 2016; Richardson, Abraham & Bond, 2012), academic attainment is a strong mastery experience source of self-efficacy (Stagg, Eaton & Sjoblom, 2018), and the period within the academic lifestyle when self-efficacy is measured influences whether it is related to students continuation and withdrawal (Carroll, Ng & Birch, 2009; Gore, Leuwerke & Turley, 2005; McLaughlin, Moutray & Muldoon, 2008).

Many attempts have been made to operationalise the notion of academic self-efficacy for research, most of the studies cited above, and those reviewed in meta-analysis and systematic reviews (Bartimote-Aufflick, Bridgeman, Walker, Sharma & Smith, 2016; Richardson, Abraham & Bond, 2012), have used self-report surveys as a means of quantifying students' academic self-efficacy. Some of the more commonly used tools for self-efficacy approximation are the academic self-confidence subscale from the Student Readiness Inventory (Le, Casillas, Robbins & Langley, 2005), academic control (Perry, Hladkyj, Pekrun & Pelleter, 2001), academic self-concept (Reynolds, Ramirez, Magrina & Allen, 1980) and the College Self-Efficacy Inventory (Solberg, O'Brien, Villareal, Kennel & Davis, 1993). Mindful of Bartimote-Aufflick, Bridgeman, Walker, Sharma and Smith's (2016) observations about the importance of measuring self-efficacy separately from self-confidence and self-esteem or self-concept, I will explore in more detail the College Self-Efficacy Instrument/Inventory (CSEI) (Solberg, O'Brien, Villareal, Kennel & Davis, 1993).

Although Solberg, O'Brien, Villareal, Kennel and Davis (1993) developed the CSEI for use with US students from a Hispanic background, they designed it to address episodes common for all students. The dimensions of the survey include items related to class, social and roommate tasks that were developed in response to college self-help manuals. The 20 items ask participants to rate their confidence in various tasks on a 10-point rating scale from 0 "not at all confident", to 10 "extremely confident". Internal consistency reliability and construct validity were confirmed for the 20 CSEI items, with five alternative standardised instruments used to establish convergent and discriminant validity (Solberg, O'Brien, Villareal, Kennel & Davis, 1993). Importantly for the objective of having a tool that was applicable with other populations, the CSEI was not sensitive to differences in culture, gender or academic level. Solberg, Gusavac,

Hamann, Felch, Johnson, Lamborn and Torres (1998) added a fourth dimension to the CSEI regarding social integration, which they argue relates to the construct of social integration from Tinto's (1975) model.

Bandura, Pastorelli, Barbaranelli and Caprara (1999) conceptualise academic self-efficacy as a student's perception of their ability to complete tasks associated with academic learning. For Tinto (2017a) self-efficacy directly influences a student's sense of belonging and motivation, which in turn impacts on their persistence. However, the research evidence for the relationship between academic self-efficacy and persistence is contested, with some authors proposing that the malleability of self-efficacy, especially during the first year of higher education, may account for the unreliability of academic self-efficacy as a predictor of students' persistence (Gore, Leuwerke & Turley, 2005).

2.3.2   Sense of belonging

Belonging, or a sense of psychological membership as Goodenow (1993) refers to it, is the subjective feeling a student has towards being personally accepted, respected, included and supported by others in the learning environment. Belonging can be viewed sociologically, as the match or mismatch between students' backgrounds and their higher education provider, or psychologically at an individual level involving subjective feelings of connection to the higher education provider (L. Thomas, 2012, p.12). The sociological approach often draws on the work of Pierre Bourdieu's considerations of students' backgrounds, in terms of the cultural capital and habitus they occupy compared to the institutional cultures of their higher education provider (K. Thomas, 2019, pp. 31-36). However, this review of the higher education belonging literature will continue to focus on the student-centred psychological aspects as a contributor to student persistence.

Although confluence around the term belonging is relatively recent, the psychological ideas that underpin it have been discussed in the higher education persistence and continuation literature for some time. Spady (1970, p. 78), when talking about normative congruence, gives an example of a

student entering a university that has a humanistic orientation, yet the student has "strong utilitarian achievement orientations". Spady (1970) refers to this mismatch between the student and higher education provider as normative incongruence but could equally be described as a poor sense of belonging.

Thomas (2012, p. 12) explains that student belonging is closely related to academic and social engagement. Other related concepts include social integration (Bean & Eaton, 2000; Spady, 1970; Tinto, 1975), acceptance (Rogers, 1983, p.123), perceived cohesion (Bollen & Hoyle, 1990), relatedness (Osterman, 2000), mattering (Marshall, Liu, Wu, Berzonsky & Adams, 2010; Tovar, Simon & Lee, 2009), psychosocial engagement (Braxton et al., 2014, pp. 90-92), and academic place-making (Carter, Hollinsworth, Raciti & Gilbey, 2018). These related concepts offer alternative, yet complementary, ways of conceptualising and promoting the subjective feelings students have towards their higher education provider. Indeed, Hausmann, Schofield and Woods (2007, p. 806) observe that in many research projects a "sense of belonging is most often implied as the result of social and academic integration, rather than specified and measured as an independent construct". This notion is given credence as Tinto's (2017b) model of student persistence includes the construct of a sense of belonging, seemingly replacing the concepts of social and academic integration seen in Tinto's earlier work in 1975 and 1993. Baumeister and Leary (1995) refer to the belongingness hypothesis as the pervasive human drive to form and maintain significant interpersonal relationships that are lasting and positive. Such relationships need to be based on interactions that are frequent, affectively pleasant and have mutual concern for each other's welfare (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

Thomas (2012, p. 13), in the *What Works? Student Retention and Success* report, acknowledges Baumeister and Leary's (1995) description of belonging and explains that belonging emerged as the key concept related to student retention and success from the seven UK projects funded by the programme between 2008-2011. Thomas (2012, pp. 13-15) notes that the desire to connect with people and belong is greater in some people, than it is in others. This observation complicates any attempts to use belonging as a predictive factor for student persistence and continuation. However, Osterman's (2000) review of belonging research in schools demonstrated that a satisfied sense of belonging

was significantly associated with students' academic engagement. Specifically, students who experienced acceptance were more highly motivated, engaged in their learning and more committed to their schools. This suggests that a student's observable motivation and engagement with learning could be a demonstration and approximation of their sense of belonging.

Goodenow's (1993) research with adolescents in US schools, identified that belonging was positively correlated with school motivation, and to a lesser extent to academic attainment and teacher-assessed effort. Comparable quantitative research investigating the links between belonging and attainment for higher education students comes from Hausmann, Ye, Schofield and Woods (2009) who observed belonging's indirect effect on students' intentions to persist and persisting behaviours. There is also considerable recent qualitative research exploring belonging for specific higher education student groups including commuter students (Pokorney, Holley & Kane, 2017), international students (Slaten, Elison, Lee, Yough & Scalise, 2016), non-traditional students from further education colleges (Tett, Cree & Christie, 2017) and first-generation students (Smith & Lucena, 2016).

Diverse student populations in college higher education are characterised by non-traditional (or underrepresented) students, who commute to their college, are often first-generation and with a low-tariff entry qualification (Bathmaker, 2016; Parry, Callender, Scott & Temple, 2012; ████, 2017). Tett, Cree and Christie (2017) conducted a ten-year longitudinal study with non-traditional students who had attended further education colleges then university in Scotland. During critical moments of transition within the student journey, participants highlighted the importance of positive relationships between the students, their peers and educational practitioners. Similarly, Pokorney, Holley and Kane's (2017) narrative exploration of commuter students' belonging to their higher education provider recognised the importance of social relationships between the student and their family, friends, and the home and learning communities. Both Tett, Cree and Christie (2017) and Pokorney, Holley and Kane (2017) recommend higher education providers promote initiatives that foster positive relationships to promote student belonging including physical and

virtual student social spaces, sensitive timetabling to promote friendships and learning, and opportunities to build relations of trust between staff and students.

Bryson and Hand (2007) asked undergraduate business studies students to consider the role of engagement in teaching and learning. They found that the dominant positive notion highlighted by participants in the focus groups was teachers and the teaching team investing time in building strong trusting relationships with the students. This complements Ní Raghallaigh and Cunniffe's (2013) finding that the atmosphere in which learning takes place was of central importance to student engagement, and findings from Kember, Lee and Li (2001). Kember, Lee and Li (2001) conducted semi-structured face to face interviews with 53 part-time students at Hong Kong universities. Their findings indicated a strong relationship between students' sense of belonging and their reported rapport with teaching staff. Students indicated that the development of a rapport corresponded with teachers being highly approachable, having "sufficient interpersonal skills" and taking the initiative to establish the relationship (Kember, Lee & Li, 2001, p. 336).

Linked to the concept of rapport and a sense of belonging, is the feeling of mattering. "Mattering is the psychological tendency to perceive the self as significant to others" (Marshall, Liu, Wu, Berzosky & Adams, 2010, p. 367). Students' mattering is often explored in the context of mattering to family and friends, and the impact it has on their self-esteem and wellbeing (Matera, Bosco & Meringolo, 2020; Matera, Paradisi, Boin & Nerini, 2021). However, White and Nonnamaker (2008) explored the role of mattering within the university itself. Interviewing 60 doctorial students at two universities in the US, White and Nonnamaker (2008) recognised that students are situated in nested communities of influence, and that students needed opportunities to connect with those in each community to develop both a sense of belonging and the feeling that they mattered. Tovar, Simon and Lee (2009) developed and validated an inventory scale for higher education student mattering, and subsequently Tovar (2013) developed a conceptual model for the impact of mattering and a sense of belonging. Building on their findings, Tovar, Simon and Lee (2009) asserted that universities ought to find ways for staff to demonstrate that students are important, as feeling like you do not matter can be a precursor to dropping out from college (Schlossberg, 1989). The principal

way in which universities can do this is give academic and support staff the time and opportunities to build relationships and rapport with students.

Drawing on their work in clinical practice, Carl Rogers believed that the conditions required for rapport are a genuineness of the relationship, unconditional positive regard and empathy (Rogers, 1957). Applying these core humanistic principles to education, Rogers (1983, pp. 121-126) identifies teachers who exhibit realness, acceptance and empathy, facilitate learning. Rogers (1983, pp. 123-125) describes the quality of acceptance, as prizing the learner and their feelings, opinions and person, accepting the learner has worth of their own, and believing the learner is fundamentally trustworthy. When viewed from the learner perspective, these qualities could engender feelings of belonging as the student is likely to internalise the qualities demonstrated by their teachers and engage psychosocially in the relationship with their teachers and peers (Braxton et al., 2014, pp. 90-92). The conditions of rapport and qualities of acceptance can be seen in the answers given by Kember, Lee and Li's (2001, p. 331) participants who reported "the lecturers, their attitudes, their approach and their reflections are very important" and conversely a student who had reported a poor relationship with teachers pondered that "perhaps he can't understand my situation" (Kember, Lee & Li, 2001, pp. 331-332).

Many researchers define belonging in learning environments citing Goodenow's (1993) notion of students' subjective feelings towards being personally accepted, respected, included and supported by others (Humphey & Lowe, 2017; Maunder, 2018; Pittnam & Richmond, 2008; Slaten, Elison, Deemar, Hughes & Shemwell, 2018). However, even between researchers citing the same definition of belonging, the way it is measured, observed or identified within the higher education environment differs considerably. These differing approaches appear to reflect the paradigmatic approach of the researchers, the other psychological constructs being observed and/or research specific student domains, for example commuter students, international students or transition to university.

Research undertaken since 2010 within a social constructivist or interpretative paradigm seeking to understand higher education students' perceptions of belonging and related concepts, used a range of qualitative data collection

methods. Open-ended discussions directly with students have been used widely. Focus groups have allowed for a socially constructed dialogue of the notion of belonging in connection with Indigenous students (Carter, Hollinsworth, Raciti & Gilbey, 2018) and in relation to retention interventions in the first year of study (Masika & Jones, 2016). Interviews have enabled researchers to gather narrative and individual accounts of belonging in relation to commuter students (Pokorny, Holley & Kane, 2016), first-generation students (Smith & Lucena, 2016), and international students (Slaten, Elison, Lee, Yough & Scalise, 2016). Creative methods were used by Humphry and Lowe (2017) who held a 'Feedback Exhibition' for participants to create timelines and mind-maps depicting their student journey in relation to belonging. Researchers using pragmatic mixed-methods designs have incorporated open-ended qualitative questions into student surveys that have also collected quantitative data (Fernandes, Ford, Rayner & Pretorius, 2017; Meehan & Howells, 2019).

The use of self-report scales within questionnaires to measure belonging is widespread in the research literature, but there is little agreement on a single sense of belonging scale for higher education students. The scales used in post-2010 research exploring a sense of belonging in higher education students have often been designed by the researchers combining existing scales measuring some of the related concepts, examples include: the University Belonging Questionnaire (Slaten, Elison, Deemer, Hughes & Shemwell, 2018); Maunder's (2018) questionnaire combining the College Adaptation Questionnaire (Van Rooijen, 1986), University Attachment Scale (France, Finney & Swerdzewski, 2010), Adapted Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987) and a researcher-designed Problematic Peer Relationships scale; Karaman and Cirak's (2017) Belonging to the University Scale (BUS); Bollen and Hoyle's (1990) Sense of Belonging subscale (Thornton, Miller & Perry, 2019); Chipuer and Pretty's (1999) Sense of Community scale (Krafona, 2014); and the researcher-designed Student Experience Evaluation instrument (Meehan & Howells, 2018).

The wide range of methodological approaches taken to investigate higher education students' sense of belonging reflect the nebulous nature of belonging and its many contributing and complementary constructs. Tinto's (2017b) inclusion of a sense of belonging in the model of student persistence has its

roots in the concepts they referred to earlier as social and academic integration (Tinto, 1975, 1993). Integration is today more commonly discussed as engagement (Skinner et al., 2016; Zepke & Leach, 2010). As this current research seeks to use Tinto's (2017b) model as a basis for exploration of how persistence can be fostered by personal tutors, aspects of the scales developed by Slaten, Elison, Deemer, Hughes and Shemwell (2018) and Bollen and Hoyle (1990) seem relevant. Slaten, Elison, Deemer, Hughes and Shemwell's (2018) scale used three sets of questions on university affiliation, university support and acceptance, and faculty and staff relations. The university affiliation questions are less applicable for a college based higher education provider, especially one in the UK, as they ask about university-branded material, representing the university in sports and wearing the university's colours. Bollen and Hoyle's (1990, p. 485) sense of belonging subscale consists of just three items: "I feel a sense of belonging to _____", "I feel that I am a member of the _____ community", and "'I see myself as part of the _____ community" responded to on a ten-point Likert scale. The goodness-of-fit statistical testing that Bollen and Hoyle (1990) used exhibited a strong model fit, demonstrating the psychometric properties of the scale (Chin, Salisbury, Person & Stollak, 1999).

Goodenow's (1993) broad definition of belonging as the subjective feeling a student has towards being personally accepted, respected, included and supported by others in the learning environment, incorporates many of the associated constructs discussed. It places emphasis on students' subjective feelings, implying that it can only be investigated through student self-reports and not using more objective measurers related to engagement such as attendance, teacher-reports or resource-use as an approximation. Self-report scales used in research with higher education students have directly asked about a student's sense of belonging (Bollen & Hoyle, 1990) but this requires a student to understand the concept. Alternatively, others ask participants to consider their connection, acceptance, inclusion and support from peers, academic staff and the higher education provider. The items related to university support and acceptance, and faculty and staff relations factors developed by Slaten, Elison, Deemer, Hughes and Shemwell (2018) offer a scale with strong face-validity for college higher education students and

statistically significant construct validity. However, Slaten, Elison, Deemer, Hughes and Shemwell (2018) note that the university affiliation factor, which has less face-validity for college higher education students, was a significant factor in overall belonging, which they conclude demonstrates that belonging is more than just relational.

2.3.3 Perceptions of the curriculum

Tinto (2017a) observes that students' perceptions of the curriculum they are studying have an impact on their motivation and thus persistence. They suggest that there is a complex interplay between how the student perceives the quality of the curriculum and its relevance to goals and aspirations. Factors involved include: the pedagogical approaches taken by programme teaching teams which impact on students' integration, involvement and engagement; the perceived quality of the higher education provider the student is enrolled with and how the provider is perceived in comparison to others; and the student's own values and learning preferences (Tinto, 2017a).

The pedagogical approach taken by the higher education provider and teaching team equates to a teaching or lecturing practitioner's 'pedagogical identity', which Moore (2012, p. 42) considers is constructed from a range of pressures, philosophies and discourses, including direct and indirect policy interventions. The pedagogical identity may be controlled overtly through regulations and management, or more tacitly in relation to organisational values and rhetoric. Moore (2012, p. 129) suggests that individual practitioners may construct an identity as a communicative, competent, reflective and/or reflexive teacher, potentially alongside the identity of researcher and theorist. Similarly, Kettle (2011) presents the notion of 'academic practice", which they describe as the dialectical interrelation between the person, activity and society. Kettle (2011) illustrates this relationship by discussing how the technological advance of the introduction of PowerPoint resulted in practitioners reconstructing knowledge to fit into the prescribed slide sizes and templates, thus the societal and technological changes impacted on the activity of teaching and in turn on the person representing and transmitting the knowledge.

An individual practitioner's pedagogical identity and academic practice influences the learning and engagement of their students. Shaari, Yusoff, Ghazali, Osman and Dzahir (2014) explored the relationship between teaching style and students' engagement at a Malaysian university, where the term 'teaching style' was used as a synonym for the notions of pedagogic identity and academic practice discussed. They utilise Grasha's (1996, p. 154) five teaching styles: expert, formal authority, personal model, facilitator and delegator, and asked students about their levels of engagement using an adapted version of the American National Survey on Student Engagement. Shaari et al. (2014) identified that there was a significant but moderate correlation of $r = 0.53$, $p = <0.05$. between teaching style and engagement, concluding that "university students need to identify their style of academic engagement and suit themselves with lecturers' teaching styles in the classroom" (Shaari et al., 2018, p. 18). I would argue that the suggestion that students need to "suit themselves with lecturers' teaching styles" (Shaari et al., 2018, p. 18) implies the onus is on the student to assimilate to the academic practice. This onus on the student to assimilate contrasts with a student-centred approach which encourages the promotion of higher education learning culture and curriculum designed to enable students to learn through doing and interacting with each other by making use of real-world, group and work-based learning (Thomas, 2012, p. 31).

The student-centred pedagogical approach described by Thomas (2012, p. 31) can be enacted through relationship-rich education (Felten & Lambert, 2020). Relationship-rich, or relationship-based, education and pedagogy seek to foster higher education student success through four principles, every student must experience genuine welcome and deep care, must be inspired to learn, develop a web of significant relationships, and explore questions of meaning and purpose (Day, Gomez-Becerra, Humphrey, Bedetti, Hermes & Carpenter, 2022; Felton & Lambert, 2020, pp.17-18). Felten and Lambert (2020, pp. 41-57) discuss some of the challenges educators have creating strong relationships within the classroom. These challenges included students feeling imposters or isolated in the class, the physical classroom structure which makes interaction difficult, the curriculum not connecting with students, and higher education providers not valuing teaching and student relationships in terms of timetabling

and career progression opportunities. Folk (2018) explored the importance of the curriculum connecting with students, finding that by enabling students to draw on their prior lived experience or identity during their assessments prompted better engagement in learning and assessment. This was particularly important for non-traditional students, including first generation students and those from minority communities, who were better engaged and empowered by the opportunity to connect with the curriculum and their teachers (Folk, 2018).

The perceived quality of a higher education provider and how that provider compares with others is cited by Tinto (2017b) as a further aspect of how a student's perception of the curriculum might impact on their motivation and thus their persistence. In 2017 the UK Government introduced the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF) with the aim of better informing student choices, raising esteem for teaching, recognising excellent teaching and meeting the needs of employers (Department for Education, 2017, p. 7). The TEF complements the Research Excellence Framework (REF) which has contributed to the implicit traditional hierarchies of higher education providers in the UK: Oxbridge, Russell Group, Pre-92, Post-92 and college higher education providers (Croxford & Raffe, 2015). The TEF evaluation process consists of an examination of organisational quantitative metrics and a 15-page narrative provider submission. One of the measures included is data from the National Student Survey which is used as a proxy for students' perceptions of teaching quality (Lubicz-Nawrocka & Bunting, 2018). The award of a TEF Gold, Silver or Bronze rating can be viewed as a representation of quality but can contrast with the traditional hierarchies often informed by the REF (O'Thomas, 2018). For example, in the initial TEF ratings in 2017, one Russell Group university, the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), was awarded Bronze and at least twelve college higher education providers were awarded Gold (Office for Students, 2020f). TEF results are published on the University Central Admissions System (UCAS), Unistats and Office for Students websites. The Office for Students encourages prospective students to use the ratings to help them to decide where to apply to study (Office for Students, 2020g). Perhaps because TEF is relatively new, there is a paucity of empirical evidence as to whether students are using TEF and/or REF to inform their perception of provider quality or to compare

providers. However, earlier studies have identified institution and course reputation, which will in part be related to perceived quality, as a key factor in UK university choice (Brooks, 2002; Dunnett, Moorhouse, Walsh & Barry, 2012).

The final aspect cited by Tinto (2017b) as contributing to perceptions of the curriculum is the value students place on what they are being asked to learn and whether students perceive learning materials to be of sufficient quality to justify their studying time and effort, and their own learning preferences. The concept of assessing learning value and whether learning materials warrant the investment of studying time and effort, alludes to expectancy value theory. Wigfield (1994) reports that expectancy value theory originates from the seminal work of John Atkinson in 1957 who proposed a model of how the motive to achieve and the motive to avoid failure influences motivation and behaviour, and was further developed by Jacquelynne Eccles and colleagues in the 1980/90s. Wigfield and Eccles (1992) describe how expectancy value theorists believe that people complete tasks that they value positively, but avoid those they ascribe a negative value. Further, they note that individuals seem to give the most value to tasks that they do well in, perhaps to maintain their own self-esteem (Wigfield & Eccles, 1992). Applying this notion to perceptions of the curriculum suggests that students will ascribe positive value to curricula and course materials that they are doing well with, and that this positive value will in-turn motivate them to complete the tasks.

Tinto (2017b) cites Tessema, Ready and Yu's (2012) research as supporting the notion that students' perceptions of the quality of their curriculum and the value they place on it, impacts on their overall perception of the curriculum which in turn contributes to their motivation to persist with their studies. Conducting their research in a US university, the notion Tessema, Ready and Yu (2012) were exploring was student satisfaction with the curriculum major they had chosen. Using a survey methodology, they found that five of 11 factors had a statistically significant positive impact on overall satisfaction: quality of instruction, academic advising, overall college experience, preparation for career or graduate school, and the capstone experience. They explain the capstone experience is the opportunity towards the end of their course for students to integrate, synthesize and reflect on what has been learnt during

their studies. However, the most important factors affecting satisfaction, according to Tessema, Ready and Yu's (2012) participants were preparation for career or graduate school and academic advising. This suggests that students are satisfied when their curriculum enables the development of academic skills and creates value for their future or possible selves, in terms of their career and graduate progression opportunities.

Markus and Nurius (1986) introduced the concept of possible selves to describe how individuals think about their future and their potential. The possible selves include our ideal selves, the ones we would like to become, and those we are afraid of becoming. They explain that our range of possible selves are cognitive manifestations of our aspirations, motives, enduring goals, fears and threats (Markus & Nurius, 1986). More fully formed and detailed possible selves, which are elaborated to provide a vivid vision of the future self and how to get there, have a stronger impact on individual's choices and motivation for current activities that may influence the outcome of desired possible self (Cross & Markus, 1991). The concept of possible selves has been applied to schooling (Leondari, Syngollitou & Kiosseoglou, 1998; Oyserman, Bybee, Terry & Hart-Johnson, 2004), student extracurricular experiences (Stevenson & Clegg, 2011) and entry into the graduate job market (Papafilippou & Bentley, 2017). If you apply the concept of possible selves to Tessema, Ready and Yu's (2012) findings that students place value in curricula that prepare them for careers and graduate studies, it suggests curricula that elaborate possible selves to shape expectations and embed career and progression possibilities into students' self-concepts would be perceived positively by students.

Tinto (2017b) cites Tessema, Ready and Yu (2012) and Frick, Chadha, Watson, Wang and Green's (2009) research as evidence that perceptions of the curriculum influence motivation and persistence. Tinto (2017b) reports that Frick, Chadha, Watson, Wang and Green's (2009) student participants needed to feel that learning materials were of sufficient quality to justify their time and effort. Inspection of Frick, Chadha, Watson, Wang and Green's (2009) study confirms that there was a significant positive correlation between academic learning time and course satisfaction ($r = 0.874$, $p = <0.0005$) but I would argue that academic learning time does not necessarily imply student persistence.

Frick, Chadha, Watson, Wang and Green's (2009) investigation into the correlation between student satisfaction and academic learning time cites Merrill's (2002) five First Principles of Instruction as commonalities between effective instructional design linked to student satisfaction. Merrill's (2002) First Principles of Instruction advocate learning activities that are real-world problem-centred, activate previous experiences, demonstrate learning, apply learned knowledge or skills to solve problems, and encourage learners to integrate their learning into everyday life. Active learning is an example of learning activities that can deploy First Principles of Instruction. Bonwell and Eison (1991, p. 2) characterise active learning as when students are involved more than listening, emphasis is on students developing skills, being involved in higher-order thinking, engaged in activities and when there is greater emphasis on students' exploration of their own attitudes and values. Active learning can involve cooperative or collaborative learning activities. Pritchard and Woollard (2010, p. 26) note that although cooperative and collaborative learning are inextricably connected, they are distinctly different. Cooperative learning is characterised by support and helpfulness with learners helping one another to learn, whereas in collaborative activities, learners retain autonomy of their own learning goals (Pritchard & Woollard, 2010, pp. 26-27).

Kahu (2013) identifies active and collaborative learning as features of student engagement research from both a cognitive psychological perspective and from a behavioural approach focusing on effective teaching practice. A meta-analysis by Freeman et al. (2014) reviewing 225 studies comparing active learning pedagogy to traditional lecturing in science, technology, engineering and maths undergraduate programmes found strong support for an improvement in student examination scores when learning actively. However, other studies have demonstrated only a weak relationship between active learning engagement measures and academic achievement (Carini, Kuh & Klein, 2006), and suggested that the atmosphere within active learning activities is of central importance (Ní Raghallaigh & Cunniffe, 2013). Cavanagh (2011) discusses how students value a mixture of active and traditional teaching, especially opportunities for small-group and whole-class discussions, with Carini, Kuh and Klein (2006) adding that active learning was positively associated with improvements in critical thinking.

Despite the evidence that links active, cooperative and collaborative learning approaches to engagement measures including attainment outcomes (Bryson & Hand, 2007; Carini, Kuh & Klein, 2006; Freeman et al., 2014), and the evidence that engagement is linked to student persistence and continuation (Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie & Gonyea, 2016), there is a paucity of research making a direct link between active pedagogies and higher education students' persistence with their studies.

Tinto (2017b, p. 259) contends that when a "curriculum is seen as unrewarding, irrelevant, or of low quality" students will lack motivation to engage with learning materials or persist with their studies. Exploring factors that influence a students' perception of their curriculum including the pedagogical approach taken by the teaching team, the perceived quality of the higher education provider compared to others, and the student's own values and learning preferences, I have demonstrated that each factor is more complex than just how satisfied a student declares themselves to be. A student's perception of the curriculum interacts with their engagement in learning, relationship with university staff, assessment of quality of the provider, the value they place on learning, and how much they consider their curriculum is preparing them for a career or progression towards their desired possible future self.

Taking the concept of perception of the curriculum as a whole, Tinto (2017b) cites Zepke's (2015) research review as supporting the notion that students' perceptions of the curriculum influence their motivation and persistence. Zepke (2015) identified that the culture and curriculum of a university is one of several antecedent factors for student engagement alongside students' background and peer relations, as well as motivation, self-efficacy and identity. However, Zepke (2015) focused specifically on student engagement, and whether engagement is synonymous with persistence is debatable. Evans, Baker and Dee (2016), when exploring student participation in massive open learning courses (MOOCs), distinguishes between engagement, as the student's interaction with the course, compared to persistence which is prolonged engagement. Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie and Gonyea (2008, p. 542) are more specific, they define engagement as the "time and energy students invest in educationally purposeful activities and the effort institutions devote to using effective educational

practices" which emphasises the two-way interaction of student engagement, further removing it from student persistence.

If we accept Evans, Baker and Dee's (2016) description of persistence as prolonged engagement, it follows that research exploring students' perceptions of the curriculum need to measure the impact of the factors of perception - pedagogical approach, perceived higher education provider quality, and the student's own values – on student engagement and prolonged engagement over a course of study. There is a paucity of studies taking a longitudinal approach to understanding students' satisfaction with, and perceptions of, the curriculum, but there are a few recent UK-based cross-sectional studies that explore student satisfaction regarding their whole course, rather than just the curriculum (Douglas, Douglas, McClelland & Davies, 2015; Meehan & Howells, 2018).

Douglas, Douglas, McClelland and Davies (2015) collected narrative accounts from first and final year students in two UK universities regarding experiences that were either particularly satisfying or dissatisfying. Both first and final year students discussed attentiveness and availability during teaching and learning experiences and student support services, and its impact on their course persistence. Additionally, for teaching and learning experiences, key determinants of satisfaction were communication and usefulness, and for support services access and value for money were considered important. Interestingly, positive attentiveness of support services staff was a satisfier for both first and final year students, but first year students who had had a negative attentiveness experience did not identify this as a dissatisfier, potentially because as new students they have a level of tolerance due to inexperience, which becomes less tolerant as they progress through their studies (Douglas, Douglas, McClelland & Davies, 2015). Meehan and Howells (2018) compared data collected over five years in the first term of an undergraduate programme in the UK with data collected as part of the National Student Survey in the final year of the programme. Three key themes were identified across the two data sets: academic staff-student interactions based on trust and rapport; the nature of academic study, particularly academic staff noticing different students' starting points and orientations to study; and feeling like they belong. Meehan and Howells (2018) conclude that dissatisfaction and dis-engagement may arise

if there is a mismatch between a student's expectations and experiences of these aspects of student life.

I have demonstrated that Tinto's (2017b) notion of perception of the curriculum is multi-facetted and there is a complex interplay with wider measures of student satisfaction. Student satisfaction, as measured in the UK through the National Student Survey for final year students, reflects teaching, learning opportunities, assessment and feedback, academic support, organisation and management, learning resources, the learning community and student voice (Office for Students, 2020g). Many questions on the survey incorporate relational aspects of curriculum delivery, for example "staff value student's views…", "'I feel part of a community…'" and "I have been able to contact staff…". The only factor Tinto (2017b) mentions that is not reflected in the National Student Survey is the overall perceived quality of a higher education provider and how that provider compares with others. Due to the rather nebulous nature of the notion of perception of the curriculum, there is a scarcity of studies that investigate all the factors Tinto (2017b) identified or compares them to students' motivation and persistence.

2.3.4   Goals

Goal commitment is one of two commitments that Tinto (1975) proposes students form that can lead to a drop-out or continuing decision, the other being institutional commitment. Tinto (1993, p.43) explains that students' goal commitment relates to their educational and occupational goals. Tinto cites Cope and Hannah's (1975, cited in Tinto, 1993, p. 43) conclusion that commitment to an academic or occupational goal is the single biggest predictor of persistence. Further, Tinto (1993, p. 43) reports the research carried out by Abel (1966) as supporting this proposition. Abel's (1966) research compared goal commitment and grade-point-average (GPA) as a predictor of non-graduation in students, finding that certainty of goal commitment was a stronger predictor. Within their sample, 75% of students who were low performing and with low goal certainty did not graduate, more than twice that of the remaining low performing students. GPA is an international measure averaging course

achievement usually measured on a scale of 1.0-4.0, it is used widely in US literature as a proxy of academic achievement. It should be noted that the sample in Abel's (1966) study were all male and consisted of 89 participants. Participants were considered low performing if they had a GPA of 2.0 or below and were allocated as either certain or uncertain in their career or academic aspiration based on their admission record. The use of an all-male sample is relevant because, Abowitz and Knox (2003) identified that there was a significant difference in the value placed on being well-educated as a life goal between male and female college students, with women rating it as more important. Perrone, Sedlacek and Alexander (2001) also found a gender difference in factors influencing career goals in their sample of 2,743 freshman in a US university. They found that both males and females gave the most frequent reason for their career chose as "'intrinsic interest in the field", but the second most common reason differed, with men selecting "anticipated earnings" but women choosing "well-respected or prestigious occupation". Perrone, Sedlacek and Alexander's (2001) finding was validated by Bonneville-Roussy, Evans, Verner-Filion, Vallerand and Boufford (2017) who found that women had higher levels of intrinsic motivation for their studies. This observed difference in students' goals challenges the validity of evidence that proports to support the notion that goals are the strongest predictor of persistence when the sample comes from one gender, such as in Abel's (1966) study.

Furthermore, more recent research challenges the notion that goals are the single biggest predictor of persistence. Burrus et al. (2013, p. 30) found that goals were just one of a range of strong predictors of persistence including a student's socio-economic background, previous academic experience, psychosocial factors and study skills. They include academic goals and self-efficacy in psychosocial factors. In contrast to Burrus et al.'s (2013) findings and those of earlier studies, Nakajima, Dembo and Mossler (2012) found that for their sample of 427 US community college students, psychosocial factors were not predictors of persistence. However, breaking down psychosocial factors to analyse their impact further, Nakajima, Dembo and Mossler (2012) found that goals and self-efficacy were both significantly correlated with cumulative GPA, which in turn predicted persistence. Research by Burrus et al. (2013) and Nakajima, Dembo and Mossler (2012) found that goals are a predictor, but not

necessarily the strongest predictor of persistence. This research has greater validity due to their sampling techniques than the earlier research cited by Tinto (1993, p. 43), Cope and Hannah (1975, cited in Tinto, 1993, p. 43) and Abel (1966).

Nicholls (1984) explains that goals can prompt achievement behaviour which in turn can demonstrate a high ability to ourselves or others. The orientation of that goal in achievement situations is either towards acquiring, mastering or working hard for a learning goal, or a performance goal to seek positive judgements about our ability from others (Nicholls, 1984; Tuckey, Brewer & Williamson, 2002). For Tinto (2017b) a student's goal to complete the course is mediated by the character and intensity of that goal. Tinto (2017b) questions whether students' goals are motivated by intrinsic benefits of learning and development, or perceived extrinsic benefit of undergraduate study such as income or occupation. According to self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000b) people who seek intrinsic goals are inwardly framing their goal orientation towards natural growth tendencies, in contrast to those who pursue extrinsic goals who have an outward orientation seeking to impress others (Vansteenkiste, Timmermans, Lens, Soenens & Van den Broeck, 2008).

Ciani, Sheldon, Hilpert and Easter (2011) used path modelling to explore the ability of self-determination theory and achievement goal theory (Elliott & Dweck, 1988) to predict class motivation in preservice trainee teachers. Ciani, Sheldon, Hilpert and Easter (2011) measured the achievement goals of 184 trainee teachers in the US three times within a semester. The measures related to mastery, mastery-avoidance, performance and performance-avoidance. The trainee teachers were further tested for psychological need satisfaction and self-determined motivation. Results demonstrated that self-determination theory constructs were helpful at understanding initial and changing achievement goal profiles, implying that there is integration between self-determination and achievement goal theory (Ciani, Sheldon, Hilpert & Easter, 2011). As Ciani, Sheldon, Hilpert and Easter (2011) note, a decrease in mastery goal orientation may have resulted in feeling less positive about becoming a teacher, a factor not measured in the study, which could have a strong impact on students' persistence with their course. Developing a greater understanding of how

students' goals impact on their motivation, will support the understanding of persistence.

Bieg, Reindl and Dresel (2017) followed a sample of 1156 psychology students during semester one at a German university taking measures of mastery goal orientation and intrinsic motivation four times over a ten-week period. They describe mastery goals as focused on developing competence in a task, with a mastery-approach characterised by the focus on learning as much as possible. They measured students' mastery goals using a validated scale with a five-point Likert response to statements such as "Today in class I wanted to learn as much as possible". Bieg, Reindl and Dresel (2017) concluded that the students' mastery goals predicted their intrinsic motivation, but intrinsic motivation did not predict mastery goals. Although this longitudinal study suggested that mastery goal orientation and intrinsic motivation stayed relatively stable over the semester, it is noted that it was across only one semester and without any assessment tests that might have created anxiety or pressure which in turn might have impacted on mastery goals and/or intrinsic motivation. The stability of mastery goals could be considered to support Dweck and Leggett's (1988, p. 256) social-cognitive approach to motivation that describes mastery-orientation as the "seeking of challenging tasks and the maintenance of effective striving under failure".

Dweck and Leggett (1988) use performance goals (to gain favourable judgements of one's competence) and learning goals (concerned with increasing competence) as a framework for explaining how individuals interpret and react to events. They describe a mastery-oriented pattern of cognition-affect-behaviour as involving the seeking of challenging tasks and persistence through "striving under failure" (Dweck & Leggett, 1988, p. 256), in contrast to a maladaptive helplessness response that avoids challenges and there is a deterioration of performance when faced with obstacles. They suggest that a focus on performance goals leads to a helplessness cognition-affect-behaviour, whereas mastery-orientated patters of cognition-affect-behaviour come from a pursuit of learning goals.

Research has identified that goal orientation can influence students' patterns of cognition, affect and behaviour, with those who have learning or mastery-

oriented goals demonstrating greater intrinsic motivation which in turn positively influences persistence and academic achievement. It is now important to explore the theory and research that links motivation as a whole concept to student persistence.

2.3.5 Motivation

The motivation of higher education students and younger learners has been studied widely and is often considered a central element of teaching and learning theory and practice. This is evidenced by motivation being included in the first of the Teachers' Standards (Department for Education, 2011/2013, p. 10) for school teachers in the UK, "Set high expectations which inspire, motivate and challenge pupils". Ryan (2019, para. 1) charts the history of human motivation theory and research, explaining the shift away from an exclusive behaviourist approach of shaping behaviour through external reinforcements and punishments, via a consideration of our deficiency and growth needs, towards a greater understanding of internal processes and sources of motivation. The complexity and breadth of student motivation theoretical literature cannot be given justice within this short section of the review of the literature, therefore I have given an overview of behaviourist, humanistic, social-cognitivist and neuroscience perspective interpretations of motivation and how they have contributed to our current understanding of student motivation in relation to persistence. Due to the focus in this thesis on the role of personal tutors, there is consideration given to how other people can influence students' motivation from the differing psychological perspectives.

Maslow's (1943) seminal humanistic theory of human motivation, the hierarchy of needs, argues that lower order deficiency needs must be satisfied, or at least partially satisfied, before progressing onto the higher order being or growth needs of social, esteem and self-actualisation. The theory posits that the deficiencies or physiological needs of keeping the body in homeostasis must be at least partially satisfied otherwise the individual is dominated by that need of hunger, for example, and all other needs are pushed into the background (Maslow, 1987, pp. 27-28). There remains widespread application of the theory

to education, business, social work, health and other sectors (Castle & Buckler, 2018, p. 236) due to its ready acceptance as it "seems reasonable and fits our preconceptions" (Neher, 1991, p. 91).

Over the years there has been critique of Maslow's (1943) hierarchy regarding self-actualisation's universality as a concept, the notion of highly self-actualising people and the evidential basis of the model. However, as Compton (2018) notes much of the critique is based on misunderstanding or misinterpretation of Maslow's writings. Henry (2017) reviewed 21 introductory psychology textbooks to consider their presentation of humanistic psychology. They found that 15 of the 21 texts discussed Maslow's (1943) hierarchy as highly rigid, with people needing to achieve lower order needs before addressing higher order growth needs, this contradicts Maslow's (1987, pp. 27-28) clarification that "a more realistic description of the hierarchy would be in terms of decreasing percentages of satisfaction as we go up the hierarchy of prepotency". Henry (2017) found that this misunderstanding or misinterpretation in turn led to criticism that the model was unable to account for anecdotal examples of individuals who seek self-actualisation without their deficiency physiological needs met, for example someone on hunger strike for a political or moral cause (Henry, 2017, p. 284). Compton (2018) also challenges earlier works that refute the notion that people need to work through the levels of the hierarchy to attempt self-actualising, citing the work of Tay and Diener (2011) and Hagerty (1999) who both demonstrated that on a societal or cultural scale, the search and motivation for self-actualisation is more likely in countries and societies where the population have many of their basic needs met.

One of the continuing critiques of Maslow's work relates to the individualist nature of the hierarchy, downplaying the role of the environment and social relations in motivational needs (Neher, 1991). The third level of need in the hierarchy is love, affection and belonging (Maslow, 1943). As Hanley and Abell (2002) observe, these needs are often framed in what the individual needs as a deficiency need, rather than how love, affection and belonging can be sources of motivation. Child (2007, p. 242) agrees that needs can be part of a circular relationship. Thus, an individual may be motivated towards a certain behaviour to satisfy the need for love, affection or belonging if they believe the love is dependent on that certain behaviour or outcome. If you apply this notion to

students' motivation, the students may feel that love, affection or belonging is dependent on their academic success and thus be motivated to persist with their studies to satisfy this need. One could argue that a student with a poor sense of belonging or with unsatisfied love needs within their family or friends may seek this platonic love, affection or belonging from their teaching team or personal tutor. To further counter the critique that Maslow's writings are individualistic, Compton (2018) observes that Maslow describes highly self-actualising people as having attitudes and behaviours that often centred on others and humanitarian concerns, with deep, profound interpersonal relations with a small group of friends or relations.

Earlier behavioural interpretations of motivation being driven by reinforcement and punishments, and Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs have all contributed to our current understanding of the motivation of students. The modern understanding and definitions of student motivation allude to the integration of social, cognitive and affective aspects influencing our behaviour. Such definitions include motivation "as an individual's desire, power, and tendency to act in particular ways" (Walter & Hart, 2009, p. 162), consisting of the "internal processes and external incentives which spur us on to satisfy some need" (Child, 2007, p. 226). Irvine (2018, p. 1) explains "'motivation is a meta concept that subsumes a number of related concepts such as engagement, persistence, interest, self-efficacy, and self-concept". Further, Hidi and Renninger (2019, p. 1) summarise that theory and research regarding motivation considers our responses to social and cultural circumstances, be they conscious or unconscious (implicit); the will we have to engage, connect and participate; how our feelings of self-concept and self-efficacy can influence motivation; and how self-regulation and self-motivation can address those feelings about ourselves.

Building on the behaviourist view that a stimulus reinforcement or punishment can act as a motivator, the stimuli can be characterised as either an intrinsic or extrinsic reward (Deci, 1976, p. 23). The dichotomous view of motivation as either intrinsic or extrinsic is appealing in its simplicity, intrinsic motivation is doing something because it is inherently interesting or enjoyable, whereas extrinsic motivation refers to doing something because it leads to a separate outcome (Ryan & Deci, 2000a, p. 55). This distinction is central to Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory that posits that competence,

relatedness and autonomy underpin individuals' self-determined motivation, choices, and behaviour. As already discussed, self-determination theory considers those with intrinsic goals and motivation as inwardly framing towards growth tendencies, such tendencies are like those discussed by Maslow (1943) as higher order needs.

In 2000, Ryan and Deci revisited their classic dichotomous definitions to reflect contemporary theory and research, offering a taxonomy of human motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000a, p. 61) as illustrated in Figure 7. Ryan and Deci's (2000a) taxonomy of human motivation recognises that intrinsic motivation leads to behaviours that are driven by our own interests or to satisfy our psychological needs for autonomy and competence, yet extrinsically motivated behaviours are on a continuum illustrating the extent to which they represent self-determination.
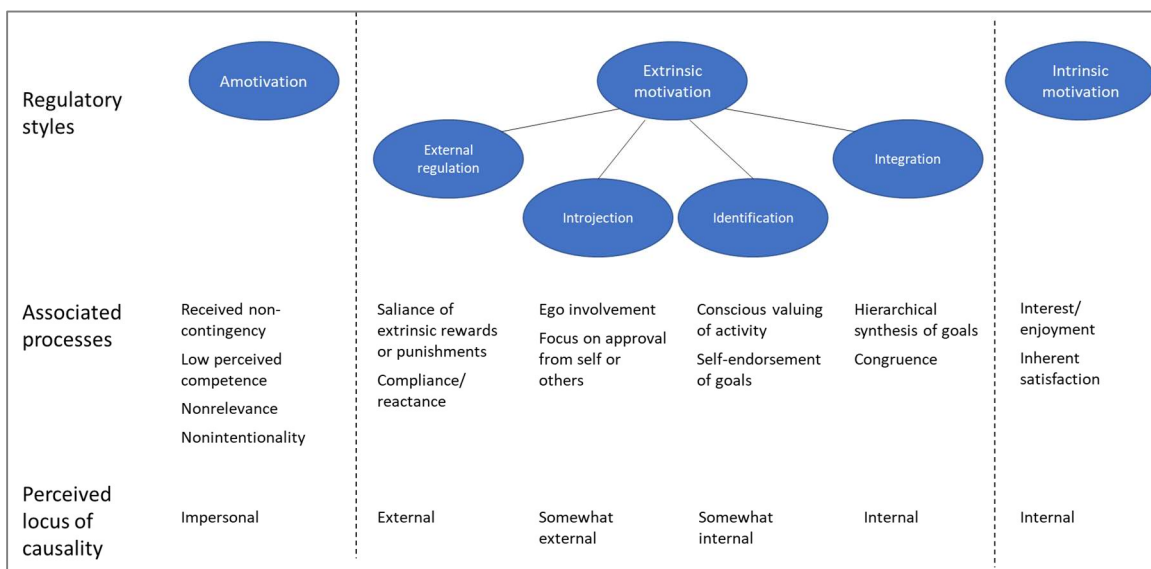
Figure 7. A taxonomy of human motivation adapted from Ryan and Deci (2000a).

There is increasing neuroscientific evidence for the differing ways the brain responds to intrinsic and extrinsic rewards and motivation. Hidi and Renninger (2019, p. 6) describe how neuroscientists have provided evidence to explain how dopaminergic systems within the brain play a central role in motivation and attributing value, alongside the cortical system's involvement in attention and memory. Together they can explain the link between motivation and learning through reward anticipation and receipt of rewards. Anselme and Robinson (2019, p. 166) discuss how dopamine influences the wanting of a reward, but

that it is not the only neurotransmitter or brain region playing its part in motivational incentive rewards. They use the term incentive motivation to explain how the brain produces motivational processes, how the motivations can be dissociated from pleasure and learning, and the unconscious awareness that can take place during the cognition computation of behavioural decisions (Anselme & Robinson, 2019, p. 163). For a fuller discussion of the latest developments in neuroscience related to motivation, see Reeve and Lee (2019).

This section has attempted to provide a brief overview of the complex theoretical literature related to motivation from a behaviourist, humanistic, social-cognitivist and neuroscience perspective. As Ryan (2019, para. 17) summarises "motivation research has been ever evolving in its explanations of behavior, becoming more complex, as well as moving more and more from the outside in". Motivation is no longer simply seen from a behaviourist perspective of stimulus and reward, or from a humanistic perspective of seeking ever higher-order needs towards self-actualisation. There is recognition that motivation is mediated by our cognitive processes and self-determined decision-making; wants, needs, goals and desires; and social and cultural influences. The following sections will consider how relationships can influence motivation, our thoughts about our futures might influence motivation, and how students' motivation interacts with their persistence.

There is widespread theoretical and research literature agreement that social integration and relationships influence students' motivation to study and persistence to continue. Explaining Social Determination Theory, Ryan and Deci (2000b) postulate that when the three innate psychological needs of competency, autonomy and relatedness are met, self-motivation and wellbeing are enhanced. They describe relatedness as the need to feel belongingness and connectedness with others (Ryan & Deci, 2000b). Cross-cultural research exploring the role of relatedness or relationships for students broadly support Ryan and Deci's (2000b) proposition. Raufelder, Bakadorova, Yalcin, Dibek and Yavuz (2017) and Bakadorova, Hoferichter and Raufelder (2020) assessed the contribution of peer and teacher relatedness to secondary school students' motivation in Turkey and Germany, and Canada and Russia respectively. Both studies supported the notion that student-student and student-teacher relations

are associated with achievement drive motivation, but that there were differences in association that could be attributed to cultural and educational system differences. For example, Bakadorova, Hoferichter and Raufelder (2020) reported that students in Montréal, Canada reported better teacher-student relations and higher levels of perseverance and effort, that the researchers attributed to the more student-centred education system in Canada compared to Russia. Investigating the role of school teachers further, Wentzel, Muenks, McNeish and Russell (2017) found that consensus about teachers' perceived support for students influenced students internalised values, academic effort and goal orientation. The research presented supports Ryan and Deci's (2000b) proposition that relations between school teachers and their students, influences students' motivation. However, there remains a paucity of similar research in the higher education sector about the role of relationships and relatedness, with student motivation.

Markus and Nurius (1986) introduced the concept of possible selves to represent how people view what they might become in the future, both what they would like to happen and what they are afraid of, and to explain the conceptual links between an individual's cognition and their motivation. Harrison (2018), noting that possible or future selves are the future-tense for self-concept, employs Markus and Nurius' (1986) theory of possible selves to consider higher education decision-making and the motivation needed to succeed. Harrison (2018) proposes a conceptual model predicting two separate, but interlinked forms of motivation related to accessing higher education: demand for becoming a student/graduate and stimulating behaviour that will boost the likelihood of acquiring the qualifications to access higher education providers. Reflecting the principle recognised in expectancy value theory that people value activities they do well in and are more likely to be motivated for these activities (Wigfield & Eccles, 1992), the concept of possible selves suggests that if a student has academic success at school, it makes the possible self of being a higher education student more plausible and thus increases motivation for it (Harrison, 2018).

An experiment with undergraduate students at a French university demonstrated that general visualisation of a successful future or a specific failure, had a greater influence on academic and task motivation than more

general failure or specific successes (de Place & Brunot, 2020). They account for these rather mixed results through the attributions participants gave to the situation, general success was attributed to internal factors and recalling a specific failure suggested it was a one-off contrary to usual successful performance. Whereas general failure was internally attributed and specific successes were often attributed to luck or external factors. This explanation draws on Weiner's (1986) attribution theory which states that an individual with an internal locus of control provides causal attributes that are personal, for example skills or attributes, to the outcome of events, whereas someone with an external locus of control might attribute situations to things they cannot control. Bean and Eaton (2000) suggest someone with an internal locus of control is more likely to be motivated to study as they see the outcome as something they can influence. De Place and Brunot (2020) suggest students might have high-level construct goals such as succeeding or avoiding failure at university if they foresee general academic possible selves, whereas those with specific academic selves might focus on getting a good grade in an assessment or avoiding a bad grade.

In contrast to the predominately linear trajectory of younger students who progress from school to university, perhaps only interrupted by a gap year, Stevenson and Clegg (2013) note that mature or adult learners have less predictable or linear routes, often with complex or fractured past experiences. 11 mature students were interviewed and asked to describe their journeys into further/higher education, why they had chosen to do that, who had influenced them, their ideal careers, and what had influenced their career choices (Stevenson & Clegg, 2013). Analysing the interview transcripts, Stevenson and Clegg (2013) found that even those adults with fractured past experiences are able to put strategies in place to overcome the challenges they face. However, participants recognised that their future was shaped by their personal experiences, and the structural social constraints put on them, such as their need to stay local to meet their caring responsibilities and received support (Stevenson & Clegg, 2013). This recognition that mature or adult students have differing but realistic perceptions of their future selves, which may constrain their goals, has implications for how goal-orientation is perceived as motivating factor for students from non-traditional backgrounds.

Harrison (2018) recommends four interventions to raise the aspirations of potential higher education students. The four interventions are: expanding young people's pool of possible selves, particularly for disadvantaged students who are likely to envisage fewer possible selves requiring a degree; engaging young people in recognising their ability to exercise control over their futures and to succeed in tasks through reflection, focusing on self-efficacy and locus of control, and developing a 'learning orientation'; supporting young people to elaborate their desired possible self by translating their vision into manageable steps for a working self-concept; and making higher education desirable and realistic through exposure to campus and current students (Harrison, 2018). Integrating de Place and Brunot's (2020) research into Harrison's (2018) intervention recommendations suggests that students should be encouraged to visualise generalised academic successes as part of their future possible selves. Harrison's (2018) recommendations are directed at disadvantaged young people, it would be interesting to consider how these interventions would be applicable for mature students, such as those interviewed by Stevenson and Clegg (2013), who have more complex trajectories into higher education and maybe equally unlikely to envisage their possible self.

Tinto (2017b) explains that without motivation, students' persistence is unlikely. However, they acknowledge that motivation is malleable and is understood as an interaction between self-efficacy, sense of belonging, perception of worth or relevance of the curriculum and goals, as presented in their model of student motivation and persistence (Tinto, 2017b). The relationship between motivation and persistence has been well-documented, Bandura (1989, p. 1176) claims that someone's "level of motivation, [i]s reflected in how long they will persevere in the face of obstacles" and Graham, Frederick, Byars-Winston, Hunter and Handelsman (2013) discuss how self-efficacy is a requirement for persistence and the powerful influence on motivation. However, Allen (1999) discusses that there is a lack of clarity regarding the definition and measurement of the construct of motivation, with motivation operationalised in multiple different ways across the research field. I would argue that this is also true of the concept of persistence, it is commonly operationalised as completing the college course or degree rather than withdrawing from studies (Baker, 2010; Carroll, Ng & Birch, 2009; Dwyer, 2017). However, others view persistence as a

shorter term with varying length of study considered as persistence: completing a one-semester module (Cámara-Zapata & Morales, 2019); re-enrolling from one semester to the next (Capps, 2012); completing the first year of study (Brooks, Jones & Burt, 2012; Charlton, Barrow & Hornby-Atkinson, 2006; Copeland & Levesque-Bristol. 2011); and enrolment during four continuous semesters (Arifin, 2018). This variation in how the concepts of motivation and persistence are operationalised adds to the confusion regarding the evidence about the association between motivation and persistence. Many studies assume a linear relationship between motivation and persistence based on the theoretical models presented by Spady (1971), Tinto (1975, 2017), Bean and Eaton (2000) and others, but few have researched the relationship directly.

One study that attempted to assess the relationship between motivation and persistence was conducted by Cabrera, Stampen and Hansen (1990) who were interested in the relationship between US students' ability to pay for college and their motivation and persistence. Their sample of 1,375 students were attending a four-year higher education provider in 1982. Their dependent variable measured persistence by reviewing enrolment and attainment data to ascertain whether a student had completed their studies at the same institution or withdrawn from their studies. This measure of institutional persistence neglects the distinction Tinto (1993, p. 8) makes between institutional departure and system departure, therefore Cabrera, Stampen and Hansen (1986) might have overlooked students who transferred to other providers to complete their studies as an institutional departure. Cabrera, Stampen and Hansen (1986) tested the impact of various independent variables, the ability to pay, academic skills and abilities, and a range of motivational factors recognised in Tinto's (1975, 1982, 1987) models including goal commitment, academic integration and social integration. Their results demonstrated that the ability to pay moderated the effects of motivational variables on the students' persistence. Although this study provides some evidence to support the link between motivation and persistence, its value comes from the variety and transparency of the different motivational factors measured which enabled the assessment of individual factors contributing to motivation. The academic integration measure they used was made of up of seven sub-measures from the High School and Beyond study (Jones et al., 1986, cited in Cabrera, Stampen & Hansen, 1986):

academic performance (GPA), and satisfaction with faculty, development of work skills, intellectual growth, intellectual life, quality of instruction and curriculum. These factors broadly reflect the self-efficacy and perception of the curriculum elements of Tinto's (2017b) model of student persistence.

Theories of motivation propose that a student's motivation to study and complete their undergraduate degree can be influenced intrinsically or extrinsically, this is mediated by the level of self-determined autonomy and competence, and influenced by our relationships, social environment and experiences. Motivation is generally considered a key determinant of students' persistence but due to the ill-defined nature of both concepts they are operationalised in different ways in much of the research conducted in this area. Combining the complex theoretical field of motivation and the ill-defined operationalisation of the concept, results in a lack of clarity about how motivation influences students' persistence.

2.3.6 Persistence

Theoretical models of student persistence were explored earlier in this review of literature. Models from the 1970s to the 2000s considered student persistence from a sociological perspective, reflecting how the student's individual attributes and pre-university experiences, as well as their family background, influence their academic and social integration, this person-environment fit then ultimately impacts on their decision to continue or withdraw from their studies (Bean & Eaton, 2000; Spady, 1970; Tinto, 1975). Tinto's (2017b) model accepts earlier sociological interpretations of students' withdrawal or continuation decision-making, and supplements it with a psychological consideration of what contributes to student motivation and ultimately their persistence.

Tinto (2017a) explain that persistence is another way of talking about motivation and it is the "quality that allows someone to continue in pursuit of a goal even when challenges arise" (Tinto, 2017a, p. 2). However, persistence is also related to the constructs of perseverance, grit and resilience. This section will

review the overlap in these terms, and the theory and research applying them to undergraduate students and their academic studies.

The American Psychological Association (2020, point 2) say that persistence, "the quality or state of maintaining a course of action or keeping at a task and finishing it despite the obstacles", is also called perseverance. This synonymous use of the terms is supported by many researchers who use the terms interchangeable (Ashraf, Godbey, Shrikhande & Widman, 2018; Hodge, Wright & Bennett, 2018; Oluremi, 2014; Sauvé, Fortin, Viger & Landry, 2018). However, Fowler (2004, p. 4) distinguishes between the constructs, defining perseverance as "investing your time to accomplish something" and persistence as "you stay in a particular mode or situation until you achieve your goal". The distinction that Fowler (2004) draws could be applied to consider perseverance as keeping going with studying in the short or medium term, compared to persistence that implies completion of the course and achievement of the graduation goal. As already discussed, the student persistence research uses a range of timeframes from one semester to completion of undergraduate study as their measure of persistence. One possible implication of this is that using the language of perseverance may be more appropriate for research that considers short-term behaviours, for example a task designed for the research, a single module or unit of study, rather than persistence towards completion of the graduation goal. However, as much of the research literature and Tinto's (2017b) model uses the term persistence for both short- and long-term student behaviours towards their study goals, this is the term that will continue to be used in this thesis.

Grit is often written about as a construct that contributes to persistence (Fosnacht, Copridge & Sarraf, 2019; Meyer, Shatto, Kuljeerung, Nuccio, Bergen & Wilson, 2020; Usher, Li, Butz & Rojas, 2019). The link between grit, and perseverance and persistence is attributed to Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews and Kelly (2007, p. 1087) who define grit as "perseverance and passion for long-term goals" and state that a "gritty individual approaches achievement as a marathon; his or her advantage is stamina" (p. 1088). Thus, grit is perceived as a trait or characteristic, compared to persistence which is a behaviour. Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews and Kelly (2007) demonstrated across six studies that individual differences in grit could account for variances in success

outcomes over and above those explained by IQ and Big Five Conscientiousness measures. They also noted that grittier people were those with higher levels of education, were older, made fewer career changes, and achieved higher GPA at university. In conclusion, they claimed that achievement is a product of talent and effort, with effort being a function of the intensity, direction, and duration towards achieving a goal. Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews and Kelly's (2007) conception of grit has been widely applied to educational endeavours as a means of understanding students' engagement, achievement and persistence.

One study that deployed Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews and Kelly's (2007) conception of grit that has particular resonance with the current research was conducted by Hodge, Wright and Bennett (2018). Hodge, Wright and Bennett (2018) investigated the grit of undergraduate Australian students, and one of the variables they explored was whether being the first in their family to attend university was associated with grit. First in family is a synonymous term for first generation students, with first in family often used in UK and Australian higher education literature. Using Duckworth and Quinn's (2009) eight item grit scale, the Utrecht work engagement scale (Schaufeli & Baker, 2004) and demographic and performance measures, Hodge, Wright and Bennett (2018) demonstrated that aspects of effort and interest grit are associated with being the first in family to attend university. The results suggest that the levels of effort were significantly different between first in family students and others at the level of p <0.05, but the effect size is small at d = 0.21. However, first in family students did not significantly differ from their peers in their consistency interest, the ability to maintain interest over time. Hodge, Wright and Bennett (2018) also found that both the interest and effort aspects of grit were associated with engagement, with effort contributing twice as much as interest to the variance in students' engagement. They found no significant difference in levels of grit between the genders, contrary to some previous research, but account for this with the imbalanced sample with 12.6% of male and 87.4% of female participants. By using Duckworth and Quinn's (2009) grit scale with items measuring effort and interest, Hodge, Wright and Bennett's (2018) research demonstrates that students who were the first in their family to attend university exhibited significantly more effort-grit than their peers. As the current research

takes place in a college higher education provider where ~50% of students are the first in their family to attend university (████, 2021b), this finding that first in family students have higher level of effort grit is interesting as it might suggest that the case study University Centre students will have higher grit and persistent than other higher education students.

Credé (2018) suggests there is no reason to support the notion that grit is a good predictor of success and educational performance. They argue that the evidence presented to support this notion usually comes from two sources, interviews with or historical accounts about high-achieving individuals, and correlational data from a variety of settings. Reports from, or of, high-achieving individuals are inherently bias as they neglect the persistent and gritty individuals who do not achieve high levels of success. Correlational data is problematic in its application to higher education students, in that some studies have demonstrated an association, but other factors are stronger. One such study was conducted by Muenks, Wigfield, Yang and O'Neal (2017) who found that effort-grit, but not interest-grit, positively predicted students' later grades. However, they note that engagement and self-regulation were stronger predictors of grades than grit. In contrast to Muenks, Wigfield, Yang and O'Neal's (2017) research that used Duckworth and Quinn's (2009) grit scale with sub-scales for effort and interest grit, Flagagan and Einarson (2017) used the same scale, but they did not distinguish between effort- and interest-grit. They found a moderately positive impact of grit on undergraduate students' grades in high-stakes course assessments, with students exhibiting higher grit scores outperforming their lower grit score peers. Flagagan and Einarson (2017) note that the significance of their research is that grit levels were compared in real-world undergraduate assessments rather than specific research tasks or achievement self-reports as in earlier studies. This application to real-life academic assessment is important when considering the longer-term student perseverance and persistence aspect of grit.

Several studies have explored the importance of relatedness and relationships in the demonstration of student grit. Bonfiglio (2017) contemplates the individualist nature of grit and resilience, and observes that relatedness, and the cohesive nature of community and belonging that foreground the qualities of empathy, forgiveness and solidarity, are missing from the grit literature. They

fear that the promotion of the quality of grit may foster a generation of students who are able to overcome barriers on their own, but not know how to work together for the good of the community. Datu (2017) explored the association between relatedness and dimensions of grit in 606 Filipino high school students. They used the same eight-item grit scale used in earlier studies (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009). Relatedness was operationalised as the extent to which students felt accepted by teachers, parents and friends, measured using a 12-item sense of relatedness scale developed by Furrer and Skinner (2003). Datu (2017) demonstrated that relatedness to teachers was positively associated with overall grit, and grit's two sub-aspects of perseverance of effort and consistency of interest. There were further associations between relatedness to parents on consistency of interest and overall grit, but these associations were not as strong as those with relatedness to teachers. Datu (2017) attributed the strong teacher relatedness association to the long time that Filipino students spend at school, about 30 hours a week. If this attribution is reliable, it would lessen the generalisation of Datu's (2017) results to higher education students who typically spend considerably less time a week with their teaching team or tutors.

Building on the observation of relatedness to teachers from Datu (2017), Buskirk-Cohen and Plants (2019) investigated similar conceptions of relatedness in a small teaching-focused university in the US. They found that, compared to their peers, students who had low commitment to persisting until graduation and low academic performance also had significantly lower impressions of their professors' pedagogical caring. They measured professors' pedagogical caring on the Freeman, Anderman and Jensen (2007) sense of belonging scale and define it as the extent to which students felt valued by their professors. Buskirk-Cohen and Plants (2019) make no inference regarding cause or effect in this association between persistence and relatedness to teachers – professors' pedagogical caring. However, it is notable that only students rated low on both persistence and performance had reported lower pedagogical caring which suggests a complex relationship between this aspect of belonging, persistence and academic performance.

Zhang, Mou, Tong and Wu (2018) and Akbağ and Űmmet (2017) both investigated the association between grit, relatedness or belonging and mental wellbeing in university students, in China and Turkey respectively. Zhang, Mou,

Tong and Wu (2018) found that the two aspects of grit, interest and effort, may have differential effects on mental wellbeing. They identified that consistency of interest-grit and school belonging were negatively correlated with three measures of poor mental wellbeing, stress, depression and anxiety, whereas perseverance of effort-grit was only negatively correlated with depression. Investigating relatedness and grit's predictive role in positive subjective wellbeing, Akbağ and Űmmet (2017) observed that although grit was a significant predictor of subjective wellbeing, the satisfaction of the three psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness drawn from self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) were stronger predictors of positive subjective wellbeing. This link between aspects of grit and relatedness or belonging, and their impact on wellbeing suggests that wellbeing needs to be considered more closely within Tinto's (2017b) model. There is research exploring the interconnection between the psychological concepts featured in Tinto's (2017b) model of persistence and wellbeing, but the psychological conceptions are often summarised as resilience rather than persistence (Brewer et al., 2019; Ganguly & Perera, 2019; Gray & Hackling, 2009).

In contrast to grit, which is seen as a personality trait approximate to consciousness measure of the Big Five personality dimensions (Warren & Hale, 2020), resilience is often described as the adaptive strategy, process or ability to bounce back from stressful events or situations (Martin & Marsh, 2008; O'Connor, Mueller & Neal, 2014; Smith et al., 2008). Martin and Marsh (2018) observe that resilience is typically characterised as overcoming adversities that are either acute or chronic in nature. Thus, grit is a personality trait or characteristic, whereas resilience is the adaptive strategy, process or ability a person uses to deal with adversity. Wang (2021) notes that both grit and resilience affect students' success and wellbeing. However, I would argue that due to the contested nature of defining and measuring resilience their comparative contribution to student persistence and success remains unclear.

Conducting a scoping review of 72 papers exploring resilience in higher education published between 2013 and 2017, Brewer et al. (2019) identified several challenges. They noted that despite the increased interest in resilience, without a universally accepted definition or means of measuring the concept it remains difficult to fully ascertain the impact of resilience in higher education.

Brewer et al. (2019) recommended that any future shared definition of resilience should focus on thriving at university rather than just surviving, thereby emphasising that universities should be a place of growth rather than just something to persist at and survive. This recommendation is interesting for the student persistence literature, as it shifts the focus even further from the traditional provider-centred concepts of retention, via persistence that although student-centred, it still is measured by the successful completion of the graduation goal, to a fully student-centred aspiration of not just completing the graduation goal but also the student feeling they have reached their growth potential during the higher education experience. Brewer et al. (2019) recommend that higher education student resilience should be defined as "a dynamic process of positive adaptation in the face of adversity or challenge" (p. 1114) where students "negotiate for, and draw upon, psychological, social, cultural and environmental resources" (p. 1114).

Ganguly and Perera (2019) concur that the dynamic interaction of individuals' different psychological strengths is central to understanding resilience. Taking a person-centred perspective, they examined the resilience profiles of 274 Australian university students with disabilities, attributing one of three resilience profiles: vulnerable, spiritually-dominant and engaged resilient. The vulnerable students were less likely to adapt to change, had difficulty regulating negative affect, perceived little personal control and had few spiritual resources. Whereas the spiritually-dominated students were less likely to persevere, invest effort in academic attainment, bounce back from adversity or view themselves as competent at managing difficulties. They had above average spirituality but below average resilience resources. The final profile, labelled engaged resilient, was applied to students who were adaptable, perceived their relationships as secure, were likely to engage and persist, and exerted control over their environment. Students who were identified as having a vulnerable or spiritually-dominated profile had the lowest wellbeing, career optimism and academic satisfaction scores. Resilience profiles such as those used by Ganguly and Perera (2019) could be a useful means of highlighting students who may have low resilience in the face of adversity and knock-on challenges to their wellbeing, career optimism and academic satisfaction. By highlighting such students early in their higher education career, they could be supported through

their Disabled Students Allowance mentors, student support services and personal tutors to develop skills and behaviours to support their resilience and persistence with their studies.

Tinto's (2017b) model of student persistence illustrates persistence as a product of students' self-efficacy, sense of belonging, perception of the curriculum, goals and motivation. This section has demonstrated that the behaviour of persistence can also be viewed through the psychological notions of perseverance, grit and resilience. These notions are in turn interconnected with each other and aspects that Tinto (2017b) illustrated in the model, particularly a sense of belonging which is similarly referred to as relatedness. The nuanced differences between persistence and perseverance, grit and resilience have been observed with some of the recent research related to students. As this thesis seeks to explore persistence from the theoretical position presented by Tinto (2017b), it will continue to use the term persistence. But it recognises that persistence is both the behaviour of continuing with academic studies and the psychological concept of the "quality that allows someone to continue in pursuit of a goal even when challenges arise" (Tinto, 2017a, p. 2) which interconnects with a range of terms that can be used synonymously by some authors.

2.4   Continuation and persistence of non-traditional students

UK higher education students are traditionally portrayed in the media as a homogenous group, depicted as young, academic high achievers, who study full-time whilst living away from their family home initially in university accommodation. Students who possess demographic characteristics that are counter to this classic image of UK undergraduate students are variously described as widening participation, non-traditional or under-represented students. Although there are specific meanings to these terms in certain contexts, broadly they are used interchangeably in the research literature to describe any students who do not fit the traditional image of an undergraduate student. However, the reality of student populations in the UK is more complex than the traditional students depicted in the media.

In English higher education providers 30% of students are classified as mature (aged 21 or above at the commencement of their course), 43% are from postcode areas that are classified as the two highest quintiles of deprivation (using the 2019 Index of Multiple Deprivation [IMD]), 31% have a Black, Asian or minority ethnic (BAME) heritage and 17% are disabled (Office for Students, 2022). The Office for Students (2022) recognises that nationally mature students, those from disadvantaged areas, those with BAME heritage, disabled students and those who are care-experience as under-represented, have poorer access, success and progression outcomes than their peers. Further, Donnelly and Gamsu (2018) explain that approximately 25% of full-time young undergraduate students are defined as commuter students, travelling daily to university. Social class is a key factor in university mobility, with leaving home and attending a distant university still the preserve of white, middle class and privately educated young people (Donnelly & Gamsu, 2018). Despite this national picture of under-representation of certain demographic groups, in individual higher education providers there is considerable variation in student populations. In the case study University Centre, 74% of students are mature, 45% of students are from the two most deprived IMD quintiles, less than 5% are of BAME heritage and 28% are disabled (Office for Students, 2022), and over 99% are commuter students whose home address is in the same county as the University Centre (████, 2020).

There is considerable data to suggest that the pattern of student continuation and persistence for non-traditional students varies considerably from their peers. The latest data from the Office for Students (2022) report that in English higher education providers mature students are 8 percentage points less likely to continue with their studies compared to young students; students from IMD quintile 1, the most deprived postcode areas, are 8 percentage points less likely to continue compared to students from IMD quintile 5; Black students are 6.2 percentage points less likely to continue compared to their White peers; and disabled students are 0.9 percentage points less likely to continue compared to their non-disabled peers (Office for Students, 2022). Theory and research have attempted to understand the reasons for these differing continuation rates between under-represented or non-traditional students, and their peers.

Almost 40 years ago, Bean and Metzner (1985) presented a conceptual model explaining the contributing factors to the attrition of non-traditional students (Figure 8). The noticeable difference between this model and earlier student attrition models is the influence of social interaction. Bean and Metzner (1985) propose that social variables from the outside environment are more valuable to non-traditional students than the college social variables of traditional student models of attrition, and other environmental variables such as family responsibilities also play a significant role. They propose the most important non-traditional characteristics that influence attrition are older students, part-time students, those from ethnic minorities, women and academically unprepared students, particularly those at certain types of higher education providers. Indeed, the challenge facing models and research of non-traditional student continuation is disaggregating the impact of different non-traditional characteristics, the intersection of disadvantage when students possess more than one non-traditional characteristic, and the differential impact of whether non-traditional students are under or over-represented in their higher education provider. Thus, arguably an 'under-represented' mature commuter student from a more disadvantaged background maybe a typical student within their specific provider, such as the University Centre. If so, it raises the question, are they subjected to the same influences and challenges compared to if they were at a more traditional provider with a dominant residential, young and middle-class student population.
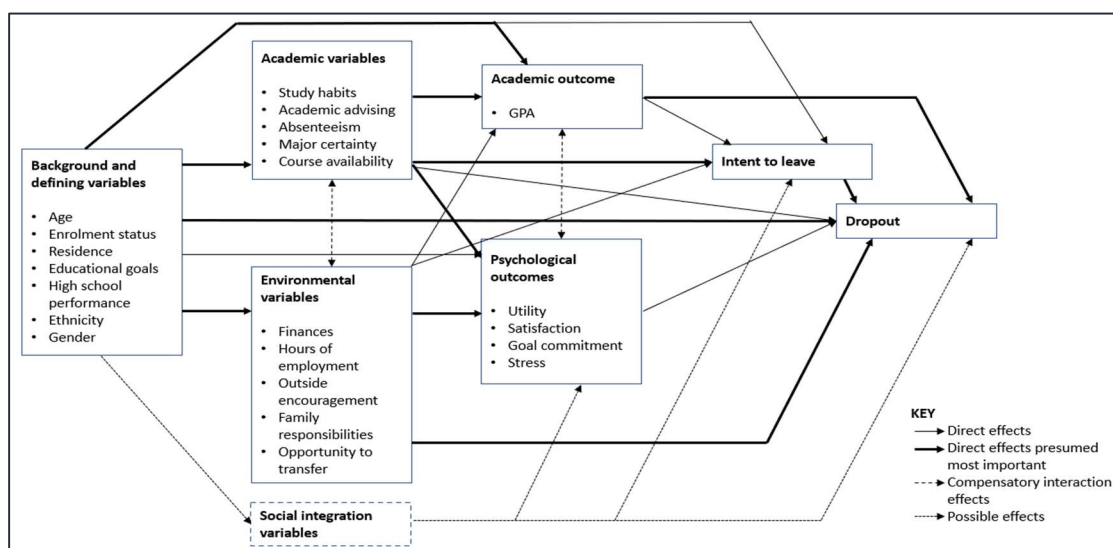
Figure 8. A conceptual model of non-traditional student attrition adapted from Bean and Metzner (1985).

Research exploring non-traditional student groups tends to consider the factors that influence the persistence of students with certain background demographic characteristics or conflate all non-traditional characteristics to identify any universal factors influencing continuation. In the UK the most widely accepted definition of a non-traditional student is any student with a characteristic under-represented in higher education – as advocated by the Office for Students (2022) – and those who are the first in their family to attend university, mature students, disabled students, single parents, students from low-income families, and with a BAME heritage (Cotton, Nash & Kneale, 2017). In US academic research, students attending community colleges are often depicted as disadvantaged, thus research in this field contributes to our understanding of non-traditional student continuation. Research identifies themes in the factors influencing the continuation and withdrawal of such students: demographic characteristics, pre-university learning experience, financial and employment issues, relationships, organisational fit and belonging, engagement in learning, and a supportive higher education provider.

Bean and Metzner (1985) identify students' background and defining variables, their demographic characteristics as well as their pre-university studying experience as a central factor in dropout decision making. Non-traditional student research supports the model, and identifies student demographic groups at particular risk of withdrawing as male students (Hillman, 2021; Rose-Adams, 2013), mature students (Nakajima, Dembo, & Mossler, 2012; Mason, 2018; Rose-Adams, 2013), those with an ethnic minority heritage (Elder, 2021; Hillman, 2021) and those who are the first in their family to attend university (Cotton, Nash & Kneale, 2017; Elder, 2021). Students' attendance pattern is highlighted across the literature as having an impact on their continuation. Their planned attendance pattern - part-time, distance or full-time - as well as their actual attendance at lectures (Cotton, Nash & Kneale, 2017; Hillman, 2021), and the time and distance to commute to campus (Cotton, Nash & Kneale, 2017; Hillman, 2021; Rose-Adams, 2013) are factors impacting on continuation. Despite the identification of these at-risk groups in this section of the literature, there is little discussion about why they might be at risk, and what it is about these characteristics that makes them less likely to complete. Research

discussed later, focusing on individual demographic groups, explores the reasons in more depth. Those who had a poor schooling experience or progressed to higher education from a further education college or with a low tariff entry point, are also identified as at greater risk of withdrawing (Cotton, Nash & Kneale, 2017; Elder, 2021; Nakajima, Dembo, & Mossler, 2012; Rose-Adams, 2013; Wong, 2018). Wong (2018) interviewed 30 final year high-achieving non-traditional students at a UK university to identify what helped them to succeed. They found that successful students had a strong personal desire to prove themselves as capable, often in response to previous negative experience (Wong, 2018). This desire to prove oneself in response to previous negative experience was also reflected in Cotton, Nash and Kneale's (2017) application of a resilience framework to understand student retention. They recognised that students with a high intrinsic or altruistic determination motivation to succeed, or a positive self-identity and confidence, demonstrated greater resilience and were more protected against withdrawal contemplation. Possibly, this resilience intrinsic determination could be a manifestation of the desire to prove themselves in response to previous negative experience. The background variables identified have an influence on students' environment variables (Bean & Metzner, 1985).

Research that has investigated students with certain background demographic characteristics explores the continuation of mature students, those with disabilities, from ethnic minorities, refugee students, commuter students, those who are the first in their family to attend university, from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds or are care-experienced. The characteristics most relevant to the current research are mature students, commuter students, and those who are first-in-family to attend university or from disadvantaged backgrounds, as students with these characteristics are overrepresented at the University Centre.

Withdrawal contemplation is more common in mature students, than in the general student population (Webb & Cotton, 2018). The reasons attributed to mature students' withdrawal contemplation or non-continuation varies across the research literature, but there are themes. Pressures of employment, including demanding job roles, the financial imperative to work more hours, and job loss or redundancy are cited as contributing factors to withdrawal

contemplation (Capps, 2012; Castles, 2004; Markle, 2015). Conversely participants in Markle's (2015) online survey of over 4000 mature undergraduates in the US identified the ability to adjust their work commitments as a factor that supported their continuation. The role of mature students' families was also central to their ability to continue with their studies. A supportive family, who were not experiencing any form of crisis, and the feeling that studying was providing a role model for students' children were all protective factors in student continuation (Capps, 2012; Castles, 2004; Markle, 2015). However, the same research also recognised that a family crisis, intimate relationship difficulty or additional family demands such as caring for a relative, can cause students to contemplate withdrawing or cease with their studies. How the student prepares for and actively engages in their studies, including using the available support was a further theme of withdrawal contemplation for mature students. Students who took a strategic approach to learning, prepared themselves for their studies, took responsibility for their learning, and accumulated skills and knowledge outside of the classroom, were all more likely to continue (Capps, 2012; Carreira & Lopas, 2020; Castles, 2004; Markle, 2015; Ozga & Sukhnandan, 1998). In contrast, those who were unprepared, with unrealistic expectations of university, or failed to make use of the support services available from the university, instead relying on informal support from peers, were more likely to withdraw (Ozga & Sukhnandan, 1998). Mature students also reflected the importance of contact with academic and support staff, including their personal tutors, on their withdrawal contemplation. Those who positively integrated with this support and sought wider social integration at university were less likely to withdraw or contemplate it (Carreira & Lopas, 2020; Castles, 2004; Webb & Cotton, 2018).

Commuter students typically make up 25% of young student populations in the UK (Donnelly & Gamsu, 2018). Research indicates that time spent commuting between home and campus significantly affects continuation, with one London higher education provider illustrating that for every additional ten minutes commute, the likelihood of students' continuation dropped by 0.63% (London Higher, 2019). Commuter students attending predominately residential universities identify several factors in addition to the actual time commuting that impact on their continuation. A complicated relationship or poor sense of

belonging to the higher education provider, and a lack of social integration is a noted contributing factor to withdrawal (Baker, Arroyo, Braxton & Gasman, 2020). Fernandes, Ford, Rayner, and Pretorius (2017) reported on an intervention to foster a positive sense of belonging for commuter students at an Australian university. Participants who had joined the Non-Residential Colleges programme of mentors, events and collegial identity activities for commuter students, found an increased sense of belonging, connectedness with peers, engagement in social networks, and increased on-campus attendance (Fernandes, Ford, Rayner & Pretorius, 2017). Like mature students, commuter students also cite the important role of the family and interactions with academic and support staff. Pokorney, Holley and Kane (2016) recognised that family connections and constraints were important both in the selection of higher education providers, and in maintaining the students' sense of belonging whilst at university. Interpreting the responses of commuter students in Ireland, Dwyer (2017) stresses the importance of student-faculty interactions in the classroom in fostering students' social integration, and subsequent academic development and persistence with their studies. They imply that as commuter students are typically less involved in the social life of their higher education provider, a classroom environment that provides opportunities for active and collaborative learning between peers and academic staff, enables commuter students to build those important social connections that foster belonging (Dwyer, 2017). Thus, concurring with the research into mature students' persistence, the importance of creating a sense belonging that mirrors that of traditional students can not be underestimated in terms of its contribution to student persistence.

Unlike the research with mature and commuter students, investigations into the persistence of students who are socio-economically disadvantaged, or the first in family to attend university, tend to focus on practical issues and students' assimilation into university life. Harrison and Waller (2018) observe that students from disadvantaged backgrounds are often suspected of having lower aspirations, and this has guided UK higher education policy in recent years with activities to raise aspirations. However, they report that those from disadvantaged backgrounds have similar levels of aspirations, whereas their school attainment accounts for almost all the differences in participation levels (Harrison & Waller, 2018). On a practical basis, Harrison, Davies, Harris and

Waller (2018) found that low-income students reported the usefulness of financial bursaries in enabling them to continue to participate in higher education. Students who are socio-economically disadvantaged are often reported as being unprepared for university, arriving with differing levels of human capital (Crawford, 2014; Sadowski, Stewart & Pediaditis, 2018). Those who are the first in the family to attend university are also impacted by reduced human capital and family support. Andrew, Costello, Robinson and Dare (2020) interviewed 29 nursing students whose partner had not attended university, they found partners were less willing to share the university journey or provide emotional and practical support. Contrary to the narrative that disadvantaged or first in family students lack human capital, Payne, Muenks and Aguayo (2021) found that first in family students were effectively seeking help, using their networks to seek help, assess the quality of that help and take corrective measures. This final finding from Payne, Muenks and Aguayo (2021) illustrates that disadvantaged students take agency in their learning, perhaps not in traditional means, but use their own strengths to build success. Despite the indications that disadvantaged and first in family students have poorer continuation than their peers, Quinn et al. (2005) observed that some of those who withdraw from their studies for rational reasons, but see value in a university education, seek to return later. Unfortunately, as noted earlier, although this may be the aspiration, in England, the student finance regulation may now prohibit students from returning to university later.

Hunt and Loxley (2021) observe that part-time students are a heterogeneous population and often include students with varied demographics recognised as non-traditional: mature students, return to study students, and those from different ethnic, social and economic groups. Hunt and Loxley (2021) conducted interviews with part-time students from six higher education providers in Ireland, finding that although students felt a sense of belonging to their programme, this did not equate to a feeling of inclusion to the whole organisation. The part-time students had busy and complicated lives impacting on their ability to access support and facilities, which further impacted their integration with the organisation and their ability to persist. The picture presented by Hunt and Loxley (2021) is supported by earlier research in the UK by Rose-Adams and Hewitt (2012) and in Hong Kong, Australia and Papua New Guinea by Kember

(1999), who attest to the complex lives of part-time students with competing family, work, social and study priorities. Kember (1999) notes that part-time students are adept at negotiating sanctuaries of time and space for study within their busy lives, and that those with adverse circumstances are not pre-destined to fail, but higher education providers need to create accessible support facilities for part-time students.

Bean and Metzner's (1985) environmental variables are recognised in the research literature as contributing to continuation or withdrawal contemplation, notably financial concerns and the influence of the family. Having financial concerns were cited widely as a factor contributing to withdrawal, as was the impact of having to work in paid employment (Cotton, Nash & Kneale, 2017; Elder, 2021; Nakajima, Dembo, & Mossler, 2012; Rose-Adams, 2013). Students with financial difficulties reported withdrawing to be able to take up more work or due to concerns about the costs of being a student (Rose-Adams & Hewitt, 2012), and financial worries causing mental health difficulties which subsequently impacted on their ability to study (Cotton, Nash & Kneale, 2017). Conversely Elder (2021) and Harrison, Davies, Harris and Waller (2018) found financial support in the form of scholarships and bursaries alleviated financial concerns, facilitating continuation. For some non-traditional students, the challenge of childcare or providing care for family members were cited as factors making continuing with studies difficult (Cotton, Nash & Kneale, 2017). However, the outside encouragement from a supportive family, significant adult relationship and a strong family and friendship network are identified as protective factors by Cotton, Nash and Kneale (2017) and Wong (2018). For mature students the family plays an even greater role (Capps, 2012; Castles, 2004; Markle, 2015). Further, Wong (2018) found that successful non-traditional students had significant others in their lives, supporting them emotionally, practically and with their studies. Typically, this significant other was a family member or close friend, but some students also cited their personal tutor or academic and support staff who went over and above to support them to achieve (Wong, 2018).

The role of academic staff in supporting students is also reflected in Bean and Metzner's (1985) academic variables, alongside factors such as study habits. A supportive higher education provider that enables students to develop academic

skills, through an organisational culture that demonstrates staff care and provides accessible support was observed as a factor in enabling non-traditional students to continue with their studies (Cotton, Nash & Kneale, 2017; Mc Taggart, 2016; Nakajima, Dembo, & Mossler, 2012; Wong, 2018). Mc Taggart (2016) conducted interviews and focus groups with higher education students studying at a further education college in Northern Ireland. The students who had withdrawn from their studies questioned who the college support services were for, as they felt they were aimed at further education students and did not meet their needs. However, Mc Taggart (2016) notes that potentially due to students' poor educational capital and self-confidence, they did not seek out the appropriate support, simply giving up as they felt it was not for them. The college higher education setting of Mc Taggart's (2016) research makes it particularly relevant to the current study. They discuss college higher education students being primarily the first in their family to attend university and the associated economic, cultural and educational capital challenges that they face, but that within a college higher education environment they can feel supported and that they belong (Mc Taggart, 2016).

The final theme of the non-traditional student persistence research literature is belonging and institutional fit. Although Tinto (2017b) includes a sense of belonging as a key element of persistence, it is not reflected in Bean and Metzner's (1985) model apart from as social integration variables. Cotton, Nash and Kneale (2017) and Elder (2021) both identify the gap between a student's first-choice or preferred university characteristics, and the provider where the student ends up studying, as a factor involved in their continuation. Cotton, Nash and Kneale (2017) observe that this variable is more marked if the student enrols at the university through the clearing process. The aspect of institutional fit or belonging observed by Read, Archer and Leatherhead (2003) and Rose-Adams (2013), also relates to the culture or perception of a non-traditional student not belonging in a more selective or high entrance tariff university. There is evidence to suggest that non-traditional students in high entrance tariff providers have a weaker sense of belonging and institutional fit, as they may perceive themselves as 'others', compared to their peers in lower tariff providers (Read, Archer & Leatherhead, 2003). However, this research is almost 20 years

old, and although carried out at a post-1992 higher education provider, may not reflect the more socially diverse higher education environments of today.

Reviewing Bean and Metzner's (1985) model of non-traditional student persistence considering recent academic research demonstrates that the homogenous conception of non-traditional students is more complex, with different students' characteristics impacting on continuation and persistence, and the intersection of those characteristic compounding some of the challenges students face. Further, Bean and Metzner's (1985) omission of the notion of belonging, because they felt that social variables from outside the higher education environment were more valuable, appears to not be supported by the research. Non-traditional students in the research demonstrate the importance of a sense of belonging, feeling that academic staff care, not feeling othered by students, and having the capital and confidence to seek support were all important factors in their continuation and persistence with studies.

2.5   Personal tutoring

Mynott (2016) discusses how being a personal tutor in higher education is an ill-defined role, with a lack of focus regarding what tutors are trying to achieve. They talk about three levels of tutoring practice at the macro, meso and micro level. At the macro level, tutors are focusing on improving provider-level transition and retention data driven by organisational targets to meet governmental benchmarks. Arguably there is increased pressure from this macro driver since the establishment of the Office for Students and their B conditions of registration that emphasise positive outcomes for all students (Office for Students, 2020b). Mynott (2016) contends that at the meso level, tutors are working towards provider-level policies and priorities which likely highlight the provider's mission, vision and approach to learning. Finally, at the micro level, Mynott (2016) proposes that tutors are student-centred, focusing on individual students' wellbeing and satisfaction. The complexity of the role with potentially competing priorities can leave personal tutors feeling challenged (Luck, 2010; McFarlane, 2016). Further to the competing priorities, the roles and responsibilities can be wide, Lochtie, McIntosh, Stork and Walker (2018, pp. 13-14) summarises these as: providing academic feedback and

development; personal welfare support; referral to further information and support; embodiment and representative of the university; information about higher education processes, procedures and expectations; engendering a sense of belonging; goal/target setting and monitoring achievement; and solution-focused coaching.

It is widely reported that personal tutors can play a key role in supporting students to persist with their studies (Bowden, 2008; Richardson & Radloff, 2014; Thomas, Hill, O'Mahony & Yorke, 2017). Webb, Wyness and Cotton (2017) reviewed literature from 2007 for the Higher Education Academy regarding retention, attainment and progression. They summarised that although literature suggested that personal tutors have potential for being key to enhancing student engagement and retention, they found few studies that were able to quantify the impact tutoring has on retention. However, several case studies and qualitative research have reflected the positive impact personal tutors can have on students' contemplation of withdrawal and decision to persist. Thomas, Hill, O'Mahony and Yorke (2017) presented case studies from 13 higher education providers illustrating their approaches to improving student retention and success. Many of the case studies cite personal tutors as having a role within the retention activities including using data analytics, providing academic development feedback, one-to-one tutorials, group time-tabled tutorials for team building and academic skills development, providing interventions for weak students, monitoring attendance, and facilitating peer mentoring.

In response to Webb, Wyness and Cotton's (2017) finding that there was a lack of quantitative studies, Webb and Cotton (2018) developed an institutional survey of 1170 undergraduates to explore the factors involved in students' contemplation of withdrawal. The contemplation of withdrawal is a significant predictor of actual withdrawal from higher education (Willcoxson, Cotter & Joy, 2011). Webb and Cotton (2018) found an association between contemplating withdrawal and the perception that there was a low level of one-to-one contact with academic staff; non-lecture-based delivery methods; low peer interactions; and a high level of assessments. 37% of their student participants felt that the

number of meetings with their personal tutor was too low. Despite this observation, contemplation of withdraw was not associated with perceptions of personal tutoring. Students positively rated their tutor's approachability, being comfortable discussing non-academic issues with their tutor, and the tutor's encouragement and giving of useful advice. Webb and Cotton (2018) conclude that finding ways to increase the level of one-to-one contact between students and their academic staff, especially personal tutors, could positively impact on students' persistence if they are contemplating withdrawing from their studies.

Thomas (2006) suggests the additional commitments that many students have, such as caring or family responsibilities and the need to work alongside their studies, reduce students' participation in extra-curricular activities or anything that is perceived as non-essential, including the seeking of pastoral or academic support. Blythman, Orr, Hampton, McLaughlin and Waterworth (2006) note that students arrive in higher education with differing understandings and alignments to higher education provider processes. They suggest that this is a specific problem for students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, but I would argue that it is a problem for all college higher education students. Students in college HE rarely take traditional routes into higher education, many have been out of formal education for twenty or thirty years, are the first in their family to undertake tertiary education or they need considerable study or mental health support to enrol and remain on programme (Thomas, 2015). Additionally, Quinn et al. (2005) recognised that there was a wide spectrum and complex interplay of reasons why 'working-class students drop-out' leaving their course before completion. Thus, college higher education students are likely to arrive at their higher education provider without a strong idea of what to expect or an understanding of processes involved in undergraduate study, nor the knowledge and skills to start studying at that level, thereby influencing their capacity to persist with and complete their studies.

Inclusive educational practices can enable all students from diverse backgrounds to develop a sense of understanding, alignment and belonging to their new higher education provider. Booth and Ainsworth (2002, p. 3) describe inclusive educational practices as an "unending process of increasing learning

and participation for all students". Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) assert there is a broad consensus and understanding around this definition but draw a further distinction between inclusive practice and inclusive pedagogy. They describe inclusive practices as "the things that people *do* to give meaning to the concept of inclusion" and inclusive pedagogy "indicate[s] a focus on the act of teaching" (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011, p. 814, italics in original). Hockings (2010, p. 1) expands the definition of inclusive pedagogy, claiming it is the way "pedagogy, curricula and assessment are designed and delivered to engage students in learning that is meaningful, relevant and accessible to all". Lochtie, McIntosh, Stork and Walker (2018, p. 2) describe tutoring as encompassing personalised learning activities between academics, support staff and students, I believe tutoring in this manner is reflective of inclusive practice and pedagogy.

Acknowledging the greater diversity of students entering higher education under the widening participation agenda, Grant (2006, p. 13) questions whether the traditional pastoral model of tutorial support is sustainable, observing that many students experience a range of personal, financial, practical and health difficulties during their studies that require specialist knowledge, skills and experience that are usually lacking in the academic staff who often undertake the personal tutoring role. Many higher education providers, including the case study University Centre, have reviewed their tutorial offer since Grant's (2006) questioning of the sustainability of a pastoral model, and now deploy an integrated approach to personal tutoring, drawing on the pastoral, professional and curriculum models.

A curriculum model of tutorial involves group tutorials being part of the timetabled curriculum, with an emphasis on academic study skills, group cohesion and wellbeing, and personal and professional development. This is the tutorial model often used in compulsory secondary schooling and further education, but less often used in higher education. According to Lochtie, McIntosh, Stork and Walker (2018, p. 114), the curriculum model of group tutorials is increasingly used in the UK higher education sector. However, there is a paucity of research about group tutorials, and particularly their impact on student experience or persistence. Stevenson (2009) discuss how group

tutorials can support students to become familiar with higher education practices and norms, and the skills needed to succeed, which are particularly important for non-traditional students who may have arrived at their university with under-developed knowledge and skills in this area. Braine and Parnell's (2011) nursing students wanted more regular group tutorials, and they supported Stevenson's (2009) observation that group tutorials not only fostered students' sense of belonging, but also their capacity to learn together and from each other. In practice, the curriculum model of group tutorials is often used in conjunction with pastoral tutoring in an integrated model of tutoring.

Thomas (2006, p. 27) presented an intergraded model of tutoring involving a personal tutor supporting individual students, academic tutoring embedded in programme structures, and support from professional services teams. An integrated model requires the personal tutor to co-ordinate these facets of tutoring to "create a safe, supportive and positive learning environment" whereby students feel safe, secure, confident and valued (Lochtie, McIntosh, Stork & Walker, 2018, p. 190). To create this learning environment, Thomas, Hill, O'Mahony and Yorke (2017, p. 8) suggest that "the human side of higher education needs to come first", by this they mean "above all, feeling a part of your course of study and the institution". This can be achieved through the core values of effective personal tutoring: high expectations, approachability, diplomacy, being non-judgmental, compassion, an "equal partner, not superior" approach, authenticity and valuing students as individuals, implying that these qualities contribute to student-centred approaches to personal tutoring (Lochtie, McIntosh, Stork & Walker, 2018, p. 33). These core values are reflected in the Professional Framework for Advising and Tutoring (UKAT, 2019). Therefore, I contend that if higher education providers are to continue providing pastoral tutoring within an integrated model of tutoring, they need to embrace student-centred approaches to inclusion and inclusive practices by focusing on the 'human side' of higher education.

Student-centred learning is ubiquitous in UK higher education, the term is widely used in teaching and learning literature with many higher education providers' websites proclaiming to use student-centred teaching and learning

approaches. But as O'Neill and McMahon (2005) and Tangney (2014) acknowledge, student-centred learning is poorly defined and can mean different things to different people. Tangney (2014) notes that it is generally associated with constructivist ideas of building on prior knowledge, purposeful active learning and sense-making. Yet, it is often paraphrased as the educator caring for students as individuals and seeking to engage students in the learning process so that they have more responsibility for their learning (Lillie & Wygal, 2011; McCabe & O'Connor, 2014). These concepts relate to the curriculum learning environment rather than the more holistic conceptions of personal growth, consciousness raising and empowerment, advocated by Carl Rogers (Tangney, 2014), within a personal tutoring environment. For more nuanced definitions of student-centred learning, we need to explore its roots in the principles of person-centred counselling advocated by the founding humanistic psychologist Carl Rogers (Bryan, Lindo, Anderson-Johnson & Weaver, 2015; Heim, 2012; Tangney, 2014). Rogers believed that students have the most important answers to their own personal issues within themselves, and that the job of the teacher is to create a supportive learning environment allowing students to discover those answers (Rogers, Lyon & Tausch, 2014, p. xxiii). Rogers (1957) explains the conditions required are a genuineness of the relationship, unconditional positive regard and empathy.

Thus far, it is acknowledged that at the micro level personal tutoring is student-centred with the focus on the individual students' academic and social wellbeing (Mynott, 2016) and that student-centred learning has its roots in Rogers' (1957) principles of genuineness, unconditional positive regard and empathy. Turning to research that has explored how student-centred personal tutoring supports students' success and positive outcomes, it is useful to identify the milestones in the student journey when personal tutors can have influence. Tait (2004) argues that tutors have a facilitative role in student retention that is both complex and valuable. They note that there are three key issues in the student journey: making contact, moving forward and boundary issues. Using an action research methodology with Open University tutors in the UK, Tait (2004) stressed the importance of the initial making contact period to welcome the student, early encouragement ahead of the first assessment submission and

feedback to help the student judge whether it is the right course for them. Moving forward referred to the establishment of good relations to enable tutors to recommend well-timed and structured interventions. Uniquely to the Open University that is structured with a modular curriculum, Tait (2004) observed that tutors were focused on completion of their individual module rather than the broader aspiration of supporting students to persist to complete a full undergraduate degree. This was recognised when tutors talked in a finite manner about learning experience in one module course without consideration of the potential systematic impact on the student's overall persistence.

Tait (2004) discussed the role of moving forward within the student journey and how the relationship between personal tutors and students can facilitate this. They observed that successful learning derives from good relationships and timely support interventions. The distance learning nature of the Open University creates some unique challenges for building and nurturing strong student-tutor relations. However, even in face-to-face teaching environments students reported wanting more meaningful contact with their tutors (Webb & Cotton, 2018; Stephen, O'Connell & Hall, 2008). A meaningful relationship with the personal tutor, where the students feel they matter can provide the 'safety net' some students need when they are struggling or feeling isolated during their studies (Dobinson-Harrington, 2006). However, this meaningful relationship can be resource intensive for the tutor, who is likely to give up much of their personal time to provide empathic support and understanding to the tutees (Dobinson-Harrington, 2006).

The final aspect considered by Tait (2004) was one of boundary issues. Boundaries within the personal tutor-student relationship are often discussed (Gardner & Lane, 2010; Walker, 2020b). Tait's (2004) research concurs with the reflections and findings from Gardner and Lane (2010) and Walker (2020b) that tutors find the challenges of maintaining boundaries within the tutor-student relationship, and struggle to maintain the balance between supporting a student to achieve and either over-supporting or not taking an active enough role. One of Tait's (2004) participants reflected that getting the balance right between prompting a student with encouragement and not putting too much pressure on

them is difficult, especially in a distance-learning environment. Similar themes were raised by Walker's (2020b) tutor participants who felt challenged by the need to foster independence rather than dependence. Gardner and Lane (2010), who uniquely co-authored a reflection on the relationship from both the tutor and student perspective, discuss the boundaries between educational support and therapy or counselling. They reflect, personal tutors are not counsellors and being aware of the limitations of the personal tutor role with clear boundaries is important to enable the tutor to provide educational support not therapy. Walker's (2020b) participants also discussed boundaries in terms of the pastoral side of the role, with many expressing the need for more training to support tutors to gain clarity about what they can do and how to do it which would give greater confidence in establishing and maintaining appropriate boundaries. Despite the context of Tait's (2004) research within the Open University with its distance-learning modular curricula, the observations about the three key issues in the student journey are valid for other higher education providers. The key issues Tait (2014) observes of making contact, moving forward and boundaries have resonance for all personal tutors in how they can facilitate retention and student persistence. The importance of the relationship between tutor and students to foster this persistence is discussed in the next section.

Conducting a review of extant research regarding the teacher-student relationship in higher education, Hagenauer and Volet (2014) conclude that the relationship clearly affects students' course satisfaction, learning approaches, achievement and retention. They present a heuristic framework for teacher-student relations depicting antecedents, quality and consequences (Figure 9).
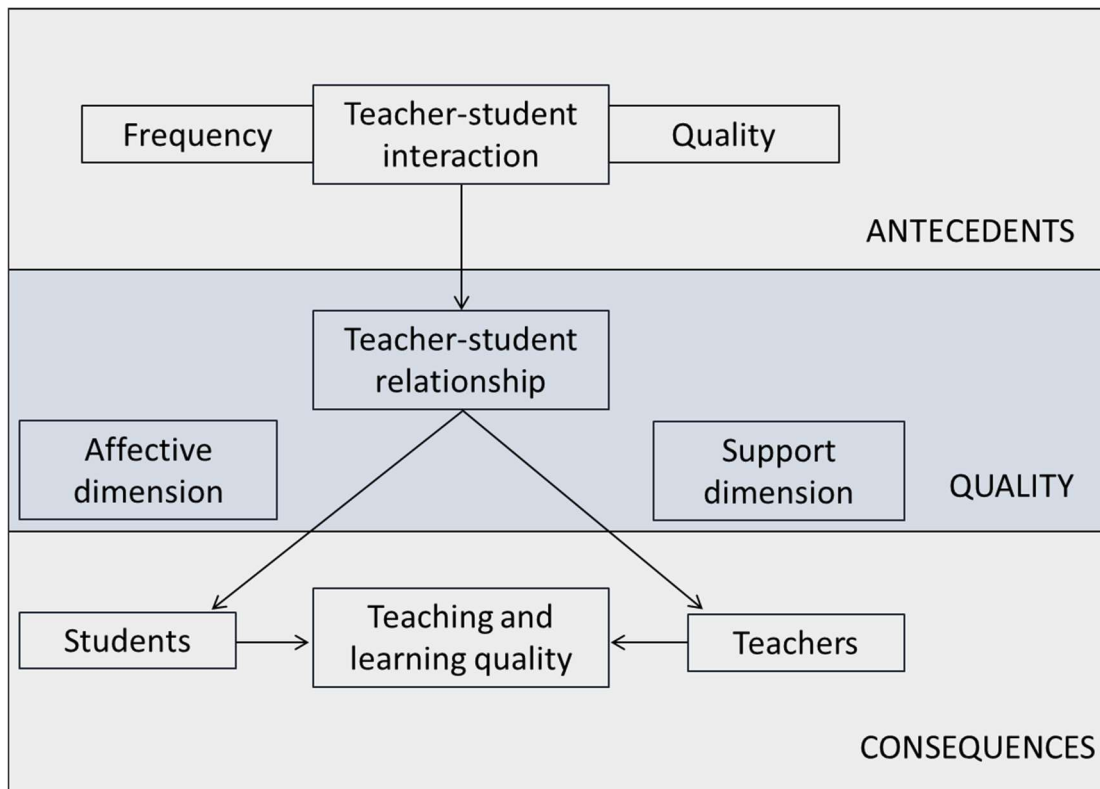
Figure 9. A heuristic framework for exploring teacher-student relationships in higher education, adapted from Hagenauer and Volet (2014).

According to Hagenauer and Volet (2014) the two main dimensions which differentiate quality within the teacher-student relationship are affective and support. They describe the affective dimension as the bond between teacher and student which when positively experienced is a secure and affective relationship. Aspects of the affective dimension include trust, honesty, respect and care for students which reflect the humanistic values extoled by Rogers (1957). Hagenauer and Volet (2014) observe that much of the teacher-student research relates to schools and thus the caring aspect reflects an adult-child relationship. Whereas in higher education the relationship is adult-adult and the caring aspect reflects teachers promoting independence in their students rather than a dependency relationship that you might observe in a school setting. There are parallels in this observation to Walker's (2020b) findings that personal tutors' perception of the effectiveness was often framed in terms of fostering independence in their students. The support dimension relates to the support a student needs from the teacher-student relationship to succeed at university (Hagenauer & Volet, 2014). The support dimension is also depicted as a balancing act between supportive helpful behaviour and the teacher providing

challenge to the students. Achieving the right balance between support and challenge can be tricky, yet Devlin and O'Shea (2012) found that higher education students identified the most helpful teachers as those that pay attention to their learning, speak in language students can understand and maintain academic challenge. Hagenauer and Volet (2014) observe that the quality of approachability, that is highlighted widely as a core value of personal tutoring (Lochtie, McIntosh, Stork & Walker, 2018, p. 48), is a characteristic of both the affective and support dimension of the teacher-student relationship. Students recognise a teacher as affect-approachable if they feel that they will be listened to and that they trust the teacher, and support-approachable if they are physically available to support students who are seeking help (Hagenauer & Volet, 2014).

Extending Hagenauer and Volet's (2014) antecedent, quality and consequences framework, Yale (2019) explored how the framework applied to the specific student-personal tutor relationship. Yale (2019) interviewed six female first-year undergraduates at a UK university, three students were under 21 years old and three were mature students in their 30-40s. Despite this sample not being widely representative of the UK student population, it does more closely reflect the student population of the University Centre in this case study that is 60% female and 60% mature students. Inquiring about the quality of the student-tutor relationship, Yale's (2019) participants described the importance of building a bond with their tutor and getting to know them so that they felt comfortable asking for support. The overriding affective dimension recognised as important to the students was that of authenticity, where they felt that the tutor genuinely cared about them. Conversely, one of the participant students felt that their tutor did not want to see them, expressing strong negative emotions and feelings of rejection due to the tutor's apparent indifference. Yale (2019) concludes that a successful student-tutor relationship requires a genuine desire to help, and that simply increasing the number of student-tutor interactions is not enough, it is the quality of the relationship that matters. Cotton, Nash and Kneale (2017) echoed the importance of a tutor who provides a strong bond and relationship for the student with a 'significant adult' who is interested in the whole student, particularly for students who are care leavers and other non-traditional students.

The focus on the affective-quality of the relationship identified by Hagenauer and Volet (2014), Yale (2019) and Cotton, Nash and Kneale (2017) reiterates the importance of relatedness and belonging emphasized by Goodenow (1993).

Hagenauer and Volet (2014) discuss the importance of the professional relationship and approachability when focusing on the support-quality dimension, but they do not expand on the communication and interaction approaches taken by academic staff and tutors to facilitate this support. Braine and Parnell (2011) explored the personal tutoring support experiences of pre-registration nursing students at a UK higher education provider. Analysing self-report questionnaires from 447 students and semi-structured focus groups with 32 participants they identified that students were broadly satisfied with personal tutors' support, often expressing that they were crucial in their ability to complete the programme. However, supporting Richardson and Radloff's (2014) finding that frequency of interactions is important, Braine and Parnell's (2011) participants did want more timetabled structured group tutorials and individual time with their tutors. So much so that a quarter of questionnaire respondents felt they had unmet pastoral and academic support needs. This finding about the time spent with tutors contrasts with Yale's (2019) finding that it was the quality not the quantity that mattered. This discrepancy could simply be the result of differing tutoring practices within the higher education providers researched, perhaps the students in Yale's (2019) study had greater contact-time with their tutors than those in Richardson and Radloff's (2014) and Braine and Parnell's (2011) research. This suggests that there is an optimal balance of personal tutoring time, but this is also likely to differ for individual students.

Yale (2020) argues that psychological contract theory is a useful way to explore the student-tutor relationship. They describe the psychological contract as the beliefs individuals have about their roles and responsibilities in the exchange agreement established between themselves and the organisation or other parties in the agreement – the student and their tutor. It involves notions of obligations and expectations, and Yale (2020) contends that when the contract is fulfilled positive outcomes ensue such as increased motivation, overall satisfaction, and wellbeing. Exploring the psychological contract theory with six

purposefully sampled undergraduate students in one higher education provider, Yale (2020) identified themes related to attributions when students were feeling a sense of conflict when trying to make sense of their relationship with their tutor. The sources of conflict that participants raised related to notions of independence, confusion regarding the support a tutor could give, and tutors availability. The balance between fostering independence and dependency has been discussed previously (Hagenauer & Volet, 2014; Walker, 2020b). Yale's (2020) participants illustrated the conflict when discussing their expectations that they were to be independent learners in higher education, but needing support with new aspects of academic learning, such as referencing. Students were uncertain about how much support they could expect, and this led to negative emotions, which were often attributed to the organisation not giving clear guidance or appropriate teaching and learning experiences. Similarly, students were conflicted about the availability of their personal tutor, some attributing this internally as the tutor not interested in them, but others attributing it to the tutor being too busy with research or other students. The final conflict students expressed related to the perception of power within the student-tutor relationship. Yale (2020) observed that the mature students recognised the tutor's position of authority and respect, accepting this and being broadly unaffected by it, however the younger students tended to adopt a teacher-pupil discourse rather than adult to adult. It is noteworthy that the participants in this study are the same students interviewed during Yale's (2019) research, this is not intended as a critique as the depth of discussion and analysis undertaken warrants its inclusion. However, the views expressed relate to just six female first-year undergraduates from one programme, psychology, in one higher education provider and as already observed tutoring practice varies considerably from one provider to another.

Returning to the conflict of independence versus dependency (Hagenauer & Volet, 2014; Yale 2020), Walker (2020b) and McFarlane (2016) discuss the use of directive and non-directive approaches to interactions between tutors and their students. Evaluating the implementation of new professional development resources for tutors, Walker (2020b) observed that the key change in professional practice that tutors would implement due to the resources was to

adopt a non-directive coaching style in their practice. Tutors felt it helped them to elicit a greater response from students by using the questioning technique and a solution-focused approach. McFalane (2016) concurred that a non-directive approach fostered independent decision making in students. Interviewing eight personal tutors in a UK university, they observed both directive and non-directive approaches, attributing the differing approaches to tutors' confidence and previous experience. The advocation of non-directive coaching approaches to foster independence in students supports the proposition put forward by Lochtie, Mcintosh, Stork and Walker (2018, p. 15) that there is common ground between tutoring and coaching. However, Lochtie, Mcintosh, Stork and Walker (2018, p. 16) warn that although there is common ground, tutoring and coaching are not the same. Tutoring is relationship based supporting the formulation of personal development or learning goals, whereas coaching aims to develop skills or competency as part of a relationship.

To conclude this section on how personal tutoring supports students' success and persistence with their studies, the clear message from the research is that the quality of relationship both from an affective perspective and the support facilitated by the tutor is central to helping the student persist with their studies. Evaluating research regarding students' perceptions of the support they receive from their tutors is problematic. Due to the disparate nature of personal tutoring in the UK and overseas, the evidential conclusions regarding the availability and approachability of personal tutors are mixed.

2.6   Studying during the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has had wide-reaching implications for universities, students, and higher education staff around the world. Universities pivoted to online learning during early 2020 as the pandemic spread and lockdowns were imposed prompting university campus closures. The COVID student experience research and commentary published to date focuses on four broad areas: online learning, support from universities, the impact of COVID campus closures on student wellbeing, and the future implications for students. To date

there is a paucity of research related to student continuation and persistence during COVID. Zainol and Salleh (2021) report findings from student withdrawal records at a university in Malaysia citing the reasons for withdrawing during the COVID pandemic as low academic performance, e-learning difficulties, family/personal issues, financial constraints and mental or physical health issues. Similar UK research is not yet published, but there is preliminary UK data regarding continuation and withdrawal levels.

The rates of student early withdrawal, those who withdraw before 29 November in any given academic year, have fluctuated since the start of the pandemic in early 2020 according to the Student Loans Company. Comparing the pre-COVID baseline figures from 2018/19 of early withdrawals from higher education providers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, there was a small increase of 4% in 2019/20, followed by a 7% decrease in 2020/21, and a 6% increase in 2021/22 on the baseline figure (Student Loans Company, 2021). The Student Loans Company (2021) caution that the 2020/21 decrease of 7% could be accounted for by the irregular start to the academic year, with some providers extending the 'cooling off' period before students became liable for tuition fees and general administration disruption. However, another contributing factor could be students starting university in autumn 2020 being more realistic about the challenges they were going to face six months into the pandemic. The more comprehensive non-continuation records reported by the Office for Students and the Higher Education Statistic Agency for the full pandemic period have yet to be published. However, data from the Office for Students (2022) reveals that national continuation rates rose from 90.1% in 2018/19 to 91.4% in 2019/20, and the rate at the University Centre rose from 86% to 88% over the same period.

Reviewing the research and commentary regarding students' experiences of online learning during COVID highlights salient issues. There were widespread reports of student dissatisfaction with online learning, particularly in the initial campus closures of spring 2020 (Office for National Statistics, 2021; Pearson & Wonkhe, 2020; Xiong, Jiang & Mok, 2020). With just 27% of students satisfied with online learning at Hong Kong universities (Xiong, Jiang & Mok, 2020).

Further, 47% of students replying to the Pearson and Wonkhe (2020) online survey promoted through 13 English and Welsh higher education providers, wanted a fees reduction or compensation for the things they perceived missing out on during online learning. Students and university staff suggested the teaching and learning experience could have been improved with training to develop online learning resources, the ability to iteratively adapt curriculums for online delivery, and time to adapt to the expectations of active learning online (Lim, 2020; Scull, Phillips, Sharma & Garnier, 2020; Xiong, Jiang & Mok, 2020). In their 457 participants student survey from a public university in China, Su and Guo (2021) found that the biggest influence on student outcomes and satisfaction during COVID online learning was how students interacted with the learning content resources. The notion of learner-content interaction is not explained fully by Su and Guo (2021), but they use items from Kuo, Walker, Belland and Schroder's (2013) online student satisfaction tool. Kuo, Walker, Belland and Schroder (2013) explain that learner-content interaction is the process of students elaborating and reflecting on the course or subject content and is consistently found to be the strongest predictor of student satisfaction. This finding is noteworthy, as it indicates that despite the unique challenges of COVID, satisfaction during this period was influenced by the same online learning challenges that face students studying online in non-COVID times, namely the way they interact with the learning resources and learning process.

Research carried out by Pearson and Wonkhe (2020) provide some insight into the learner-content interaction challenges of asynchronistic online learning, with students explaining they wanted greater opportunities to ask questions, discuss learning, access feedback from academic staff and receive one-to-one support, all of which can foster deeper learning. University students reflecting on the challenges of online learning cited time management, distractions and self-discipline as the predominant difficulties they faced (Pearson & Wonkhe, 2020; Lim, 2020; Scull, Phillips, Sharma & Garnier, 2020; Su & Guo, 2021; Xiong, Jiang & Mok, 2020). Time management skills can help students to develop self-control and plan their unstructured time during COVID online learning. Recognising this, Tabvuma, Carter-Rogers, Brophy, Smith and Sutherland (2021) tested whether students who had received time management training

were able to spend more time on activities associated with student success during COVID online learning. They found that all students increased the amount of time they spend on leisure activities following the transition to online learning, but those who had received time management training spent more time on activities associated with student success than the control group (Tabvuma, Carter-Rogers, Brophy, Smith & Sutherland, 2021).

There is evidence about the impact of interactions between students and university staff during COVID on student satisfaction and outcomes. Su and Guo (2021) found no significant effect of learner-instructor interactions on student satisfaction, however UK student participants in the Pearson and Wonkhe (2020) survey cited greater interactions during learning, improved communications from the university and more one-to-one academic support as ways universities could improve the online learning experience. The importance of the higher education provider communicating frequently in a clear and timely manner is highlighted by Pearson and Wonkhe (2020) and Lim (2020). Lim (2020), reflecting on lessons learnt during COVID in Singapore, made the case for clear and frequent communications to students using multiple channels. They advocated taking regular pulse check surveys and responding proactively to the findings, tweaking the online experience and sharing concerns, so that the feeling of 'we are in this together' could help everyone on the online journey (Lim, 2020). Despite Pearson and Wonkhe's (2020) finding that students wanted more interaction in learning and one-to-one support, there is a paucity of UK research about relationships and interactions between students and academic staff during COVID campus closures, and how this influenced student experience and continuation. However, research from a Ghanaian university found that a smooth and successful transition to online learning during COVID was dependent on advising, engagement and remote transitional support (Adjeri, Pels & Amoako, 2021).

Student participants in Adjeri, Pels and Amoako's (2021) focus groups cited needing more direction in managing the multiple personal, home and academic challenges during the pandemic, this theme was corroborated by the Student Affairs team at the university who reported an overwhelming increase in

counselling, coaching and advising sessions. The students were positive about how the university engaged with seeking and addressing students' concerns and feedback, with support for internet bandwidth, and scholarships for accommodation and careers support as students entered an uncertain job market. The final element cited by the Ghanaian student participants was remote transitional support, involving timely responses and access to resources and flexibility in learning resources (Adjeri, Pels & Amoako, 2021). The practical difficulties of internet bandwidth and space conducive to studying was also noted by studies in the UK (Pearson & Wonke, 2020), Singapore (Lim, 2020), Hong Kong (Xiong, Jiang & Mok, 2020) and Australia (Scull, Phillips, Sharma & Garnier, 2020).

The issue that garners the most attention in the COVID student experience literature is the impact of online learning, campus closures and lockdowns on students' wellbeing and mental health. Numerous studies report the adverse impact of the COVID pandemic on students' mental health, particularly increased levels of anxiety and depression in countries as diverse as Australia, Italy, Germany, Bangladesh, Lebanon, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, India, US and UK (Andrewartha, Knight, Simpson & Beattie, 2022; Brooks et al., 2020; Calandri et al., 2021; Dadaczynski, Okan, Messer, & Rathmann, 2021; Dhar, Ayittey & Sarkar, 2020; Duong, Luo, Pham, Yang & Wand, 2020; Fawaz & Samaha, 2020; Jojoa, Lazaro, Garcia-Zapirain, Gonzalez & Urizar, 2021; Koelen et al., 2021; Kurcer, Erdogan, & Kades, 2021; Mohammed et al., 2021; Rudenstine et al., 2021; Suhail, Iqbal & Smith, 2020). Depending on the measures or instruments used in the research studies, researchers report: mental health decline; suffering severe/moderate/mild anxiety or depression; low wellbeing; or anxiety, depression or stress symptoms such as post-traumatic stress symptoms, confusion, anger or crying. In addition to generalised anxiety and depression, Kurcer, Erdogan and Kades (2021) reported increased levels of health anxiety, triggered by cyberchondria, particularly for students who lived alone, had a chronic health condition or were taking herbal supplements against COVID. Brooks et al. (2020), Calandri et al. (2021) and Masuymama et al. (2021) all reported COVID infection or contagion concerns and fears as contributing to students' poor mental health.

Other factors that are identified as contributing to students' mental health difficulties and poor wellbeing included financial stress, family and friendship relationship difficulties, concerns about academic studies, and worries and uncertainty about the future. The impact of financial insecurity, particularly job loss, parental income, financial problems and concerns about paying for the basics such as food were highlighted often as aspects that contributed to students' depression and anxiety symptoms. Rushenstine et al. (2021) and Cheah et al. (2021) identified that having a lower income family background increased students' likelihood of a poor quality of life and wellbeing during COVID in the US and Malaysia respectively. Further, Andrewartha, Knight, Simpson and Beattie (2022) observed that COVID exacerbated financial concerns for some students, due to job loss, reduced working hours or long-term financial insecurity. The impact of family and friendship relations on students' mental health and wellbeing is complex, for some, the absence of those relations due to social distancing rules and lockdowns prompted loneliness and poor wellbeing (Dhar, Ayittey & Sarkar, 2020; Koelen et al., 2021; Rudenstine et al., 2021), but for others lockdown and campus closures had a detrimental impact on family relations which in turn prompted depression (Calandri et al., 2021).

Students cite the pressure and worry about academic demands during the campus closures as contributing to their poor mental health and wellbeing. Bangladeshi students responding to Dhar, Ayittey and Sarkar's (2020) survey using the Generalised Anxiety Disorder Scale (GAD-7) demonstrated that worry about academic delays and not being able to progress with their studies due to COVID, had a moderate impact on anxiety levels. Further both Fawaz and Samaha (2020) reported that the academic demands of studying during the pandemic made day to day life stressful, and Masuymama et al. (2021) found that Thai students' worries about COVID were impacting on their studies. There is little research into how students sought to mitigate these factors impacting on their mental health and wellbeing, but Fawaz and Samaha (2020) note that most of their student participants with declining mental health did not report their difficulties or seek psychological support for their wellbeing. However,

Andrewartha, Knight, Simpson and Beattie (2022) observed that 10% of their parent-students reduced their study load, for example changing to part-time, and a further 7% took a break in learning or withdrew from their studies. It is possible to conclude that the widespread decline in student mental health and wellbeing during COVID was accepted by most as a consequence of the pandemic, and that some students took the only action they felt was available to them to reduce their study load or discontinue with their studies. However, it is clear that other students took a more drastic response to their declining mental health, with Brailovskaia, Teismann, Friedrich, Schneider, and Margraf (2021) reporting a doubling of German student suicide ideation in 2020 compared to the previous year, and Fuse-Nagase et al. (2021) observing an increase in Japanese student suicide rates during the lockdown, after an initial decline, particularly amongst female students.

Concerns and uncertainly about the future, both in terms of students' employability in an uncertain job market, but also more generalised future thinking contributed to poor wellbeing (Dadaczynski, Okan, Messer, & Rathmann, 2021; Elsharkawy & Abdelaziz, 2020; Pearson & Wonkhe, 2020; Suhail, Iqbal & Smith, 2020; Yatsuya & Ishitake, 2021). The Pearson and Wonkhe (2020) survey of UK students found that 49% of students were less certain about their next steps, with loss of work placement or industry experience, and changes in the economy and job security, cited as causes for this uncertainty. Four-fifths of students felt they had missed out on specific learning that would contribute to their employability including hands-on laboratory, studio or practical time, work-based learning, research activities, group or collaborative projects and study abroad. The impact of this uncertainty and missed opportunities resulted in 43% of respondents planning to defer their next year of work or study, with 20% planning to leave higher education (Pearson & Wonkhe, 2020).

Applying psychological thinking to student continuation and withdrawal, Bean and Eaton (2000) posit that leaving higher education is a behaviour and that behaviour is psychologically motivated. Conversely, continuing with studying also requires behaviour change when confronted with challenges. The

challenges students faced during COVID campus closures included self-discipline to engage in online learning, social isolation from peers, friends and family, mental health and wellbeing difficulties, and worries about the future, particularly in relation to employability. However, Fawaz and Samaha (2020) observed that the majority of their Lebanese student participants who experienced declining mental health during the pandemic did not report their difficulties or seek psychological support for their wellbeing. Jackson (2020), commenting on the Pearson and Wonkhe (2020) research, observes that although the UK students' wellbeing was suffering, the action students wanted universities to take related to online teaching and learning, rather than their welfare. The students recognised that their COVID wellbeing concerns had be compounded by the poor way they perceived their universities had managed interactions and online learning, and that this had increased their anxiety (Jackson, 2020).

Research published to date exploring the student experience during COVID has ranged from reflective commentaries from academics, student surveys reported by various agencies involved in higher education, rapid response research, and more traditional academic research. Clearly more research will continue to be published in the coming months and years as the medium- and long-term impacts of COVID online learning, campus closures, social distancing protective measures and changes in the employability landscape become more evident. However, the available research to date depicts widespread negative impacts on students' learning engagement, social experience, mental health and wellbeing, and longer-term employability.

2.7   Review of the literature conclusions

Tinto's (2017b) model of motivation and student persistence has provided a theoretical framework for this review of the literature. The model was not intended to elucidate all aspects of motivation and persistence. Rather it aims to shift attention to the psychology of student persistence. Thereby, enabling students, and those that support them, to understand the cognitive patterns and

related behaviours, and how they can be influenced to enable the student to succeed. Evidence has been presented to support Tinto's (2017b) assertion that the psychological concepts of self-efficacy, sense of belonging, perception of the curriculum, goals and motivation contribute to persistence. However, the literature reviewed has demonstrated the interconnected nature of these concepts and other notions, including grit and resilience. Throughout the persistence and personal tutoring literature, the central role of belonging, relatedness and relationships has been extolled by researchers of higher education students across the world. Much of this research echoes Rogers' (1957) assertion that a supportive learning environment is built on principles of genuineness of the relationship, unconditional positive regard, and empathy.

Comparing Tinto's (2017b) model of the psychology of student persistence and Bean and Metzner's (1985) model of persistence in non-traditional student groups highlights the latter's omission of belonging or institutional fit, instead suggesting that social interaction variables were more important to non-traditional students. Recent research with non-traditional student groups contradicts Bean and Metzner's (1985) omission by illustrating the central role of belonging, with students feeling cared for by academic staff, not being 'othered' by their student peers, and having the educational capital and confidence to seek support. This evidence further supports the utility of Tinto's (2017b) model for all students rather than implying non-traditional students have differing psychological needs.

Explorations of students' experiences during COVID identified challenges for their learning engagement, social relations, mental health and wellbeing, and long-term employability. Students around the world were dissatisfied with the online learning experience, and this impacted on their mental health, wellbeing and considerations for the future. Each challenge students face requires adaptive behaviours to meet and manage the challenge (Bean & Eaton, 2000). Yet Fawaz and Samaha (2020) observed that students were not reporting or seeking support for their mental health difficulties, suggesting that students were not making the necessary adaptive changes to support their learning and wellbeing. This is further evidenced by Pearson and Wonkhe (2020) and Andrewartha, Knight, Simpson and Beattie (2022) reporting approximately 20% of students' intention not to continue with the next year of study or reduce their

study load. Although, these finding are not born out in the preliminary continuation data published by the Student Loans Company (2021) and Office for Students (2022) which found that early withdrawals did not fluctuate much during the pandemic.

To date, Tinto's (2017b) model has not been investigated in a holistic manner to determine the interconnections and influence of the differing aspects of student persistence. This research sets out to do this with a specific population of non-traditional students in a UK college higher education provider during a particularly challenging time for students, the COVID-19 campus closures. Further, it also seeks to identify how personal tutors were able to facilitate the psychological aspects of persistence to enable students to succeed.

2.8 Research questions

The aim of this research is to enable personal tutors at the University Centre to adopt tutoring practices that foster persistence in college HE students, thereby improving students' outcomes in terms of their continuation to completion of their studies and grades achieved. To do this, research was undertaken during the COVID-19 pandemic when many students struggled to persist with their studies. There are four Research Questions, the first two seek to understand the experience of student persistence, the third relates to the utility of Tinto's (2017b) model of student persistence and the final question is more specific to appreciate the role of personal tutors in that persistence.

1. What was the experience of college higher education students as they persisted with their studies during the COVID-19 campus closures?
2. What factors influenced college higher education students' persistence during COVID-19 campus closures?
3. How useful is Tinto's (2017b) model for understanding college higher education students' persistence?
4. How did college higher education personal tutors foster students' persistence during the COVID-19 campus closures?

3. Methodology

To determine the lived experience of college HE students at the University Centre during the COVID-19 campus closures, this research took an organisational case study approach. Using a two-phase, mixed-methods design, underpinned by a pragmatic paradigmatic theoretical framework the research collected, analysed and interpreted data during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021.

3.1   Theoretical assumptions of pragmatism

Thomas Kuhn (1922-1996) introduced the term paradigm to explain a unitary package of beliefs about science and scientific knowledge (Crotty, 1998, pp. 34-35). Crotty (1998, p. 35) explains that the paradigm taken by a researcher establishes boundaries and parameters for the research inquiry. Guba and Lincoln (2005) suggest that a paradigmatic worldview leads to four related questions about axiology, ontology, epistemology and methodology. They propose that the axiology question relates to the ethical behaviour of the researcher, and ontological questions revolve around the philosophical notion of the nature of reality, and what can be known about it. The epistemological questions are about the relationship between the knower and what can be known. Finally, Guba and Lincoln (2005) propose the paradigmatic position of the researcher, and their axiology, ontology and epistemology sets the boundaries for their methodology, how the inquirer finds out "whatever he or she believes can be known" (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p. 108).

The continuum of paradigmatic worldviews is depicted variedly by authors from differing academic traditions. However, broadly there are three groups of social and behavioural science traditions: quantitatively orientated researchers largely working within the positivist, post-positivist or realist paradigm collecting and analysing numerical data; qualitative orientated researchers collecting and analysing narrative data within a constructivist, interpretative or relativist paradigm; and those researchers who see importance in both quantitative and

qualitative methods who primarily work within a pragmatic paradigm (Tashakkori, Johnson & Teddlie, 2020, p. 4). Despite this inclusion of pragmatism within Tashakkori, Johnson and Teddlie's (2020, p. 4) description of research paradigm worldviews and methodological movements, not all authors accept pragmatism's place within the continuum due to its perceived lack of theoretical assumptions.

Giving weight to the critique that pragmatism lacks theoretical assumptions is the omission of pragmatism from some of the seminal social research paradigmatic discussions. Guba and Lincoln (1994/2005) and Cotty (1998) both give passing reference to pragmatism, implying it does not possess the same robust theoretical assumptions that underpin conventional quantitative and qualitative research paradigms. Tackling the debate about whether pragmatism is a distinct paradigm, Biesta (2015) suggests that the notion of paradigms bringing together assumptions and ideas is flawed when it is applied to pragmatism. Biesta (2015) argues that paradigmatic thinking encourages wholesale embrace or rejection of ideas based on a given paradigm, rather than critical engagement in the elements of ontology, epistemology and methodology. Thus, applying paradigmatic thinking to mixed methods pragmatic research is complex due to the ontology, epistemology and methodology pluralism which are characteristic of mixing methods (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

Writers and researchers using mixed methods in education or psychology research often align their research to a pragmatic paradigmatic position (Bishop, 2015; Hammond, 2013; Klingner & Boardman, 2011). Teddlie and Tashakkori (2015) observe that although pragmatism is often cited as the preferred paradigm for mixed method researchers, there are several versions of it. Consistent with Tashakkori, Johnson and Teddlie's (2020, p. 4) depiction of paradigms, Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) describe mixed methods as the third research paradigm, after the more establish positivism and constructivism of quantitative and qualitative research respectively. Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) propose that pragmatic mixed methods research can be situated to bridge the schism between the quantitative and qualitative ends of the paradigmatic continuum. However, they recognise that how the data collection and analysis methods are mixed, and potential prominence given to some

methods over others in a research design, will determine the positioning on the paradigmatic continuum and the associated theoretical assumptions (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

Pragmatism is often described as real-world oriented, using 'what works' to seek solutions to problems in practice (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p. 41; Ormerod, 2020), but as Morgan (2014) observes the notion of 'what works' is a perennial problem for pragmatism. Arguably, the 'what works' characterisation simplifies pragmatism to being about the selection of mixed methods to answer the research problem, rather than a rich research paradigm with associated theoretical assumptions.

The theoretical philosophy of pragmatism has its roots in the writing of William James (1842-1910), John Dewey (1859-1952) and George Herbert Mead (1863-1931), who endorsed the use of experimental inquiry for social, moral and political problems (Crotty, 1998, p. 62; Sorrell, 2013). Dewey contended that inquiry was a self-corrective process, whereby actions must be evaluated and amended based on subsequent experience, with all such decisions value laden (Ormerod, 2020). Thus, a pragmatic practitioner or researcher, seeks to solve real world problems, through evaluation and amendment, conscious of the morality and ethical consequences of actions. Biesta (2015) contends that pragmatism in a Dewey tradition, accepts realist assumptions do not necessarily have to align with an objectivist conception of truth. They explain that once-and-for-all truths about a world independent of our lives are not always possible, as our actions to obtain knowledge will mediate the connections between those actions and consequences, and the knowledge gained. Thus, Biesta (2015) argues pragmatism should be viewed as a set of insights into mixed methods research, rather than a paradigmatic underpinning.

Acknowledging the academic debate concerning whether pragmatism is a fully formed paradigm, and the theoretical implications of pragmatism when applied to educational and psychological research, this research accepts Creswell and Plano Clark's (2011, p. 41) position that pragmatism is the worldview typically associated with mixed methods research. Creswell and Plano Clark (2011, p. 41) recognise pragmatism as focused on the consequences of research, thus it is pluralistic with differing theoretical orientations underpinning to the different

methods used. As such, pragmatism "debunks concepts such as 'truth' and 'reality' and focuses instead on 'what works' as the truth regarding the research question under investigation" (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003, p. 713). Thus, in the current research, the research questions of *what* the student persistence experience was, *what* factors influenced persistence, and *how* did personal tutors foster persistence dictated the research approach of mixed methods.

The overarching theoretical assumptions of pragmatism apply to the entire current research study, with further theoretical assumptions of phenomenological and critical realism inquiry discussed within the Phase 1 and Phase 2 methods sections. Tashakkori, Johnson and Teddlie (2020, p. 62) summarise the paradigmatic position of pragmatic research as having an ontological position that multiple kinds of reality exist which can be subjective, intersubjective and/or objective, and that different disciplines recognise the importance of different parts of reality. As this research study draws on the traditionally objective discipline of psychology and the broadly subjective discipline of education studies, the recognition that both disciplines' traditions influence the study in its acceptance that multiple kinds of reality exist, is relevant. This ontological position leads to a pragmatic epistemological acceptance that any source and method can be used to produce knowledge, and as such can have claims to "warranted assertability" (Tashakkori, Johnson & Teddlie, 2020, p. 62). The associated pragmatic axiological position is one that values ultimately making the world better, with our values guiding what and how we study, interpret, and use the research to fulfil the goal of the research question (Tashakkori, Johnson & Teddlie, 2020, p. 62). As such, this mixed methods research study's aim is to enable personal tutors at the University Centre to adopt tutoring practices that foster persistence in our college HE students, thereby improving the outcomes for students in terms of their continuation to completion of their studies and grades achieved. To meet these aims both qualitative and quantitative methods will be deployed within the research design.

Isabel Hallam

3.2   Research design

This pragmatic inquiry was undertaken using a single case study approach at the University Centre. The research was both insider/work-based in orientation and conducted using an appreciative lens. It took a longitudinal perspective, both in terms of the lived experience during the COVID-19 campus closures but also asking participants about their pre-university and future selves. The research was operationalised with a mixed methods pragmatic research (MMPR) design utilising an exploratory sequence of two sequential phases of data collection and analysis. The dominant qualitative first phase consisted of 13 online focus groups during the first COVID-19 campus closures of 2020. The themes identified in Phase 1 were used to develop the online survey tool for the second phase. Phase 2 was a predominantly quantitative Likert scale online survey used to investigate the generalisability of the Phase 1 findings. The survey took place in mid-2021 following the second period of COVID campus closures, after the UK Government restrictions on university students attending in-person teaching had been lifted on 17 May 2021. The results and interpretation of both phases fed into the final analysis and presentation.

The research design is depicted in Figure 10.
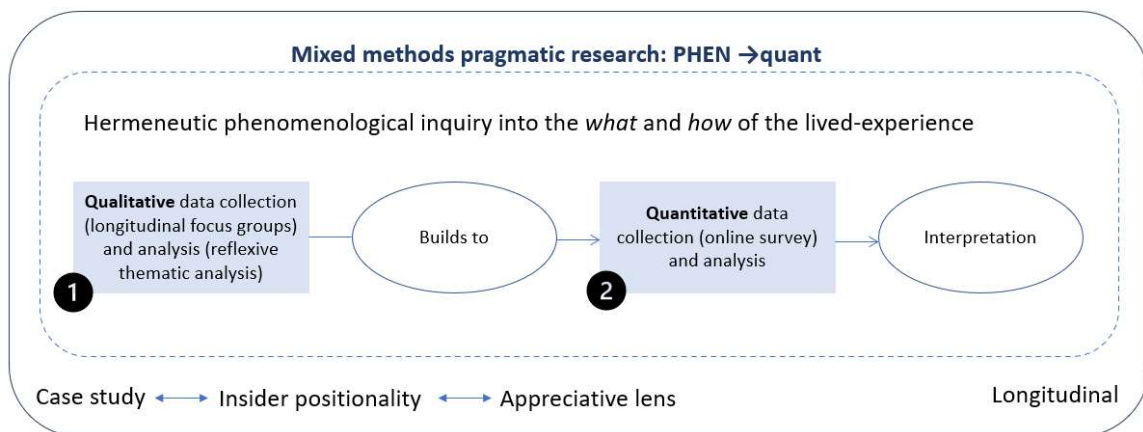
Figure 10: The mixed methods pragmatic research design of the current study to explore the experiences of college HE students as they persisted with their studies during COVID-19.

3.2.1 Mixed methods

Teddlie and Taskakkori (2015, pp. 9-12) outline nine characteristics of mixed methods research which influence the orientation and description of the research: methodological eclecticism, the selecting and synergy of different quantitative and qualitative methods to research a phenomenon; paradigm pluralism, the belief that different paradigm philosophies can be used within mixed methods research; emphasis on diversity at all levels, thus mixed methods research can address exploratory and confirmatory questions; continua rather than dichotomies, offering options from across the methodological continuum; iterative and cyclical research approach which can include both deductive and inductive logic; a focus on the research question to determine the methods use; a basic set of *signature* research designs and processes; an implicit tendency towards balance and compromise; and a reliance on visual representations and notional systems. The characteristics of the current research match those outlined by Teddlie and Taskakkori (2015, pp. 9-12), specifically: the methods were implemented sequentially, qualitative and then quantitative; the overarching paradigm for the research was pragmatic; and the research questions guiding the methods used. As the purpose of the research was exploratory, the research questions dictated that the qualitative methods took priority. This design is variously described as exploratory sequence (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p. 86) or a follow-up quantitative methods in a qualitative study: QUAL→quant (Morgan, 1998). Typically, the term *exploratory sequence* will be used to describe the research and is illustrated in Figure 11 below.
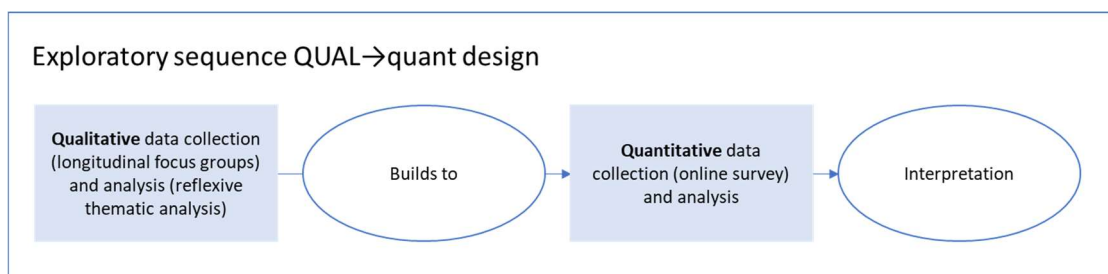
Figure 11: The exploratory sequence QUAL→quant design used in the current study (adapted from Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011, p. 69)

Isabel Hallam

Although, the exploratory sequence design describes the order of phases of research, qualitative then quantitative (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p. 86) it does not clarify if one element is given priority over the other. Morgan (1998) and Johnson, Onwuegbuzie and Turner (2007) both endeavour to address the need to articulate the priority or dominance of quantitative or qualitative methods in a mixed methods design. Morgan (1998), who considers mixed methods designs as needing to complement each other for a well-coordinated purpose, talks about complementary methods with either quantitative or qualitative methods in the preliminary or follow-up position. This is a useful distinction as the current research is structured as a *follow-up quantitative methods in a qualitative study:* QUAL→quant, demonstrating the primacy of the qualitative methods within the research. However, Johnson, Onwuegbuzie and Turner (2007) discuss the need to demonstrate how researchers are gaining breadth and depth from their research by illustrating the dominance or equality of methods. They describe research as either qualitatively dominant, quantitatively dominant or of equal status. The current research is qualitatively dominant, which can be symbolised as QUAL +quan research (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie & Turner, 2007) or QUAL→quant (Morgan, 1998).

Morgan's (1998, p. 368) illustration of the QUAL→quant design suggests it can be used to generalise results to different samples or test elements of emergent theories. The ability to generalise from qualitative data reflects the purpose of exploratory designs outlined by Creswell and Plano Clark (2011, p. 86), however they contend that there are two main variations of the exploratory design: theory-development and instrument-development. The theory-development variant used in the current study places priority on the qualitative phase whereby the researcher develops an emergent theory or taxonomy, and then tests that theory or the prevalence of the findings with a wider sample (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p. 90). Thus, I suggest that the QUAL→quant design outlined by Morgan (1998) and the theory-development variant of the exploratory sequence design described by Creswell and Plano Clark (2011, pp. 86-90) overlap in both method and approach. However, as the qualitative research is being undertaken as a hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry, the

symbols can be further clarified as PHEN → quan (Mayoh & Onwuegbuzie, 2015).

Mayoh and Onwuegbuzie (2015) argue that phenomenological approaches to research are particularly well suited to being combined into mixed methods research due to their flexibility and adaptability. They recognise that descriptive phenomenology is a strong partner to post-positivist quantitative methods due to their similar ontological and epistemological positions of seeking to bracket off the researcher's bias and identify the essence of an experience. However, Mayoh and Onwuegbuzie (2015) also advocate the mixing of methods with an interpretative or hermeneutic phenomenological approach, as they are in the current study. They propose that as phenomenological inquiry is discovery-orientated, an exploratory design can be used whereby a second quantitative phase tests the theories or themes developed through the earlier qualitative phenomenological methods of inquiry, PHEN → quan mixed methods phenomenological research (MMPR).

Discussing how phenomenological mixed methods research can be framed, Martiny, Toro and Høffding (2021, p. 1) claim that there should be "mutual constraint and enlightenment" between the first-person subjective qualitative methods and the third-person objective quantitative data. They propose a three-part structure for phenomenological mixed methods researchers consisting of:

i. The phenomenological framework: The phenomenological philosophical foundation and assumptions that intrinsically links the two tiers in response to the research question.
ii. Tier one: The phenomenologically informed collection or generation of qualitative and quantitative data.
iii. Tier two: The phenomenologically informed analysis and interpretation of qualitative and quantitative data.

Applying Martiny, Toro and Høffding's (2021) structure to the current research demonstrates its goodness of fit to a mixed methods phenomenological research design. The phenomenological framework is built on the presumption that any understanding of the world must come from first-person reports of the experience by the experiencer. Thus, the lived experience data is collected directly from students who have persisted with their studies during COVID-19, in

line with Tier One of the structure (Martiny, Toro & Høffding, 2021, p. 1). Subsequently the data was analysed and interpreted phenomenologically rejecting both realism and "out-and-out subjectivity" (Hammond, 2013, p. 608), instead acknowledging that knowledge is consequential and fallible. Therefore, this research accepts that thoughts and opinions expressed by participants are their own personal constructs about tutoring and persistence during COVID-19 campus closures and that the data gathered is individual to the setting at that time, rather than universal truths that can be robustly generalised to populations outside of the University Centre.

Morgan (1998) cautions there are difficulties combining methods, technical problems regarding the viability of the design and paradigmatic problems which they claim often result in researchers ignoring deeper paradigmatic issues. One of the main concerns with a QUAL→quant exploratory sequence design is the potential perception, from others with a more post-positive orientation, that the qualitative results should be viewed as tentative until they are verified by the quantitative second phase (Morgan, 1998; Morse, 1996). Morse (1996) also questions how feasible it is for a researcher to be knowledgeable and skilled at both quantitative and qualitative research to carry out quality mixed methods research. This is an interesting point that requires me to reflect on my own methodology training. I was a psychology undergraduate in the 1990s when my social science research methods training was solely quantitative. However, this desire for a universal truth reflecting a post-positive paradigm was challenged throughout my development studies postgraduate and earlier career in the charity and school sector when there is always an exception to the norm. Arriving in academia twenty years later, teaching both education and psychology has allowed me to explore more *why* questions, consistent with interpretivist paradigms. Most of my teaching is educational research methods and dissertation supervision, which requires me to seamlessly slip along the paradigmatic continuum to support students undertaking paradigmatic and methodologically diverse research projects. I would not characterise myself as one of the "few, very few, [who] are expert methodologists in both paradigms" (Morse, 1996, p. 4). However, I can operate competently in a range of approaches and feel most comfortable in mixed method research applying,

what Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018, p. 34) describe as both inductive and deductive reasoning to investigate plural views of the phenomenon.

The pragmatic positioning of the research oversees the use of different approaches in the two phases of the research. The 13 focus groups that constituted Phase 1 of the research were phenomenological in nature. O'Reilly and Kiyimba (2015, pp. 14-15) characterise phenomenology as giving a greater understanding of people's life experience, whereby the researcher endeavours to see the studied phenomenon from the participants' point of view considering how they make sense of the experience. Therefore, the focus groups sought to elicit rich descriptions of the experience of studying during the COVID campus closure, and participants' perceptions of that experience, to enable me to interpret how they were making sense of the experience. A detailed evaluation of how the phenomenological qualitative inquiry was deployed during Phase 1 is outlined in the section 3.4 Phase 1 Methods.

Between the research phases, the themes identified in Phase 1 were used to prepare for Phase 2. Creswell and Plano Clark (2011, p. 88) state that during this 'builds to' intermediate step, the researcher develops quantitative research questions or hypotheses that build on the qualitative results. The theory-development orientation of the exploratory sequence implies that the purpose of this intermediate step is to develop Phase 2 methods that can test the generalisability of a theory being developed from the Phase 1 results. The theory being developed during this research, relates to the applicability of Tinto's (2017b) persistence model to UK college HE students during COVID campus closures and the role of personal tutors in that persistence. Thus, Phase 2 sought to experimentally test whether the themes identified in Phase 1 as important to students' persistence during COVID, were held more widely by the University Centre's student population in the second COVID campus closure. Szollosi and Donkin (2021) suggest that theories are tested to prompt improvement by critiquing the argument in terms of what it can and cannot account for or how easily it adapts to data that has not been observed, or through experimental testing.

During Phase 2 of the research an online survey was developed to experimentally test the generalisability of student experience and persistence

topics identified in Phase 1. The researcher-designed survey tool was distributed to the entire University Centre population following the return to in-person teaching in May 2021 after the end of the second COVID campus closure. The second phase sought to test multiple hypotheses concerning the differences between demographically diverse groups of students in their identification with statements related to persistence. The statements were directly related to the codes and topic summaries identified in Phase 1 of the research. A critical realist approach was adopted during the second phase of the research. Maxwell and Mittapalli (2015, p. 146) explain the common features of realist research is the integration of a realist ontology that accepts "there is a real world that exists independently of our perceptions", with a constructivist epistemology which maintains that "our understanding of this world is inevitably a construction from our own perspectives".

This PHEN → quant mixed methods phenomenological research (Mayoh & Onwuegbuzie, 2015) explored the utility of Tinto's (2017b) psychological model for student persistence for UK college higher education students. Gilbert (2006) describes this type of mixed methods research as 'practical', as it aims to obtain descriptive information about an issue or phenomenon, and use inferential statistics to test hypothesis generated. The four research questions were addressed by the two phases of the research. The phenomenological qualitative Phase 1 sought to answer research question one regarding the experience of students during the campus closure, the objective of quantitative phase 2 was to answer research question two regarding the factors influencing students' persistence, and research questions three and four about the utility of Tinto's (2012b) model and personal tutors' role in persistence were answered from data collected in both phases of the research.

Each data collection and analysis method within the multiphase mixed methods design, qualitative analysis of focus group transcripts, and quantitative analysis of Likert scale answers to the student surveys, has its own merits and drawbacks, addressed in sections 3.4 Phase 1 Methods and 3.5 Phase 2 Methods. By combining these different methods and analysis, I would argue that the research is true to its pragmatic stance to gain an insight into the lived experience of students persisting with their studies during COVID and the role

of their personal tutor in fostering that persistence. The multiphase mixed methods design brought rigour to this research, it enabled a small intensity sample of students to provide a richness of data regarding their persistence during COVID campus closures and the role of their personal tutors, and theories generated from phase 1 to be tested by a sample of the total student population of the University Centre for their generalisability.

3.2.2 Case study approach

To enable personal tutors at the University Centre to adopt tutoring practices that foster persistence in our college HE students, a case study approach was adopted. Yin (2018, p. 15) defines a case study as an empirical method of research that provides an in-depth investigation into a contemporary phenomenon. The case phenomenon is studied within a real-world context, but the boundaries between phenomenon and context might not be clear. This implies that to understand the case or phenomenon involves understanding the contextual conditions. As an insider-researcher who is employed as a personal tutor and academic at the University Centre, I have contextual knowledge and experience of the case study University Centre organisation, personal tutoring, as well as the shared experience of working and studying during the COVID-19 campus closures.

Yin (2018, p. 2) suggests that case studies can be considered useful when the research question is concerned with 'how' and 'why' questions, the researcher has little or no control over events with the case phenomenon, and the case is a current phenomenon. However, unlike many methodologies used in social science research, there are no standardised processes or methods for conducting case study research. Thomas and Myers (2017, p. 15) propose that case studies are often presented by researchers as open-ended and untethered, and able to draw on methodological eclecticism. They suggest that instead of mapping potential methodological processes, case study research needs to adhere to key features of having: distinction between subject (the case phenomenon itself) and object (the analytical framework through which the subject is viewed); clear purpose to the study; an awareness of the analytical

approach to be pursued; and how the process can be enacted (Thomas & Myers, 2017, p. 15).

Harland (2014) asks when does the analysis stop in a case study, alluding to questions related to the boundaries of the case, and what data needs to be collected and analysed. Marriam and Tisdell (2015, p. 39) explain that "if the phenomenon you are interested in studying is not intrinsically bound, it is not a case". The boundaries of the project are very clear, it is an organisational case study within the University Centre exploring the phenomenon of student persistence and personal tutoring during the COVID-19 pandemic. Taking a pragmatic position, this research accepts that the qualitative thoughts and opinions expressed by participants are their own personal constructs about tutoring and persistence, and that the quantitative data gathered is individual to the setting at this time, rather than universal truths that can be robustly generalised to populations outside of the University Centre. Thus, the mixed-methods organisational case study will provide an in-depth and detailed account which is flexible and holistic, yet critical. Harland (2014) asserts that the question of what data is collected and analysed is dictated by what the researcher already understands, the research question and when the data feels saturated. They define saturated as when "no more learning comes from the formal analysis and writing" (Harland, 2014, p. 1118). Data saturation is also often seen as a metric of research quality (Tong, Sainsbury & Craig, 2007). However, I would argue that saturation level is difficult to ascertain, as you do not know, what you do not know, therefore the next discovery could be just around the corner. Furthermore, Braun and Clarke (2019b) consider the operationalising of notions of data saturation to be coherent with neo-positivist approaches of data analysis, rather than consistent with the reflexive thematic analysis used in Phase 1 of this study.

I recognise some of the potential weakness of a case study methodology including generalisability, validity and reliability, and have mitigated these through Tight's (2018, p. 29) recommendations of theoretical framing, rigour and triangulation. However, as Hammersley (2012) observes the word 'theory' has at least seven different meanings: in relation to practice; versus fact; as abstraction as against concrete particulars; as concerned with the macro, as

against accounts of the local; by contrast with description, explanatory theories; as an explanatory language; and as an approach or 'paradigm'. Hammersley (2012) suggests that in the context of case studies many authors use theory to refer to explanatory theory which consider theory as 'by contrast with description', here the case study facilitates a description of the unique characteristics of the case.

The current research has two strong theoretical framings. The first relates to Hammersley's (2012) final definition of theory to be related to the approach or paradigm of the research; the current research's first phase is rooted in phenomenology whereby I seek to gain a greater understanding of how the students make meaning of their lived experience of persistence and tutorial during the COVID-19 pandemic. The second theoretical framing relates to the explanatory theories which seek to describe the unique characteristic of the case in relation to Tinto's (2017b) theoretical model of student persistence. Rigour comes from carefully planned data collection and analysis methods which include triangulation of qualitative responses from a small sample of students with wider student quantitative feedback. Concerns about generalisability are lessened through an openness about the limited generalisability to the University Centre and similar settings. However, Lewis and Ritchie (2003, p. 264) discuss how in qualitative research, generalisability is often considered in terms of transferability to other populations or contexts, or involving the generation of theoretical concepts. In this manner, the research aims to have transferability to tutoring in *normal times* when tutoring is not online during a pandemic and to wider student populations.

The organisational case study approach, utilised to identify students' persistence and personal tutoring experiences during COVID-19 at the University Centre, has clear case phenomenon boundaries related to the organisation, topic of interest, participants, and the time-period. The theoretical framing of phenomenology and Tinto's (2017b) model of persistence provide rigour and research quality to the design, however there is a recognition that the generalisability of the research is limited, but the results can be transferred from the period of COVID-19 campus closures to normal times.

3.2.3 Insider positionality

My research is work-based, in that I am employed at the case study organisation and seek to bring about practice-based changes for myself and my colleagues. The insider positionality that is afforded due to the research being work-based has two interconnected aspects. As an organisational insider, the job-role and professional identities I inhabit at the University Centre as a practitioner-researcher have influenced project planning and data collection practicalities; and sociologically I am an insider within the phenomenon of studying during COVID-19 and working alongside the student population at the University Centre due to our shared experiences.

My professional identities have evolved during my doctoral studies. When I commenced my PhD research I was a university teacher, programme leader and personal tutor at the University Centre. My interest in the topic stemmed from my experience of personal tutoring and reflecting on how valuable students found the relationship. I was also aware of different University Centre success metrics across curriculum areas, and the observation that this appeared to correlate with curriculum teams who were not consistent in their personal tutoring. Initially, I anticipated celebrating positive tutoring practice and motivating colleagues to adopt tutoring practices that students reported as contributing to their ability to persist with their studies. This sharing of best practice is consistent with the organisational approach to continuous professional development and coaching practice. However, mid-way through my PhD studies, I was appointed to a new role as Student Development and Tutorial Manager. In this role, alongside my teaching responsibilities, I lead the organisational approach to higher education personal tutoring and student support, and am a member of the University Centre leadership team. Thus, I have been leading a programme of change in the University Centre's approach to personal tutoring concurrently with my PhD research. As Student Development and Tutorial Manager, I am a third space professional. Whitchurch (2013, p. 3) defines a third space professional as one with an academic or professional background who has work in the other domain, thus I retain my academic identity but now also work 50% of my time managing the student support and tutorial provision. Reviewing studies investigating third space

professionals, Whitchurch (2013, pp. 79-80) concludes that third space professionals tend to have a strong ideological commitment to their work, take a people orientated approach, develop credibility with colleagues through their dual roles, and can use appropriate language to interpret and translate between different stakeholder groups. Identifying with these qualities in my work, I reflect on how they also influence my research. As a practitioner-researcher, I am conscious that throughout my research I have several professional identities that are perceived differently by students, participants, colleagues and the University Centre leadership. Professional identity is defined by Pleasance (2016, p. 23) as simply "how we see ourselves as professionals", they remark this is broadly based on our beliefs, values, attitudes, motives and experiences.

Figure 12 below depicts the identities I have at the University Centre with various stakeholders and the complexity of the overlap of those roles. The identity of researcher is the least prominent, and even when communicating with potential participants, I have initially introduced myself in my job role to give credibility and legitimacy to the request. The University Centre is a small higher education provider with approximately 700 students at any one time. In my capacity as Student Development and Tutorial Manager, I am physically present within the Student Support Hub and quite well known to students. They might not know my name, but would recognise me, so by giving my job role, many prospective participants will have made the connection and might feel more inclined to take part in the research due to this recognition (Costley, Elliott & Gibbs, 2010, p. 31).
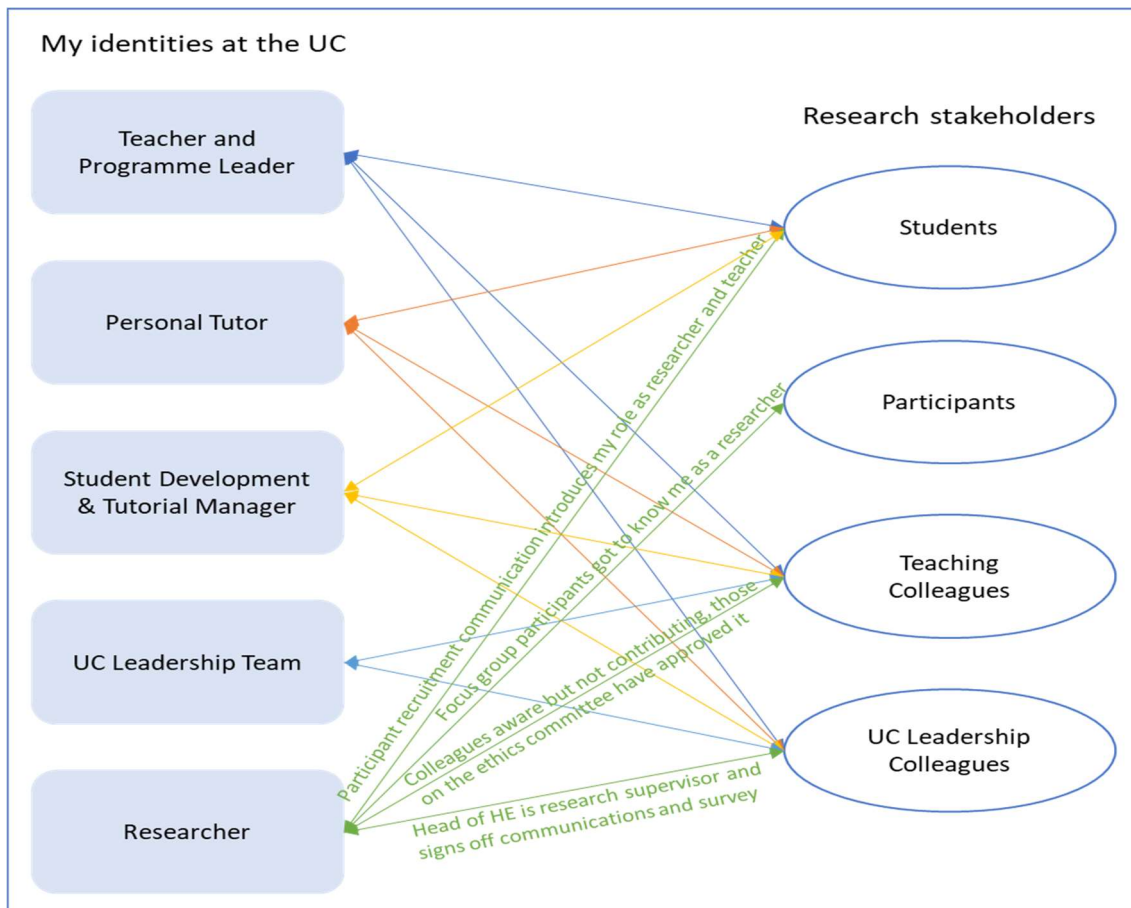
Figure 12: Depiction of my identities at the UC and relationships with stakeholders during the research with a focus on the researcher role.

Costley, Elliott and Gibbs (2010, p. 29) discuss the challenges of work-based research and caution that the practitioner-researcher's main responsibility is to themselves, to undertake research that feels right to them without imposing on others. This has echoes of promoting academic freedom to undertake research that is free from undue political influence, whereby the researcher is free to reason and to speak without external influence (Jackson, 2020). However, despite my academic freedom being assured by my employer, I am acutely aware of my position within the University Centre leadership team. I am conscious there is an unspoken expectation that my research complements the ethos and aims of the organisation and does not disrupt 'normal business'. For example, my University Centre research supervisor is also my line manager and the organisational gatekeeper for access to students as research participants. Although I have had complete freedom in the design and development of my research, my University Centre supervisor has wanted oversight over the

communication with students for participant recruitment and the items included in the online survey for Phase 2. This has not changed the nature of the communication or research tools but has slightly shifted emphasis or timelines. For example, the Phase 2 online survey had to be delayed by a couple of weeks to ensure a time buffer between the end of the National Student Survey in April and the end of the academic year at the beginning of June. This likely impacted on sample size but was a necessary compromise to accommodate University Centre operations.

Thus, my insider positionality as a practitioner-researcher at the University Centre has evolved during my doctoral studies as my job-role has grown, and consequently this has influenced the practicalities of data collection. In addition to the practical implications of work-based research, the insider positionality presents its own challenges and opportunities within the analysis and interpretation of the data.

Conducting work-based insider research brings privileged insider knowledge of the organisation, people and phenomenon of study. Insider-researchers have in-depth understanding of the organisation and the participants, and can draw on this to access unique insights. Gray (2020) claims that, as social science research is rarely neutral or value-free, *who* the researcher is, often matters more than *what* the research is. As an insider researcher with professional identities and job role interactions with stakeholders across the University Centre, I bring a depth of insider understanding to my research data collection and analysis. My positionality is also influenced by the background I share with my student-participants, and that I was also experiencing the COVID-19 campus closures and the associated disruption alongside the student participants, although from a different perspective.

The University Centre is a local provider of higher education, over 99% of students are commuter students who live and study locally. 65% of students are mature, 55% are the first in the family to study at university, 25% have a disability and over 80% work alongside their studies (█████, 2020). I associate with many of these factors, I teach in the same college where I took my A-levels over 30 years ago, many of my students attended the same secondary school I did and most are mature students who work and study, just as I do. Many of the

University Centre students had a disrupted or unsuccessful secondary education and are returning to studying after a period away from education. My literacy difficulties and dyslexia impacted significantly on my secondary education, affecting my self-esteem, confidence and attainment. I could have easily left school with few qualifications or ambitions, but I was lucky to have an inspirational teacher who believed in me. Felicity Craig, my remedial English teacher in the mid-1980s, remains my inspiration as a teacher and believer in students' potential. She gave me intensive support to help me learn to read and spell when I was 14 years old, and consequently I became one of very few students from my state secondary school to go to university, and I recognise the impact this had on my personal, academic and professional values and beliefs.

In many ways I feel an insider when I am with students, I know where they have come from, and share their believe that education can make a difference. I am conscious that in discussions with students I often introduce myself by discussing my background to build rapport and to demonstrate potential. This was also evident in my data collection when I asked questions about students' school and pre-university experiences, I was able to do it from a position of authenticity and shared experience. The sociological conception of insider/outsider has its roots in the writing of Harold Becker. Becker's (1963, p.1) original notion regards those who conform to social group norms as insiders and those whose deviant behaviour has broken the group's agreed rules as outsiders. However, I am acutely aware that many students do not consider me an insider, by virtue of my current position as a university teacher and my other identities, including PhD researcher. Therefore, arguably, using Becker's (1963) definition I am an outsider as I broke the local state-school 'rules' and went to university in my late-teens and am now a university teacher. Thus, although I have insider roots, I am now an outsider but one who retains insight to the insider world.

When the insider concept is applied to research it is typically used to distinguish researchers who are conducting research within their community of practice and who share a frame of reference within which the analysis will take place (Mercer, 2007). Trowler (2016, p. 6) and Mercer (2007) observes there are potential consequences for research analysis in that researchers need to contend with their own pre-conceptions and any prior knowledge of the shared

participant-researcher history. Trowler (2016, p. 6) suggests any implicit bias might not facilitate enough detachment to conduct robust research. However, this suggests that robust research is dependent on objectivity rather than valid research that acknowledges and benefits from the privileged knowledge of the insider-researcher. I concur with Ahmed's (2016) observations that in addition to the privileged access to participants, the insider can promote a balanced understanding of population and facilitate dialogue between participants and the researcher. "Although being an insider is associated with various advantages, the framing of a researcher as being either an insider or an outsider is problematic because it conceptualizes the researcher as only possessing one identity" (Ahmed, 2016, p. 179).

As an insider I have an in-depth understanding of the organisation, the participants and studying during COVID-19, and can draw on this to access unique insights. As with the broader case study challenges, having self-awareness and reflexivity to respond to the context and knowledge construction has mitigated this potential drawback.

3.2.4 Appreciative lens

The principles of positive psychology and appreciative inquiry have been utilised throughout this research to highlight tutoring practices that foster students' persistence that will subsequently enable personal tutors at the University Centre to adopt such practices. Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2002, p. 5) define positive psychology as "a science of positive subjective experience, positive individual traits, and positive institutions [that] promises to improve the quality of life". Cooperrider and Whitney (2005, p. 1) describe appreciative inquiry as a solution focused approach to change management to enable organisational members to co-create a way forward. Positive psychology's focus on individual or organisational positive experience, and what makes a difference is central to the appreciative inquiry notion of *positive core* (Lewis, 2016, p. 124). The decision to incorporate positive psychology and appreciative inquiry into the research design is both theoretical and pragmatic.

From a theoretical perspective, the integration of the appreciative inquiry methodological approach is rooted in my positive psychology framing of student persistence throughout the research, rather than its negative counterpoint, student withdrawal or drop-out. The literature review focuses on the positive psychological factors involved in student persistence and the role of personal tutoring in student persistence. Thus, the research is framed in exploring what enables students to persist with their studies, rather than observing the factors involved in students' decisions to withdraw from their undergraduate studies. This positive psychology approach was taken throughout the literature review and subsequent primary data collection and analysis.

In contrast to action research, which is traditionally problem-focused (Baumfield, Hall & Wall, 2013, p. 3), appreciative inquiry is solution-focused (Lewis, 2016, p. 62), enabling researchers to identify the *positive core* of an organisation, with a focus on 'what works' (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005, p. 14). Positive core is the set of values and beliefs that are key to enabling the organisation, or in this case the tutorial system, "to achieve goals, do things and generally make a difference" (Lewis, 2016, p. 124). Appreciative inquiry was developed as an organisational change management cycle on the premise that organisations are "centres of vital connections and life-giving potentials" (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005, p. 1). It rests on the positive psychology assumption that people and organisations have the answers, and are full of assets, capabilities, resources, and strengths that can be used to facilitate positive change (Dewar & MacBride, 2017). Cooperrider and Whitney (2005, pp. 15-16) explain that the appreciative inquiry cycle is flexible and can be as rapid as a conversation with a colleague, or a formal organisational process involving multiple stakeholders. The aim is to identify and maximise an organisations' positive core through the 4-D cycle: Discovery, Dream, Design and Destiny. During the discovery stage strengths and best practices are expressed before a clear vision of potential is articulated in the dream stage. Once the stakeholders have moved to the design stage, they aim to create potential propositions of the ideal organisation to magnify the positive core thereby realising the expressed dream. The final stage of destiny seeks to affirm the capacity of the organisation to build hope and momentum for the future (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005, pp. 15-16).

Isabel Hallam

Royer and Latz (2016) explain that appreciative inquiry has its epistemological roots in constructionism, as such meaning is constructed rather than discovered through the process. One of the principles of appreciative inquiry is that it is a generative theory, in that it enables individuals and organisations to challenge prevailing assumptions and cultures, and reconsider what is taken for granted, so that the future can be seen differently (Bushe, 2013). Appreciative inquiry has also been used as a research tool in educational settings, particularly when the student voice is central to the investigation (Bergmark & Kostenius, 2018; Conway & Foskey, 2015; Cullen & Ramoutar, 2003). Researchers also suggest that the appreciative inquiry cycle can be used flexibly. Cousin (2009, p. 168) proposes that the discovery stage can be used to inform an initial line of inquiry, and Conway and Foskey (2015) adopt what they refer to as an appreciative lens. They explain that the appreciative lens enables them to explore the data differently, with a shift towards positive insights and avoiding deficit discourse, which opens new possibilities for action (Conway & Foskey, 2015).

Because the current research is an exploratory study and no organisational change is formally planned, it focuses on the discovery stage of the 4-D cycle with a strong emphasis on student voice. Several authors have adopted a modified version of Appreciative Inquiry for research purposes, primarily using the discovery stage of the 4-D cycle. I have employed the term appreciative lens used by Conway and Foskey (2015), but appreciative reflection (Goldman, 2014) and appreciative guide (Griggs and Craine-Dorough, 2021) are also used. Utilizing appreciative reflection, Goldman (2014) sought to highlight factors contributing to participants' career longevity rather than the deficit discourse which characterised prior research in the field. Similarly, Griggs and Craine-Dorough (2021) used the discovery stage principles of Appreciative Inquiry to guide their question development for their interview guide. Using Conway and Foskey's (2015) term of appreciative lens, reflects the entire research study's focus on positive insights and the avoidance of a deficit discourse. Therefore, the literature review emphasised student persistence and continuation rather than drop-out or withdrawal research, although the latter was needed for historical context to the field. Further, the interview guide for the focus groups was positively phrased to reflect the focus on insights that

contributed to students' ability to persist rather than the factors that made them contemplate withdrawal.

By adopting an appreciative lens, the current research could be critiqued for not completing the cycle by implementing change. But this was an active pragmatic decision, because although I have the full support of the University Centre for the research, at the point of research design I did not have capacity to introduce large scale organisational change within the research timeframes. Further, the appreciative lens approach could be critiqued as not giving students the opportunity to air their concerns or grievances relating to their withdrawal contemplation. Yuliani, Adnan, Colfer and Indriatmoko (2015) acknowledge that an appreciative approach to research can be frustrating for some stakeholder participants as they may feel disappointment that their own problems or concerns are not addressed, or that others with a hidden agenda will dominate discussions. To counter this, potential participants were informed of the appreciative nature of the research focusing on the factors present within students and their student-tutor relationship when students are persisting and succeeding studies, see appendix 5, Focus group participant information and consent form.

The principle of identifying the positive core of an organisation is fully consistent with the University Centre's organisational values and supported by the college's senior leadership team. Shining a light on positive practice is common within the University Centre's continuous professional development activities. It is also a pragmatic decision as I need to continue to have positive working relationships with colleagues throughout the research and into the future. Cousin (2009, p. 167) suggests that appreciative inquiry can be seen as a welcome alternative to adversarial approaches that seek to problem solve but warn that some higher education stakeholders might find the appreciative inquiry language and approach uncomfortable. This warning from Cousin (2009, p. 167) that stakeholders and colleagues might be uncomfortable with the language of appreciative inquiry is pertinent. Lewis (2016, pp. 101-102) discusses the importance of using language with care when working with stakeholders to make meaning from their experiences. Concurring with Cousin (2009) and Lewis (2016) regarding the importance of language when conducting work-based research or organisational change, I believe the

appreciative inquiry 4-D language can be perceived as American business speech, and risks alienating potential participants and colleagues more accustomed to British academic language. Thus, using an appreciative lens rather than the full 4-D cycle, and maintaining focus on positive tutoring practices and how they support students' persistence, is appropriate to the current study.

The use of a positive psychology framework and an appreciative lens throughout the research design, implementation and analysis gives a strong theoretical framework to the research which is both reflective of my own worldview and the best practice sharing approach of the University Centre.

3.2.5 Longitudinal inquiry

The research takes a longitudinal approach both in design and investigation. The research design affords longitudinal data collection in the first phase of the research when students contributed to regular focus groups throughout the first campus closures in 2020. This element of the design is discussed in more detail in section 3.4.3 Online focus group data collection. The investigatory approach was also longitudinal as a form of temporal inquiry that followed students' lives during COVID-19, aiming to shed light on their persistence behaviours. Neale (2021, p. 4) describes how temporal research constructs a moving picture of a social process or phenomenon, in contrast to the snapshot created through non-longitudinal methods. They propose that longitudinal inquiry can be both retrospective and prospective, thus when making meaning about a phenomenon, participants and researchers can look backwards and forwards in the individual's life experience (Neale, 2021, pp. 4-5).

Although the focus of the current research is primarily on the COVID-19 campus closures period and how students persisted with their studies during that period, the use of longitudinal inquiry allows exploration of why students were able to persist. The participants and researcher can time travel in their exploration, moving along the past – present – future experiential timeline (Smith, 2021). The use of retrospective and prospective inquiry enables exploration of how participants orient themselves in the past, present and future. Retrospective

questioning encourages participants to use hindsight to gaze backwards in time from the present day, whereas the prospective lens asks participants to consider their future selves and the changes that they anticipate happening (Neale, 2021, p. 5). Oyserman, Destin and Novin (2015) discuss how imagining one's future self can motivate action, thus uncovering participants conceptions of their future self may aluminate their motivation to persist with their studies.

Smith (2021) proposes a taxonomy for temporal longitudinal research: naturalistic/retrospective, naturalistic/prospective, impact of intervention/retrospective and impact of intervention/prospective. Naturalistic studies reflect those where things have occurred in peoples' lives and the participants naturally introduce retrospective or prospective thinking. Whereas impact of intervention work describes reflections from participants when they have had an enforced intervention or experience that has prompted them to reflect retrospectively or prospectively (Smith, 2021).

Neale (2021, pp. 67-78) discusses how longitudinal research explores the fluid nature of time within individual's life course, and the importance of turning points or triggers which are often the drivers of changes in life course. Often within research regarding students' withdrawal from their studies there is investigation into the turning point or trigger that prompted their withdrawal (Aljohani, 2016; Bowles & Brindle, 2017; Rose-Adams & Hewitt, 2012). As the current research focuses on those students who persisted with their studies rather than withdraw, the turning point or trigger notion will not be actively sought. However, it was anticipated that COVID-19 might be conceived as a trigger for students to consider withdrawing from their studies.

There is a paucity of published longitudinal mixed methods studies in the field of education. It is often suggested that the lack of published mixed methods research stems from the word count limits within academic journals that constrain comprehensive mixed methods articles (Calarco, 2021). This appears to be even more relevant to longitudinal mixed methods that use a sequential rather than concurrent design, with either the qualitative or quantitative data in dominance, and may be accounted for by researchers publishing each phase of their sequential design as separate journal articles. However, there are a few

examples that offer insight into the challenges and opportunities of mixed methods longitudinal research.

Anguza at al. (2019) investigated the decisional conflicts of couples seeking options for infertility. Their longitudinal mixed methods approach consisted of six interviews with 34 opposite-sex couples in the US and self-administered conflict scale surveys across a 12-month period. Although each method was analysed separately, there was some convergence in reporting the results with quotes from the qualitative data used to explain some of the quantitative findings. The longitudinal design used by Anguza et al. (2019) uses the conventional snapshot approach that is created synchronically, where the events are considered without the retrospective or prospective context (Neale, 2021, p. 4). Questions were asked about couples' reproductive history and lifestyle changes, but the analysis focused on decision making in the present time across the longitudinal period rather than considering the participants past and future selves. This approach foregrounds the here and now for participants but arguably does not give a comprehensive picture of the lived experience of couples making fertility decisions as you would anticipate in a phenomenological research study. In contrast, Ryba et al. (2016) investigated the psychosocial processes underpinning the career-minded behaviours of talented adolescent athletes in Finland. They collected quantitative survey data from multiple standardised assessments from 391 athletes and conducted qualitative life-story interviews with a subset of 18 participants across three years. The life-story approach used by Ryba et al. (2016) in their qualitative data collection reflects a diachronically approach of exploring the life of the phenomenon, in contrast to the snapshot synchronically approach used in Anguzu et al. (2020). However, Ryba et al. (2016) also only use the qualitative to enhance the interpretation of quantitative findings and reveal future lines of inquiry rather than giving prominence to the potential rich insights of the qualitative data. Both Anguzu et al. (2020) and Ryba et al. (2016) use longitudinal mixed methods to explore the lived experience of their stakeholders, but their paradigmatic positioning gives prominence to the quantitative data rather than the qualitative.

Longitudinal inquiry enables researchers to explore a topic through time, either taking synchronically snapshots through a specific period or diachronically when

the research creates a story from retrospective and prospective reflections (Neale, 2021, p. 4). The current research uses longitudinal mixed methods to investigate the phenomenon of student persistence during COVID. The diachronically approach asks participants to reflect on their past, present and future selves to make meaning of their lived experience.

3.3   Ethical implications

This research was planned mindful of the ethical guidelines of both the British Educational Research Association (BERA) (BERA, 2018) and the British Psychological Society (BPS) (BPS, 2014, 2018). As educational research the BERA guidelines offer guidance in terms of responsibilities to participants, stakeholders and the community of education researcher, and responsibilities for publication and researcher wellbeing (BERA, 2018). The BPS (2014) guidelines consider similar ethical dilemmas but place emphasis on four principles: respect for autonomy, privacy and dignity of individuals and communities; scientific integrity; social responsibility; and maximising benefits and minimising harm.

3.3.1   Voluntary nature of participation

Participation in Phases 1 and 2 of primary data collection was voluntary. Students were invited to take part by email in Phase 1 (Appendix 4), and by tutorial resources, emails and Moodle message for Phase 2 (Appendices 12-15). No coercion or incentive were used to promote participation. However, it is recognised that some participants might have felt influenced to take part due to a perceived power differential or obligation reflecting the nature of my relationship to students.

3.3.2   Informed nature of participation

Participants were fully informed of the nature of the research and the emphasis on student persistence and the role of personal tutors. Participants were

reassured that their data was to be anonymised at source and kept confidential in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018. No deception was used. Included in the email invite to participate in Phase 1 was a hyperlink to the Information and Consent online form (Appendix 5). At the beginning of the focus groups the information was verbally reiterated, and participants asked to confirm their consent verbally. Participants were told they have a right to withdraw their data from the research within specified timeframes by emailing their pseudonym to the University Centre team, who would in turn asked me to withdraw the data related to that pseudonym. During Phase 2 participants were informed about the nature of the study and asked for their informed consent at the beginning of the survey (Appendix 16). A debrief with a reminder of how to withdraw their data was shown after submission of their surveys (Appendix 20).

3.3.3 Assessment of possible harm

It was not anticipated that this research would pose any possible harm to either participants or the researcher. Although tutees experience challenging or sensitive situations within the tutorial and wider student experience, the emphases on identifying the positive core guarded against psychological harm. During the first few Phase 1 focus groups, a member of the Higher Education Wellbeing team was present, but not contributing, enabling students to seek support after the focus group if any issues have been raised. After the first set of focus groups, participants agreed it was not necessary for the member of the Wellbeing team to be present, and they knew they could contact them if needed.

3.3.4 Data protection and storage

The data was collected and used in accordance with the seven key principles of the Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulation. The Phase 1 data was not personal data as it has been anonymised prior to processing for this research. The Phases 1 and 2 data had the legal basis for processing as *consent*, because all participants had actively opted in to the research giving their consent. All data was stored on a password protected

OneDrive account and deleted within the specified timeframe. Audio recordings of focus groups were anonymised at transcription stage and audio recordings were deleted as soon as the transcript had been cross-referenced with notes taken during the focus groups. I undertook the University of Exeter's Information Governance and Security (Postgraduate) online training course prior to data collection commencing.

3.3.5 Declarations of interest

The research had the full support of the University Centre as the case study organisation, subject to ethical approval (Appendix 1). As I am employed as a lecturer, personal tutor, programme lead and Student Development and Tutorial Manager at the University Centre I have a declared interest in the research outcomes. Although my PhD fees are being part-paid by the University Centre, my academic freedom to research with impunity has been assured.

3.3.6 Participant engagement and feedback

The themes emerging from the analysis of the focus groups were shared with participants for their consultation and comments. Participants were informed that research outcomes and methodology would be shared anonymously at conferences and submitted for publication.

3.4 Phase 1 methods

Phase 1 of this exploratory sequence design was phenomenological in orientation, consisting of 13 online focus groups during the first COVID-19 campus closures of 2020, between April and October 2020. The themes identified in Phase 1 were used to develop the online survey tool for Phase 2.

3.4.1 Phenomenological inquiry

Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009, p. 11) define phenomenology simply as "a philosophical approach to the study of experience". Langdridge (2007, p. 4) explains that when phenomenological philosophy is applied to psychology, there is a focus on "people's perceptions of the world in which they live and what this means to them", their lived experiences. Thus, the researcher seeks the essence of a phenomenon by focusing on individuals' lived experience. The goal of phenomenology is to describe *what* was experienced and *how* it was experienced through the consciousness of the experiencer (Mayoh & Onwuegbuzie, 2015; Neubauer, Witkop & Varpio, 2019). There are two main theoretical frameworks of phenomenological research which adhere to the philosophical traditions of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger respectively, each tradition has a different way of conceiving the *what* and the *how* of individual lived experience.

Husserl (1859-1935), often described as the father of phenomenology, believed that when endeavouring to understand a phenomenon, nothing should be assumed or presupposed. Phenomenological inquiry that adheres to Husserl's tradition, and more latterly the writing of Amedeo Giorgi and colleagues (Giorgi, 1994; Giorgi, Giorgi, & Morley, 2017), is typically referred to as descriptive, transcendental or eidetic phenomenology. It relies on an ontological assumption that reality is internal to the knower and what appears to their conscious, with epistemological assumption that the observer must separate themselves from the world experience to reach a state of transcendence which is bias-free (Neubauer, Witkop & Varpio, 2019). Giorgi, Giorgi and Morley (2017, p. 180) demonstrate this by explaining that the descriptive phenomenological researcher seeks to describe the lived experience as something that is

presented to the consciousness, setting aside any knowledge that has not been directly presented to their consciousness by the participants. This setting aside of knowledge, or bracketing, is described by Husserl (1859-1938) as *epoché*. Epoché is the abstaining from our presuppositions and any preconceived ideas we have regarding the subject of our investigations (Langdridge, 2007, p. 17). Langdridge (2007, p. 17) suggests that the core of Husserl's concept of epoché is the doubt we have about natural attitudes or bias related to everyday knowledge, and that the phenomenological researcher's role is to have critical awareness of these natural attitudes and how the assumptions play out in a person's lived experience.

Contradicting Van Manen's (2014, p. 28) claims that the methods of phenomenology must involve epoché and reduction, Zahavi (2019) argues that although Husserl places epoché and reduction as central for transcendental phenomenology, they have questionable relevance to psychological phenomenological inquiry. Zahavi (2019) illustrates this by observing that Smith, Flowers and Larkin's (2009) Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis approach rejects the notions of epoché and reduction. Indeed, Smith (2021) refers to Husserl's work as 'difficult' for qualitative psychological analysis due to its lack of recognition of how past experiences and knowledge influence understanding. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009, p. 15-16) recognise the importance of Husserl's work in placing reflection as a central process in understanding our lived experience. However, they acknowledge that the greatest challenge, when applying Husserl's ideas to psychological research, stems from Husserl conducing phenomenological inquiry on their own experience. In contrast, psychologists are typically concerned with analysing other people's experiences, and capturing those experiences as they are experienced by those involved. Thus, for psychological research rooted in phenomenological theoretical framework, such as the current study, the writings of Heidegger offer a stronger set of theoretical assumptions.

Heidegger (1889-1976), a former student and colleague of Husserl, who succeeded them as Chair at Germany's University of Freiburg between the World Wars, departed from Husserl's writing to create their own branch of the philosophy, hermeneutic or interpretative phenomenology. In contrast to Husserl's concept of epoché, Peoples (2021, pp. 32-36) explains that

Heidegger's hermeneutic approach asserts that individuals cannot bracket off past experiences of the world from their conscious being state. Thus, for Heidegger, the ontological assumption is that the lived experience is an interpretative process in which knowledge is interpretated through our experiences of things, people, relationships and language (Neubauer, Witkop & Varpio, 2019; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p. 16). This leads to an epistemological proposition that the observer is part of that world experience and is not, nor can be, bias free (Neubauer, Witkop & Varpio, 2019). Therefore, the researcher's subjectivities, bias and past experiences are acknowledged and play a role in the researcher's interpretation of the analysis of the experiences presented within the research (Mayoh & Onwuegbuzie, 2015).

In their major work *Being and Time* (1927/1996), Heidegger introduces the concept of *dasein* as the term to describe the unique quality of 'human being' or the presence of being there. Peoples (2021, p. 32) explains that dasein refers to the self in ones' own existence, thus we cannot achieve the everyday consciousness and the epoché of bracketing off experiences as Husserl contends, because of the critical importance of dasein's being present to the understanding and interpretation of the world. Heidegger proposes that as bracketing is not realistic, phenomenological understanding should be gained through hermeneutic circles, a revisionary process whereby we use our fore sight of preconceived knowledge to interpret and revise our judgments (Peoples, 2021, p. 32). Applying Heidegger's philosophical approach to the practices of phenomenological researchers, Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009, p. 35) explains that the researcher is making sense of the participants and their experience, who in turn are attempting to make sense of the phenomena experienced, a process described as double hermeneutics.

The use of hermeneutic phenomenological theoretical assumptions in the current research enables the focus to shift from simply describing the *what* of the phenomenon of persisting with studying during the COVID-19 campus closures, to *how* students interpret their persistence in the context of the past and future selves. The first phase of this research used focus groups to collect data describing the lived experience, or lifeworld, of college HE students during the first COVID campus closure in 2020.

Consistent with a hermeneutic phenomenological approach the focus groups data collection and analysis sought to provide a rich description of the students' subjective lived experience of studying and being supported by their tutor during the COVID-19 campus closures. Instead of simply describing the experiences, whilst bracketing off past knowledge, as would be advocated by descriptive phenomenology (Giorgi, 1994; Giorgi, Giorgi & Morley, 2017), hermeneutic phenomenology enables interpretations of those experiences through participants' use of language (Love, Vetere & Davis, 2020). Further, understanding the phenomenon or experience involves researchers using their prior knowledge to attempt to understand the participants, whilst the participants are themselves endeavouring to make sense of their own experience. Thus, the research uses double hermeneutics, where the researcher co-creates participants' mean-making. The researcher only has access to participants' first-order meaning-making through the experiences as they report them, and the researchers' sense-making is second order (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, pp. 35-36).

Applying a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to focus group research is less well documented than the idiographic approach of interviews which dominate hermeneutic phenomenological research. However, Love, Vetere and Davis (2020) and Tomkins and Eatough (2010) both review examples of such research and discuss the merits of taking a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to focus group data collection. Despite their reviews both evaluating the use of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009) in focus groups, rather than the reflexive thematic analysis used in this study, there are lessons to be learnt. Love, Vetere and Davis (2020) recommend small, homogenous groups who all share similar experiences, thus ideographic accounts can be given whilst participants and the researcher make commonalities across the participant group. However, Tomkins and Eatough (2010) caution the anticipated double hermeneutics might expand to be multiple hermeneutics. In multiple hermeneutics not only is the researcher attempting to make sense of the experience, but the participants are also mean-making their own experiences whilst simultaneously attempting to make sense of others' experiences (Love, Vetere & Davis, 2020).

The hermeneutic phenomenological approach pervades the whole of Phase 1 of this research: the decision to use focus groups so that multiple hermeneutics evolve during the longitudinal focus groups; the design of the focus group interview guide which encouraged participants to not only reflect on their current lived experience but also how their past experiences and future-selves might have influenced those experiences; and the phenomenological influence on the reflexive thematic analysis that was used to analyse the focus group data.

3.4.2 Sampling and participants

I was awarded ethical approval from my supervising university (Appendix 2) and the case study University Centre (Appendix 1). Further, the Head of Higher Education at the University Centre gave gatekeeper permission to demonstrate they were aware and supportive of the proposed research (Appendix 3). I also needed gatekeeper approval for the final wording for the call for participants and the associated participant information. Upon receipt of all ethical and gatekeeper approvals, I issued a call for participants to all higher education students at the University Centre via their student email account.

The call for participants consisted of a short introductory email (Appendix 4), with a link to an online survey form with detailed participant information inviting students to express their interest in the research and consent to taking part (Appendix 5). The email was generated via a message posted on the University Centre virtual learning platform which forwards to students' University Centre email accounts. This was the typical means of mass communication to students at the time. As a condition of the University Centre ethical approval, all personal tutors were also informed via email that the research would be taking place and that students had been invited to take part. This tutor notification included a link to the participant information for transparency (Appendix 6).

The call for volunteer participants made no guarantee that volunteers would be accepted into the study, however I anticipated being able to accommodate all volunteers, anticipating a maximum of 20 responses. The sampling method used was non-probability volunteer sampling, whereby all members of the research population of University Centre students had an equal opportunity to

take part (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018, p. 222). Teddlie and Yu's (2007) taxonomy of sampling techniques places volunteer sampling as a type of convenience sampling. Volunteer sampling was used to ensure equity of opportunity and inclusivity amongst the University Centre student population, and for temporal convenience as it was considered important to get the research underway early into the campus closures. From an ethical perspective, the volunteer sample was also desirable due to the considerable level of commitment asked of participants for the longitudinal and open-ended focus groups. The British Educational Research Association (BERA) (2018, p. 9) guidelines remind researchers that they should do everything they can to ensure participants understand what the study involves. As the campus closures had no end-date, it was not possible to confirm the exact number of focus groups at the start of the research. Therefore, voluntary informed and ongoing consent was a key feature of the research. The initial formal informed consent was included as part of the participant information. Participants were reminded at the beginning of each focus group of their right to withdraw from the study or to have individual answers redacted, and were asked for their verbal consent to continue and video-record their answers at the beginning of each focus groups in compliance with education research ethical guidelines (BERA, 2018, p. 9).

Volunteer participants are more likely to be committed to the research and persist with it, giving more truthful answers (Berndt, 2018; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018, p. 222). However, volunteer, or self-selection, sampling has potential challenges to research quality, namely that selection bias can occur which results from a non-representative sample and can lead to exaggerated or misleading findings (Berndt, 2018).

Thirteen students responded to the call for participants, giving informed consent to take part in the research. In consultation with the Head of Higher Education, one student was not selected due to their significant mental health condition. This student was known to me in my capacity as manager of the Student Support Hub and I had concerns that their participation would impact negatively on their condition, the Head of Higher Education agreed. Student 13's offer to take part was politely declined and their Wellbeing worker was informed to enable them to discuss any concerns the student had. The 12 accepted

participants were from a range of cognate areas and divided into three focus groups based on information they disclosed on the consent form. The decision to divide the 12 participants into three focus groups of four participants was a purely practical one, at the time MS Teams, the University Centre's online platform, limited the number of meeting participants visible on the video stream to four. Therefore, the participants and I would be able to see each other throughout the focus groups to observe facial expressions and responses to questions. It was anticipated that these observations would not only facilitate dialogue but also enable me to monitor the ongoing wellbeing of the participants. Woodyatt, Finneran and Stephenson (2016) compared online with in-person focus groups, finding few differences in data quality, however online participants were more candid when talking about sensitive topics. Although Woodyatt, Finneran and Stephenson (2016) compared on and offline focus groups, which Barbour (2018, p. 2) notes have the key feature of the moderator being encouraging and attentive of group interaction, it is likely focus groups may also elicit candid talk of sensitive subjects. These findings illustrate the importance of online focus group facilitators being able to see the participants to monitor wellbeing, thus the decision was taken to limit each focus group to a maximum of four participants.

In allocating participants to focus groups I used knowledge about their programme and level of study that had been supplied in the participant information and consent form (Appendix 5), and my professional awareness of them through my job role as a lecturer and manager of the Student Support Hub. To protect the anonymity of participants, their characteristics have been described by focus groups rather than individual participants:

A. Group A consisted of four Level 6 students who were all known well to me as I had taught them for all three years of their degrees. There was one male and three females. All four also knew each other to varying degrees and I had been personal tutor to two of the students.

B. Group B included three Level 6 students and one Level 5 student, three females and one male, and only one of the students was known to me as I had previously been their personal tutor and lecturer. None of the students

knew each other prior to the research.

C. Group C consisted of four first year students, three at Level 4 and one at Level 5. There were three females and one male, and only one student was known to me but in a personal rather than professional capacity. None of the students knew each other prior to the research.

Each participant was invited to five focus groups in total from April to mid-October 2020. All dates and times were arranged in consultation with participants, and took account of their timetables and working commitments. Two participants, the male students from Group B and Group C, did not attend any focus groups, and one participant only attended the first in their focus group series. However, the remaining participants attended four or five of their focus group series. Focus groups one to three occurred for all three groups, A-C. However, due to known or anticipated non-attendance and in agreement with the participants, groups were merged towards the end of the series to facilitate dialogue.

Of the ten active participants who attended focus groups, six have been awarded Disabled Students Allowances for a range of learning, physical or mental health difficulties. Participants were all mature students, ranging in age from early twenties to mid-50s and seven of the ten were the first in their family to attend university. Only one participant is from a Black, Asian or minority ethnic background. One participant was repeating the academic year. Three participants were newly appointed members of college staff as well as students. The staff-student participants had all been in their job-roles for less than a year and were studying alongside their employment. It is not unusual for students to gain employment at the college during their degrees, teaching or supporting learning in further education in their subject area. Only four students were working over 16 hours a week alongside their studies, but three of these were furloughed at some point during the campus closures. This demographic data is reported to demonstrate the salient characteristics of the focus group participants and to situate these participants, it is not intended to be used as a variable.

The participants' demographic information was disclosed during our focus group conversations rather than systematically collected at any stage in the research. This was an oversight during the initial data collection period, but all demographic details were confirmed with participants at the end of the series of focus groups. Braun and Clarke (2013, pp. 67-68) advocate the systematic collection of demographic information. They contend that as knowledge is situated, demographic details enable the researcher to reflect on the relationship between the sample and the results. However, they caution that demographic information only tells you part of the story about a person's identity or identities and should only be used to demonstrate the basis on which claims are made, rather than as a variable (Braun & Clarke, 2013, pp. 67-68).

All participants have been given a number from one to ten, and will be referred to as P1-P10, to protect their anonymity. A summary table of the ten active student participants' characteristics in their original focus groups appears in Table 1 below:

	Group	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Disabled	First in family	Working 16hr +	Known to IH
P1	A/AB	Mature	♂	White	DSA*	1st		IH
P2	A/AB	Mature	♀	White		1st		IH
P3	A/AB	Mature	♀	White	DSA	1st		IH
P4	A	Mature	♀	BAME				IH
P5	B/BC	Mature	♀	White	DSA	1st	16hr +	IH
P6	B/AB	Mature	♀	White	DSA			
P7	B	Mature	♀	White		1st	16hr +	
P8	C/BC	Mature	♀	White	DSA	1st		
P9	C/BC	Mature	♀	White		1st	16hr +	
P10	C/BC	Mature	♀	White			16hr +	IH

Table 1: Focus group participant characteristics (*Awarded Disabled Student Allowances)

The volunteer sampling technique resulted in a focus group sample that was not fully representative of the University Centre student population. Mertens (2015, p. 336) suggests that sampling that requires people to volunteer their views risks attracting participants who have something to say about the topic. They illustrate this notion by reporting the 1975 case of an advice columnist who asked for people to write in with their views on having children. 70% of the almost 10,000 responses said that if they had their time again, they would not have children. This contrasted substantially with a robustly designed survey a few months later that found that over 90% would have children (Moore & McCabe, 2003, p. 248, cited in Mertens, 2015, p. 336). Mertens (2015, p. 336) concludes that those who were unhappy were more likely to respond to the request for views, than those who were content with their choice. I would add to this, that in the current research it is possible that students who were very happy with their personal tutoring may have also volunteered to participate. This suggestion is given credence by the disproportionate number of student volunteers who knew me in a professional capacity. They are unlikely to have volunteered to participate in qualitative focus group research, if they foresaw that they would need to criticize myself or my close colleagues. Furthermore, participants were aware that I am not only a lecturer at the University Centre but also manage the Student Support Hub, they may have felt that by participating their views might directly influence future support and tutorial provision.

There is evidence to suggest that volunteers for research are more likely to be female, more educated (Donkin, Hickie, Christensen, Naismith, Neal, Cockayne & Glozier, 2012; Ganguli, Lytle, Reynolds & Dodge, 1998) and from more affluent areas (Goodman & Gatward, 2008). At least one of these characteristics is evident in the focus group sample, with ten of the original 13 volunteers being female. This is just one example of the selection bias that the original 13 self-selecting volunteer participants demonstrate. Selection bias occurred on a number of additional levels: all were mature students, compared to 76% of the University Centre's 2019/20 student population; more than half were well-known to me as I had taught them, or knew them personally as acquaintances; three of them had been tutored by me, and as the research was clearly advertised as being about personal tutoring this implied they knew they

were going to be asked to reflect on my tutoring; three of them were employed by the college and colleagues of mine, although I did not work closely with any of them; and over half have been awarded Disabled Students Allowances, which is twice the University Centre average.

The most obvious selection bias is the non-response from male students. Stec (2008, p. 59) explains that non-response bias can occur at two data collection points: unit non-response arises when prospective participants do not respond to the research invite, whereas item non-responsiveness occurs when participants do not respond to individual lines of enquiry or survey items. I would argue that both types of non-response bias are present in the focus group sample from the population of male students. The University Centre population in 2019/20 was 35% male, so a disproportionate male/female sample was expected, and unit non-response occurred when only three of the 13 volunteers were male. Three males from the sample of 13, represents 23% of the sample. Furthermore, the withdrawal of two male participants from the focus groups demonstrates item non-responsiveness. The two males had consented to take part in the research and accepted the focus group invite but chose not to attend and thus answer the questions. Stec (2008, p. 60) suggests non-response bias can be mitigated by motivational incentives to coax participation. However, the University Centre does not encourage the use of incentives or payments for research participation, so this option was not possible as part of the research design. Purposeful sampling, using an iterative process to intentionally selecting participants who elucidate a specific phenomenon (Robinson, 2014), may have been an option to increase the number of male participants. However, it was not until the first set of focus groups had been completed and I had followed up with the two male participants who had not attended that it became clear that the sample was so biased in favour of female students. Therefore, it would have been difficult to recruit and integrate new male participants at this stage.

Following the withdrawal of the two male participants, the range of cognate areas studied by the participants reduced to social sciences, health, education, and biological sciences. Computing, creative arts, engineering, and business students were not represented in the sample, which is a notable limitation of the sample as they make up approximately one-third of the student population. There are a few potential explanations for lack of volunteer participants from

these curriculum areas. These curriculum areas are based on the wider college campus rather than in the University Centre building where my desk in the Student Support Hub is housed. This could mean I am less familiar to students in these curriculum areas and they may not have felt so confident to volunteer as they do not know, or know of, me so much as the students who are based in the University Centre. The call for participants was made through students' University Centre email accounts, it is possible that students in these curriculum areas have less of a culture of using their student email account and may simply not have seen the call for participants. Some of these programmes were early adopters of using MS Teams as their primary communication tool once the University Centre teaching moved online in March 2020, therefore it is possible they were less likely to be checking their student email account. If this was the case, although all students were given equal opportunity to volunteer as they all received the email, due to some programmes not using email so widely, there would have been unequal uptake of the voluntary opportunity.

Another possible explanation for the lack of volunteers from computing, creative arts, and engineering curriculum areas is that as these programmes are practical in nature and they may have been more adversely impacted by the COVID-19 campus closures than other programmes and did not want to discuss this or reflect upon it for research. This explanation was given credence in the feedback given by Course Representatives from similar programmes during the second COVID-19 campus closure in 2021. The representatives reported their peers were frustrated by the lack of onsite access to practical resources, necessary computing equipment and support given by their tutors (█████, 2021a). The final possible reason for lack of volunteer participants from computing, creative arts, engineering, and business studies relates to the research culture within these curriculum areas compared to the areas represented in the sample. There is a strong research culture in social sciences, health, education, and biological sciences at the University Centre. This is partly because these curriculum areas have Level 6 Bachelors programmes and thus scaffold research and dissertation learning throughout the undergraduate programmes. As a result, students in these curriculum areas are more research active and perhaps more research curious, thus may have wanted to be involved in the project to develop their own research skills and experience. With

less of a research culture in computing, creative arts, engineering, and business, it is possible taking part in research was simply not appealing as it was not familiar to them, and they saw no personal benefit.

A second notable response bias relates to the high number of students who were known to me who expressed interest in being a research participant. Of the 13 students who expressed interest, six were known-participants, five were tutees or students, and one was a personal acquaintance. As the focus groups form insider-research, it is possible that students felt obliged to take part due to their connection with me (Costley, Elliott & Gibbs, 2010, p. 31). This potential power-differential between myself as a lecturer, tutor and Student Support Hub manager and the student participants, risks the research quality in terms of ethics and validity. Barstow (2008, p. 53) describes power-differentials as "the enhanced amount of role power that accompanies any position of authority". This implies that participants who knew me professionally were likely to have felt additional power imbalance as not only were they participants to my researcher role, but also had an existing student to teacher power relationship. Costley, Elliott and Gibbs (2010, p. 34) suggest that peers from within an organisation may not only feel obligated to participate but may welcome the opportunity to share their views about an area of practice that is important to them, either because they want to share their experiences, discuss a problem or air a grievance. Irrespective of their motivation to volunteer to participate in the focus groups there are research quality implications of half the participants having an existing relationship with me.

There are data collection and data analysis implications resulting from half of the participants knowing me prior to the research, and potential challenges to the validity of the findings and their analytic generalisation. In terms of data collection, as Costley, Elliott and Gibbs (2010, p. 34) observe participants may want to share their views, however the answers they give might be prone to social desirability bias. Davis and Silver (2003, p. 33) define social desirability bias as the underlying "propensity for survey respondents to tailor their answers to what they think would satisfy or please the interviewer". It is argued that social desirability bias presents in two forms, self-deceptive positivity with honest but overly favourable representations, and impression management whereby participants want to appear in a socially approved way (Dahlgren &

Hansen, 2015). Although social desirability bias could be exhibited by any of the focus group participants, both self-deceptive positivity and impression management bias would be more likely from participants who not only know me, but in the case of Group A, also know each other. To mitigate the potential propensity to give socially desirable answers, all participants were regularly reminded of the importance of honest and truthful answers, and that their answers would be handled confidentially and only shared anonymously as part of generic feedback to the University Centre tutors towards the end of the research. Data analysis could be compromised due to my pre-existing relationship with six of the participants, as my interpretations of the data might be influence by my prior knowledge of the participants background and experience. Mercer (2007) argues that insider research offers a shared frame of reference within which data analysis takes place, but that researchers need to contend with their own pre-conceptions and any prior knowledge of the shared participant-researcher history. The mitigations put in place to reduce the influence of such cognitive bias during the data analysis process is discussed in detail in section 3.4.4. Yin (2018, p. 21) describes analytic generalisation as the goal of expanding and generalising case study research to theoretic propositions. Therefore, although the validity of the interpretation and generalisation of data from known-participants could be questioned, as the goal is not statistical generalisation, this critique has less credibility. The generalisation of the findings is also discussed further in section 3.4.4.

By inviting volunteer student participants to take part in the Phase 1 research, I was not seeking a representative sample, rather participants who could give information-rich ideographic accounts of their experiences during the campus closure. However, by coincidence the original 12 volunteers were broadly representative of the key demographics of the University Centre's student population in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, disability and first in family to attend university. However, following unit non-response and withdrawal of two male participants, there was a deficit in male participants and over representation of disabled students. This also resulted in a lack of student participants from curriculum areas that make up approximately one-third of higher education programmes at the University Centre. The selection bias illustrated threatens both the internal and external validity of the research.

However, mitigations were put in place in the research design with triangulation of data from Phase 2 of the research, robust ethical procedures throughout data collection to minimise the influence of social desirability bias during focus group dialogue, and data analysis processes that acknowledge my insider positionality whilst maintaining integrity.

3.4.3 Online focus group data collection

Online focus groups were used to collect qualitative data regarding students' experiences of their persistence attitudes and behaviours throughout the COVID-19 campus closures of 2020. 13 synchronised video-conferencing focus groups took place between April and October 2020 with ten participants on the University Centre's collaborative workspace, Microsoft Teams.

Silverman (2017, p. 297) describes research focus groups as a small group of six to eight people sharing a particular characteristic, who engage in a focused discussion on a particular topic based on a schedule of questions. Expanding on Silverman's (2017, p. 297) definition, Barbour (2018, p. 2) notes that emphasis on accessing participants' 'views' should be foregrounded when considering the role of focus groups in research.

Barbour (2018, p. 2) states that focus groups should be characterised by encouragement of, and attention to, the interaction between participants in the discussion. The role of the researcher-moderator is to nurture discussion amongst participants to avoid the participants only responding to the researcher's questions (Barbour, 2018, p. 2). This emphasis on nurturing discussion amongst participants is consistent with social constructionism. The focus group participants can be given both individual and collective agency by revealing their own situations and experiences, and contributing to and modifying the collective view which is socially constructed (Callaghan, 2005). Silverman (2017, p. 297) observes that occasionally focus groups are referred to as group interviews or focus group interviews. I would contend that focus groups and group interviews are different, not only in process but also orientation. Group interviews will follow a more formal question and answer process with less interaction fostered between participants. Thus, group

interviews are less attuned to the epistemological grounding of social constructivism whereby the researcher and researched are interactively linked creating and altering the findings, and associated realities, throughout the process (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, pp. 110-111).

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and social distancing guidelines, all the focus groups for this research took place online, using the University Centre's collaborative workspace, Microsoft Teams. Interest has grown in online qualitative research data collection methods with the growth of internet connectivity, social media and highspeed broadband. King, Horrocks and Brooks (2019, p. 117) discuss how remote interviews by telephone, and latterly by video-call, are often a pragmatic choice made to maximise time and financial resources. However, they cite comparative studies between telephone and in-person interviews that demonstrate telephone interviews are not necessarily less superior (Drabble et al., 2016; Ward, Gott & Hoare, 2015). Drabble et al. (2016) and Ward, Gott and Hoare (2015) both observed the practical benefits of telephone interviews, being able to conduct geographical disparate interviews and reschedule missed interviews, as well as participants' positive experience being comfortable to discuss sensitive topics without being judged. However, Drabble et al. (2016) recognised there were challenges for telephone interviews, notably establishing rapport. They suggested the difficulties with building rapport can be mitigated through using interviewers with strong interpersonal skills who have had training in managing interview practicalities and interviewee distress, creating rapport through small talk at the beginning of interviews, and debriefing participants. Further, Ward, Gott and Hoare (2015) stress the value of paralinguistic cues, such as intonation and hesitation, when participants are concentrating on the interviewer's voice rather than their facial expression or body language as they would in-person. These studies demonstrate that remote qualitative research undertaken when the researcher and participants are not in the same physical space can offer not only a valid alternative to in-person data collection, but also some additional benefits when discussing sensitive topics.

Comparative studies have also been undertaken between in-person and online interviews and focus groups. Hanna and Mwale (2017, pp. 267-269) recognise internet connectivity and highspeed broadband as the key challenges of online

interviews. They note that even when participants have reliable connectivity to the internet, depending on their broadband speed the quality of video or audio feed may make it difficult to see or hear each other. Poor quality video calls can create misinterpretations and disjointed dialogue flow, resulting in individuals talking over one another and longer than anticipated discussions (Hanna and Mwale, 2017, pp. 267-269). Recognising the potential practical challenges of using a synchronised online environment for qualitative data collection and how these challenges are reducing with improved broadband connections, researchers have more recently turned their attention to investigating the quality and diversity of findings from online versus in-person data collection.

Kite and Phongsavan (2017), Richard et al. (2021) and Woodyatt, Finneran and Stephenson (2016) all found that the quality of data gleaned from online focus groups was like that of in-person focus groups. Specifically, Richard et al. (2021) observed that although in-person focus groups generated a larger word count in transcription and a greater number of ideas, analysis of the themes demonstrated a high degree of crossover, with ten of the total 13 themes occurring in both formats of data collection. Richard et al.'s (2021) findings support that of Woodyatt, Finneran and Stephenson (2016) who also observed a high overlap of themes between both online and in-person focus groups. However, Woodyatt, Finneran and Stephenson (2016) also recorded an additional theme in their online focus group regarding a sensitive topic. They attribute this additional sensitive theme to participants being more comfortable and candid in online focus groups, due to the anonymity and safety of being in their own home environment.

The evidence presented suggests that remote qualitative data collection, either by telephone or online video conferencing, can, with preparation, deliver the same quality of data collection as in-person methods. Further, remote methods offer opportunities for participants who cannot travel to feel comfortable and safe in their home environments, encouraging more candid and open discussion about sensitive topics.

For the current research, following their consent to take part in the study, the 12 original volunteers were divided into three focus groups, A, B and C, as described in the Sampling and Participants section. I had individual email

communication with the 12 participants explaining that I would invite them to the first focus group the following week, having found a mutually convenient time according to their university timetable. Prior to the first focus group, participants were asked to jot down notes on a pre-prepared timeline (Appendix 7). The timeline was designed to enable participants to reflect on their initial feelings in the weeks leading up to campus closures and the first few weeks of online learning to act as a prompt for the first focus group.

I facilitated each focus group, acting as moderator introducing each new question or topic, and prompting participants for their responses to the questions and each other's answers. In addition to the four participants for each focus grouping, a member of the University Centre Wellbeing team was present for the first couple of focus groups. This was to mitigate against any potential distress prompted by the discussions. Participants were aware a member of the Wellbeing team would be present as it was explained in the participant information (Appendix 5) and a condition of the University Centre ethical approval (Appendix 1), and they were introduced at the beginning of each session. The Wellbeing team member turned off their camera and did not speak once they had introduced themselves. Participants were told that they could contact the Wellbeing team if there was anything they want to follow up with after the focus group, and that the Wellbeing team would contact them if anything was said that concerned them. After the first set of focus groups, and in agreement with the participants, the member of the Wellbeing team did not attend as participants were happy with the conversations and knew they could follow up with the Wellbeing team if needed.

Each focus group followed the same structure: welcome and introductions, reiteration of the participant information; asking for confirmation of their continued consent to take part in the research and have the focus group recorded and transcribed; reminder that they can withdraw at any time or choose not to answer a question; that the Wellbeing team will follow up if they have any concerns and that participants can contact them also; and the setting of ground rules with a polite request for respect, confidentiality and to let everyone speak, as they would in the classroom. Around these formalities, we started each focus group with a catch up to discuss how things were for individuals and anything topical from the news or University Centre, for

example, submissions of assessments or dissertation, changes in Government guidance on COVID-19 or personal circumstances. These conversations helped to build online rapport and put people at ease before we discussed the research topics.

Barbour (2018, p. 2) advocates that the role of the moderator is to nurture discussion amongst participants to avoid the participants only responding to the researcher's questions. The moderator introduces the questions and directs the conversation to gather views that will answer the overall research question. Each set of focus groups was designed to broadly explore the different elements of Tinto's (2017b) model of student persistence. The interview guide outlined topics and starter questions, however I used these with flexibility, adapting the specific question to allow for participants to lead the dialogue and any unexpected changes in direction of the conversation (King, Horrocks & Brooks, 2019, p. 63). The five sets of focus groups took place between April and October 2020, with the interview guide (Appendix 8) using the following topics:

1. Initial weeks pre/post campus closures
2. Motivation
3. Sense of belonging
4. Self-efficacy, curriculum and goals
5. Re-joining in-person teaching

Reflecting the phenomenological nature of the phase, the interview guide and prompt questions sought to tap into different aspects of the campus closure experience and the participants' views of that (Langdridge, 2007, pp. 65-68). Participants were asked open questions to enable them to give examples of situations, explain how they felt about experiences, consider why they thought they might feel that way, and reflect on alternative ways of viewing that experience. Finlay (2006) describes how phenomenologists contend that one's body discloses the world, and embodiment is a fundamental presence in the lifeworld or lived experience, thus phenomenological researchers should attend to not only participants' but also their own bodies during data collection. They advocate reflexively attending to three connected but distinct layers: bodily empathy, embodied self-awareness, and embodied intersubjectivity. Bodily

empathy is described as the embodied relationship between participant and researcher displayed as the physical movements and general demeanour; embodied self-awareness is the examination of our own embodied responses; and embodied intersubjectivity is the in-between that occurs between participants and researcher (Langdridge, 2007, p. 70). Due to the video-conferencing tool MS Teams, I was able to attend to these embodiments and reflexively respond to nurture rapport and facilitate discussion during the focus groups, and reflect on the interaction during data analysis to reduce the risk of missing something Finlay (2006, p. 20) describes as potentially important.

Each focus group was audio and visually recorded within the University Centre's collaborative workspace, MS Teams. The auto-transcriptions were created within the platform and imported into MS Word for formatting and analysis.

3.4.4 Data analysis strategy

Reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019a) was used as the data analysis strategy for Phase 1 of the research, the longitudinal focus groups during the first COVID campus closure. The primary objective was to identify rich qualitative themes related to college HE students' subjective experiences and sense-making of their studying persistence, and the role of their personal tutors during COVID campus closures. However, the interim objective was to identify themes and their associated codes for utilisation in the development of items for the student survey used in Phase 2 of the research.

Braun and Clarke (2019a) reflect on how their widely cited 2006 article 'Using thematic analysis in psychology' has led to problematic use and interpretation of their approach to thematic analysis (TA), indicating some "conceptional confusion" (Braun & Clarke, 2019a, p. 590). Explaining their own theoretical assumptions and demarcating how their TA approach differs from some reported applications of TA, Braun and Clarke (2019a) clarify what they now refer to as reflexive TA. Reflexive TA gives transparency regarding the researcher's role in knowledge production, whereby the researcher implements reflexive TA's theoretical assumptions coherently throughout the analytical and

reporting process. Further, they discuss how reflexive TA procedures reflect the values of a qualitative paradigm, centrally placing the researcher's subjectivity, use an organic and recursive coding process, and the importance of reflection on, and engagement with, the data (Braun & Clarke, 2019a). Thus, in the current research, my positionality as an insider researcher is foregrounded alongside the theoretical assumptions of phenomenology.

As an insider researcher, I am conscious about how my positionality will create a level of subjectivity within my data collection and analysis. Insider subjectivity has advantages during the data collection period as it gives privileged access to participants, and the ability to facilitate dialogue between participants and promote a balanced understanding of the participant population (Ahmed, 2016). However, subjectivity in data analysis is often seen as something to avoid. Gough and Madill (2012) summarise that within psychological research, subjectivity is traditionally considered a source of bias that should be minimised or even eliminated, with subjectivity's antonym, objectivity, being a desirable research quality. Ashworth (2015) talks about objectivity as the traditional catchword for post-positive psychological research that seeks to focus on research events that are both reliable and can be observed by someone other than the person with the experience. However, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018, pp. 25-27) contend that viewing subjectivity and objectivity as opposites on a continuum is a false dichotomy. They illustrate this by explaining that within post-positive research that asserts to be objective, researchers rely on personal judgements to create hypotheses, take observations, make inferences, and draw conclusions. Further, they assert that objectivity is refracted through the eyes of the researcher who draws on their personal understandings and formulations to conduct the research, and thus objectivity can never escape its subjective roots (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018, p. 25).

In contrast to the traditional objectivity approach to psychological research, Braun and Clarke (2019a) advocate researchers actively creating their themes as analysis output, through the "intersection of data, analytic process and subjectivity" (p. 594). Braun and Clarke (2019a) stress the importance of the researcher generating themes from their data, through active, reflective, and thoughtful engagement with the data. Thus, the researcher's own subjective experiences are understood as a resource to be used within the analysis

process to create and interpret the stories told by participants. Ashworth (2015, pp. 8-9) cautions that if objectivity is foregrounded in data collection and analysis, attention is shifted away from assets valued in qualitative and phenomenological research: first-person perspectives, perceptual approaches, idiographic research, identifying meaning, the specificity of language use and social relatedness. Thus, in reflexive TA, the researcher is reflexive in their practice, understanding and interrogating their assumptions and positioning throughout. In practice, this meant that throughout the phases of reflexive TA – familiarisation, coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing the report (Clarke, Braun & Hayfield, 2015, p. 230) – I was consciously questioning my own attitudes and perceptions to ensure I was interpreting the participants' sense-making in a manner that respectful of their position but conscious of mine.

Alongside the subjectivity of my insider positionality, the other key aspect of reflexive TA for this research project are the theoretical assumptions of phenomenology. Langdridge's (2007, p. 4) explanation of phenomenological philosophy applied to psychology, proposes a focus on "people's perceptions of the world in which they live and what this means to them", their lived experiences. Thus, the Phase 1 data collection sought to elicit rich descriptions of the students' concrete experiences of studying during the COVID campus closure and their tutors' contribution to their persistence. Consequently, the data analysis using reflexive TA aimed to describe and interpret the lived experience from the perspective of hermeneutic phenomenology.

The phenomenological approach of using iterative or hermeneutic cycles, is complementary to both thematic analysis and my insider positionality. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009, pp. 35-36) describe hermeneutic circles as concerned with the relationship between the part and the whole, thus examination of constituent parts is needed to understand the whole phenomena, yet to understand the parts you need to look at the whole. They stress that the part-whole relationship, not only refers to the whole phenomena, but also the single word in the whole sentence, or a single interview or focus group within a series of data collection events (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, pp. 35-36). Neubauer, Witkop and Varpio (2019) describe how hermeneutic circles are used within data analysis, whereby there is a deliberate going back

and forth between the different parts of the data to consider how they contribute to the evolving understanding of the phenomena. This stage of analysis is reflective of Clarke, Braun and Hayfield's (2015, p. 230) fourth stage of thematic analysis, the reviewing of themes, where the researcher is revisiting candidate themes with the data to ascertain goodness of fit.

Husserl's notion of epoché, the abstaining from our presuppositions and any preconceived ideas we have regarding the subject of our investigations is advocated by descriptive phenomenological researchers (Giorgi, Giorgi & Morley, 2017). However, as Zahavi (2019) observes Heidegger does not refer to Husserl's notion of epoché, indeed hermeneutic phenomenology embraces the researchers' prior knowledge within the hermeneutic circles. Zahavi (2019, p. 9) contends that it is counterproductive to insist that applied phenomenological researchers suspend their "metaphysical assumptions about the mind-independent status of the world", implying that their prior knowledge and experience facilitates rather than detracts from the analysis. Thus, as an insider researcher who has tacit knowledge of the COVID campus closure experience and personal tutoring, my role during the analysis is to consciously observe my own knowledge and understanding, and question how my own attitudes are influencing my description of the participants' lived experience, rather than set it aside in Husserl's epoché manner.

The data analysis procedure for Phase 1 of the current research, the longitudinal focus groups undertaken during the first COVID campus closures in 2020, followed the six phases of reflexive TA outlined by Clarke, Braun and Hayfield (2015, p. 230), undertaken in a manner that reflected van Manen's (1997, pp. 30-34) dynamic interplay of hermeneutic phenomenological research activities that constitute methodological themes. Although, combining reflexive TA and hermeneutic phenomenology is uncommon, Braun and Clarke (2022, pp. 189-190) cite examples of how hermeneutic phenomenology theory have been used to influence the interview guide and the bottom-up analytical approach focusing on participants' experiences, as it has in this research. Figure 13 below demonstrates how the two approaches worked together during this data analysis.
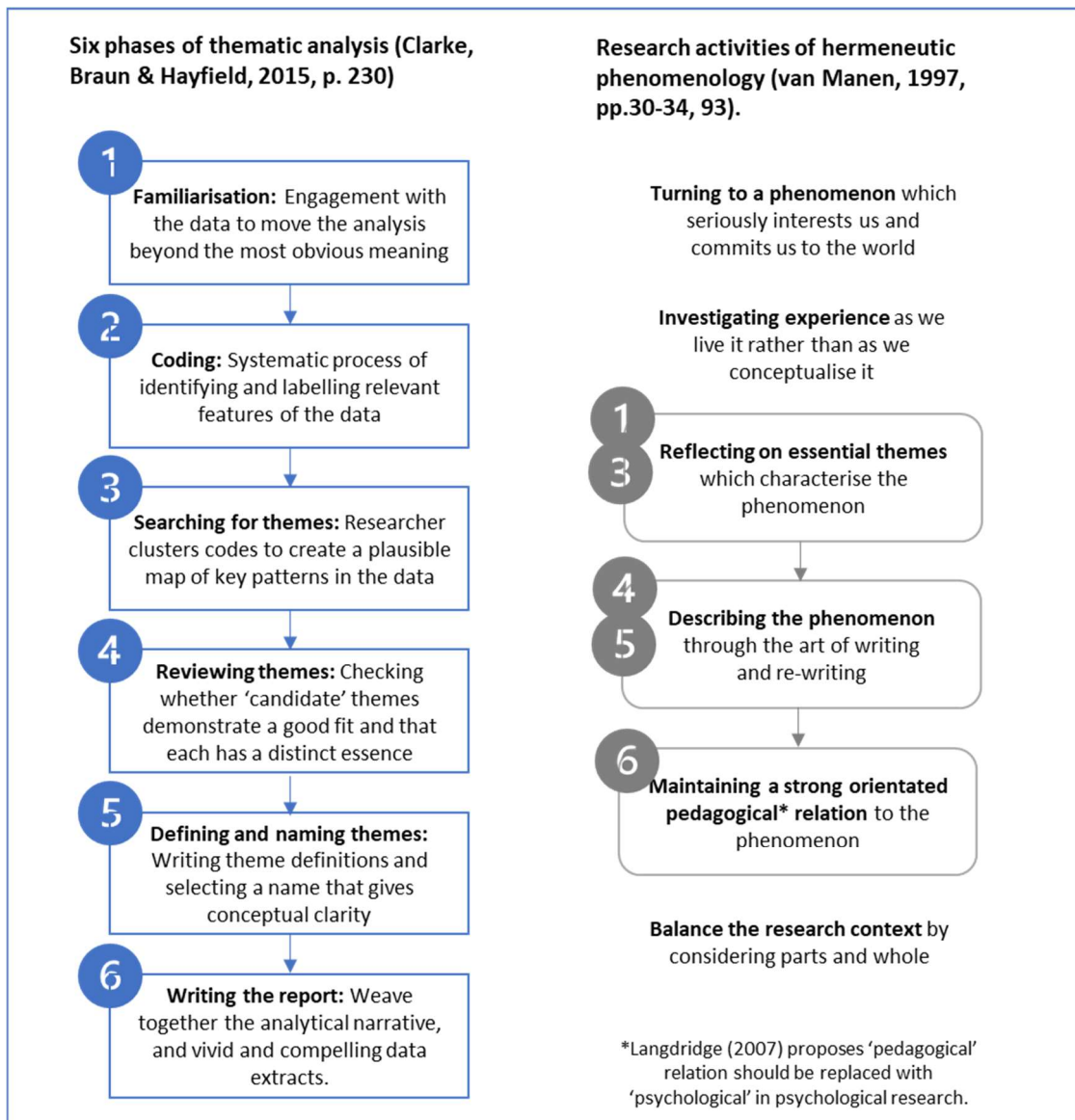
Figure 13: The phases of Thematic Analysis (Clarke, Braun & Hayfield, 2015, p. 230) and dynamic methodological activities of hermeneutic phenomenological research (van Manen, 1997, pp. 30-34).

Expanding on the analysis elements of the methodological activities, van Manen (1997, pp. 92-93) describe how reflecting on the essential themes that characterise the phenomenon involves three approaches. The three approaches outlined by van Manen (1997, pp. 92-93, italics in the original) are:

1. The wholistic or sententious approach: When reading the researcher attends to the text as a whole and ask, *What sententious phrase may capture the fundamental meaning or main significance of the text as a whole?* Then they try to express that meaning by formulating such a phrase.

Isabel Hallam

2. The selective or highting approach: Here the researcher listens to or reads a text several times and asks, *What statement(s) or phrase(s) seem particularly essential or revealing about the phenomenon or experience being described?* These statements are then circled, underlined, or highlighted.
3. The detailed or line-by-line approach: The researcher looks at every single sentence or sentence cluster and asks, *What does this sentence or sentence cluster reveal about the phenomenon or experience being described?*

Van Manen (1997, p. 93) explains that as the lived-experience descriptions are studied, "themes…begin to emerge", a phrase firmly challenged by Braun and Clarke (2020). Braun and Clarke (2020) acknowledge that the concept of 'emergent themes' is used in Smith, Flowers and Larkin's (2009, p. 92-96) as a step within their Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis method. But Braun and Clarke (2020) challenge its use within TA as it suggests the themes pre-exist within the data and are waiting to be discovered, rather than recognising the important role of the researcher in interpreting the themes from the data. This is an area where primacy is given to TA over phenomenological approaches within the current study's analysis strategy, in that I recognise my own positionality as an insider and will be reflexive within my TA processes actively seeking out the themes.

Focus group data collection was undertaken between April and October 2020, when MS Teams' transcription service was limited. The downloaded files required considerable formatting as random alphanumerical coding and line spacing appeared within the text file. The transcripts created by MS Teams record verbatim dialogue, but they do not record pauses, intonation, non-verbal utterances or emphasis, and there is a lack of clarity when one person speaks over another. If discourse or conversation analysis had been the analysis strategy, this would have been a hinderance to the process as they utilise such features of speech (Wiggins, 2017, pp. 91-93). However, thematic analysis requires an orthographic transcript which focuses on the words spoken with some basic details about how they were said, such as emphasis (Clarke, Braun & Hayfield, 2015, p. 229). The lengthy formatting process, where I checked the text for accuracy and emphasis, and amended accordingly, greatly supported

the familiarisation phase of analysis as I was afforded time to watch and listen to the focus groups on multiple occasions. The re-watching of the focus groups enabled me to annotate the transcripts with notes about how the bodily empathy, embodied self-awareness, and embodied intersubjectivity (Finlay, 2006) were represented by the participants. These notes highlighted aspects in the transcript that participants illustrated had particular significance to them through their physical movements and general demeanour, examination of our own embodied responses, and the in-between that occurs between participants and researcher (Langdridge, 2007, p. 70). The textual formatting did not 'tidy up' the transcribed talk, rectify mispronunciations, grammar-errors, non-verbal utterances, or prosodic features. Instead, I followed King, Horrocks and Brooks' (2019, p. 195) guidance to simply correct mis-transcribed speech, and added indications of emphasis using capital letters, laughter (laughter) and inaudible speech [inaudible]. King, Horrocks and Brooks (2019, p. 199) and Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009, pp. 73-74) concur that the aim of transcription is accuracy rather than creating a corrected version. Having formatted 13 focus groups, I was able to immerse myself in the data, making initial observations regarding the situation of the participants during different periods of their undergraduate journey during COVID.

During the initial coding stage of analysis, I acted reflexively seeking to question my own subjectivity and presuppositions. Braun and Clarke (2020) explain that codes are analytical units used to capture single facet observations from the data. To achieve the interim initial objective of identifying themes and codes that could be utilised within the development of the Phase 2 online student survey, from the 13 transcripts, 25 codes were initially observed, with deeper analysis eliciting 114 sub-codes, many of which appeared in multiple codes. The sub-codes did not meet the criteria of capturing a single facet and thus were not promoted to code. I was initially drawn to the aspects of Tinto's (2017b) persistence model as a means of instinctively labelling the codes. By reflexively questioning my own subjectivity and presuppositions I was able to look beyond Tinto's (2017b) model to code the data conscious of my subjectivity, prior knowledge, and presuppositions. This initial semantic level analysis exploring the meaning at the surface level of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 57) identified five themes related to student experience during COVID campus

closures: online teaching and learning, peers on your course, University Centre culture and values, wellbeing and confidence. Braun and Clarke (2020, p. 14) caution that researchers often conflate themes with topics, in that themes are "patterns of shared meaning, united by a central concept or idea" rather than a summary of a topic discussed. Reflecting on the topic summaries and themes conflation, I observe that during the initial semantic analysis I identified five topic summaries which "capture a range of responses around a particular issue" (Braun & Clarke, 2020, p. 77) that have potentially different and contradictory meaning. These topic summaries and their associated codes (Appendix 9) were particularly useful as the basis of the Phase 2 online survey towards the end of the second COVID campus closure in 2021, but not representative of reflexive TA themes. Thus, the focus group data required considerable subsequent reflection and re-analysis to generate themes that demonstrated shared meaning.

Revisiting the qualitative focus groups data almost a year later, after the construction and distribution of the Phase 2 online student survey but prior to survey data analysis, the topic summaries were initially considered as candidate themes. The topic summary candidate themes were reviewed for their goodness of fit, both with their constituent codes and the entire data set. True themes needed to meet the phenomenological criteria of being psychological meaning units, however the topic summary candidate themes did not represent meaning units. Initially I considered whether the topic summaries could be reinterpreted as having shared meaning, but through the iterative process of going back and forth between the data and the summaries I identified that I needed to start the analysis again. Thus, I reanalysed the qualitative data afresh disregarding the topic summaries and starting the whole process of reflexive TA from the beginning with the aim of identifying units of meaning. Giorgi, Giorgi and Morley (2017, p.186) explain that meaning units are derived when the description of the phenomenon transitions in meaning. The meaning units cannot exist alone, they are interdependent upon each other in the same way the codes interact. I re-coded the 651 quotes extracted from the full data set of 13 focus groups seeking meaning to generate themes that express the sense-making or psychological meaning behind the lived experiences discussed by participants.

The iterative process of generating themes from the codes required the application of the phenomenological attitude of reduction, whereby the researcher systematically varies the present phenomenon to consider and determine its essence (Giorgi, Giorgi & Morley, 2017, p.187). This going back and forth between iterations of candidate themes to determine their essence required me to distinguish between different meaning units within the data. Although Giorgi, Giorgi and Morley (2017) are describing the process of reduction as part of descriptive phenomenology, this seeking of the essence of phenomenon is consistent with van Manen's (1997, p. 30) third research activity of hermeneutic phenomenology, reflecting on the essential themes that characterise the phenomenon.

Giorgi, Giorgi and Morley (2017, p.186) explain that this stage of reflecting on the essential themes initially requires the use of the participants' language which is subsequently converted to third person to avoid fusion of the research and participants' experiences. This is an element of the phenomenological process from which I have departed, in that I have retained the verbatim quotes from participants in their given form to honour the student-participants. Further, addressing this notion of avoiding a fusion of the researcher and participants' experiences, Braun and Clarke (2020) posit that even descriptive analysis involves interpretation by the researcher. As I am situated within my social, cultural, political, historical, and ideological position, the language I use is "never neutral, even in apparently descriptive reporting" (Braun & Clarke, 2020, p. 12). Thus, although the generation of themes seeks to identify meaning units and the essence of the phenomenon in line with phenomenology (van Manen, 1997, pp. 30-34), it is my situated interpretation of the data that gives depth to the reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2020).

There are examples of research that deploys thematic analysis within a phenomenological inquiry (Chang & Wang, 2021; Spiers & Riley, 2019; Sundler et al., 2018). However, arguably they do not adhere to Braun and Clarke's (2019) reflexive TA criteria. Chang and Wang's (2021) research explored instructors' experiences of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) purporting to follow the Braun and Clarke (2006) process. However, their themes are arguably topic summaries with titles such as *instructional delivery* and *instructional passion* which do not reflect any shared meaning (Chang & Wang,

2021). Exploring General Practitioners' distress, Spiers and Riley (2019) analysed interview transcripts using both Thematic Analysis and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Spiers and Riley's (2019) TA analysis talks about creating a codebook and 'emergent themes', both factors which Braun and Clarke (2020) dismiss as inappropriate in reflexive TA. In contrast, Sundler et al.'s (2019) discussion about the integration of a descriptive phenomenological approach with thematic analysis methods does not claim to use Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach yet there are tell-tale indicators of reflexive TA. They report that their methodological principles emphasize openness, questioning pre-understanding and adopting a reflective attitude, all of which are consistent with both reflexive TA and phenomenology. However, Sundler et al. (2019) used descriptive phenomenology, recognising the importance of epoché and reduction, rather than the hermeneutic phenomenological approach used in the current research.

Ho, Chiang and Leung (2017) discuss how hermeneutic phenomenology can be used within thematic analysis. They specifically cite Braun and Clarke's (2006) seminal text on thematic analysis that offers two types of TA, inductive and theoretical. However, Virginia Braun, Victoria Clarke and colleagues, in more recent texts, offer a range of different forms of TA including inductive, deductive, semantic, latent, descriptive, and interpretative (Clarke, Braun & Hayfield, 2015, pp. 225-226) and reflexive TA (Braun & Clarke, 2019, 2020). Ho, Chiang and Leung (2017) observe how inductive TA, most recognisable to the current study's reflexive approach, is data-driven, requiring the researcher to immerse themselves in the text thereby 'dwelling' in the experience as depicted in the language of participants. Ho, Chiang and Leung (2017) explain that the notion of dwelling in language was used by Heidegger in 1946 to express how language can demonstrate both the spoken and unspoken meanings. Thus, the researcher attends to both what is implicitly and explicitly said, and makes meaning from what is said, omitted and implied, through the words and manner of speech. This necessitates the researcher to use their tacit knowledge and prior experience to interpret and make meaning of the phenomenon.

The data analysis strategy for Phase 1 was implemented in two stages. The first stage used semantic TA to identify five topic summaries which were subsequently used in the development of the Phase 2 online student survey.

The second stage of analysis implemented reflexive TA with a hermeneutic phenomenological theoretical underpinning, consistent with the approach taken by Ho, Chiang and Leung (2017). The process described demonstrates how the two approaches were integrated, with supremacy given to reflexive TA when the methods contradicted each other. Namely the "interpretive depth lies in the skill of the analyst, not the method" (Braun & Clarke, 2020, p. 13), thus my subjectivity and positionality are acknowledged, but reflexivity is deployed to seek essence of the phenomenon.

3.5 Phase 2 methods

Phase 2 of this exploratory sequence design was an online survey collecting mostly quantitative data conducted from a critical realist stance. The survey tested the generalisability of the themes identified in Phase 1 to a wider student population shortly after the end of the second COVID-19 campus closures in May/June 2021. 64 students at the University Centre completed the online survey, representing almost 10% of the student population. The results were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics recognising the limitations of inferential statistics for the small sample size.

3.5.1 Critical realist inquiry

The second phase, a critical realist inquiry, sought to uncover different and valid perspectives on the reality of student persistence during the COVID 19 campus closures. Critical realism has its roots in the writing of Roy Bhaskar (1978, 1989), and can be seen as a midway point between positivism and interpretivism (Zachariadis, Scott & Barrett, 2013). Maxwell (2012, p. 5) describes critical realism as retaining ontological realism, in that the real world exists independently of our constructions; whilst holding an epistemology of constructivism, in that our understanding of the real world is constructed with our own perceptions and stand points. Hu (2018) summarises these ontological and epistemological assumptions as recognition of an "independent reality and

subjective interpretations" (p. 119). Thus, there is no single 'correct' understanding of the world but many different and valid perspectives.

Applying a critical realism paradigm to Phase 2 of this research, entails accepting Price and Martin's (2018) description of a critical realist ontology that 'something' real happened separate from our social constructions of it, and seeking to identify the 'something' real. Further, Maxwell (2012, pp. 8-9) contends that within critical realist inquiry the concept of causality is accepted as an explanatory notion, illuminating the mechanisms and processes underpinning a phenomenon, in which individuals will have different valid perspectives on the reality. Thus, the online survey tested various hypotheses generated from prior research and Phase 1 analysis seeking to explain potential differences in students' experiences and withdrawal contemplation, an indicator of persistence, depending on their membership of various demographics and student groups. The testing of hypotheses sought to make inferences that could be generalised to the wider University Centre student population, whilst recognising that data collected is fallible as it represents the students' subjective interpretations of their experiences.

Some may argue a critical realist orientated phase is inconsistent with a phenomenological research design, indeed, Durdovic (2018) observes that writers, particularly those of a sociological tradition, regard critical realism and hermeneutic inquiry to be epistemologically incompatible. In contrast, Durdovic (2018) argues that the notion of understanding, which is central to the hermeneutic underpinning of phenomenology, and the seeking of explanation as a core principle of critical realism can be combined within analytical dualism. Thus, the "happening of meaning" (Durdovic, 2018, p. 246) was captured through the hermeneutics of phenomenology investigating the *how* students experienced persistence in the Phase 1 focus groups. Subsequently, the online survey of Phase 2 investigated *what* students experienced. This second stage identifies a "real happening" (Durdovic, 2018, p. 248) through generative mechanisms of critical realism. The rationale for the *how* coming before the *what* relates to the exploratory sequence of the design, which sought to generalise qualitative findings from the smaller sample size in phase 1 to the wider University Centre population (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p. 86). Thus, the *how* reflects how students persisted with their studies during campus

closures and the *what,* or perhaps more accurately the *whether,* identified *whether* persistence behaviours were more widely held within the University Centre population.

The critical realist approach influences every aspect of the Phase 2 of this research: the decision to collect data from the entire University Centre population using a non-probability volunteer sampling process, the use of Likert scales through the online survey so that multiple hypotheses could be tested, data analysis using inferential statistics to test the 'real happening' of differences between student groups, and the presentation of the data to enable interpretation of the *what* of students' experiences during COVID campus closures.

3.5.2   Sampling and participants

The population for the Phase 2 research is the entire student body of the University Centre. Using Aarons' (2020, p. 234) definition of the sample frame being those from the population eligible as relevant cases, the sample frame consisted of those students who were enrolled with the University Centre during the COVID campus closures and still enrolled during Phase 2 data collection. The sample represents those students from the sample frame who responded to the invite to participate and completed the survey.

In the initial research design and timeline, the Phase 2 survey was scheduled for when students returned to in-person teaching after the first lockdown. Initially this was anticipated to be in the summer term of 2020, but it soon became apparent that campus closures would be extended into the next academic year, 2020/21. Therefore, the timeline was revised, and I anticipated conducting the survey in autumn 2020. I recognised that the sample frame would be reduced; only Level 5 students and Level 6 students who were enrolled at the University Centre the previous academic year would be eligible. Potentially the response rate to an autumn term survey would have been higher due to it being the beginning of the academic year, before students became too engrossed in their academic studies and assessments, and before the annual student survey period in March/April. However, due to the second campus closures starting in

December 2020, the Phase 2 survey was delayed indefinitely, until students returned on campus to in-person teaching. In line with Government guidance, in-person teaching in a few cognate areas resumed in March 2021, but most students were not eligible to return until 17 May 2021, just three weeks before the end of the academic year. In consultation with the Head of Higher Education, we agreed that the survey would open on the day in-person teaching resumed on 17 May 2021. Due to the survey taking place after a second period of campus closures and at the end of the 2020/21 academic year, all University Centre students from Level 4, 5 and 6 would be within the sample frame and eligible to take part in the study. Thus, the population and sample frame were equal at 670 students.

Ethical approval for Phase 2 of the research was included in the original application and approval from the researcher's university and the case study University Centre, however additional verbal approval was required from the University Centre for the survey tool. This was sought and approval given (Appendix 11) before any approach was made to the sample frame.

All 670 University Centre students were invited to take part in the online survey. The sampling method used was non-probability volunteer sampling, whereby all members of the student population of the University Centre at the time of data collection had an equal opportunity to take part (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018, p. 222). Each invitation for participants gave an outline of the research, indicated the online survey would take approximately 20 minutes to complete, and gave a hyperlink to the survey and my University Centre contact details in case they had any questions. The call for participants was repeated on several occasions:

i. In the weekly tutorial resources, which are produced by me in my job-role and shared to all personal tutors across the University Centre to use in their group tutorials, in the week commencing 17 May 2021 (the week universities returned to in-person teaching), and the week commencing 24 May 2021. The tutorial slides included a short video of me introducing the research and asking students to take part. (Appendix 12)

ii. Tutors were asked in their weekly Tutors Update email to copy and paste a call for participants into their programme MS Teams message boards in the week commencing 24 May 2021. (Appendix 13)

iii. An email was sent via their student email accounts in the week commencing 14 June 2021. (Appendix 14)

iv. A post was placed on the University Centre internal social media tool, SDconnect, in the week commencing 14 June 2021 repeating the same copy as the email.

v. A final request was made by the Head of Higher Education in their end-of-year communication to students on 2 July 2021. (Appendix 15)

The survey was open from 14 May 2021 until 30 July 2021, starting just four weeks after the annual student surveys closed and at the same time as the University Centre annual Support Services Survey. The University Centre meets the National Student Survey target of a 70% response rate (Office for Students, 2021), by visiting tutorial groups, enabling students to complete it during the session on college devices, if needed, and the repeated reminders from Iposis Mori who manage the survey. However, University Centre and college internal surveys typically get a low, ~10% response rate. I aimed for a 20-30% response rate that would have yielded between 130 and 200 responses, believing that multiple presentations, students being interested in the topic and many having a personal connection to me as the researcher may increase responses above the typical internal survey rate. However, only 64 student participants completed the survey, representing 9.6% of the total student population of 670 at the time of distribution.

The 9.6% response rate was much lower than anticipated and compromises the data reliability. However, the detail provided in the survey provides a depth of information that enables varied analysis. Further, the response rate compares favourably to the University Centre Support Services Survey which took place at the same time with the same population and received 40 responses, a response rate of 6%. Few research methods texts commit to what is considered a good

response rate for online surveys, however Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018, p. 343) propose less than 30% is low, and Johnson and Christensen (2008, p. 224) suggest around 70% is generally recommended. Thus, the 9.6% response rate for the Phase 2 survey is low and this will influence the data analysis strategy, and the reliability of inferences. Bray et al. (2017) observes that online surveys lead to lower response rates compared to paper-based data collection. I had initially considered including a paper-based option to be distributed via personal tutors. However, due to COVID-19 restrictions on the use of paper resources in classrooms and many students remaining online for either online only or hybrid teaching, I decided to present the survey as online only.

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018, p. 344) and Mertens (2015, p. 190) summarise strategies to improve survey unit response rates, including follow-up reminders, multiple modes of responding, indicating the importance of the survey topic, credentials of the survey or researchers, offering incentives, interesting and attractive design of survey and items, short and easy to complete, asking personally, avoiding asking for personal information by making it anonymous, including a deadline, good timing related to the target group, and personalising communication. These strategies were implemented to boost response, except for incentives for participation which is not encouraged by the University Centre. Wilson et al. (2010) found that knowledge of incentives did not significantly improve response rates for online questionnaires. The survey was not quick to complete with the average time to complete being 14 minutes and 52 seconds, and although the questions were directly related to their studies, participants may have felt some were repetitive of other student surveys they have completed.

I feel the principal reason for the low response rate is due to the general level of exhaustion at the end of an academic year heavily impacted by COVID restrictions. In the three months prior and during the survey, students had been asked to complete at least three surveys from the University Centre: National Student Survey or Student Perception Questionnaire (depending on level of study), a college wide COVID impact and response questionnaire, and the annual University Centre Support Services Survey. Therefore, it is fair to assume they may have also had survey fatigue, reluctant to complete yet another survey about their studies. Porter, Whitcomb and Weitzer (2004)

discuss survey fatigue in student populations, concluding that multiple survey requests suppress response rates, especially if surveys are administered back-to-back. The 6% response rate to the Support Services Survey which was promoted at the same time provides credence to the proposition that survey fatigue may have negatively impacted on the response rates to the Phase 2 survey in this research.

Table 2 shows the demographics of the sample of 64 students taking part in the Phase 2 survey in comparison to the population:

	Sample characteristics			Population characteristics	
	Characteristic	Count	%	Characteristic	Average % of ~770 students
Gender*	Female	49	77%	Female	63%
	Male	14	20%	Male	37%
	non-binary	1	3%	Non-binary	not recorded by the OfS
Disability*	Non-disabled	42	66%	Non-disabled	72%
	Disabled with disability support	18	28%	Disabled	26%
	Disabled without support	4	6%	other	2%
Age*	Mature (>21)	47	73%	Mature (>21)	76%
	Young	17	27%	Young	24%
Level of study*	Level 4	26	41%	Level 4	45%
	Level 5	23	36%	Level 5	39%
	Level 6	15	23%	Level 6	17%
First in family**	First in family to attend university	35	55%	First in family to attend university	56%
	Second generation students	29	45%	Second generation students	44%
Carer**	Caring for a child under 18 and/or a disabled relative	29	45%	Caring for a child under 18 and/or a disabled relative	32%
	Not a carer	35	55%	Not a carer	68%
Employment**	Continued to work during the pandemic	33	52%	Intended to undertake paid or voluntary work during their studies	80%

	Put on furlough	9	14%		
	Unemployed or lost their job during the pandemic	24	34%		

*Population characteristics taken from the 2020/21 return to the Office for Students

**Population characteristics taken from internal University Centre data collection during 2020/21.

Table 2: Phase 2 survey sample characteristics in comparison to the population.

The demographics of the sample are broadly aligned to the wider student population. The sample included a greater percentage of female students and those who were caring for a child under 18 and/or a disabled relative compared to the wider University Centre population. It could be assumed that these two characteristics are related, with a greater percentage of female participants, the percentage of carers is likely to increase. As noted in section 3.4.2 Phase 1 Sampling and Participants, volunteers for research studies are more likely to be female (Donkin, Hickie, Christensen, Naismith, Neal, Cockayne & Glozier, 2012; Ganguli, Lytle, Reynolds & Dodge, 1998), and this selection bias is evident again in Phase 2 of the research.

In addition to the demographic data collected I also asked students to indicate how they had studied during the campus closure and whether they had considered withdrawing. 64% of the sample were studying online only during the December 2020 to May 2021 period, 21% had blended teaching with a combination of hybrid classroom and online teaching from January or March until May 2021, and 14% had online learning from December until April when they returned to the classroom for hybrid learning. 17% of respondents reported not having a weekly tutorial during online learning, despite this being the University Centre's commitment to students. Almost half the sample had considered withdrawing at some point in the academic year: 53% had not contemplated withdrawing during the academic year, 33% actively contemplated withdrawing and a further 14% considered it. It should be noted that as this survey took place at the end of the standard academic year, it can be assumed that the sample did complete the academic year (stayed enrolled on the programme to completion) but it is not known whether they all achieved the pass mark of 40%. It is possible that a few participants were enrolled on one

of the three programmes which have non-standard academic years and do not finish in June, and thus could have subsequently withdrawn from the programme mid-year.

The low sample size of 64 participants presents the greatest threat to the phase's external validity and generalisability. Although considerable efforts were made to increase the sample size through repeated calls for participants, the survey was closed at the end of the academic year due to students having completed the academic year which the survey related to. Suresh and Chandrashekara (2012) explain a study must have an adequate sample relative to the goals and variabilities of the study, such that the effects of the expected magnitude of scientific significance, is also statistically significant, but not too big a sample whereby an effect of little scientific significance is statistically detectable. To determine appropriate sample size, Cohen (1992) urges researchers to undertake statistical power analysis involving the relationship between sample size, significance criterion, population effect size and statistical power. Ideally this power analysis would be conducted ahead of the research to identify the ideal number of participants in each group. However, as this research relied on a non-probability volunteer sampling, participant recruitment was less systematic and the number of participants in each group was determined by those who volunteered rather than engineered. This lack of pre-data collection power analysis and the volunteer sampling approach results in some implications for statistical analysis reliability. Thus, the results presented are tentative conclusions based on a small sample size.

The small sample size of 64 responses, 9.6% of the population and sample frame broadly reflects the University Centre population but has implications for analysis reliability. Furthermore, I anticipated demographic and studying factors could be used as independent variables during the data analysis but due to the small sample size, the reliability of such analysis is questionable. This is discussed in greater depth in the data analysis strategy section, 3.5.4.

3.5.3 Online survey design

I designed the quantitative online survey specifically for Phase 2 of this research, with topics and survey items developed from topic summaries and codes identified in Phase 1. The survey was designed to be cross-sectional, comparing the item responses between different independent variable demographic and studying factors groups.

Due to most students not returning to in-person teaching, even when the campus reopened due to it being so close to the end of the academic year, the survey was designed and distributed online. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018, pp. 361-363) discuss the advantages and disadvantages of online surveys. Cautioning that despite the practical advantages of cost, speed and ease of distribution via the internet, convenience and anonymity of completion, design flexibility, and exportable results, there are disadvantages that need to be mitigated. Challenges with internet surveys include potential participants or their email servers assuming the invite is spam; participants not completing the survey due to length, unclear instructions, or lack of personal contact; false responding whereby participants misrepresent their answers as they are less accountable online; and response rates tending to be lower than paper-based surveys especially if the survey is too long or complicated (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018, pp. 361-363).

To mitigate these challenges, the email invites were sent from and to University Centre email accounts avoiding them being rejected by server firewalls and demonstrating the authenticity of the survey. However, this might have inadvertently resulted in fewer potential participants seeing the invite as it was near the end of the academic year, and they may have been checking their student email accounts less frequently. The online survey was constructed in the University Centre's onlinesurveys.ac.uk account. This added further legitimacy to the survey and functionality that was not available in MS Forms as part of the University Centre's OneDrive account. Onlinesurveys.ac.uk works on all computer and mobile platforms and has accessibility functions built into enabled respondents to modify or view the survey in a format that meets their disability needs (JISC, 2021).

The survey consisted of four sections: participant information and consent questions, survey items in ten sections, demographic items, and the de-brief and thank you statement. Page 1 of the survey consisted of participant information and consent questions (Appendix 16) including: an introduction to myself and my research; an outline of the function of the survey and how long it should take to complete; how the data collected would be stored, processed, and analysed; how participants could withdraw their data; and how participants could get more information about the research. This information was provided for transparency and in compliance with the British Psychological Society (2018) and British Education Research Association (2018) ethical guidance, and the Data Protection Act 2018. Participants were asked to confirm their eligibility for the survey: University Centre student during 2020/21, read and understood the participant information, recognise that they can withdraw and know how to do it, and whether they wished to proceed consenting to their participation in the survey. Therefore, the survey used consent as the lawful basis for processing the data in compliance with the Data Protection Act 2018.

The main survey consisted of ten pages separating into individual topics so as not to overwhelm participants, with a progress bar at the top of each page to illustrate their progress through the survey. Due to the PHEN → quan mixed exploratory sequence design (Mayoh & Onwuegbuzie, 2015), this second quantitative phase of the research tested the hypotheses generated from the topics identified in the earlier qualitative phenomenologically orientated Phase 1. The five central topics (pages 3-8 of the survey) represented the topic summaries regarding student experience identified during the initial analysis of Phase 1 with items developed directly from the codes within each topic summary (Appendix 17):

2. Programme delivery. This was a branching question to direct participants to items based on whether they were enrolled on a programme designed for classroom (41 programmes) or online delivery (two programmes).
3. Online teaching and learning (classroom programmes). 14 Likert scale items about engagement in learning for students enrolled on classroom-based programmes (branched from page 1).
4. Online teaching and learning (online programmes). The same Likert scale items as on page 2 regarding engagement in learning for students enrolled

as online learners, minus the two which contrasted online with classroom learning leaving 12 Likert scale items (branched from page 1).

5. Peers on your course. 13 Likert scale items asking about relationships within peer and social groups at the University Centre.

6. University Centre culture and values. 11 Likert scale items related to students' perceptions of the University Centre environment and how their personal tutor values them as an individual.

7. Wellbeing. 12 Likert scale items related to psychological, social, and emotional wellbeing during campus closures.

8. Confidence. 12 Likert scale items regarding their confidence and self-efficacy whilst studying at the University Centre.

The final three pages collected demographic data for potential use as cross-sectional independent variables. On page 9 participants were asked about their withdrawal contemplation and their predictions regarding their degree outcome (Appendix 18). Page 10 asked about personal tutoring and how the student perceived their relationship with their personal tutor. This page included the only open-ended qualitative question asking participants to describe their relationship with their personal tutor (Appendix 18). Page 11 included all the demographic questions related to student populations: level of study, online learning during COVID, gender, disability, mature student, first in their family to attend university, caring responsibilities and employment status during campus closures (Appendix 19). The final page of the survey, page 12, thanked participants for their responses, debriefed them about the research, and reminded them how they could withdraw their data or ask more questions (Appendix 20).

Page 3-8 consisted of Likert scale items based on the topic summaries and codes identified during initial analysis of the Phase 1 data. Likert scales were used in the survey to record ordinal data attitudes, reflecting Aarons' (2020, p. 149) explanation that Likert scales can be used to assess attitudes or opinions on real-life events or experiences. The scale deployed in this research was a five-point Likert: Strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree. There is some debate about whether the midpoint 'neither agree nor disagree' scale point ought to be included within Likert scales (Chyung et al., 2017). Chyung et al. (2017) argues that if Likert scales are

treated as ordinal data, whereby central tendency calculations utilise mode and median rather than mean, it is possible to exclude the midway point and have a four-point Likert. However, when Likert scales are considered to produce interval data, with distances between consecutive points representing the same value, the midpoint is essential to be able to calculate mean score. In this research I concur with Cohen, Manion and Morrison's (2018, p. 481) assessment that Likert scales recording participants' agreement with attitude and opinion statements cannot be assumed to have equal intervals between points on the scale, and thus individual item Likert scales should be considered ordinal non-parametric data. However, Bourne (2017, p. 217) argues that when adding up and totalling scores from multiple Likert scales for analysis, the totalled scores can be treated as parametric data. Thus, in this research when the Likert scales are analysed independently they will be considered ordinal non-parametric data, but the sum of multiple scales will be considered parametric.

Omitting the midpoint value can force participants to make a choice as to whether they agree or disagree with a statement. This can lead participants believing they do not really have a choice; it is forced one way or the other (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018, p. 484). Although this will likely give more conclusive results, these results may appear to demonstrate that participants have opinions when they do not, and they may later object to the manner of questioning or not complete the survey (Friedman & Amoo, 1999). The National Student Survey (The Student Survey, 2021), and internal student satisfaction questionnaires use a midpoint 'neither agree nor disagree' scale point, thus the research survey reflected this structure by including a midpoint as the student population are familiar with its design and it may also mitigate the concerns raised by Friedman and Amoo (1999). Further, Krosnick and Presser (2009) observe that Likert scales with a midpoint value have increased reliability and validity. Therefore, the inclusion of the midpoint 'neither agree nor disagree' value on the Likert scale renders the five-point scale as providing ordinal non-parametric data, which should enable the participants to feel they have a true choice in the answers, thereby supplying more reliable and valid results.

Complying with Cohen, Manion and Morrison's (2018, pp. 490-491) guidance regarding the construction of survey items, I avoided highbrow questions with

terminology that participants might not understand, and items that might appear complex, ambiguous, and irritating. I did this by using positively worded, clear, and commonplace language with only one clause per item, whilst being careful about potentially sensitive or emotive items. All items throughout the survey were presented as positively worded statements. The guiding principle was to reflect the appreciative lens (Conway & Foskey, 2015) theoretical framework of the overall research project. Thus, participants were asked to indicate their agreement with item statements framed from a positive perspective, for example: Teachers were able to make online lessons feel as normal as possible; I feel motivated when I am making progress in my learning; Friendships grew when we were working online within my peer group; and My tutor values me as an individual and makes efforts to get to know me. The challenge was to adhere to the appreciative lens whilst maintaining survey reliability and validity. The items could have been considered leading; Allen (2017) describes leading questions as ones causing participants to answer in a bias manner aligned to the researcher's goals. It could be argued that items such as 'My tutor made efforts to keep everyone positive and motivated during online learning' were leading participants to report positive tutor experiences aligned to my research goals. Leading questions risk socially desirability response bias whereby participants may give results that they believe would please the researcher (Davis & Silver, 2003, p. 33), either self-deceptive overly favourable representations or impression management to appear in a socially approved way (Dahlgren & Hansen, 2015). In the online survey leading questions could have led to overly favourable representations to provide the 'correct answer' and please the researcher.

The potential for leading questions resulting in socially desirable answers, risks the validity of the online survey. In addition to participants choosing socially desirable answers, Chyung, Barkin and Shamsy (2018) caution that positive wording also risks yea-saying bias, the tendency for participants to agree with all the items regardless of their content. They observe that Rensis Likert, who originally developed the Likert scale, foresaw this risk. Likert recommended designing one-half of the survey with positively phrased items and one-half negatively phrased, encouraging participants to stay alert and consciously engage with each item on the survey (Chyung, Barkin & Shamsy, 2018).

However, there is evidence to suggest that a mix of positively and negatively phrased items, especially unevenly weighted positively and negative worded, does not necessarily lead to greater reliability and validity of the survey instrument (Schriesheim & Hill, 1981; Roszkowski & Soven, 2010). Roszkowski and Soven (2010) used the Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency measure to determine that negatively worded items impact on survey reliability, especially if there are just a few negatively phrased items within a mostly positive survey. They suggest this is due to participants being more likely to misread negatively worded items and make errors (Roszkowski & Soven, 2010).

The use of positively phrased items was particularly important for pages 7 and 8 related to wellbeing and family life when studying, and confidence in studying. The items presented on these pages could be considered sensitive questions. Krosnick and Presser (2010) advise that sensitive questions that might make participants uncomfortable should be placed towards the end of the survey, as they were in the current research. The other mitigation to reduce the psychological impact of sensitive questions was the positive phrasing of these items. Although the aim of the survey was to reflect the codes identified in Phase 1 of the research, typically the root code from Phase 1's focus groups were negative as they related to students' poor wellbeing or declining confidence when learning online. In response to pilot testing with University Centre colleagues and feedback from the University Centre ethics committee, these negatively phrased codes were converted to positive phrasing for the online survey. For example, the code 'missing out on university experiences' was positively phrased for the survey as 'I do not feel like I have missed out on my university experiences during online learning'. The situating of sensitive items late in the survey and the positive phrasing of these items should have mitigated any negative impact on students' wellbeing whilst undertaking the survey. However, to further comply with ethical best practice in my responsibilities to participants (BERA, 2018), the final thank you page of the survey reminded participants that if anything within the survey had prompted them to question their own persistence or wellbeing, they could speak to their Tutor or contact the University Centre Wellbeing Team.

In addition to the positive phrasing of survey items, the scale was ordered positively in descending order with the Strongly Agree value in the first column

after the item. Chyung, Kennedy and Campbell (2018) explain that the primacy effect can be at play in surveys whereby participants are more likely to select options that are presented at the beginning of the visually presented response list, this is referred to left side selection bias. They argue that with left side selection bias, participants might perceive the first option to be the socially desirable option, especially if the options are presented in descending order, starting with Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. One mitigation offered by Chyung, Kennedy and Campbell (2018) would be to present the Likert scale in ascending order from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree, or use descending and ascending scales in different sections of the survey. In line with the appreciative lens, I decided to have consistency with positively phrased questions and a positive descending scale.

I endeavoured to include all the codes identified in Phase 1 data within the online survey. However, there were more codes recognised in some topic summaries than others, leading to an imbalance of items in different sections of the survey. The online teaching and learning codes were more numerous and led to a variety of survey items, some of which were initially negatively phrased in line with the participants' comments. During the pilot testing stage, when the survey was reviewed by teaching colleagues and colleagues from the University Centre Student Support Hub, feedback suggested that this imbalance in the number of items per topics in the survey implied one aspect was more important than another, and the negatively phrased items were confusing and out-of-place. The University Centre ethics committee were also concerned about the imbalance and negative phrasing; thus, all items were positively phrased in line with the appreciative lens approach and some similar items were removed to create roughly the same number of items in each topic section, between 11-14 items.

On balance the use of positively phrased items and a descending scale is consistent with the appreciative lens and avoids the potential for weakened reliability due to the inclusion of some negatively phrased items but risks some socially desirable answers. Thus, the survey results need to be understood through the appreciative lens that endeavours to find the positive core of the experience of persisting during the COVID campus closures with a recognition that some answers maybe unduly positive.

The fourth section of the survey included demographic items to be used as cross-sectional independent variables (Appendix 19). On page 9 students were asked about their persistence and intention to continue with their studies. These questions used a slider scale from 10 (very likely) to 1 (not at all likely) to enable participants to reflect on the likelihood of achieving their studies and how seriously they considered withdrawing from their studies. The scale was 10 (I did not contemplate withdrawing) to 1 (I filled in the withdrawal paperwork but chose to continue with my studies). Slider scales can be considered a Likert-type scale (Chyung et al., 2017), with ten-point scales, such as the one used in the persistence and withdrawal contemplation questions, being ordinal data due to the lack of a midpoint value and imprecise values between points on the scale. On page 10, participants were asked about their experiences of personal tutoring at the University Centre. The University Centre's commitment to students is to have weekly group tutorials, but during the first COVID campus closures some students were reporting that these were not occurring. Therefore, question 14 asked whether students had weekly group tutorials, with a nominal data answer being given. Participants were then asked about their relationship with their personal tutor, using a five-point Likert scale, participants responded to positive statements reflecting the core values and skills of personal tutors (Lochtie, McIntosh, Stork & Walker, 2018). This was followed by the only open-ended qualitative question of the survey, asking participants to describe their relationship with their tutor. The rationale for including this one qualitative question was to focus on participants' perception of the relationship aspect that had come up strongly in Phase 1 but that is difficult to measure with quantitative scales.

The final page of questions collected participants' demographic details on page 11. Nominal demographic data relating to the Office for Students' underrepresented group characteristics (Office for Students, 2018a) and salient factors related to being the first in family to attend university, caring responsibilities, and paid employment during COVID lockdowns. All these factors were included as potential independent variables for cross-sectional comparisons. Aarons (2020, p. 60) describes cross-sectional survey designs as considering comparison between groups on the dependent variables of interest. Thus, the factors determined on pages 9-11 were designed to be used as

independent variables, when comparing different groups' dependent variable results from pages 3-8 of the survey.

The final debrief page of the survey thanked participants to taking part: reminded them how to withdraw their data should they wish, described how the survey fitted into the whole research project, promoted them to seek support from the Wellbeing Team if they needed it, and explained how they could contact myself or my research supervisors (Appendix 20). Having reached this page of the survey, participants responses are automatically recorded by the onlinesurveys.ac.uk platform and available for analysis.

3.5.4 Data analysis strategy

The data analysis strategy for the Phase 2 online survey quantitative data reflects the critical realist paradigm within which this phase of the research was undertaken. The data was analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics to test eight hypotheses generated from the Phase 1 qualitative data, and theories and research presented in the Literature Review:

Student experience during COVID-19 campus closures

i. **Hypothesis 1:** Students with various demographic characteristics would have a different student experience during COVID-19 campus closure compared to their peers

ii. **Hypothesis 2:** Students who had weekly tutorials would have had a more positive COVID-19 campus closure student experience than those students who did not have a weekly tutorial.

iii. **Hypothesis 3:** Students who had not contemplated withdrawal would have had a more positive COVID-19 campus closure student experience than those students who had contemplated withdrawal.

iv. **Hypothesis 4:** Students who had weekly tutorials during COVID-19 campus closure would have more positive perceptions of their personal tutors' characteristics and values.

Withdrawal contemplation

   v. Hypothesis 5: There will be an association between students with various demographic characteristics and their withdrawal contemplation.

   vi. **Hypothesis 6:** Students who had weekly tutorials would be less likely to contemplate withdrawal.

   vii. **Hypothesis 7:** Students with certain characteristics and/or experiences would be more likely to contemplate withdrawal.

   viii. **Hypothesis 8:** Students who had contemplated withdrawing would have different grade and completion expectations than those who had not contemplated withdrawing.

In preparation for data analysis the export of 64 participant responses from onlinesurveys.ac.uk platform was modified within MS Excel before being transferred to SPSS for data analysis. The modifications made converted Likert scale answers to a coded scales (Strongly agree – 5, Agree – 4, Neither agree nor disagree – 3, Disagree – 2, Strongly disagree – 1). Totals for each topic of student experience were also calculated from the 11-14 different Likert scale items in each topic. Each participants' topic scores were then adjusted to be a percentage, so that topics could be compared to one and other. A total student experience score was then calculated from the individual topic percentages for each participant out of 500. Tutors' characteristics and values were rated on five, five-point Likert scales. The scores given were summed to give a total Tutor rating out of 25. Answers to demographic questions were coded, for example Female – 1, Male – 2 and Non-binary – 3. For the demographic groups related to disability, first-in-family, parent/carer and employment, some levels were merged for subsequent analysis. For example, in the parent/carer group, initially there were four levels: not a parent/carer – 1, carer to a relative/friend – 2, parent to an under 18-year-old – 3, with multiple caring responsibilities – 4, for subsequent analysis the three parent/carer roles were merged to provide just two levels: not a parent/carer – 1, and a parent/carer - 2.

Once imported into SPSS, a range of descriptive and inferential statistics were conducted depending on the independent and dependent variable data type: chi-square, Kruskal-Wallis, one-way between-subjects analysis of variance, one-way between-subjects multiple analysis of variance and logistic regression.

4. Results

The two phases of research were analysed independently, reflexive thematic analysis of the qualitative data collected during Phase 1 and descriptive and inferential statistical analysis comparing responses to items within the Phase 2 online survey between different student demographics groups. All qualitative and quantitative results are presented in this report, no statistical or thematic analysis findings have been omitted.

4.1   Qualitative data analysis

The qualitative data collected during the Phase 1 longitudinal focus groups was analysed three times. The first level of analysis used semantic thematic analysis (Clarke, Braun & Hayfield, 2015, p. 225) for topic summaries. The topic summaries were utilised in the construction of the Phase 2 student survey. Subsequently the qualitative data was re-analysed to develop comprehensive reflexive thematic analysis themes with "patterns of shared meaning, united by a central concept or idea" (Braun & Clarke, 2020, p. 14). Two levels of reflexive thematic analysis were conducted. Initially the full dataset was analysed for shared meaning related to student persistence during the COVID campus closures. The second level of reflexive thematic analysis focused on elements of the dataset when participants were discussing the role of their personal tutor in fostering their persistence.

For each level of thematic analysis, results are presented with themes and sub-themes. Quotes are given to illustrate the shared meaning that has been identified within the data. Quotes are attributed to participants, focus groups and transcript line numbers. Thus, P4 (A1, 561) indicates that this quote comes from participant 4, and the quote starts on line 561 of the transcript from focus group A1. Tables of all the themes, sub-themes, codes and associated quotes are in the appendices (Appendix 9-10).

4.1.1 Student experience topic summaries

Five topic summaries related to participants' student experience during COVID-19 campus closures were identified during the first level of semantic thematic analysis from 25 codes with 114 sub-codes, several codes appear in multiple topics, as illustrated by Figure 14. Appendix 9 includes illustrative quotes for each sub-code and code within each topic summary.
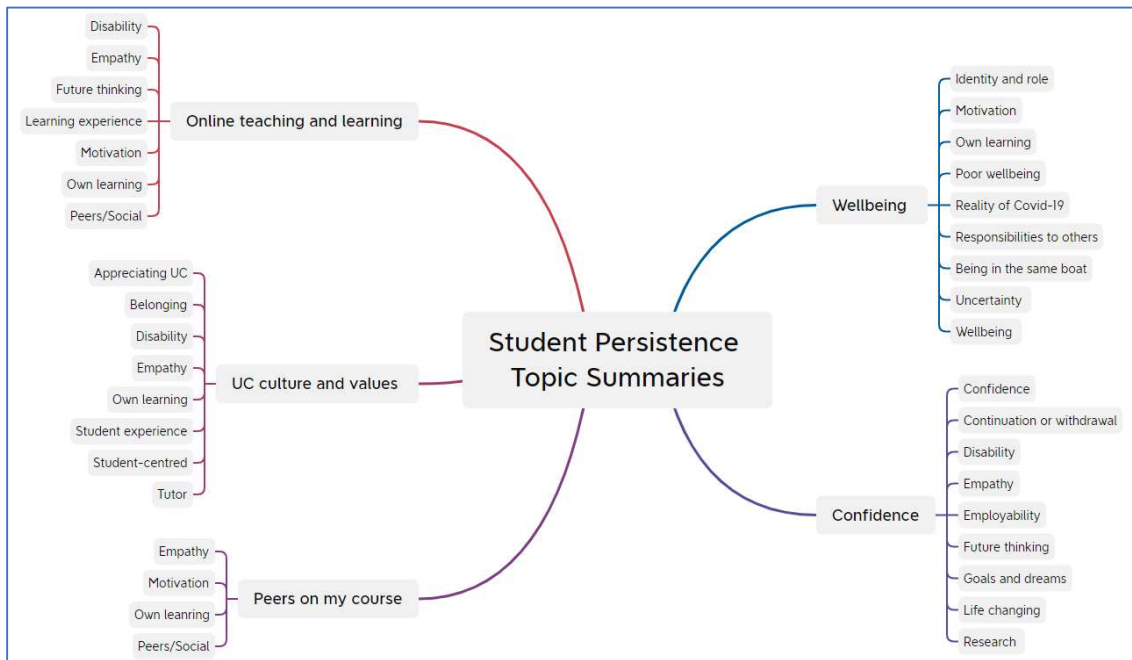

Figure 14: The student experience topic summaries and codes identified in the first level of analysis.

The first topic summary, '**Online teaching and learning**' (Appendix 9.1), reflects student participants' perceptions of the online learning experience in the first few months of the COVID-19 pandemic and first campus closure. Broadly participants were empathetic and understanding of the unprecedented position the University Centre, personal tutors, lecturers, and their peers were in, and were trying to make the best of it.

> Participant 4 (A1, 561) "Our lecturer has to deal with her toddler coming in and wanting her attention, but she's still got her focus on the class."

For many there was an assumption that online learning was not going to work for them, or that that is not what they signed up for or wanted.

Participant 6 (B1, 153) "Me and a couple of my friends were quite nervous about the whole online thing because I quite like to be able to speak to my teachers in person or just pop into the office if I have a question."

However, despite a strong desire to return to face-to-face teaching in the new academic year, they were finding some benefits, such as recorded lessons, and ways to organise their learning whilst at home and online.

Participant 5 (B2, 157) "I also feel like from a teaching point of view nothing's changed like the delivery just been as good as it would have been if we were in like in the classroom, and I think that the fact it's being recorded as well that doesn't necessarily happen in the classroom, so being able to go back onto something is really, really helpful for me."

The sub-codes within topic summary 'Online teaching and learning' led to 14 survey items asking Phase 2 participants to consider their agreement to statements related to their confidence on transition to online learning, effectiveness of learning online, interaction online, enjoyment of learning and classroom feedback.

The second topic summary **'Peers on my course'** (Appendix 9.2) relates to all social aspects of studying. Participants showed empathy and understanding for the differential impact of COVID on peers' lives and awareness of how others were dealing with it in their own way.

Participant 6 (B3, 206) "Some of them won't speak to anyone outside of lessons. I don't think it's a personal and I think everyone is different and everyone's got a lot of different things going on at home and. Yeah, I mean it's not like no one dislikes each other and no one is horrible to each other."

There was discussion of how the social side of courses helps to motivate students, both in and outside of lessons. There was a feeling that the dialogue between and within peers during lessons had reduced online and that this had a negative impact on the learning experience.

Participant 9 (C2, 201) "I find it more difficult learning on my own. Because I I sometimes need someone else to be able to explain it in a way that

Isabel Hallam

helps it makes sense to me 'cause the way it's written in a textbook is not necessarily going to be the way that everybody is going to understand it."

Participants also discussed the notion of friendship within peer groups and how this was either strengthened or challenged during COVID, the idea that you learn who you can count on came through strongly.

Participant 2 (A1, 430) "I would say it with the people it has becomes very apparent who I really can rely on."

The sub-codes within topic summary 'Peers on my course' led to 13 survey items asking Phase 2 participants to consider their agreement to statements related to the motivation and enjoyment of the social side of learning, friendships and isolation online, the diversity of peers' experiences during COVID and the impact of others' decisions to continue or withdraw from their studies.

The third topic summary **'University Centre culture and values'** (Appendix 9.3) depicts student participants' perceptions of the University Centre both in pre-COVID and COVID times. Students discussed the caring community created by personal tutors and the whole University Centre which fosters a sense of belonging.

Participant 6 (B3, 100) "So just like really eager to help you. It doesn't feel like you have with bothering anyone, which is what I sometimes worry about."

They observed how unique the University Centre is compared to other higher education providers in size, teaching and learning approach, a caring attitude, and the student community.

Participant 1 (A3, 50) "You are a name and a person. Rather than just a number, and it is very apparent with every member of staff, wellbeing, tutors alike."

Personal tutors were praised for their commitment to students, demonstrating that they genuinely care about students as individuals even during COVID when they were experiencing their own challenges.

Isabel Hallam

Participant 5 (B2, 358) "[Tutor] just know when to call us. [Tutor] knows when something's wrong. I just feel like [Tutor] has got this likes an antenna on [their] head that need to call that person that day, the everyone feels the same."

The sub-codes within topic summary 'University Centre culture and values' led to 11 survey items asking Phase 2 participants to consider their agreement to statements related to how personal tutors approached tutoring and support during COVID, how the University Centre created a student community, and confidence that they would be supported in times of need.

The fourth topic summary reflects students' '**Wellbeing**' (Appendix 9.4). The Wellbeing topic summary encompasses aspects of family life, roles and identities, and mental health. Students reflected on the initial transition to online learning when the campus closures and pandemic lockdown were enacted.

Participant 5 (B1, 71) "It was quite frustrating [missing lessons] because I'm quite a practical learner, so I learn very much from the group work that we do in class."

They spoke of uncertainty, anxiety and worry for their studies and families during COVID, but there is resignation and acceptance of the situation.

Participant 9 (C1, 71) "I'm just going to look at it [social media] once a day 'cause too much was causing me to have panic attacks again and haven't had those for years and it was causing me to feel really uncomfortable being around people."

As the campus closures continued towards the end of the academic year, some felt under pressure to complete assessments around their other life responsibilities and others accepted the safety net of assessment extensions. All spoke about fluctuating emotional wellbeing throughout the period.

Participant 10 (C2, 147) "What I am finding hard, I think, is not speaking to other adults, I just need some down time. And I really miss my mum as well. She's she's been like a real support."

Participant 2 (A1, 593) "The emotions of that whole pandemic is one day I'm on top of the world and the next day I'm just I'm just not very happy at all and I would say to my most motivation really over the Easter was fine. I think it's now that I'm struggling more."

The sub-codes within topic summary 'Wellbeing' led to 12 survey items asking Phase 2 participants to consider their agreement to statements related to their concerns regarding the pandemic itself and their studies during this period, feeling of missing out on the university experience, and competing responsibilities during campus closures between their student role and family and caring responsibilities.

The final topic summary, **'Confidence'** (Appendix 9.5) encompasses aspects of personal growth, self-efficacy and self-belief. Participants discussed this in relation to university study pre-COVID and studying during campus closures. Participants also reflected on how they felt at the start of their undergraduate studies.

Participant 1 (A4, 296) "Confidence levels with zero. Um, as far as I remember leading up to the first, um, assignments I'd already walked out of Uni. I'd had enough."

Participant 3 (A4, 112) "[Going to university] wasn't really in my sphere because my parents had not gone to Uni, I didn't have that like expectation."

Participants discussed how their personal, academic and professional confidence had grown during the course of their undergraduate studies in response to feedback from academic staff, peers and their families.

Participant 5 (B2, 141) "I think I've grown a lot in confidence, uhm, I feel like in my head I thought I relied on my peers quite a lot when actually I don't think I do. I can do it myself. I'm more than able to."

They discussed the impact of COVID on their confidence and motivation, and their determination to complete their studies despite the challenges.

> Participant 10 (C2, 78) "But I'm determined because I am getting a little bit bored of all this home schooling and stuff. I want to concentrate on myself and you know further myself really uhm 'cause otherwise I'm kind of bit stuck in a rut."

> Participant 6 (B2, 61) "It's alright, like, knowing that I'm so close to the end is what's keeping me going."

The sub-codes within topic summary 'Confidence' led to 12 survey items asking Phase 2 participants to consider their agreement to statements related to their early expectations of higher education, how confident they were when pivoting to online learning, professional confidence and aspirations, and their self-efficacy about being an undergraduate student.

4.1.2 Student persistence themes

Reflexive thematic analysis was used to capture four student persistence themes with a shared meaning, each with their own central organising concept. Braun and Clarke (2020, pp. 77-78) describe the central organising concept as an idea or meaning that unites the theme. The themes and sub-themes identified have conceptual or latent patterns, dug from below the surface of what was explicitly articulated by the participants to be interpreted for their meaning. Four themes were developed: Never thought I could, Not just a number, All in the same boat, and Not going to let COVID ruin university. The themes and sub-themes are depicted in Figure 15.
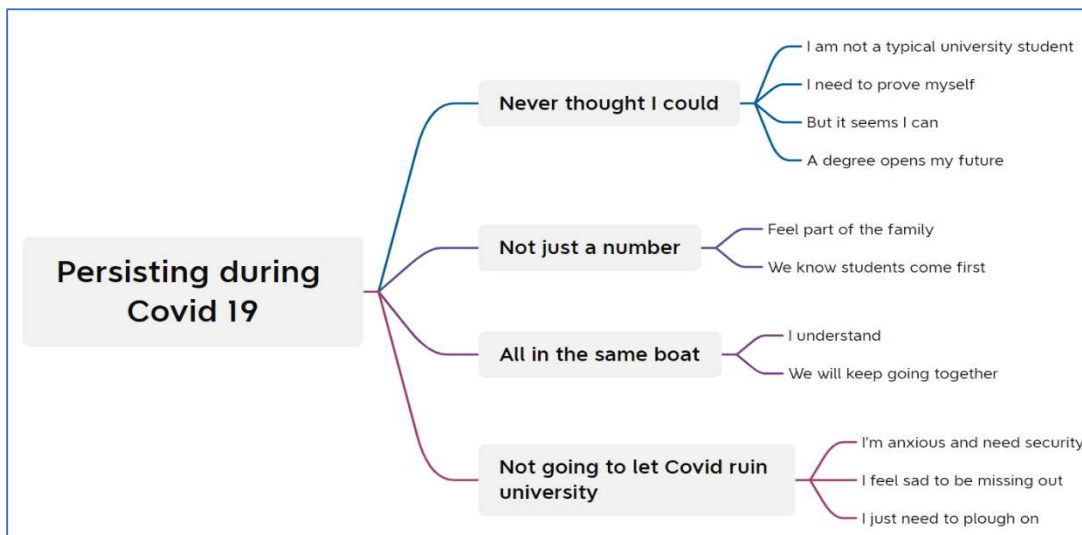
Isabel Hallam

Figure 15: The student experience of persisting during COVID 19 themes and sub-themes

i. **Theme 1: 'Never thought I could'**

The first theme **'Never thought I could'** represents the shared meaning that student participants were almost surprised to find themselves as university students, as they never thought they could study for a degree, and were therefore going to make the most of the opportunity. The theme encompasses feelings of otherness and being separate from other university students, the need to prove oneself to themselves and others, the realisation that perhaps they do deserve to be studying at university after all, and the identification that a degree will open future possibilities, not just for their own career but also for their children's future. A sense of optimism unites these aspects of the dataset, with participants proud that they are now university students despite them not having thought university was for them when they were younger and their non-typical student background.

Participants identified as **'non-typical university students'** contrasting themselves with those who start university at 18 years old after their A-levels, live away from home for the first time, and enjoy a stereotypical student life. They reflected on how they were worried before their course commenced that they would be the odd-one-out, and then on induction, conscious that their fears were realised, and they did not fit in the student group:

> Participant 9 (C3, 123) "They are a lot younger, they've literally just come straight from college, so it's a very different situation that they are in mentally than me."

> Participant 4 (A3, 85) "I was the oldest swinger in town in my class actually."

> Participant 10 (C3, 481) "We're all from different backgrounds and in the lessons... I'm kind of not really in anybody's sort of bracket or bubble."

However, they came to see that they shared more in common with their peers at the University Centre than they first perceived:

> Participant 1 (A3, 370) "One my immediate sort of fears when first starting Uni was people who are a lot lot younger would have completely differing views and one of my greatest, uhm, how can I say pushes of ensuring I get my work done is only in her young 20s and it's just great to see that sort of age has sort of I'm sort of, uhm, no effect, uhm, on friendship when it when it comes to this and that, that makes me really, really humble, actually."

Responding to questions asking them to think back to when they were 18 years old, participants were conscious at that time, they never thought they would be studying for a degree:

> Participant 1 (A4, 154) "Those people that I thought who were at Uni were sort of way out of my league."

> Participant 3 (A4, 127) "So most of the peers that I was around at that time we're doing, we're working in jobs and apprenticeships or like me, join the service and that's what I was surrounded with, so I didn't really think about a degree at that time."

This recognition that their 18-year-old selves would be surprised that they had gone on to study for a degree was offset by some participants discussing how they were out-of-step with their peers who had gone to university and the impact that had on their confidence:

> Participant 4 (A4, 101) "I was out of step with my peer group. All my friends had gone off to university at the right time. You know, I, uh. It it

wasn't the right time for me, but I always knew that was something I was definitely going to come back and do. Um, so I did it."

Participant 5 (BC4, 300) "But I don't feel like I've missed out on anything. I feel like my confidence grew so much from being [former job]."

Through their discussions about being a non-typical student at university, participants illustrated not only how they never thought they would be a university student but also how they perceived typical students. These expectations of typical students, based on their preconceptions from when they were 18 years old, their life experiences and presumably the media portrayal of student life, shaped how they initially approached their university peers and forming connections with them.

Closely linked to the notion of being a non-typical student was the discussion about needing to '**prove myself'**. Participants spoke candidly about their lack of self-belief and confidence with studying and academic work often citing the time between their last period of study and their degree:

Participant 10 (C2, 176) "When I handed in my first assignment, I was a bit worried like 'cause I haven't done it for a long time and I'll a bit like, have I done it right?"

Participant 1 (A3, 141) "I think where I hadn't done any kind of academia for around, good grief about 15 years, 15-16 years uhm, coming back into it, um, that was a little bit of a shock."

They reflected on how their lack of self-belief impacted on their academic studies and their wellbeing. Participants recognised that comparing themselves to others contributed to this lack of confidence:

Participant 1 (A4, 165) "Created a huge barrier for me when I first started uni, the self-doubt was absolutely unreal."

Participant 3 (A4, 242) "I realized that I started comparing myself to other people around the room and I started to think, uh, they've got lots more experience than I have. I don't know anything, and I did start to doubt."

However, some participants recognised that when talking to peers, they were not alone in their anxieties and perhaps not so different from each other in their confidence about their academic studies:

> Participant 9 (C2, 110) "You feel like you're the one that's falling behind and you're the only one that's in that situation until you talk to someone else and suddenly like OK. Maybe I'm not doing as bad as I thought I was."

For some their lack of academic experience and confidence in their studies was a source of motivation and determination to prove themselves:

> Participant 10 (C2, 78) "But I'm determined because. I am getting a little bit bored of all this home schooling and stuff. I want to concentrate on myself, and you know further myself really. Uhm 'cause otherwise, I'm kind of bit stuck in a rut."

> Participant 2 (A2, 504) "For me achieving this BA is going to be the best thing in the world because I'm the first one in my family to do it."

> Participant 5 (B2, 281) "I feel like I wanted to achieve a degree, like, its something I've always wanted, but I've just never seen it in my path before, 'cause I can't do that, like, I'm, not with my dyslexia, in that, I'm not, I can't, I'm not very good at spelling."

Participants expressed the need to prove themselves to others, often citing individuals who actively discouraged their aspirations when they were younger:

> Participant 1 (A4, 162) "At 18, um, according to my parents and my aunt, who's a head teacher, I was sort of person that would amount to nothing ... I'm one of those people who have been told consistently that I'm never going to amount to anything."

> Participant 2 (A1, 675) "I never thought I'd do this, and I'm proving so many people wrong, so this is a big thing."

> Participant 5 (BC4, 291) "I went to ... sixth form and I remember the PE teacher there saying get yourself an apprenticeship. And that kind of just stuck in my head … Maybe they're telling me something that you are more of a practical learner than I am academic."

Student participants implicitly and explicitly discussed the notion of proving themselves through their university studies. Their lack of confidence with their studies and the perceived expectations of others, either positive or negative, drove them to attempt to prove themselves or indeed prove others wrong.

In attempting to prove themselves by working towards their degree, participants began to realise that 'I never thought I could, **but it seems I can'.** This realisation that they could study at university level, both in normal times and when moving online during COVID, was reflected in growing studying confidence and feelings of self-worth. Students in the latter stages of their degrees were able to reflect on the academic progress they had made, demonstrating metacognitive understanding of their own learning preferences, and the growing feelings of studying confidence they experienced:

> Participant 5 (BC4, 382) "I know that there will always be errors, but I feel like it has improved, and I think it is from the feedback that I've improved."

> Participant 8 (C2, 233) "It's just like seeing my progress little by little, like the end goal is great."

The shift to online learning during the first COVID lockdown in spring 2020 caused anxiety for students who lack confidence in their capacity to study at home and contribute to online lessons. However, participants were optimistic about the potential rewards of online learning during the pandemic, confounding their initial expectations:

> Participant 5 (B1, 136) "I know we're going online, but how's it gonna work? Am I going to be able to because of my dyslexia and things like that?"

> Participant 4 (A3, 170) "There are definite bonuses for some students [of online learning], and I I I think it would be really useful if this vehicle would continue even beyond lockdown."

> Participant 5 (B2, 158) "I think that the fact it's being recorded as well that doesn't necessarily happen in the classroom, so being able to go back onto something is really, really helpful for me because I think sometimes when you're in a bright room, I do just kinda zone out."

As student participants reflected on how they had realised that they could study and achieve at university, those towards the end of their degrees observed more profound changes in themselves and the way they view the world:

> Participant 1 (A1, 651) "Not only has it provided education, it is also made me grow personally. I'm glad I come here."

> Participant 4 (A1, 288) "Lots of little things that I had not expected to gain, just insights, and it's just shifted the way I see the world and and I share it with people."

> Participant 2 (A1, 360) "Well, I think yeah, it's just that questioning or not believing everything on face value. I think that's definitely changed for me."

Discussing their growing realisation that they were able to study at university and alluding to a building belief that they did belong or deserve to be a university student, participants observed changes not only in their academic studies but also in their selves and the way they view the world, which in turn opens future opportunities.

The final aspect of the '**Never thought I could**' theme, relates to discussions about how their '**degree opens the future**', for their own career. They reflected both the confidence it has given them in their current job role, and opened opportunities they did not know existed or would have never considered:

> Participant 2 (A2, 346) "Makes me more confident practitioner and I can then question what sort of things are in place for children and say, Well, actually, you know that's not going to work, so let's try this. And it's giving me that confidence to go off and apply for jobs."

> Participant 6 (BC4, 122) "I don't know what I want to do, the degree has opened up so many different ideas, like, of jobs that I didn't necessarily even know existed."

> Participant 1 (A2, 495) "If I get onto a masters and just see where that takes me from there, um, yeah, the whole imagined future, it's. It's been kind of blown out the water shall we say."

Finally, those participants who were parents all spoke about the impact of studying for a degree and persisting during COVID campus closures on their children and their futures:

> Participant 4 (A1, 694) "It is about role modelling"

> Participant 1 (A2, 548) "My daughter… and hopefully, her seeing what I'm doing it. Will motivate her to carry on when times are tough."

> Participant 2 (A2, 558) "I am doing it to show my children that hard work does pay off and actually don't wait. Don't wait until you're my age to do it."

The first theme **'Never thought I could'** encompasses participants' awareness that they are not typical university students, instead they bring life experience often coupled with poor self-worth and a lack of studying confidence. The perception of 'never thought I could' inspires and motivates them to prove themselves and others wrong during their studies, so that they and their children can have a better future than what imagined when they were younger.

ii.   Theme 2: 'Not just a number'

The second theme **'Not just a number'** represents participants feelings of inclusion and belonging at the University Centre, and how the staff and organisation attitudes foster a sense of being valued and self-worth within the students. The theme encompasses two sub-themes, 'part of the family' and 'students come first'. A sense of gratitude and relief that they were students at the University Centre during the campus closures, rather than a larger, more impersonal university pervades this aspect of the dataset.

Participants described their relationship with peers, teachers, and support staff at the University Centre as they **'feel part of the family'**. They attributed this close relationship to the size of the organisation, and particularly the class sizes of 6-25 students, enabling students to get to know each other and their teachers, and ask questions to support their learning:

Participant 5 (B3, 182) "Like the small class sizes. I think it does make a difference. I think if I was sat in a hall of 100, I probably wouldn't have any friends."

Participant 4 (A3, 76) "I like to ask the question in the moment and that there wouldn't have been the capacity to do that, and the smaller size rooms, groups. Yeah, a privileged position. It was just yes much, much, appreciated."

The size of the University Centre itself, with approximately 700 undergraduate students, and the individualised approach taken by both the organisation-wide support staff and individual teaching teams were also credited as central to the feeling of being part of the family:

Participant 2 (A3, 114) "So I think if I had gone to a bigger University and not had the, the, wellbeing support and just the support from all the lecturers, well the majority of them anyway, um, I just feel really privileged to be a part of that and, and, it was, and I did feel really comfortable all the time."

Participant 1 (A3, 50) "There is more of a family approach and it's a family friendly environment. You are a name and a person. Rather than just a number, and it is very apparent with every member of staff wellbeing, tutors alike."

The notion that students were part of the University Centre family manifested itself in a strong sense of community, whereby participants recognised that everyone was working together to enable students to succeed:

Participant 8 (C2, 52) "I've got, like, the support of, like, my lecturer and, like, my classmates, so I mean that's helpful."

Participant 5 (B3, 87) "Collaboratively, everyone kind of together and you don't, like, feel like you're on your own, like, the peers, everyone works together in class."

Notably, participants praised the proactive support of University Centre teaching and support staff who portray a sense that nothing is too much trouble in normal times and particularly during COVID campus closures:

Participant 6 (B3, 157) "They don't ever make anyone feel like you don't matter or what you're saying, doesn't matter which I think it's important for such a small like community really, compared to other universities, everyone's got to feel comfortable. Being around each other and working with each other."

Participant 5 (BC5, 137) "Every email said, like, if you need anything then just drop us a line to any of us and stuff. And also said about the wellbeing team, saying that they are there to help."

The feeling that they were part of a family resulted in participants feeling accountable to the University Centre team, in terms of doing their best to achieve their degree:

Participant 1 (A1, 648) "I think it would be doing a great disservice to University Centre and to the lecturers if I just kind of just fizzled out now."

Participants spoke passionately about how they felt part of the University Centre family, attributing this family feeling to the size of the organisation and classes, the approach taken by staff and peers to supporting each other, and the relationship students have with the organisation and its staff which results in them feeling a responsibility to do their best.

Discussions about the way the University Centre proactively and reactively supports students in normal and COVID times further illustrated that participants felt that **'we know students come first'** and that they are treated as a person, not a number. Participants discussed the way teaching and support staff anticipate students' needs and proactively attempt to meet those needs:

Participant 5 (B2, 358) "[Tutor] just know when to call us. [Tutor] knows when something's wrong. I just feel like [Tutor] has got this like an antenna on [their] head that need to call that person that day, everyone feels the same."

Further, they recognised that staff personalise their support as they know their students well and want them to achieve:

Participant 7 (B1, 399) "I spoke to one the tutors and said that I was really struggling. He knows what I'm like and he was like, right OK by next week

you need to have written your introduction, and just give me somewhere to start."

The statement that "he knows what I'm like" (B1, 399), illustrates Participant 7's confidence in the teacher understanding their way of learning and anticipated a means of supporting the student to get them going with their assessment. This is an example of student-centred responsiveness recognised by participants:

Participant 4 (A3, 431) "Our tutor has been really strong. She has listened to feedback and um, she has taken on board and taken action where required. She's been very proactive so I think the students will feel that she has had their back and she's provided a listening ear. She has been scrupulously fair when there has been a disconnect between points of view."

Participant 6 (B1, 347) "I think it was flagged up to her by a few of us that you know we're struggling to work at home and stay focus, and I think that's when she [the tutor] thought right hang on, actually I need to kind of help a few people along."

Further, participants cited how teaching and support staff, and particularly personal tutors, go over and above to support students to persist with their studies:

Participant 3 (A1, 316) "What I thought was kind, when [the tutor] did communicate with us, it was clear that she not been very well, but she'd made that effort to check in with all of us and come back early and it was, I thought that was really, really nice, nice of her to do that."

Participant 1 (A3, 183) "I did feel really valued, um, right from the outset, and [the tutor is] so supportive as well and was always there, probably above and beyond."

Participant 2 (A3, 243) "[The tutor has] been there on the end of the phone, emails, you know even now ... Yeah um but yeah I just, you know, it's just been invaluable really because I don't think I would have finished."

Throughout discussions about the support from the University Centre, it was clear participants felt that students came first, and contrasted this with how they

perceived students at other higher education providers were treated during the COVID campus closures:

> Participant 6 (B3, 274) "I feel quite lucky 'cause I'm on Twitter.... other people like they really slate their universities, all over, you know they've been saying we've all been forgotten, and they've been going off about, you know how they don't have a clue what's going on. I just feel really lucky that actually [the University Centre] have kept, you know the HE staff in general, and personal tutors, they've kept us updated at every single stage as much as they can."

As participants reflected on the way they felt the University Centre acted in a way that demonstrated that students come first, they discussed the impact this had on their self-worth:

> Participant 8 (C3, 32) "I don't know whether this is the same every uni, like a proper uni, but I feel like I am me, like I'm, not just a number, so there's a lot more, like personal kind of, I don't know what the word is, you know? I mean, it was like a personal connection, rather than just you turn up to a lecture and you're just there and you're a fly on the wall and no one really cares."

> Participant 5 (B3, 313) "Yeah, it just makes you feel like you're worth it, like whatever you're doing is worth it. And the time that [the tutor] spends with us makes us feel like we're doing a good job and that we're worth it, and we are on the course for a reason."

The second theme **'Not just a number'** expresses the meaning participants presented about the way the University Centre staff and the organisation prioritises students, creating a community which cares about each other. The student participants alluded to a strong sense of belonging fostered through the size of the University Centre, the approach of teaching and support staff, and the care given by personal tutors that goes above and beyond. The result of this sense of belonging is students who want to achieve as they feel valued and want to please and pay back the commitment demonstrated by staff.

iii.   **Theme 3: 'All in the same boat'**

The third theme **'All in the same boat'** reflects the perception of participants that they were not left alone to continue with their studies when the campus closed. The University Centre community of peers and staff were alongside them understanding and empathising with the challenges each other was facing during the campus closures, and providing encouragement and motivation to keep going together. The sense of camaraderie pervades this aspect of the dataset, whereby student participants emphasized the commonality between student and staff experiences working online, and empathised with the individual challenges that some experienced.

The notion that **'I understand'** characterises this section of the data with participants' understanding and empathy for the experience of others during the COVID campus closure, and the recognition that University Centre staff also understand and empathise with students' experiences. The initial anxiety over growing media reports of COVID before the Government's decision to lockdown was tempered with empathy for peers' individual circumstances:

> Participant 5 (B1, 130) "It kind of felt a bit that me and another student, we were kind of just a bit blasé about it, like we weren't really taking it seriously, because obviously the impact on us quite minimal in comparison to a lot of people and yeah."

Participants talked about the camaraderie of everyone discovering online learning together, with teaching staff developing their pedagogy alongside students learning to study at home:

> Participant 7 (B1, 190) "[Tutor] has been really good. [They] set up the Teams thing for us and we have like a Teams call the other day, just so we can see each other. And it just makes it more real."

> Participant 4 (A1, 564) "[Lecturer] was very professional and yes, it was it was powerful, and I came away with new learning. And so that was huge for me because I didn't think I could learn in in this sort of environment."

Participants reflected that although the online learning experience is different from classroom learning, they still felt supported:

Participant 8 (C2, 238) "Being social is great, but you can just hear, like, other people's point of views and how they see things and how their brain works completely different... It's just, yeah, that's what I miss."

Participant 2 (A3, 388) "But I still felt part of University, you know, right? It didn't change. You know everyone was still there, you know, all the staff was still there to support us."

As the campus closed and lockdown continued, student participants demonstrated understanding and empathy towards their peers who were experiencing a range of COVID challenges in their home environment:

Participant 9 (C2, 108) "You always think that somebody is doing better than you, and then you talk to them and then go, actually they're juggling two kids or husband that's back to work. They have to do both the kids work and their own work, and they're having to look after the husband 'cause he's bit useless."

Participant 5 (B3, 365) "But I think because quite a lot of my peers have children and they're at home, they're stressed, and they've got a lot on. I feel like people are, like people that maybe wouldn't message in the group chat, have been, like with encouragement as well, uhm."

A high proportion of the University Centre student population are parents of school aged children and were juggling home-schooling with their own academic studies. These quotes, from non-parent participants, demonstrate empathy of the unique challenges that their peers faced and a realisation that although they may be finding the campus closure tough, others were managing a range of issues on top of their studies and needed additional encouragement and support. Participants were also conscious and appreciative that University Centre staff, particularly their personal tutors, recognised the challenges students were facing and adjusted their teaching approach, suggested strategies to manage the situation and been generally supportive:

Participant 3 (A1, 573) "Um [the tutor] said to me, give yourself some grace ... I was told have some grace, you have those extra 10 days if you need it, uhm and maybe take them and that's what I have done."

> Participant 8 (C3, 225) "[The tutor]'s like a lot more supportive and understanding. Now he's like '[students name] just do a summer retake or go for an extension'... I think it's just like we've gotten to know each other a bit more."

Both these quotes relate to the tutor encouraging the student to make use of the safety-net regulations put in place by the University Centre to support students during the campus closure. They suggest that although the students were aware of the safety-net they felt they needed the approval or permission of their tutor to make use of it, perhaps feeling they were not worthy of that support as it was for students who were more effected by COVID than themselves.

Student participants demonstrated considerable empathy and compassion for their teaching staff as well as their peers, recognising that teaching staff were also struggling with the pivot to online learning, managing their children at home, and other COVID challenges:

> Participant 4 (A1, 561) "Our lecturer has to deal with her toddler coming in and wanting her attention, but she's still got her focus on the class."

> Participant 5 (B2, 251) "Everyone's in quite a hard situation and I feel like [other students] forget that that... like it's hard when you know that your tutors, and that, have families at home. But I think quite a lot of the time they [peers] forget that and it's kind of all about not all about that, that's rude, but like they have their lives."

The quote above from Participant 5 (B2, 251) alludes to some frustration that their peers did not always have the same empathy for their teaching team's position, as they did. This could be accounted for by Participant 5 also working in education and sharing many of the same challenges that the University Centre staff did, as there was a hint of frustration from some participants:

> Participant 6 (B2, 194) "I mean [I feel] awful, because it's actually our exam is on in two weeks and ... we've actually not had a single lesson at all that has been relevant to either."

Participant 6 (B2, 194) recognises that they perhaps should not be grumpy at their teachers due to the circumstances but was unhappy about the impact of their online experience on their assessments.

Compassion and empathy were demonstrated throughout these aspects of the dataset, with participant saying, **'I understand'** and empathise with their peers and University Centre staff colleagues. The barriers between students and staff, that typically exist, were eroded during campus closures with participants seeing others as people with lives and responsibilities outside of the classroom.

The recognition that staff and peers have lives and responsibilities outside of the classroom fostered camaraderie and an attitude to **'Keep going together'.** Participants spoke compassionately about the motivation and encouragement of their peers:

> Participant 1 (A3, 532) "This sort of checking up on each other, and particularly when I've had some really low moments by not going into uni, uhm, that that has really hit me the hardest, and when I've had a very difficult time on an assignment and I was just thinking I cannot, I physically cannot do this anymore. And then all of a sudden some of the people that have not heard from a while, all of a sudden ping, instant messages flying everywhere."

> Participant 9 (C3, 261) "I'm still having a lot of contact with people, which is kinda helping me through that whole, I'm struggling to get like to do research to find the time or to motivate myself, so at least I'm getting some support."

Participants discussed the caring approach of teaching and support staff at the University Centre, particularly their personal tutors who were praised for their availability, and genuineness of caring:

> Participant 1 (A3, 452) "If anything, I think sometimes she's over doing the amount of work, you know, like ridiculous times at the night. You know, like she, she just responds to an email or be chatting during the weekend and even one particular mail said, oh, I chat to you tomorrow and I had to remind her know you won't it's Saturday tomorrow, what are you doing?"

> Participant 6 (B1, 170) "It felt like they actually cared about how we felt rather than oh, you know, 'you need to get your grades. You need to graduate'."

This caring approach from staff, especially personal tutors, provided participants with motivation and encouragement, to the extent that some participants credited this support with them being able to complete their studies:

> Participant 5 (B3, 297) "My tutor has encouraged me throughout. When I have had about wobbles, I have support, um, either like a text to me personally or a text to the group. So, like we've had it all angles, that we've not like been left just a think, oh I can't do this. Every like every lesson or every tutorial we've had a message to see if you need any help let us know."

> Participant 2 (A3, 243) "[The tutor has] been there on the end of the phone emails, you know even now ... Yeah um but yeah I just you know it's just been invaluable really because I don't think I would have finished."

Although participants were clear about the importance of support from their personal tutors in motivation to continue with their studies, for others the role of their family, and particularly their children, in keeping them going during the challenges of campus closures was invaluable:

> Participant 3 (A1, 665) "We've got a big white board, um, in my, in my lounge and that's like my study area and sometimes it's like *gestures writing* 'I can' and 'I will do this' and now it's like 'you can do it mummy' and things like that that come up on the board and I think, he's watching me, so I guess I've got that extra [motivation]."

Despite the encouragement to keep going supplied by peers, University Centre staff and family, participants observed that their spirit and motivation had dips, but that the camaraderie of everyone working together means they feel they keep going so as not to let others and themselves down:

> Participant 2 (A2, 183) "For me, motivation is dependent on how I'm feeling this whole pandemic to me has been a rollercoaster. I've been up on cloud 9 and then the next day I'm really not very well at all and it's just I have to take the good days with the bad days."

> Participant 3 (A3, 548) "And it's like I don't want to, kind of, I don't want to let anyone down. Don't want to let myself down."

The third theme **'All in the same boat'** conveys the meaning participants gave to the feeling of togetherness and camaraderie created during the COVID campus closure by peers, University Centre staff and their family. The student participants continued to demonstrate the importance of that sense of belonging foster by the University Centre. But within this theme they took ownership of belonging, demonstrating that students and their peers working together is central to the feeling of belonging and its impact on students wanting to continue with their studies for themselves and others.

iv.   **Theme 4: 'Not going to let COVID ruin university'**

The final theme **'Not going to let COVID ruin university'**, encompasses participants' anxiety about the unknown, acceptance and sadness at the pandemic's impact on studying and wider life, and the need to plough on and not let COVID ruin their degree. These elements of the dataset demonstrate a resignation of attitude and the behaviour of study continuation, rather than a proactive desire to persist with their studies. Participants were continuing with their studies because they knew they needed to, they had come this far, rather than a conviction and desire to do so. However, there was a determination to not let COVID ruin things, both at university and in family life.

When participants reflected on the last few weeks of the campus being open, when there was a growing sense that COVID was getting closer, and at the beginning of the COVID campus closures, they expressed that **'I'm anxious and need security'**. There was considerable anxiety expressed about the unknown and what was going to happen:

> Participant 2 (A1, 120) "Just about how it would impact on our lives. Would we get it, you know, and what would it do for studying and, and, life just, everything."

> Participant 8 (C1, 39) "I think, like, I knew it was happening, I didn't really know, like, the extent it was going to, obviously I don't think anyone knew the extent it was going to go to, so it was just kind of like an unknown feeling."

Participant 1 (A1, 238) "The realization, just walking in that final day, of what was going on and everybody was just sort of nervously chatting to each other about the potential of what is likely to happen… It was very surreal. It was almost like you was waiting for [something]."

For some participants this anxiety was managed by taking of positive steps to protect oneself and others, even when they did not necessarily think they were important or relevant to them:

Participant 5 (B1, 64) "I didn't wanna come in coughing, scare anyone... I kinda just took it on myself not to come in because I think, I didn't want to be that person that spread it. Even though I knew I didn't have it, I just didn't want that responsibility."

Participant 9 (C1, 71) "I am also in a high-risk group. But I was the same. I kind of wanted, just to get on with my normal life until I was told you're not allowed to go to Uni, not allowed to go to work, um. Although I was putting in, I was doing, steps like washing my hands a lot more regularly and I was a bit OCD over it than I've ever been before."

During this initial period of transition from normal classroom teaching to online learning, participants reported needing official reassurance. They were seeking reassurance from the Government in terms of national restrictions, and particularly from the University Centre in terms of what those restrictions might mean for them and their studies:

Participant 9 (C1, 95) "The government guidelines weren't clear whether those that were high risk have no choice but to be isolating, or if it's, if they want to, they can, and there was no clear guidance for the University either."

Participant 8 (C1, 200) "We've been told to do assignments that are due next week. What happens after that?"

In these quotes from Participants 8 and 9, there appear worried and wanting clarity from the University Centre about what to expect. Both these participants were deemed clinically vulnerable and exhibited health anxiety throughout discussions, worrying about the unknown potential impact of COVID on them. In contrast to their need for greater information and clarity, other participants were

reassured by the communications from the University Centre even when their initial comments illustrated a need for security from the anxieties of COVID:

> Participant 5 (BC5, 90) "I think for me it would be not knowing what to do and fear of doing something wrong and I'd be like oh my God, I'm so sorry but yeah, I knew what I was doing so that made a big difference."

> Participant 6 (B3, 343) "I wasn't, I didn't think I was expecting to be kept up to date as much as we have great just because obviously everyone's got a lot of other things going on."

Coupled with wider anxiety about COVID was an expressed reluctance to move to online learning. Participants recognised the need but were vocal about thinking it would not work for them and their way of learning. However, these perceptions were confounded, with participants surprised to find online teaching and learning manageable:

> Participant 4 (A1, 555) "I'm not going to sit at a computer and exchange messages because you cannot hear a tone in a chat and, and there's no facial expression. You don't know what the intent is, you know, and that kind of thing drives me crazy."

> Participant 9 (C3, 274) "I don't motivate myself. I'm not very good with all that. That's why I decided to go to [the University Centre] rather than doing an OU course, maybe I should have just done an OU course. But then after that, like a week of teething problems, it kind of felt a bit more like, this is just a bit of a weird situation. I'm still in uni student, I'm just not going in, so I'm saving money on petrol."

During the campus closures the topic of needing a routine and university studies providing that routine was raised often. Participants resented their university routine being disrupted by COVID, and sought to put a new routine in place at home to manage their study workload, but found it difficult to be disciplined in their home-studying:

> Participant 4 (A3, 158) "I came in most days of the week [before COVID]. I just found a room... and I found that I could work more quietly that way and sometimes with study buddies."

Participant 5 (B1, 260) "But the routine is definitely needed. So yeah, I get up the same time every morning as if I was going to work."

Participant 7 (B1, 391) "I'm very structured so I don't like it when it's not quite as structured. So, I tend to give up and just go the bathroom needs the flooring or the cupboards need coming out or I have to paint the hallway."

Although participants found studying at home during the campus closures challenging, they also spoke about how studying gave them a focus and a purpose during this period. This aspect was also noticeable for those final year students who completed their studies during lockdown, loosing their purpose but without the opportunities usually available to graduating students:

Participant 3 (A1, 380) "I still had that bit of norm of, this is my study, this is what I do."

Participant 1 (AB5, 88) "When I finally submitted and then I just broke down into tears, um, and it is just such for me, um, such a, such a very sort of sad way [to end]."

The **'I'm anxious and need security'** aspect of the dataset within the **'Not going to let COVID ruin university'** theme has an air of resignation and sadness throughout, with participants worried about all the implications of COVID and searching for reassurance. They endeavour to make the most of the online learning experience by creating a routine and normality so that studying gave them a purpose during lockdown.

Despite participants efforts to create normality through their studies, they reported **'I feel sad to be missing out'.** This aspect of the dataset reflects regret, loss and sadness regarding COVID lockdowns, their student life and future, and the impact those feelings had on their wellbeing. The resignation felt towards COVID restrictions and online learning, was also reflected in participants discussion about their overall wellbeing:

Participant 8 (C1, 203) "But yeah, I mean it's, it's been OK, it is very tough but..."

Participant 2 (A1, 593) "The emotions of that whole pandemic is one day I'm on top of the world and the next day I'm just, I'm just not very happy at all."

They alluded to how their wellbeing was closely tied to their focus on their studies and motivation:

Participant 1 (A2, 98) "In reality I've got that juxtaposition of feelings where I'm trying to get myself motivated and then there are periods where I'm extremely down and feel like this just isn't gonna happen."

Participant 4 (A2, 200) "Uhm, I have found the last few weeks, um very up and down, and in some instances, uhm, you know more down than up. I don't mean mental state, but my my focus and motivation."

For those participants who were in their final year, the transition to online learning felt like an abrupt end to their university experience:

Participant 2 (A1, 227) "I suppose I think it was the reality of never coming back to uni, not being able to say goodbye to your friends and you guys, you know, you've been there for three years for us."

Participant 1 (A1, 111) "Yeah [loss], more as a student, but more as a sort of family bit, like it was the last time... There is this is hole in my life, all of a sudden everything that I've been striving and working for."

Later in the series of focus groups, we discussed the online graduation, which participants had chosen not to attend. They revealed that if graduation was not the real thing, they did not want to be part of it:

Participant 1 (AB5, 94) "I expected and hoped, yeah, that that we'd have to full regalia and um, a graduation and all those final sort of get together, um, and it never come to fruition."

Participant 6 (AB5, 190) "I was really keen to like attend it when the idea was floating around at the beginning, but then as the time got closer and… I just I don't know... I was just like, you know, big stroppy child like it shouldn't be like this. I should be in cap and gown [at graduation venue]."

Participant 3 (AB5, 234) "I know it sounds like a bit like a child, but I want [graduation] as it's meant to be or I don't want it like that, yeah."

When discussion turned to the future, participants expressed concern and anxiety about their future careers and the job-market post COVID:

Participant 10 (C2, 343) "I'm a bit worried about the whole economic situation."

Participant 4 (A2, 264) "Nobody knows what the job situation is going to be, there's going to be a glut of graduates and no jobs, and in the space like this, and then you know there are no further opportunities."

Participant 6 (B2, 294) "It's a bit kind of up in the air at the minute like I have this really great plan and COVID just kind of ruined every single aspect of its while I'm into kind of revisit that."

The **'I feel sad to be missing out'** aspect of the dataset illustrates how the restrictions and campus closures impacted on student participants' overall wellbeing, and consequently their motivation and focus on their studies. As the lockdowns and campus closures continued, participants' sadness shift to missing out on key student experiences such as finishing their studies with the peers and graduation, and concerns were raised about the future and the impact of the pandemic on their careers. Throughout this aspect of the dataset, the overriding emotion that participants displayed was sadness and resignation, rather than any annoyance.

This sadness and resignation displayed by participants was accompanied by an element of stoicism, with participants emphasising **'I just need to plough on'** when discussing their academic studies. The poor motivation alluded to above was accompanied by procrastination as student participants tried to motivate themselves to plough on with their studies:

Participant 6 (B1, 209) "And then Easter came, and the sun came out and things just dropped off the radar a little bit... scheduled lessons, kind of, keep me going, erm, and things did start to kind of, I didn't fall behind us such, but I maybe wasn't on top of things as much as I was the week before."

Participant 10 (C2, 360) "I'll start thinking about it at night thinking I really need to get that done. I really need to type something tonight and then I'll make tea or whatever and then wash up and then I'm like, oh, I'm really tired... It gets the weekend and then I'm like no, really do need to get it done there and then I have to send my husband out with little one just so I can sit and do it."

These quotes from participants 6 and 10 illustrate a real tangle of emotions, the awareness that they need to study but the struggle to motivate themselves. Other participants discussed strategies to manage their motivational dips including taking extensions and self-talk motivational messages:

Participant 4 (A2, 204) "My dissertation, which I kicked into the long grass of summer, which I'm quite pleased about."

Participant 3 (A2, 133) "I've got a post it note on my mirror actually in the bedroom and it's like 'you want this work for it' with exclamation mark and then saying 'be proud of yourself of what you've achieved so far'."

The acceptance displayed by participants when discussing the impact of the pandemic and campus closures, was accompanied by a pragmatic recognition that they just need to plough on with their studies and complete assessments:

Participant 3 (A1, 491) "I kept ploughing towards the deadline."

Participant 1 (A4, 307) "Well, that [an assessment] passed and just try and plod on the year."

The end goal of completing the year, especially if it was the final year of studies, was cited as a motivator. However, instead of this being seen as an achievement, participants just wanted to finish:

Participant 5 (B2, 53) "The suns out and I want to be able to sit in it and not do my uni work."

Participant 9 (C1, 358) "I got four weeks till the end of the year and now I'm like, meh, just wanna get it done."

Participant 6 (B2, 63) "It's alright, like knowing that I'm so close to the end. That's what's keeping me going."

Despite the desire to finish their studies, COVID put practical and emotional barriers in place for some student participants who were managing additional responsibilities outside of their studies:

> Participant 2 (A2, 192) "I feel really positive [when I've done early morning study group]. Something there for me as well and it's 'cause usually you know what it's like when you're a parent you do everything for everybody else. But it's just a time that you take out for yourself. And it's not just wasted, and I just feel I'm ready for the day then 'cause I know I've done some work."

> Participant 10 (C2, 72) "Um, my partner took [daughter] away on Saturday, so I literally can just sit here on my computer and just type away. So, because I just need like complete silence to concentrate, um, so when I've got somebody going 'Mummy Mummy' every 5 minutes so it's just impossible."

> Participant 3 (AB5, 289) "It's been really difficult six months. You know, having all the children home and, and not being able to go and see my mum and dad who I'm so close to which is been really frustrating for me."

These parent-participants adjusted the way they study and made personal sacrifices to continue with their studies whilst home-schooling their children. There is a sense of guilt within their quotes, guilt that they are taking time to do something for themselves. However, those participants who were not parents confessed that lockdown benefited them, and expressed a sense of guilt that they benefited when they knew others were struggling to juggle all their commitments:

> Participant 9 (BC5, 350) "And with lockdown I couldn't work, I couldn't go see anyone. Everything I had planned was cancelled. I had less time to faff about and more time to actually get on with it, and get it done and get it done on time."

> Participant 5 (B1, 502) "I'm sat at it, I don't have to travel anywhere, so I feel like I just find it, then I'm still in that zone, so I just carry on and like with my partner, he works shift work so if he's not here, it's completely, I've

got nothing to do, so I feel like I've, I feel like I've had the opportunity to read a lot more than what I would have done."

Participant 6 (AB5, 306) "Lockdown actually really worked for me. Like I had had nothing else to do...hindsight now actually I don't think I would have graduated with a first if lockdown hadn't have happened."

Despite the emotional and practical challenges of lockdown and the campus closures, and the ups and downs of motivation, participants expressed a defiance to not let COVID ruin the degree they had worked so hard for:

Participant 1 (A1, 502) "We stopped [coming onsite], I still had it sort of, uhm defiance about me that I don't know, you know, nothing's gonna affect me. Nothing is going to affect me."

Participant 3 (A1, 660) "I feel so determined more than ever that I want to get this degree, but it's just taking so it so long and it was something that I didn't think I could do."

Participant 2 (AB5, 358) "I'm an adult and you know, I know that this is something for me and I had to finish it for myself because I was determined to prove everyone wrong and that I could do it."

The **'I just need to plough on'** aspects of the dataset represent student participants moving on from feelings of acceptance and loss due to COVID to a more pragmatic and stubborn determination to plough on with their studies and just finish, despite the emotional and practical challenges of studying during the campus closures.

The final theme **'Not going to let COVID ruin my degree'** conveys the complex interplay of emotions during campus closures, loss, guilt, acceptance, and determination, and how these emotions influence students' motivation to study. It is noticeable that participants did not blame anyone or bemoan the situation they found themselves in, instead they accepted the position and found strategies to get on with their studies, even when motivation was low, driven by an urge to not let COVID ruin everything they had worked for.

4.1.3 Student-Tutor relations themes

The final level of reflexive thematic analysis focused on the relationship between students and their personal tutors. The themes and sub-themes have been developed from across the series of focus groups in response to explicit questions about the role of personal tutors but also from comments spontaneously given. Three themes have been developed from both explicit and implicit comments, Figure 16 below illustrates the themes and sub-themes.
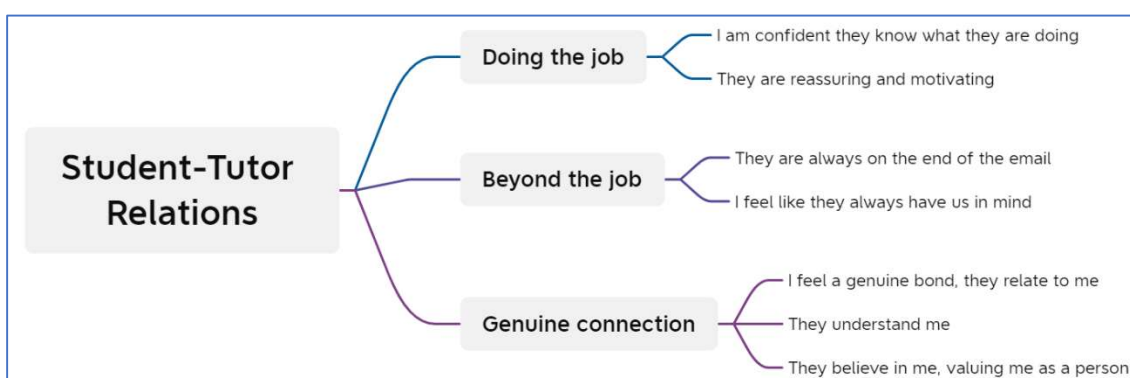

Figure 16: The student-tutor relations themes and sub-themes

i.   Theme 1: 'Doing the job'

The first theme, **'Doing the job'**, represents the shared meaning that student participants felt that personal tutors' job was to be knowledgeable and competent in their role, and be a source of reassurance and motivational support. Participants expected these traits from their tutors but were appreciative that they continued during COVID campus closures. However, they were very dismissive of those tutors that did not exhibit these traits, as it was felt these were core skills that should be expected of all tutors. This is the only aspect of the entire data where participants were forthright about what was expected and positively unhappy when those expectations were not met.

Participants illustrated the importance they placed in having confidence that your personal tutor knows the answer, that they have the skills and knowledge to help with academic and pastoral needs, and that they can give this advice with authority:

Participant 9 (C3, 197) "I think she just knows what she's doing, and I don't know where that comes across that she's just, she's never like it, never feels like she's unsure of anything and it's kind of like OK, I know what I'm doing. She knows how to help us. Yeah, she knows."

Participant 5 (B2, 361) "Like every week we get that email off [Tutor] which explains everything, and it reminds us when our deadlines are and stuff."

Participant 4 (A3, 431) "Our tutor has been really strong. She has listened to feedback and um, she has taken on board and taken action where required. She's been very proactive so I think the students will feel that she has had their back and she's provided a listening ear. She has been scrupulously fair when there has been a disconnect between points of view."

In contrast, one participant who knew their current tutor was leaving at the end of the academic year and was considering how their in-coming tutor might take on the role was dismissive of what they had seen so far:

Participant 9 (BC5, 315) "I did start to get to the point where I was 'what's the point in doing, and if this is what I'm gonna have as my tutor next year'. A few times, kind of went I don't want to do second year, I'm done. Based on how I thought it might go."

Participant 9 (BC5, 325) "It's not been communicated who is teaching us for any of our modules apart, from our option module. So, I have no idea who I'm going to walk into classroom and have teach me on Wednesday morning."

These comments demonstrate the importance of getting the basics right, having the knowledge and information that students need, and communicating it with them in a timely manner to reassure them. The other aspect that was recognised as a core skill and valued as such by participants was the reassurance and motivational support given by personal tutors:

Participant 6 (B1, 165) "Our personal tutor. She's just, I mean, she's really upbeat all the time anyway. And she was just really reassuring that she would be there to speak to us. However, it meant that she had to phone us

Isabel Hallam

rather than use Teams like if that didn't work, she was just really kind of positive."

Participant 1 (AB5, 76) "[Tutor] was absolutely brilliant, just kept me sort of pushing on even until the very end, you know, she just kept me going and going and going."

The **'Doing the job'** theme emphasises the skills and traits that student participants expected from their tutors. They expected tutors to know what they are doing, so that students feel confident in the information and motivational support they are given.

ii. **Theme 2: 'Beyond the job'**

In contrast to the **'Doing the job'** theme which reflected the expectation that tutors would do the basics, participants were enthusiastically grateful to tutors who they perceived were working **'Beyond the job'.** This was most often illustrated with examples of how tutors were accessible outside of office hours, on the weekends and in the holidays. During the COVID campus closures, many staff, especially those with young children, worked around the clock to fit their work around their other responsibilities, and this was appreciated by students who were also working non-office hours:

Participant 2 (A3, 466) "Again the availability and the contact is incredible. You guys do need your days off. Yeah, she says yeah, you know but you're always you know I will ping an email, but I don't expect a response immediately, but I always get one."

Participant 4 (A3, 223) "You know she would be responding to emails at 7:00 o'clock in the morning. And she's got her own family to be dealing with, and she was absolutely in my corner."

Participant 1 (A3, 452) "If anything, I think sometimes she's over doing the amount of work you know, like ridiculous times at the night. You know, like she, she just responds to an email or be chatting during the weekend and

even one particular mail said, oh, I chat to you tomorrow and I had to remind her know you won't it's Saturday tomorrow, what are you doing."

Participants were grateful of the after-hours support, and also alluded to how they felt that this demonstrated that tutors were keeping them in mind when they were not working:

> Participant 6 (B3, 323) "Even over like half term … technically you don't have to answer us over half term, but she still she has ... it's like she's actually thinking about us and she's not like, 'Oh yeah, that's OK, the day is done I'm just going to switch off now'."

> Participant 3 (AB5, 22) "It was like we were getting those pictures every day. It was motivation."

In the **'Beyond the job'** theme participants expressed their appreciation for tutors who went over and above what was expected of them. The accessibility of tutors working around the clock during campus closures was a noticeable pattern in the data, and the impression this gave. Participants felt valued and cared for, with their tutors keeping them in mind outside of office hours.

iii.   **Theme 3: 'Genuine connection'**

The final theme, **'Genuine connection',** emphasises the quality of the relationship between students and their tutors, based on an honesty that is genuine and not just part of the job. Student participants spoke about how they felt their tutors related to them, sharing similar experiences and characteristics:

> Participant 9 (C3, 168) "It's helped that … our tutor has also had that, so she worked for a while and then decided to go back and do her teaching degree, so she understands how bizarre is for us to kind of change our mindset and get back into the education zone if you like, urm yeah."

> Participant 1 (A3, 211) "She sort of kind of learned [my] humour and sort of relayed that back to me and um, it's just been, how could I say it's been like a bond?"

Participants reflected that this shared bond and relatedness enabled tutors to empathise with students' positions. This empathy enables tutors to provide advice and guidance that takes account of the student's individual character and concerns, rather than advising based on what is right for their job:

> Participant 4 (A1, 545) "I had a, uh a conversation with [the tutor] and she said take some time out."

> Participant 8 (C3, 225) "He's like a lot more supportive and understanding. Now he's like '[students name] just do a summer retake or go for an extension'... I think it's just like we've gotten to know each other a bit more."

The empathy shown by personal tutors builds a genuine connection between tutors and their tutees, participants demonstrated this made them feel believed in and valued as individuals:

> Participant 1 (A3, 183) "It sounds, you know, I feel I did feel really valued, um, right from the outset, and [the tutor is] so supportive as well and was always there. Probably above and beyond."

> Participant 2 (A3, 235) "I've definitely felt valued from both [tutors]. You know, you know what [the tutor has] done for me. You know [the tutor has] been there when I've been at my lowest point in my life, you know, and unfortunately my life still comes up with these horrible things that keep happening, these last few months have been horrendous. I don't really want to go into it too much 'cause they may cry. But I just can't thank [them] enough."

> Participant 5 (B3, 303) "[Tutor] say like well done, you really deserved and stuff like that encouragement, that you're doing really well… Yeah, it just makes you feel like you're worth it, like whatever you're doing is worth it. And the time that [the tutor] spends with us makes us feel like we're doing a good job and that we're worth it, and we are on the course for a reason."

> Participant 8 (C3, 53) "Makes you feel better, I think [when tutors value your contribution]. It ups your self-esteem a bit. I'm not very confident person, so I think it just raises my esteem a bit."

The genuine connection with their tutors, that participants described, was built though both normal and COVID campus closures times. Doing the basics of being knowledgeable and motivating was seen as essential, but going above and beyond the job, and behaving in a manner that made student participants feel valued was central to the positive relationship student participants had with their personal tutors.

4.1.4 Qualitative data analysis conclusion

The qualitative data from the Phase 1 focus groups was analysed three times. The first level of semantic thematic analysis (Clarke, Braun & Hayfield, 2015, p. 225) focused on the surface meaning of things explicitly said by participants. Five topic summary themes were identified, online teaching and learning, peers on my course, University Centre culture and values, wellbeing, and confidence. The topic summary themes were subsequently utilised in the construction of the online survey for Phase 2 of the research, as aspects of students' COVID campus closure student experience.

The second and third level of data analysis constituted the substantive qualitative analysis. Reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022) was deployed initially to explore student participants' persistence lived experience, and then to investigate their experience of the student-tutor relationship.

The reflexive thematic analysis tells the story of college higher education students who do not share the same background, study experience, or confidence of typical university students, and this influences every aspect of their **lived experience persisting with their studies during COVID campus closures**. They are acutely aware they do not fit the typical student mould and echoes of poor self-efficacy pervade this aspect of the dataset with participants feeling they need to prove themselves. Proving themselves provides considerable motivation to the students, they want to achieve their degree to show others that they are worth something, and to enhance their career options for themselves and their families. Students were conscious that they do not

have a traditional academic background, or have been away from studying for some time, and this initially causes anxiety and feelings of inadequacy. However, with support and encouragement, they begin to believe in themselves and their ability to study at university. At this stage, students start to imagine that perhaps they can achieve a degree and begin to consider career options that previously they would not have thought possible or open to them.

The psychological conception of a sense of belonging is evident in the two themes labelled as 'Not just a number' and 'All in the same boat'. Student participants feel a genuine connection and bond to the University Centre, and its academic and support staff. They describe this as being part of the family, where everyone respects and cares for students as individuals. During the campus closures this was particularly pertinent as participants were confident that the University Centre were putting students first, in their decision making, communication and approach to support. This was often mentioned as in stark contrast to how they perceived, through media reports, how students at other universities were being treated during the closures. The notion of belonging was distinct when participants talked about the camaraderie during COVID campus closures. The sense of togetherness was exhibited when talking about their peers and University Centre staff. Participants understood and empathised with the shared experience of lockdown, campus closures, working at home, and the associated challenges. They often comment on the availability and dedication of University Centre staff who they recognise are either ill themselves, caring for young children or struggling with their own lockdown challenges, and appreciative that they still put students first. There was also a shared sense of everyone keeping going together, of motivation and support between students, their peers and academic staff, all cajoling and encouraging each other to complete their studies and work.

The final aspect of the main student experience analysis relates directly to COVID, the determination and resolve to complete their studies despite COVID. The anxiety and worry that COVID brought, especially in the early months of the pandemic, was exhibited as a need for certainty and security. But students were pragmatic and resigned to the pandemic, lockdown, and the campus closures. Instead of being angry, they expressed sadness at all the aspects of student life they had missed out on, such as graduation. This resignation was also evident

in the determination to just plough on and complete their year of study without letting COVID ruin their degree. For most there was little celebration, it was just something they needed to work towards and get done.

In conclusion, college higher education students do not see themselves as typical students, and this held them in good stead during the campus closures. Their internal drive to prove themselves and provide a better future for themselves and their families, gave the initial motivation to study. This was coupled with the close-nit nature of the University Centre that fosters a strong sense of belonging and the feeling of all being in the same boat. Combining the initial motivation and the sense of belonging, resulted in students feeling motivated, valued, and cared for throughout the campus closure, prompting the determination to persist with their studies to completion.

The final level of reflexive thematic analysis concentrated on the aspects of the dataset related to **tutor-student relations**, and how these relations fostered persistence during the campus closures. The first theme illuminated what student participants expected from their tutors, the basics of doing the job, which were more important than ever during the campus closures. Students wanted to be confident that their tutors were knowledgeable, so that they could trust the advice and guidance given. This was essential during campus closures as students had fewer in-the-corridor conversations or sources of informal information, so needed to get the correct, up to date information from their tutors. Further, they expected their tutors to be a source of reassurance and motivation. It was seen as a core element of the role, that tutors should provide calming reassurance and upbeat motivation, especially when working online.

In addition to the basics of doing the job, student participants spoke of how their tutors were going above and beyond to support them during the campus closures with out-of-hours availability and an always-working approach. This was manifested in tutors responding to students, sending motivational messages, and adding job information or updates outside of tutorial time, demonstrating that they were keeping the students in mind throughout this period. However, the element that pervades the entire tutoring aspect of the dataset is the importance of students and tutors having a genuine connection. Students valued the bond they had with their tutors, the shared experience of

being mature students, parents home-schooling, and navigating the challenges of studying, working, and caring during the pandemic. They felt that their tutors genuinely understood and related to them, with an empathy which enabled them to advise students in their best interests, not in the interests of the University Centre. This understanding led to students feeling that their tutors honestly believed in them, and that they were truly valued as a person, not just a student. Participant 2 (A3, 243) sums it up with "[The tutor has] been there on the end of the phone, emails, you know even now ... it's just been invaluable really, because I don't think I would have finished.".

4.2   Quantitative data analysis

The quantitative data collected during Phase 2 of the research, from the online student survey, has been analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics.

4.2.1 Descriptive statistics

For analysis and comparison, the five student experience topics were adjusted to be scored out of 100, with the total maximum student experience score of 500. The descriptive statistics for each topic during COVID campus closures are depicted in Table 3 below:

	Online T&L	Peers on my course	UC Culture & Values	Wellbeing	Confidence	TOTAL
N Valid	63	64	64	64	64	
N Missing	1	0	0	0	0	
Mean	65.2	57.2	75.7	61.7	60.7	319.6
Median	62.9	54.9	78.2	60	60	329
Mode	77.1	53.8	100	50	56.7	357
Std. Deviation	17.2	14.9	20.4	18.4	14.9	
Range	71.4	67.7	72.7	76.7	76.7	
Minimum	28.6	23.1	27.3	23.3	23.3	146.3
Maximum	100	90.8	100	100	100	476

Table 3: Descriptive statistics from the five student experience topics.

The descriptive statistics for the student experience topics indicate that the means for each topic range from 57.2 for Peers on my Course, to 75.7 for University Centre (UC) Culture and Values, but that there is wide range of responses across all topics. The Standard Deviation is 14.9 for Peers on my Course and 20.4 for UC Culture and Values, indicating that although UC Culture and Values has the highest mean, there is considerable variance across the participants.

The descriptive statistics for completion and attainment expectations, and withdrawal contemplation, all rated out of ten, and the total scores out of 25 for rating aspects of their personal tutors' values are depicted in Table 4 below:

	Complete programme	Gain Pass Grade	Gain Good Degree	Gain 1st Class	Contemplate withdrawal
N Valid	64	64	64	64	63
N Missing	0	0	0	0	1
Mean	9.3	8.9	7.4	5.0	8.0
Median	10	10	8	5	10
Mode	10	10	10	1	10
Std. Deviation	1.5	1.9	2.5	3.1	2.6
Range	9	9	9	9	8
Minimum	1	1	1	1	2
Maximum	10	10	10	10	10

Table 4: Descriptive statistics for completion and attainment expectation, withdrawal contemplation and personal tutor characteristics.

32% of students contemplated withdrawing or suspending their studies during the 2020/21 academic year. Student participants' predictions of whether they will complete their programme and attain different classifications of degree are illustrated in Figure 17. The figure demonstrates that the mean predicted likelihood of attaining the classification decreases with the higher classifications, and the standard deviation increases.
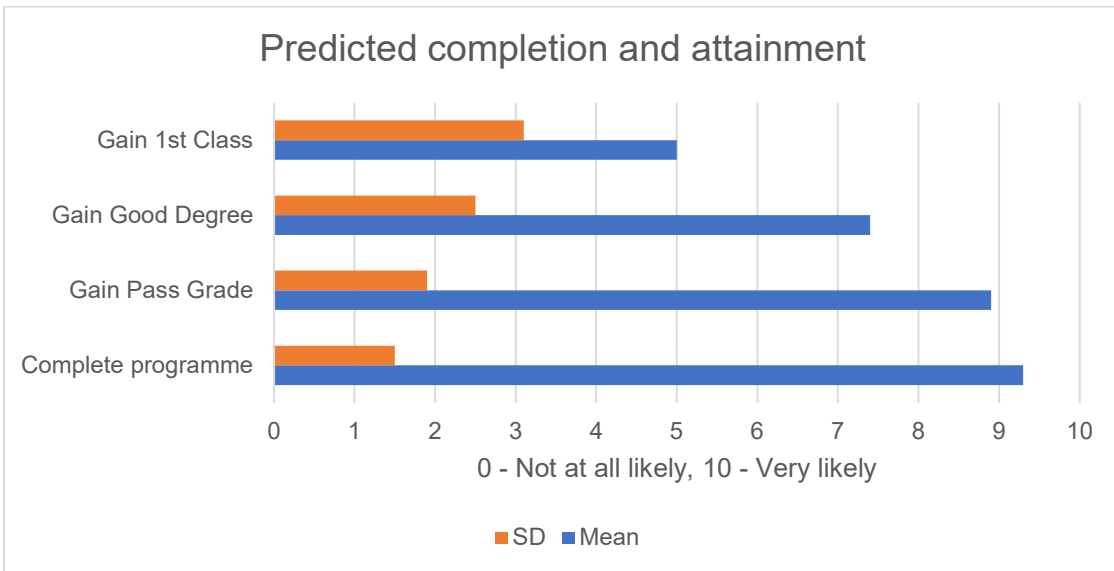
Figure 17: Chart illustrating student participants' predictions of whether they will complete their programme attain different classifications of degree.

Students were also asked to rate their personal tutor on five core values of the personal tutor (Lochtie, McIntosh, Stork & Walker, 2018). The means for each value are illustrated in Figure 18 below, demonstrating that the value most recognised in participants' personal tutors is 'approachable':
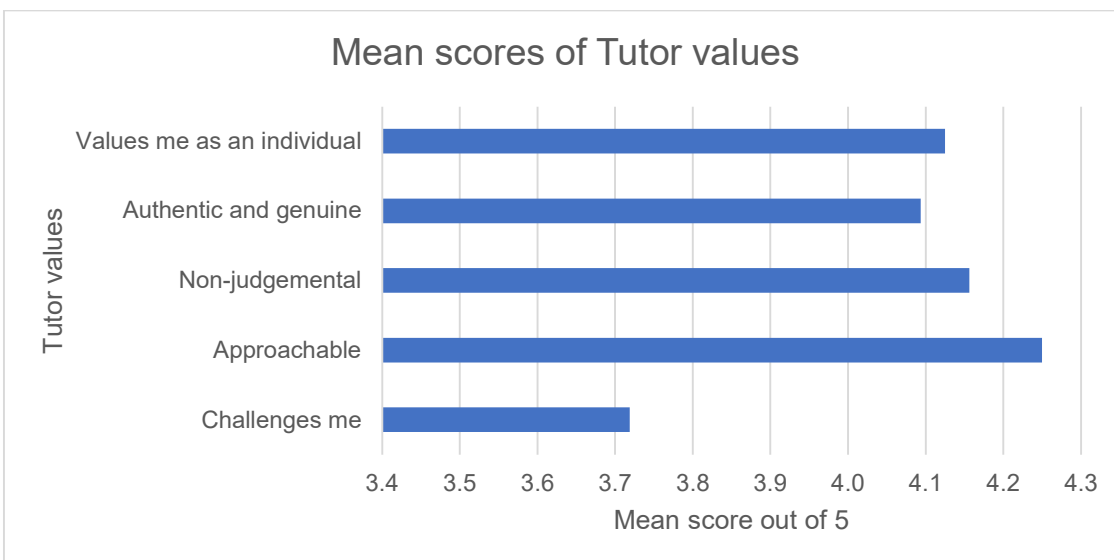

Figure 18: Chart illustrating student participants' perceptions of the core values of their personal tutors.

Analysis of the descriptive statistics demonstrates variance in both the student experience during COVID topics, and participants' perceptions of their likelihood

of completion and attainment, their withdrawal contemplation, and the values they recognise in their personal tutor. Inferential statistical analysis explores if there are differences between varied student demographics that might account for the range of responses given.

4.2.2 Inferential statistics

Inferential statistical analysis was conducted on the quantitative data collected from the Phase 2 online survey. Analysis tested the hypotheses that students from various demographic groups had different perceptions of their COVID-19 campus closures experience, withdrawal contemplation, degree expectations and perceptions of their personal tutors.

Student experience during COVID-19 campus closures

i. **Hypothesis 1**

    Students with various demographic characteristics would have a different student experience during the COVID-19 campus closures compared to their peers.

To test whether groups with various demographic characteristics had a significantly different student experience during COVID-19 campus closures compared to their peers, multiple one-way between-subjects analysis of variance were conducted. There was no significant difference within any demographic characteristic between groups on total student experience. The mean scores and standard deviation for each group were:

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Number
Gender			
• Female	324.43	74.90	49
• Male	296.00	66.55	13
• Non-binary	354.59	72.73	2
Disability			

• Non-disabled	318.46	69.48	42
• Disabled with disability support	317.00	80.05	18
• Disabled without support	343.13	89.37	4
Age			
• Young	311.28	85.15	17
• Mature	322.60	68.46	47
Level of Study			
• Level 4	317.18	74.02	26
• Level 5	316.91	75.28	23
• Level 6	327.89	70.82	15
First in family to attend university			
• First in family to attend university	312.98	73.92	35
• Child attended university	362.90	49.70	4
• Parent attended university	361.28	75.21	9
• Sibling attended university	284.25	49.03	10
• Multiple family attended university	325.70	84.55	6
Parent/Carer			
• Not a carer	299.63	76.04	35
• Carer for relative	286.75	12.23	2
• Parent to an under 18	346.77	66.89	22
• Multiple caring responsibilities	352.90	34.02	5
Employment			
• Worked <16hrs during lockdown	361.08	66.76	5
• Worked >16hrs during lockdown	313.40	65.88	28
• Lost job and remained unemployed	295.40	-	1
• Not in employment	324.08	75.42	21
• Furloughed during lockdown	308.06	95.23	9
TOTAL	**319.59**	**72.73**	**64**

Table 5: Total mean scores and standard deviation for all topics across all demographic groups.

There was no significant difference on student experience (total scores from all topics) from any of the demographic groups: Gender, $F(2, 61) = 1.23$, $p = .366$, partial $\eta^2 = .032$; Disability, $F(2, 61) = .220$, $p = .803$, partial $\eta^2 = .007$; Age, $F(2, 61) = .299$, $p = .586$, partial $\eta^2 = .005$; Level of study, $F(2, 61) = .124$, $p = .884$, partial $\eta^2 = .004$; First in family, $F(2, 61) = 1.864$, $p = .129$, partial $\eta^2 = .112$;

Parent/Carer, $F(2, 61) = 2.567$, $p = .063$, partial $\eta^2 = .114$; and Employment, $F(2, 61) = .546$, $p = .703$, partial $\eta^2 = .036$.

Analysis suggests that there is no significant difference between groups within all the demographic characteristic on COVID campus closure student experience. The near-significant Parent/Carer group was further analysed to investigate the contribution of each topic to the near-significant difference between those with parent/caring responsibilities and those without, a one-way between-subjects multiple analysis of variance was carried out. The one-way between-subjects multiple analysis of variance assessed the differences in topics of student experience. The between-subjects factor comprised of four groups: Not a carer, Carer for a disabled or ill relative, Parent of an under 18 year old, and Multiple caring responsibilities. The dependent variables comprised of the five student experience topics. Assumptions of homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices (Box's test, $p = .586$) and equality of variance (Levene, all $p > .05$) were confirmed. Analysis of each individual dependent variable, using a Bonferroni adjusted alpha level of .01, showed that there was no significant difference between parent/carer groups on any of the variables: Online Teaching and Learning, $F(3, 59) = 3.512$, $p = .021$, partial $\eta^2 = .152$; Peers on my course, $F(3, 59) = 1.056$, $p = .375$, partial $\eta^2 = .051$; UC Culture and Values, $F(3, 59) = 2.010$, $p = .122$, partial $\eta^2 = .093$; Wellbeing, $F(3, 59) = 2.241$, $p = .093$, partial $\eta^2 = .102$ and Confidence, $F(3, 59) = 2.763$, $p = .050$, partial $\eta^2 = .123$.

The four independent variables that had levels which could be condensed into dichotomous variables were re-analysed using a multiple one-way between-subjects analysis of variance, and no significant difference was observed: Disability, $F(2, 48) = .200$, $p = .657$, partial $\eta^2 = .004$; First in family, $F(2, 48) = .405$, $p = .528$, partial $\eta^2 = .008$; Parent/Carer, $F(2, 48) = 1.057$, $p = .309$, partial $\eta^2 = .022$; and Employment, $F(2, 48) = .047$, $p = .829$, partial $\eta^2 = .001$.

The null hypothesis that there would be no difference between demographic characteristics on student experience during COVID campus closures is accepted.

Isabel Hallam

ii. **Hypothesis 2**

Students who had weekly tutorials would have had a more positive COVID-19 campus closure student experience than those students who did not have a weekly tutorial.

A one-way between-subjects analysis of variance was conducted to assess the associations between students' tutorial experiences and their overall student experience during COVID campus closures and those that did not. The between-subjects factor comprised of three groups: No weekly tutorial, Always weekly tutorial, and Weekly tutorial but not always. Students' tutorial experience had a significant association with their overall student experience (total scores from all topics), $F(2, 61) = 6.729$, $p = .002$, partial $\eta^2 = .181$. The mean scores and standard deviation for each group were:

Tutorial	Mean	Standard Deviation	Number
• No weekly tutorial	266.06	68.69	11
• Yes, always weekly tutorial	338.01	66.14	47
• Yes, but not always online tutorial	273.47	70.10	6
TOTAL	**319.60**	**72.73**	**64**

Table 6: Total mean scores and standard deviation for all topics by tutorial experience

To investigate the contribution of each topic to the significant association between tutorial and overall student experience during COVID campus closures, a one-way between-subjects multiple analysis of variance was carried out. The one-way between-subjects multiple analysis of variance assessed the association between different topics of student experience and tutorial experience. The between-subjects factor comprised of three groups: No weekly tutorial, Always weekly tutorial, and Weekly tutorial but not always. The dependent variables comprised of the five student experience topics. Assumptions of homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices (Box's test, $p = .979$) and equality of variance (Levene, all $p > .05$) were confirmed. There was a statistically significant association for the three groups on the combined dependent variables of student experience, $F(10, 112) = 3.777$, $p < .000$; Wilks' Lambda = .559; partial $\eta^2 = .252$. Analysis of each individual dependent

variable, using a Bonferroni adjusted alpha level of .01, showed that there was no significant association between tutorial experiences on: Online Teaching and Learning, $F(2, 60) = 4.287$, $p = .018$, partial $\eta^2 = .125$; Peers on my course, $F(2, 60) = 1.891$, $p = .160$, partial $\eta^2 = .059$; and Confidence, $F(2, 60) = 1.335$, $p = .271$, partial $\eta^2 = .043$. But, the three tutorial experiences differed on two dependent variables: UC Culture and Values, $F(2, 60) = 16.202$, $p = .000$, partial $\eta^2 = .351$; and Wellbeing, $F(2, 60) = 5.503$, $p = .006$, partial $\eta^2 = .155$.

The null hypothesis, that there would be no association between student experience and tutorial experiences, is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. The analysis demonstrates a significant association between students who had a weekly tutorial and those who did not, or did not always have a tutorial, when studying online on their student experience during COVID campus closures. Students who always had a weekly tutorial reported a better student experience. Further investigation demonstrates that the two topics that contributed to the overall significant difference were UC Culture and Values, and Wellbeing.

Retrospective power analysis was carried out within SPSS at power level of 0.8 and the standard deviation of 72.73. It determined that a sample size of 54 with 18 participants in each of the three tutorial experience groups would be required for reliable inferences from the data. Although the total participant sample size was larger than the 54 recommended there was uneven distribution across the groups. Therefore, although the null hypothesis is rejected in favour of the alternative hypothesis that there would be significant association between students who had a weekly tutorial and those who did not, or did not always have a tutorial, when studying online on their student experience during COVID campus closures, these results should be considered tentative and treated with caution due to the uneven sample.

iii. **Hypothesis 3**

Students who had not contemplated withdrawal would have had a more positive COVID-19 campus closure student experience than those students who had contemplated withdrawal.

A one-way between-subjects analysis of variance was conducted to assess the association between student experience and withdrawal contemplation. The between-subjects factor comprised of two binary groups: Not contemplated withdrawal (No) and Contemplated withdrawal (Yes). Whether the participants had contemplated withdrawal had a significant association with their student experience (total scores from all topics), $F(2, 61) = 6.738$, $p = .012$, partial $\eta^2 = .098$. The mean scores and standard deviation for each group were:

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Number
Not contemplated withdrawal (No)	335.38	70.92	43
Contemplated withdrawal (Yes)	287.27	66.82	21
TOTAL	319.59	72.73	64

Table 7: Total mean scores and standard deviation for all topics by withdrawal contemplation

To investigate the contribution of each topic to the significant difference between those who had contemplated withdrawal and those that had not, a one-way between-subjects multiple analysis of variance was carried out. The one-way between-subjects multiple analysis of variance assessed the differences in topics of student experience between those students who had contemplated withdrawal and those that had not. The between-subjects factor comprised of two groups: Not contemplated withdrawal (No) and Contemplated withdrawal (Yes). The dependent variables comprised of the five student experience topics. Assumptions of homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices (Box's test, $p = .324$) and equality of variance (Levene, all $p > .05$) were confirmed. There was a statistically significant difference between the two groups on the combined dependent variables of student experience, $F(5, 57) = 4.464$, $p = .002$; Wilks' Lambda = .719; partial $\eta^2 = .281$. Analysis of each individual dependent variable, using a Bonferroni adjusted alpha level of .01, showed that there was no significant difference between withdrawal contemplation on: Peers on my course, $F(1, 61) = 3.051$, $p = .086$, partial $\eta^2 = .048$; UC Culture and Values, $F(1, 61) = 2.610$, $p = .111$, partial $\eta^2 = .041$; and Confidence, $F(1, 61) = 1.517$, $p = .223$, partial $\eta^2 = .024$. However, there was a significant different in withdrawal contemplation on two student experience

variables: Online Teaching and Learning, $F(1, 61) = 6.909$, $p = .011$, partial $\eta^2 =$ .102; and Wellbeing, $F(1, 61) = 16.974$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .218$.

The null hypothesis, that there would be no difference on student experience between students who had contemplated withdrawal and those who had not, is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. The analysis demonstrates a significant difference between students who had contemplated withdrawal and those who had not on their student experience during COVID campus closures. Students who had not contemplated withdrawal reported a better student experience. Further investigation demonstrates that the two topics that contributed to the overall significant difference were Online teaching and learning, and Wellbeing.

Retrospective power analysis was carried out within SPSS at power level of 0.8 and the standard deviation of 72.73. It determined that a sample size of 74 with 34 participants in each of the two contemplated withdrawal or not groups would be required for reliable inferences from the data. Therefore, although the null hypothesis is rejected in favour of the alternative hypothesis that there would be significant difference between students who had contemplated withdrawal and those who had not on their student experience during COVID campus closures, these results should be considered tentative and treated with caution due to the sample size and uneven distribution.

iv. **Hypothesis 4**

Students who had weekly tutorials would have more positive views regarding their personal tutors' characteristics and values.

To test whether there was a significant association between students' tutorial experience and their perceptions of their personal tutors' characteristics and values, a one-way between-subjects analysis of variance was conducted. The between-subjects factor comprised of three groups: No weekly tutorial, Always weekly tutorial, and Weekly tutorial but not always. Whether the participants had a weekly tutorial had a significant association with their perceptions of their personal tutors' characteristics and values, $F(2, 61) = 16.09$, $p < .000$, partial η^2 = .345. The mean scores and standard deviation for each group were:

Tutorial	Mean	Standard Deviation	Number
• No weekly tutorial	14.27	7.00	11
• Yes, always weekly tutorial	22.49	4.38	47
• Yes, but not always online tutorial	14.67	5.85	6
TOTAL	**20.34**	**6.12**	**64**

Table 8: Total mean scores and standard deviation for tutor characteristics and values by tutorial experience

To investigate the contribution of tutor characteristics and values towards the total perception of personal tutors and the association with the tutorial experience, a Kruskal-Wallis one-way between-subjects was carried out. The Kruskal-Wallis was used as each characteristic was measured by one Likert-style question and is thus considered non-parametric ordinal data (Bourne, 2017, p. 217). A Kruskal-Wallis test revealed that there was a significant difference between participants' perceptions of their tutors' characteristics and values depending on their tutorial experience: Challenge, X^2 (2, N = 64) = 21.935, p <.000; Approachable, X^2 (2, N = 64) = 17.654, p <.000; Non-judgemental, X^2 (2, N = 64) = 18.031, p <.000; Authentic, X^2 (2, N = 64) = 18.400, p <.000; and Valued as an individual, X^2 (2, N = 64) = 19.795, p <.000.

The null hypothesis, that there would be no significant difference between students' different tutorial experiences on their perceptions of their personal tutors' characteristics and values, is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. Students who always had a weekly tutorial viewed their personal tutors' characteristics and values more positively.

Retrospective power analysis was carried out within SPSS at power level of 0.8 and the standard deviation of 6.12. It determined that a sample size of 30 with 10 participants in each of the three tutorial experience groups would be required for reliable inferences from the data. Although the total participant sample size was larger than the 30 recommended there was uneven distribution across the groups. Therefore, although the null hypothesis is rejected in favour of the alternative hypothesis that there would be significant difference between students' different tutorial experiences on their perceptions of their personal tutors' characteristics and values, these results should be considered tentative and treated with caution due to the uneven sample.

Isabel Hallam

Withdrawal contemplation

v. Hypothesis 5

There will be an association between students with various demographic characteristics and their withdrawal contemplation

To test whether there was an association between students' various demographic characteristics and their withdrawal contemplation a multi-dimensional chi-square test was undertaken on the non-parametric nominal data. Almost a third of participants (32.8%) contemplated withdrawal during the 2020/21 academic year. Analysis demonstrated that there was no relationship between various demographic characteristics and withdrawal contemplation:

	Did not contemplate withdrawal		Contemplated withdrawal		Chi-square analysis
Gender	Count	%	Count	%	
• Female	31	63%	18	37%	X^2 (2, *N* = 64) = 1.878, *p* = .391
• Male	10	77%	3	23%	
• Non-binary	2	100%	0		
Disability					
• Non-disabled	31	74%	11	26%	X^2 (2, *N* = 64) = 3.358, *p* = .187
• Disabled with disability support	9	50%	9	50%	
• Disabled without support	3	75%	1	25%	
Age					
• Young	12	71%	5	29%	X^2 (2, *N* = 64) = .121, *p* = .727
• Mature	31	66%	16	34%	
Level of Study					
• Level 4	20	77%	6	23%	X^2 (2, *N* = 64) = 2.464, *p* = .292
• Level 5	15	65%	8	35%	
• Level 6	8	53%	7	47%	
First in family to attend university					
• First in family to attend university	22	63%	13	37%	X^2 (2, *N* = 64) = 2.944, *p* = .567
• Child attended	4	100%	0		

	Did not contemplate withdrawal		Contemplated withdrawal		Chi-square analysis
	Count	%	Count	%	
university					
• Parent attended university	7	78%	2	22%	
• Sibling attended university	6	60%	4	40%	
• Multiple family attended university	4	67%	2	33%	
Parent/Carer					
• Not a carer	23	66%	12	34%	X^2 (2, $N = 64$) = 2.994, $p = .393$
• Carer for relative	2	100%	0		
• Parent to an under 18	16	73%	6	27%	
• Multiple caring responsibilities	2	40%	3	60%	
Employment					
• Worked <16hrs during lockdown	5	100%	0		X^2 (2, $N = 64$) = 8.488, $p = .075$
• Worked >16hrs during lockdown	18	64%	10	36%	
• Lost job and remained unemployed	1	100%	0		
• Not in employment	16	76%	5	24%	
• Furloughed during lockdown	3	33%	6	66%	
TOTAL	**43**	**67%**	**21**	**33%**	

Table 9: Frequency of withdrawal contemplation and chi-square analysis across all demographic groups.

Four independent variables had levels that could be condensed into dichotomous variables and were re-analysed using the Chi-square test.

	Did not contemplate withdrawal		Contemplated withdrawal		Chi-square analysis
Disability	Count	%	Count	%	
• Disabled	12	55%	10	45%	X^2 (2, $N = 64$) = 2.430, $p = .119$
• Non-disabled	31	74%	11	26%	
First in family to attend university					
• First in family to attend university	22	63%	13	37%	X^2 (2, $N = 64$) = .657,

	Did not contemplate withdrawal		Contemplated withdrawal		Chi-square analysis
• Not the first in family to attend university	21	72%	8	28%	p = .418
Parent/Carer					
• Parent/Carer	20	69%	9	31%	X² (2, N = 64) = .076, p = .783
• Not a parent/carer	23	66%	12	34%	
Employment					
• Working during campus closures	23	70%	10	30%	X² (2, N = 64) = .195, p = .659
• Not working during campus closures	20	65%	11	35%	
TOTAL	**43**	**67%**	**21**	**33%**	

Table 10: Frequency of withdrawal contemplation and chi-square analysis across all dichotomous groups.

Non-parametric analysis of the nominal demographic characteristics independent variable data and the binary question 'Did you contemplate withdrawing or suspending from your studies during this academic year?' as the dependent variable, yielded no significant differences. Therefore, the null hypothesis that there would be no association between students with various demographic characteristics and their withdrawal contemplation is accepted.

vi. **Hypothesis 6**

Students who had weekly tutorials would be less likely to contemplate withdrawal.

To test whether there was an association between students' weekly tutorial experiences and their withdrawal contemplation a multi-dimensional chi-square test was undertaken on the non-parametric nominal data. Almost a third of participants (32.8%) contemplated withdrawal during the 2020/21 academic year. Analysis demonstrated that there was a significant association between students' tutorial experience and their withdrawal contemplation:

	Did not contemplate withdrawal	Contemplated withdrawal	Chi-square analysis

Tutorial experience	Count	%	Count	%	
• No weekly tutorial	6	55%	5	45%	X^2 (2, *N* = 64) = 15.920, *p* < .000
• Always weekly tutorial	37	79%	10	21%	
• Weekly tutorial, but not always	0		6	100%	
TOTAL	**43**	**67%**	**21**	**33%**	

Table 11: Frequency of withdrawal contemplation and chi-square analysis across tutorial experiences.

The chi-square demonstrates a significant difference between those who had weekly tutorials, and those who either did not have weekly tutorials or did not always have them. To explore this association further a Kruskal-Wallis one-way between-subjects was carried out, with the independent variable being the tutorial experience nominal data and the 10-point Likert scale of seriousness of withdrawal (10 – I did not contemplate, 1 - I filled in the paperwork) as the dependent variable. The Kruskal-Wallis was used as the 10-point Likert scales is considered non-parametric ordinal data. A Kruskal-Wallis test revealed a significant association between tutorial experiences and withdrawal contemplation: X^2 (2, *N* = 63) = 6.161, *p* =.046. The mean scores and standard deviations, and the mean rankings for each tutorial experience group is below:

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Number
Contemplate withdrawal	7.98	2.63	63
	Mean Rank		**Number**
Tutorial experience			
• No weekly tutorial	26.9		10
• Always weekly tutorial	34.82		47
• Weekly tutorial, but not always	18.42		6

Table 12: Descriptive statistics for withdrawal contemplation by tutorial experience.

Thus, the null hypothesis that there would be no difference in withdrawal contemplation between those who had weekly tutorials and those who did not, or did not always have weekly tutorials, is rejected.

Retrospective power analysis was carried out within SPSS at power level of 0.8 and the standard deviation of 2.63. It determined that a sample size of 126 with

42 participants in each of the three tutorial experience groups would be required for reliable inferences from the data. Therefore, although the null hypothesis is rejected in favour of the alternative hypothesis that there would be significant difference in withdrawal contemplation between those who had weekly tutorials and those who did not, or did not always have weekly tutorials, these results should be considered tentative and treated with caution due to the small sample size and uneven distribution.

vii. **Hypothesis 7:** Students with certain characteristics and/or experiences would be more likely to contemplate withdrawal.

To investigate whether any student characteristics and/or experiences were more likely to predict withdrawal contemplation than others, a binomial logistic regression was conducted. The logistic regression was performed with withdrawal contemplation as the dependent variable. The eight independent variables were level of study, gender and age, plus five independent variables which had levels that could be condensed into dichotomous variables – disabled, first in family, parent/carer, employed and weekly tutorial. A total of 64 cases were analysed and the full model significantly predicted withdrawal contemplation (omnibus chi-square = 22.07, df = 10, p = .015). The model accounted for between 29.2% and 40.6% of variance in withdrawal contemplation, with 86% of the withdrawal contemplation predicted. Overall, 71.9% of predictions were accurate. Table 13 gives the coefficients (B), and the Wald statistics and associated degrees of freedom and probability values for each of the predictor variables (Exp.(B)).

Variables	B	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp (B)
Level of study		4.920	2	.085	
Level of study (1)	**-2.382**	**4.900**	**1**	**.027**	**.092**
Level of study (2)	-1.805	2.876	1	.090	.165
Gender		1.138	2	.566	
Gender (1)	20.664	.000	1	.999	942331313.2
Gender (2)	19.725	.000	1	.999	368408873.2
Age (1)	.018	.000	1	.984	1.018
Disability (1)	-1.365	3.415	1	.065	.255
First in Family (1)	-.247	.120	1	.729	.781

Parent/Carer (1)	.083	.012	1	.914	1.087	
Employed (1)	-1.097	1.635	1	.201	.334	
Tutorial (1)	**2.700**	**9.201**	**1**	**.002**	**14.881**	
CONSTANT	-18.898	.000	1	.999	.000	

Table 13: Logistic regression predictor variables in the equation for withdrawal contemplation.

The analysis shows that only 'tutorial' and 'level of study' reliably and significantly predict withdrawal contemplation. The values of the coefficients reveal that each increase in level of study is associated with an increase in withdrawal contemplation by a factor of 0.092, and that not having or not always having a tutorial increases the withdrawal contemplation by a factor of 14.881.

Retrospective power analysis was carried out within SPSS at power level of 0.8 and the standard deviation of 0.2 for the 'levels of study' variable. It determined that a sample size of 45 with 15 participants in each of the three levels of study groups would be required for reliable inferences from the data. The sample meets this criterion. Therefore, the result that level of study was a significant predictor of withdrawal contemplation, with Level 6 students most likely to contemplate withdrawal is considered reliable.

viii. **Hypothesis 8**

Students who had contemplated withdrawing would have different grade and completion expectations to those who had not contemplated withdrawing.

To investigate the difference between those who contemplated withdrawal and their peers on different grade and completion expectations, a Kruskal-Wallis one-way between-subjects was carried out. The between-subjects factor comprised of two groups: Not contemplated withdrawal (No) and Contemplated withdrawal (Yes). The mean scores and standard deviation for each group were:

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Number
Complete the programme			
• Not contemplated withdrawal	9.452	1.517	42

• Contemplated withdrawal	9.047	1.465	21
• Total	9.318	1.501	63
Gain pass grade (>40%)			
• Not contemplated withdrawal	9.024	1.569	42
• Contemplated withdrawal	8.714	2.261	21
• Total	8.920	1.817	63
Gain Good grade (60-69%)			
• Not contemplated withdrawal	7.691	2.533	42
• Contemplated withdrawal	7.048	2.559	21
• Total	7.476	2.539	63
Gain 1st class grade (>70%)			
• Not contemplated withdrawal	5.119	3.117	42
• Contemplated withdrawal	4.667	3.230	21
• Total	4.968	3.137	63

Table 14: Total mean scores and standard deviation for grade and completion expectations out of 10

The Kruskal-Wallis was used as each measure was assessed by one ten-point Likert-style question and is thus considered non-parametric ordinal data (Bourne, 2017, p. 217). A Kruskal-Wallis test revealed that there was no significant difference between those who contemplated withdrawal and their peers on grade expectations: Complete programme, X^2 (2, N = 64) = 1.923, p =.166; Pass grade, X^2 (2, N = 64) = .041, p =.840; Good degree, X^2 (2, N = 64) = 829, p = .363; and 1st Class, X^2 (2, N = 64) = .367, p = .545.

The null hypothesis that there would be no difference on their grade and completion expectations, between students who had contemplated withdrawal and those that had not, is accepted.

4.2.3   Quantitative data analysis conclusion

In accordance with the exploratory sequence design, the Phase 2 survey, that provided the quantitative data for analysis, sought to test the generalisability of the qualitative results from the longitudinal focus groups during Phase 1 to the wider University Centre student population.

Quantitative results demonstrated that:

i. Demographic characteristics did not significantly impact on students' perceptions of the topics of student experience during COVID campus closures (Hypothesis 1).

ii. Students who had a weekly tutorial reported a **significantly more positive** student experience during COVID campus closures compared to their peers, with the two topics contributing most to the association being UC Culture and Values, and Wellbeing (Hypothesis 2).

iii. Whether a student had contemplated withdrawal within the academic year had a **significant association** with their overall student experience, with the two topics contributing most to the association being Online teaching and learning, and Wellbeing (Hypothesis 4).

iv. Students who had a weekly tutorial reported **significantly more positive** views regarding their personal tutors' characteristics and values compared to their peers (Hypothesis 4).

v. The variance in students' persistence with their studies during COVID campus closures, as measured by the withdrawal contemplation, could not be accounted for by demographic characteristics (Hypothesis 5).

vi. Students who had a weekly tutorial were **significantly less likely** to contemplate withdrawal within the academic year (Hypothesis 6).

vii. Being on a higher level of study and not having a weekly tutorial regularly was a **significant predictor** of withdrawal contemplation (Hypothesis 7).

viii. Whether a student had contemplated withdrawal within the academic year did not have significant association with their grade and completion expectations (Hypothesis 8).

Using power analysis calculations within SPSS to determine an appropriate sample size for five hypotheses that had a significant difference demonstrates that although there was a significant difference within the sample, the sample was too small and uneven across the groups to make reliable inferences from the data. In conclusion, there is a significant association between withdrawal contemplation and student experience, and weekly tutorials played a significant role in students' withdrawal contemplation, students' experience during COVID campus closures, and students' perceptions of their personal tutors' characteristics and values.

5. Discussion

Drawing together the results of this two-phase mixed methods study I sought to answer *what* the student persistence experience was, *what* factors influenced persistence, and *how* personal tutors fostered persistence for college higher education students during the COVID-19 campus closures. Discussing the results of the study in the context of the previous research literature, I will address the individual research questions in turn.

5.1 What was the experience of college higher education students as they persisted with their studies during the COVID-19 campus closures?

Tinto's (2017b) model of student persistence proposes the persistence experience is influenced by students' self-efficacy, sense of belonging, perceptions of the curriculum, goals and motivation. My college higher education student focus group participants, studying during the COVID-19 campus closures, broadly confirmed Tinto's (2017b) model, but with some nuanced distinctions. *What* they experienced during this challenging period was shaped by who they are, their previous learning experiences, the support they received from the University Centre, peers and family, how they felt about that support, and their determination to not let COVID ruin their university studies. The experience can be characterised as:

> *'I am not a typical university student. I am not confident about my academic skills because of my past learning experiences. My goal is just to study at university. At the University Centre I am treated as an individual. Relationship-rich regular group tutorials help to develop my confidence with studying, enable me to explore possible career opportunities, and foster genuine relations. I feel like I matter to staff and my peers, and they matter to me. Because of this, I am determined to prove everyone wrong and complete my studies. I am not going to let COVID ruin my chance to improve things for myself and my family. I can begin to see a new post-graduate future for myself and my family'.*

Their common experience was one of not feeling like they were traditional students with typical pre-university experiences, and that this shaped their academic confidence, goals and motivations, interactions with support offered, and sense of being a student. The COVID campus closures intensified this distinctive experience, prompting students to reflect on their position and experience. Exploring the utility of Tinto's (2017b) model to explain the persistence experience, I will investigate each aspect of the model in relation to my participants' unique college higher education student experience during COVID.

Self-efficacy

Ninety percent of the University Centre's student population come from at least one underrepresented group, mature or disabled students, those from a Black, Asian or minority ethnic heritage, from a low socio-economic background or are care experienced (███████ 2019). As illustrated in the first theme identified in the Phase 1 reflexive thematic analysis, 'Never thought I could', the student participants within this research were acutely aware that they are not traditional university students and earlier in their lives would not have anticipated a university education. Their reflections on the non-traditional student label related more to being older, returning to learn, commuters, working-parents, and the first in their family to attend university, rather than the Office for Students' (2018a) underrepresented definitions. I have intentionally used the word 'older', in contrast to the Office for Students' (2018a) definition of a mature student as someone who is 21 or above on the first day of their course. I use 'older' because the student participants were contrasting their age to their peers, rather than simply recognising themselves as mature.

Related to the discussion about being older than typical university students, my focus group participants spoke candidly about how the time between their last period of studying and their degree impacted on their self-belief, confidence and self-efficacy. Their reflections on this time-lag relate to the impact on their academic self-efficacy and confidence. Bandura, Pastorelli, Barbaranelli and Caprara (1999, p. 259) define academic self-efficacy as involving learners' beliefs about managing their own learning, mastering academic subjects and

fulfilling their own and others' academic expectations. However, for my participants their beliefs about their studying are deeply held from long-ago school experiences. Participants discussed their struggles at school that they now recognise as dyslexia, being told they would not amount to anything, seeing their peers thrive academically, and feeling that they had missed out on education and opportunity when they were younger. These long held perceptions of themselves and their educational ability, influenced the students' confidence with academic work, engagement in learning and development, perception of themselves in comparison to their peers, and their self-worth and wellbeing. However, as they had embarked on the undergraduate academic journey, their aspiration and goals must have been strong enough to overcome that self-doubt and reflects a self-belief that they are better and more capable than those images they have of themselves.

Students who are socio-economically disadvantaged are often reported as being unprepared for university, arriving with differing levels of human capital and understanding of higher education processes (Blythman, Orr, Hampton, McLaughlin & Waterworth, 2006; Crawford, 2014; Sadowski, Stewart & Pediaditis, 2018). This implies that students with less experience and knowledge of university, including those who are the first in their family to attend, will experience a sense of culture shock when they start university. This culture shock for college higher education students will relate to the academic standards, expectations for professional behaviours and discourse, and the need for active engagement in learning, rather than the additional social and residential culture shock of a traditional university experience. Participants alluded to this culture shock when they discussed the realisation of the work required in addition to lessons and the expectation that all their peers would be as committed to the university learning. This culture shock, and arguably unrealistic expectations, could contribute to students overcoming their self-doubt and past learning experiences to think it would be possible for them to study at university.

Participant 5's reflections on the impact of their dyslexia on their self-confidence to study at undergraduate level mirror those of Stagg, Easton and Sjoblom's (2018) dyslexic participants who scored lower on measures of past achievements, social persuasion and physiological state sources of efficacy

than their non-dyslexia peers. However, the importance of 'ability awareness', 'impact of school', and 'observing others' was recognised in both dyslexic and non-dyslexic students (Stagg, Eaton & Sjoblom, 2018), implying that the same factors impact self-efficacy for all students. Indeed, participant 3 in the current study directly references how "comparing myself to other people" (A4, 242) impacted their confidence and increased their self-doubt. However, the poor self-efficacy exhibited by my participants at the beginning of their studies, and related anxieties and feelings of inadequacy were attributed to more than just their 'ability awareness', 'impact of school', and 'observing others' (Stagg, Eaton & Sjoblom, 2018), they directly discuss the influence of family and teachers' attitudes.

These attitudes of family and teachers, go beyond the 'impact of school' on self-efficacy (Stagg, Eaton & Sjoblom, 2018), to encompass the wider concept of self, specifically that of self-esteem, described by Hewitt (2009) as rooted in four ideas of acceptance, evaluation, comparison and efficacy by oneself and others. Participant 1's reflection on how their family viewed them as "amounting to nothing" (A4, 162) when they were younger appears to be rooted in their family's acceptance and evaluation of them as a person. Despite the low self-efficacy, and arguably low self-esteem, exhibited by participants particularly at the beginning of their courses, they began to realise that perhaps they could achieve their degree and future goals.

During the focus group discussions, student participants at the latter stages of their degrees were able to reflect on their growing academic self-confidence and the progress they had made with their studies. They began to realise that although they never thought they could complete a degree when they were younger, they might be able to achieve it and began to contemplate their future. Their reflections alluded to the notion of possible selves. Although the concept of possible selves was originally presented by Markus and Naurius (1986) as an element of self-knowledge, participants and recent applications of the concept recognise the role of possible selves in motivation. Participants' explicit discussions about the role of imagining their future and its motivation force was typified by participant 1 (A2, 93) "Um, what's been motivating me? Um? Posting things all over my wall graduation pictures". This discussion by participants promoted my deeper exploration of the notion of possible selves and how it

could be applied to students' motivation. Harrison's (2018) utilisation of possible selves suggests students who had academic success at school saw higher education as more plausible, increasing their motivation for it. If we extend this concept to students once they have arrived in higher education, those who recognised their successes can begin to imagine that they could graduate, and this increases their motivation. This extended notion is exhibited by my participants, participant 8 (C2, 233) explains "It's just like seeing my progress little by little, like the end goal is great". Further the developing self-confidence enabled them to consider a future self that they would not have previously conceived.

Tinto (2017b) recognises that students must believe they can succeed, otherwise there is little reason to continue to persist to do so. My participants demonstrated that only a small amount of self-efficacy and belief in oneself is needed to embark on the undergraduate journey. They had poor self-efficacy initially due to their earlier learning experiences but overcame any self-doubt partly because of their in-experience and awareness of higher education meant that they did not fully appreciate the efforts and academic study needed. However, once studying and with the appropriate academic support from the University Centre, including support for their disabilities that might have impacted their earlier experiences, students began to believe in themselves and develop a self-efficacy that they could succeed, and this growing self-efficacy provided the reason and motivation to continue.

Sense of belonging

The second theme identified in the Phase 1 focus groups data was 'not just a number' representing students' feelings of inclusion, belonging, and mattering to the University Centre and its staff. Tinto's (2017b) model and the research literature focuses on the concept of belonging, defined by Goodenow (1993) as the subjective feeling a student has towards being personally accepted, respected, included and supported by others in the learning environment.

Tinto (2017a) explains that for this sense of belonging to occur, students need to become engaged with and see themselves as part of the university

community and a valued member of it. They discuss how the sense of belonging can be influenced by a fear prior to studying that they do not belong at university, but of greater influence is their experience once they begin studying. My participants' prior educational experience and lack of self-efficacy about their studying capacity, could lead one to assume they would experience a poor sense of belonging. But their focus group data contradicts this, suggesting that although they are non-traditional students who might not belong at a traditional higher education provider, because 90% of the student population at the University Centre are from underrepresented groups, they feel at home from the beginning.

In contrast to the sense of belonging discussed by Tinto (2017b), my student participants alluded to the concept of mattering, "mattering is the psychological tendency to perceive the self as significant to others" (Marshall, Liu, Wu, Berzosky & Adams, 2010, p. 367). Participant 1 (A3, 50) explained that "There is more of a family approach and it's a family friendly environment. You are a name and a person. Rather than just a number, and it is very apparent with every member of staff, wellbeing [team], tutors alike". Tovar, Simon and Lee (2009) describe how prior research has illustrated feeling like you do not matter leads to socially undesirable behaviour, and increased academic stress and alienation, in contrast to students who feel they matter becoming more likely to participate in the classroom culture. I contend that for college higher education students, the majority of whom are commuter students with their own lives and community outside of university, mattering is a more important psychological need than belonging as Tinto (2017b) proposes. The research on students feeling they matter to their academic and support staff is limited. White and Nonnamaker (2008) discussed how doctoral students experience mattering, placing the student at the centre of nested communities of influence within the doctoral journey. However, White and Nonnamaker (2008) recognise that these are not the only communities that sustain students during their studies. Indeed, existing research tends to focus on students mattering to their family and peers.

Marshall, Lu, Wu, Berzonsky and Adams (2010) explored university students' perceived mattering to parents and friends, finding that mattering remained broadly invariant over the course of their undergraduate degree, with a slight decrease in mattering to their mothers. Although this study illuminates the

importance of university students' mattering to family and friends, its sample of 17-21 year olds, 98.3% of whom were living in university accommodation, cannot be considered comparable to the University Centre student population. However, my participants concurred that mattering to their families was an important motivator. Those who were parents were particularly vocal about how their studying mattered to their children. They felt that by studying they were being role models, demonstrating that you can study later in life, and improve your career opportunities and personal fulfilment. Similarly, participants also discussed how their family were their greatest advocates and motivators, taking over childcare so that they can study, leaving motivating notes and giving encouragement, and showing interest in their studies and achievements.

Matera, Bosco and Meringolo (2019) identified that perceived mattering to family and friends and self-esteem, were found to contribute to wellbeing in the general population. Later research also led by Camilla Matera in Italy found that individuals who experienced more mattering to families during the COVID-19 pandemic experienced fewer difficulties with emotional regulation and higher psychological wellbeing (Matera, Paradisi, Boin & Nerini, 2021). This link between mattering and wellbeing could contribute to explaining why my participants, who all felt they mattered to the University Centre and often spoke of their families as being strong motivators, had enough positive wellbeing to enabled them to persist with their studies during the campus closure.

Mattering to University Centre staff was also illustrated throughout the 'All in the same boat' focus group theme. However, here mattering was illustrated by participants feeling that we were all in this together, alluding to being an equal partner rather than inferior to the staff. Lochtie, McIntosh, Stork and Walker (2018, p. 48) consider an "equal partner, not superior" to be a core value of personal tutoring, and my participants reiterated this equal notion by placing themselves alongside University Centre staff during the campus closures. They empathised with the teaching team and recognised we were all in the same boat during the campus closures. The empathy for their friends and feeling of camaraderie discussed by the participants alludes to their social integration with peers and the University Centre. Spady (1970) theorised that social integration was key to the decision as to whether to continue with studying, and influenced by consistent and intimate interactions with others, holding values and

orientations reflecting the social collective, and compatibility to the immediate social system of the higher education provider. The social integration illustrated by my participants appears to be based on empathy and understanding garnered through interactions with others and a shared objective, rather than collective social values.

Reflecting on Hausmann, Schofield and Woods' (2007, p. 806) observation that "sense of belonging is most often implied as the result of social and academic integration, rather than specified and measured as an independent construct", it is interesting to consider participants meaning when they discuss being all in the same boat. Their social integration narrative regarding University Centre staff and course peers' challenges during COVID could be construed as them showing reciprocal mattering. Mattering is usually discussed as people feeling that they matter (Marshall, Liu, Wu, Berzosky & Adams, 2010), but here the students have reversed this with a feeling that others matter, and thus there is a togetherness which implies they know they also matter.

Tinto's (2017b) proposition that a sense of belonging is a central concept within student persistence is partially contradicted within my focus group evidence. Instead, participants demonstrated the related concept of mattering to have greater utility. The participants valued both feeling that they matter to others, and that others matter to them, demonstrating the importance of the reciprocal nature of mattering and the sense of togetherness.

Perception of the curriculum

Tinto (2017b) discusses how students' perception of the value they place on what they are being asked to learn influences their persistence. The perception of the curriculum they study encompasses the quality and relevance of the learning experiences, the academic challenge of the course materials, and the inclusive nature of the curriculum. The quality and relevance of learning experience was highlighted as linked to pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning that fostered active engagement in learning (Tinto, 2017b). Due to the pivot to online learning during the COVID campus closures, my participants

reflections centred on their online learning experience rather than the course content specifically.

In contrast to the widespread reports of student dissatisfaction during online learning in the initial campus closure (Office for National Statistics, 2021; Pearson & Wonkhe, 2020; Xiong, Jiang & Mok, 2020), my participants did not express dissatisfaction, rather anxiety about studying implications and sadness to be missing out on the seminal moments of studying, such as graduation. However, there were some frustrations with online learning, specifically what Kuo, Walker, Belland and Schroder (2013) refer to as learner-content interaction. This frustration supports the research which indicated the predominant difficulties students faced when studying online were time management, distractions and self-discipline (Pearson & Wonkhe, 2020; Lim, 2020; Scull, Phillips, Sharma & Garnier, 2020; Su & Guo, 2021; Xiong, Jiang & Mok, 2020). The key factor here was whether the students were parents of school aged children or not.

Parents of school aged children struggled to fit in studying alongside their new home-schooling responsibilities, having to carve out new pockets of time first thing in the morning or when the children had gone to bed. Participants 3 and 4 who did not know each other before the research, shared their difficulties in the focus groups, and subsequently arranged to be study-buddies. They met online early in the mornings for study time, working quietly but online to keep accountable to each other. This finding supports research from Andrewartha, Knight, Simpson and Beattie (2022) who found that their student parent participants in Australia experienced increased parenting responsibilities, and had worsening mental health and financial situations. My participants who were not parents, especially those who were furloughed or not working, reported the opposite problem of struggling with self-discipline and procrastination, especially after the novelty had worn off after the first few weeks and they realised they were going to have to complete their academic year online only.

Pearson and Wonkhe (2020) found that UK students wanted more interaction in learning and one-to-one support. However, my participants did not really reflect this sentiment, perhaps because of our small class sizes when teaching pivoted online, the timetabled lessons continued as per normal but just online. Students

were able to contribute and ask questions, as they would in class. For participant 4 this was a transformative experience as they were not relishing the idea of online learning, due to some of the media reports and their own preconceptions of online learning, but found that although it was different, they were still able to engage, contribute and learn. Arguably the small class sizes and student-centred approach of the University Centre can sometimes foster relationship-rich pedagogy or education. Felten and Lambert (2020, pp. 17-18) describe the four principles of relationship-rich education as every student must experience genuine welcome and deep care; be inspired to learn; develop a web of significant relationships; and explore questions of meaning and purpose. I am not suggesting all students will have experienced relationship-rich education at the University Centre, but certainly some of the student participants' description of the care provided by staff and online pedagogy reflect Felten and Lambert's (2020, pp. 17-18) principles. Just two participants discussed wanting more interaction in learning, these were both students on practical courses who were concerned about having received enough practical learning for their portfolio and exam respectively.

The issue that has so far garnered the most research evidence about studying online during COVID campus closures regards the impact on students' wellbeing, and this was also evident in my focus groups. Over the duration of the longitudinal focus groups, participants often referred to the impact on their wellbeing. They discussed their initial anxieties about the pandemic and the pivot to online learning, the highs and lows of wellbeing and motivation, the reality of finishing their studies online, and their concerns about the future job market. However, the wellbeing aspect of online learning, related to the wider campus closure and lockdown, rather than students' perceptions of online learning and the online curriculum.

Tinto (2017b) posits that the perception of the curriculum that students are studying is a key factor in persistence. The evidence from my focus groups suggests that, in COVID campus closures at least, importance is place on the pedagogy rather than the curriculum itself. Indeed, what my participants valued was the opportunity to interact with each other and the teachers, and engage actively in the learning, rather than the subject matter. This suggests that it is

the relationships that were important and social interaction that fostered those relationships.

Goals

According to Tinto's (2017b) model of student persistence, having the goal of completing their studies is a necessary condition for completion. They contend that for some students the intrinsic benefits of university are goal enough, but for others the extrinsic value of improved career and income opportunities are the goal. Further Tinto (2017b) recognises that students' goals can vary in character and intensity throughout their course.

For my focus group participants, their goals were never clearly articulated, perhaps out of shyness and reticence to share their inner most aspirations, and perhaps because their goals had shifted during their studies. For those early in their courses, the goal seemed to be just wanting to pass, but with growing confidence students began to aspire to do better, and the goal of completing their studies and graduation became more realistic. Career related goals were implied, and rarely spoken about beyond wanting to work in a course related field or to be better at their current job role. As the campus closures dragged on towards the end of the academic year, most students' goals were to 'just get it done' reflecting their frustration with the pandemic lockdowns as a whole.

Markus and Nurius' (1986) possible selves concept describes how individuals think about their future and their potential. My participants were predominantly orientated to the present and very near future. They were only able to foresee and consider a future studying, rather than a post-graduation future where their goals aligned to a career and future employment. Stevenson and Clegg (2011) interviewed 61 undergraduate students about extra-curricula activity, including work-related activities. Of their present-orientated student interviewees, there was a subset who were student-focused, their extra curricula activities were paid employment and orientated towards survival in the present time. They recognised that this group were from predominately working-class families, and although not incapable of developing possible selves as they had envisaged becoming a student, they observed that they needed support to persist when

faced with difficulties (Stevenson & Clegg, 2011). This description of student-focused present-orientated students has resonance with my participants who were very much orientated towards their immediate studying future, and needed support and nurturing from the University Centre team to imagine a future beyond their immediate experience. Students discussed how their studies had changed their possible selves, making them more confident in their job role, opening job opportunities they did not know existed and enabling them to consider post-graduate study. They recognised that their degree opened the future, but their possible selves remained present-orientated and under-developed. Stevenson and Clegg's (2011) observation that present-orientated student-focused possible selves were more prevalent in their working-class students. Further, Stevenson (2019, p. 144) notes that research implies that students who are disenfranchised or impoverished are unlikely to have access to emotional or material resources to fulfil their desired future selves as those from more privileged groups. Both of these observations could be applied to the current study to explain perhaps why the University Centre students were so present-orientated in their future thinking.

Tinto's (2017b) positioning of goals as a necessary condition for persistence is somewhat supported by my research participants. However, the goals for these college higher education students are present-orientated, to pass the next assessment, just finish the year or to be a better practitioner, rather than more developed as future-orientated career and life goals.

Motivation

In Tinto's (2017b) model of student persistence, self-efficacy, sense of belonging and perception of the curriculum interact to influence motivation, which also draws on the student's goals to predict their persistence behaviour. This interpretation of motivation as a complex notion is supported by Irvine's (2018) description of motivation as a meta concept subsuming the related concepts of engagement, persistence, interest, self-efficacy, and self-concept. In contrast to these multifaceted theoretical conceptions of motivation, my participants discussed it more simplistically as the internal drive to behave in a manner that achieves positive outcomes.

All the focus group participants were older students, who recognised their age in comparison to their peers and reflected on the life experience this brought. When discussing their motivation to study at university, their prior educational experience, desire to prove themselves and do something for their family shone through. The current findings support Mason (2018) who interviewed three older students, aged 45-65, studying Foundation Degrees at a British university. Mason's (2018) participants discussed similar motivations to prove themselves and change through their studies. They observed a strong intrinsic motivation and drive to overcome challenging emotions as part of their studies which Mason (2018) characterised as a transformative learning experience. The parallels between Mason's (2018) participants and those in the current study are evident, although only two of the current participants were in this age demographic, all were, or had initially, studied a Foundation Degree. The current participants also discussed how their studies transformed them, participant 1 (A1, 651) reported that "Not only has it provided education, it is also made me grow personally".

My participants discussed how their study motivation waxed and waned during the campus closure influenced by assessment deadlines and feedback, relations with others, structure versus opportunities to procrastinate, and their wellbeing. The role of relationships with others in motivation pervades the data set. Participants talk about family being their greatest champion, peers and tutors sending motivational messages, tutors and University Centre staff going over and above to support students, and 'class' discussions during online learning all contributing to their motivation. The association between motivation and positive relations between teachers and peers is well established in compulsory education (Bakadorova, Hoferichter & Raufelder, 2020; Raufelder, Bakadorova, Yalcin, Dibek & Yavaz, 2017; Wentzel, Muenks, McNeish & Russel, 2017), but there is a paucity of research exploring the association in higher education.

Bakadorova, Hoferichter and Raufelder (2020) explored classroom relations within secondary schools in Montréal and Moscow and the association with achievement drive motivation. They found similarities in the importance of peers relations for motivation in both cities. Exploring the student-teacher relationship, they recognised this relationship to be stronger in Montréal which they attribute

to the more student-centred education system in Canada. Students in Montréal were also found to have higher levels of achievement drive motivation overall. Translating these findings to higher education, implies that strong peer relations are important for motivation. Further, positive student-teacher relationships as part of a student-centred education system would also bring about improvements in students' achievement drive motivation. Applying this to the University Centre, the dialogue within focus groups exposed strong peer and student-teacher relationships. These strong relationships are in part due to the size of the provider and class sizes resulting in students feeling like they are not just a number, and students feeling a genuine connection with the staff who they recognise as equals rather than superiors.

Within the focus groups, participants regularly reported their wellbeing directed their motivation, and conversely their motivation was often influenced by their wellbeing. They alluded to having lows, not feeling great, and struggling to motivate themselves, but none of the participants explicitly spoke about worsening mental health, and to protect their privacy within the focus groups, they were not asked directly. However, research undertaken internationally during the same period with student populations using a range of standardised mental health measures all indicated declining wellbeing and mental health (Calandri et al., 2021; Dadaczynski, Okan, Messer, & Rathmann, 2021; Dhar, Ayittey & Sarkar, 2020; Jojoa, Lazaro, Garcia-Zapirain, Gonzalez & Urizar, 2021; Koelen et al., 2021; Kurcer, Erdogan, & Kades, 2021; Mohammed et al., 2021). It is fair to assume that similar results would have been identified in the University Centre student population as the same macro factors were at play: social isolation, contagion fear, financial concerns, and student workload worries.

Fawar and Samaha (2020) observed that most of their student participants with declining mental health did not report their difficulties or seek psychological support for their wellbeing. Given my participants' regular contact with their personal tutors, teachers, and the wellbeing team, I would anticipate that they might have been able to seek wellbeing support but perhaps not mental healthcare. To date there is a paucity of published qualitative research exploring student wellbeing during the pandemic. In future we might see investigations into the issues raised by my participants including the highs and lows of

motivation, missing out on student life milestones, and concerns about the future job market.

Tinto's (2017b) presentation of motivation as the penultimate cognitive function before the behaviour of persistence is validated by my research findings. The students' motivation fluctuated throughout the campus closure, but ultimately, they motivated themselves to persist with their studies to completion of the academic year. The causes of that motivation are less clear from the qualitative element of the research, although the issues discussed by participants include the drive to prove others wrong, relationships with others, positive wellbeing, time imperatives, and 'just wanting to get it done'.

Persistence

All of the focus group participants persisted with their studies during the campus closures to complete the academic year 2019/20. Preliminary evidence from the Office for Students (2022) suggests that continuation rates increased by 1.3% in 2019/20. There is no evidence to account for this increase yet, but it could be because higher education providers put safety net arrangements in place to support students' attainment, offered hardship funding from the Office for Students and students planned support for their studies, such as childcare, study skills or wellbeing coaching, and applying for assessment extensions. Andrewartha, Knight, Simpson and Beattie (2022) observed that 10% of their parent-students reduced their study load during the pandemic, switching to part-time or dropping some subjects. Although none of my participants formally changed their study load, some did take advantage of the safety net to make their workload more manageable by undertaking summer referral work.

In contrast to reducing their study load or withdrawing, my participants were determined to finish their studies, and not let COVID ruin their university experience. They struggled with self-discipline and found themselves procrastinating with housework, decorating or enjoying the sunny weather, and others found study time hard to negotiate due to home schooling, caring responsibilities and increased commitments to paid work for those in education and healthcare roles. Despite the tangle of emotions this lack of self-discipline

Isabel Hallam

caused, knowing they needed to study, but struggling to motivate themselves or make time, they had a determination to complete their studies. This determination was driven by their need to prove others wrong, make a better future for themselves and their families, and be a good role model to their children, and it was fostered through support and encouragement from others.

Wong (2018) found that high-achieving non-traditional students had a strong personal desire to prove themselves capable. This seems to have been replicated in my research with students discussing the need to prove themselves and others wrong. The students in my study were not selected by achievement status, but did all go on to complete their studies, and were from at least one underrepresented group. Thus, we could understand that they are showing the same desire to prove themselves as Wong (2018) found in their sample. A common story from my participants was having had a negative schooling or prior educational experience, and this was cited as contributing to their desire to prove themselves. Cotton, Nash and Kneale (2017) applied a resilience framework to understand student continuation. They identified that students who had a high intrinsic or altruistic determination, for example a need to prove themselves, demonstrated greater resilience. Those with that greater resilience were less likely to withdraw or contemplate withdrawal. Thus, my participants could be understood to have resilience associated with high intrinsic determination due, in part, to their previous negative learning experiences, and this contributed to their persistence with their studies.

The aspiration to make a better future for themselves and their families, and in turn be a strong role model for their children, also provided students with a strong motivation to persist with their studies. During the pandemic and campus closures, my participants often drew on this aspiration to motivate themselves to just keep going. They cited conversations with their partners and children, notes left by their children, being able to spend more time with their families and partners when they had completed their studies, and demonstrating to their children that it is never too late to better yourself. Andrewartha, Knight, Simpson and Beattie's (2022) parent-student participants also cited the benefits of gaining a higher education degree as being able to financially secure their family's future. However, their participants also highlighted the challenges of studying as a parent, primarily the lack of time, parenting and childcare

concerns, and financial hardship. These themes were also raised by my participants as challenges but were very much accepted as part of the student-parent compromise to gain a degree, even though it resulted in a sense of parental guilt at times.

Throughout the series of focus groups, participants expressed how the support and encouragement of others contributed to their motivation and ability to persist. They cited the important role of family, peers on their course, and University Centre staff in fostering a sense that they could do it, they were good enough and it would be worth it. As well as family being an inspiration and motivation, they gave practical and emotional support when students were struggling to persist. Parent-students discussed partners taking the children out for the day or increasing their share of the household jobs to give them time to focus on their studies. This could be in contradiction to Andrew, Costello, Robinson and Dare's (2020) finding that students who had partners who had not attended university found their partners to be less willing to provide practical and emotional support, or share the university journey. Although partner's university status was not enquired about with my participants, most of my participants were the first in their family to attend university, so we can imply that their partners are unlikely to have a university education. Children and family were also cited as strong motivators, reminding them to 'keep going and be proud of yourself'. Asked who has kept them going when things were tough, all students cited their family as their principal motivator during the campus closures. This finding supports that of Tovar (2013) who found that first and foremost, the support from family and friends was key to US community college students' success. Calandri et al. (2021) found that most of their Italian university student participants (*n*=296) reported stable or even improved relations with their family towards the end of the first major lockdown in May 2020. This was attributed to lockdown and prolonged cohabitation being an opportunity to strengthen family ties through the shared experience of lockdown and give reciprocal support. This explanation seems plausible for my own participants, several of whom received support from partners or parents who had been furloughed. In contrast, Calandri et al. (2021) also recognised a minority of participants who found the forced cohabitation caused conflict and stress, impacting negatively on their family relations. None of my participants

overtly expressed this, but the three younger students who lived with their parents spoke about spending all day in their rooms. This may allude to a practical issue of space and ownership within the home. Students living in the parental home who study in their bedrooms may have felt more confined than those who had separate studying spaces. Several of my participants discussed how pre-COVID they would stay at the University Centre after lessons to study, suggesting that they might have felt more comfortable and motivated to study in the university environment, and thus would have struggled more when the campus closed.

Bean and Metzner (1985) explain that social integration is "the extent and quality of students' interaction with the social system of the college environment" (p. 507). Most models of student persistence express the importance of social integration (Bean & Eaton, 2000; Bean & Metzner, 1985; Spady, 1970; Tinto, 1975). However, for non-traditional students, particularly commuter students, social integration into their higher education provider is of comparatively little importance (Bean & Metzner, 1985). This proposition from Bean and Metzner (1985) is broadly supported in my research findings. Although students valued the support and encouragement they received from their course peers, they recognised these were functional friendships for studying. They spoke of being groups of individuals with pockets of friendships based on their shared university experience. This was illustrated by participant 2 who spoke of realising who your friends were during the campus closure, as peers became more insular to manage their own responsibilities.

In contrast to the finding that supports Bean and Metzner's (1985) notion that social integration is of comparatively little importance to commuter and non-traditional students, my participants did value the social engagement and support of peers within lessons and around assessment deadlines. This finding supports research conducted by Dwyer (2017) who observed that for commuter students, the classroom environment brings opportunities for active learning and the building of social connections between peers, and between peers and their teaching team. My participants spoke of the value of hearing others' ideas and contributions during online learning. They discussed how engagement online made the virtual learning experience more enriching than they had anticipated, but they recognised that not all students wanted to contribute online

and that this sometimes made lessons less fulfilling both for students and the teachers. Pearson and Wonkhe (2020) found that UK higher education students during COVID campus closures wanted greater opportunities to ask questions, discuss learning, access feedback from academic staff and receive one-to-one support. However, evidence from my focus groups suggests that when given these opportunities in synchronistic online teaching, not all students took advantage of the opportunities. In turn this meant that planned lessons with student activities would have been less effective for all students. Participant 5 recalled one lesson when they were the only student who returned for the plenary session after a group off-line activity. Although participant 5 recognised they benefited from the teacher's one-to-one support, they acknowledge it would have been better for them, the teacher and their peers if more students had been actively engaged and contributing to the lesson, as students claimed they wanted in the Pearson and Wonkhe (2020) survey.

The final relationships that my student participants explained helped to foster their persistence was with the University Centre staff, their teachers, the Support Hub team, and their personal tutor. I will discuss the role of their personal tutor in more depth in answer to the fourth research question, but will address the role of the academic and support staff here. Throughout our focus group discussions, participants expressed their gratitude and appreciation to staff who provided support and encouragement during the campus closure. They talked about proactive messages offering support, staff responding to queries out-of-hours, the University Centre keeping them up to date with information, and the one-to-one support given with study skills and wellbeing.

Buskirk-Cohen and Plants (2019) investigated relatedness in a small teaching-focused university in the US. They found that students who rated their professors' pedagogical caring as low, also had low commitment to persisting with their studies or lower academic performance. Similarly, Datu (2017) observed that students with a high degree of relatedness to their teachers, operationalised as the extent to which students felt accepted by teachers, had greater grit, particularly perseverance of effort and consistency of interest. Although Buskirk-Cohen and Plants (2019) make no inference of cause and effect, and Datu's (2017) study was carried out with high school students, the principle that students who relate well to those supporting them are likely to be

able to show more grit and perseverance appears to be supported by my focus group participants. My participants all demonstrated strong relatedness to the staff supporting them through the studies, and persevered to complete their studies.

Student participants in this current research demonstrated persistence with their studies. Broadly their experience offers support for Tinto's (2017b) model, recognising the contribution of self-efficacy, sense of belonging, perceptions of the curriculum, goals and motivation. However, the non-traditional nature of the college higher education students creates a unique experience were the importance of grit, resilience, relatedness and relationships are foregrounded.

5.2   What factors influenced college higher education students' persistence during COVID-19 campus closures?

The online survey used in Phase 2 of the research investigated students' experiences of the second campus closure during winter 2020/21 and spring 2021, and sought to identify which factors influenced students' persistence. A range of independent and dependent variables were measured and analysed. The demographic independent variables were gender, disability, age, level of study, first in family to attend university, parent/carer, employment status, and whether they had a weekly tutorial. The student experience variables were online teaching and learning, peers on my course, University Centre culture and values, wellbeing, and confidence. Students were also asked to predict the likelihood on a scale of 1-10 of whether they would achieve a 1st class, good or pass degree, and whether they would complete their programme, and asked the binary question 'Did you contemplate withdrawing or suspending from your studies during this academic year?'. The final set of questions related to their perceptions of their personal tutor. Descriptive and inferential statistical analysis identified three significant findings.

Isabel Hallam

There was an association between student experience and withdrawal contemplation

Students who had not contemplated withdrawal reported a significantly more positive student experience during COVID campus closures than their peers who had contemplated withdrawal. The two elements of student experience that contributed to the overall significant difference were online teaching and learning, and wellbeing.

Nationally, we know there was widespread dissatisfaction with the online student experience in UK student populations during the first campus closure in 2019/20 (Office for National Statistics, 2021; Pearson & Wonkhe, 2020). However, this dissatisfaction did not translate into an increase in withdrawals. On the contrary, evidence from the Office for Students (2022) reports a decline in non-continuation of 1.3% in the 2019/20 academic year. This implies that although students were widely dissatisfied with the student experience, they did persist with their studies. However, my Phase 2 participants were asked whether they had contemplated withdrawing in the academic year 2020/21, not whether they had actually done so. The contemplation of withdrawal is a significant predictor of actual withdrawal from higher education (Willcoxson, Cotter & Joy, 2011), but there is not a direct correlation. Indeed 32% of my participants reported they had contemplated withdrawing but were still enrolled and studying at the time of the survey in the final weeks of the 2020/21 academic year.

Although to date there is a paucity of published research about withdrawal during COVID campus closures, there is some early findings which are consistent with my results. Zainol and Salleh (2021) found that 48% of withdrawing students at a Malaysian private higher education provider during the pandemic cited the reason for their withdrawal as low academic performance and a further 31.9% cited e-learning as their reason. Further, Su and Guo (2021) found that the biggest influence on student outcomes during COVID online learning was how students interacted with the learning content resources. Therefore, you could imply that the main reason for COVID withdrawal was poor academic outcomes and performance, and those outcomes are strongly influenced by the way students interacted with the online

learning. Thus, it would be reasonable to infer that if students were not satisfied with their online teaching and not interacting with the learning content, they would have poorer outcomes increasing the likelihood of withdrawal contemplation.

Most of the research published to date about the COVID student experience relates to the impact on students' wellbeing and mental health, but there is little that then considers the impact on withdrawal contemplation. Zainol and Salleh (2021) found that just 4.3% of their Malaysian student participants cited mental and physical health issues as the factor influencing withdrawal decision behind academic performance (48%), e-learning (31.9%), family or personal issues (17%), other (7.8%), and financial constraints (5%). However, this could be accounted for by a reluctance to share or discuss mental health difficulties. Students in Bangladesh (Dhar, Ayittey & Sarkar, 2020) and Thailand (Masuymama et al., 2021) reported that the academic demands of studying during COVID impacted on their wellbeing, indicating that the actual act of studying during the wider pandemic could have worsened wellbeing for some students. This may have prompted some to reduce their study load or contemplate withdrawing totally. Ten percent of Andrewartha, Knight, Simpson and Beattie's (2022) Australian parent-students reduced their study load during the pandemic, staying enrolled but transferring to part-time study or dropping some subjects, and a further 7% had deferred, taken a break in learning or withdrawn. It is possible to conceive that the 10% of Andrewartha, Knight, Simpson and Beattie's (2022) participants who reduced their study load may have contemplated withdrawing until they were advised there were alternatives to reduce their study load. Similarly, not all students would have sought support to consider their options, and some may have simply withdrawn rather than reduce their study load.

The association between student experience and withdrawal contemplation that was found within the survey data collected following the winter 2020/21 and spring 2021 campus closure is understandable. What is more, the major contribution of online teaching and learning, and wellbeing to the student experience and withdrawal contemplation is supported by research undertaken in universities around the world during the pandemic.

No significant difference of demographic factors and withdrawal contemplation

In contradiction to the established research literature that demonstrates non-traditional student demographic groups are more likely to withdraw than others, there was no significant difference between any demographic groups and their withdrawal contemplation in the current study.

Research in non-COVID times indicates mature students, those with disabilities, from lower socio-economic groups and from a Black, Asian and minority ethnic heritage are less likely to continue with their studies than their peers (Office for Students, 2022). This pattern continued nationally in the UK in the period of the first campus closure, the academic year 2019/20 (Office for Students, 2022). However, there were no statistical differences in any of the demographic groups measured in the current study and their withdrawal contemplation. Although it should be noted that neither socio-economic group nor ethnic heritage was measured in the current study. However, I was able to assess the additional demographic factors of level of study, first in family to attend university, parent/carer, and employment status.

Webb and Cotton (2018) found that withdrawal contemplation is more common in mature students, than in the general student population. Pressures of employment, including demanding job roles, the financial imperative to work more hours, and job loss or redundancy are cited as contributing factors to withdrawal contemplation for mature students (Capps, 2012; Castles, 2004; Markle, 2015). In contrast to the national picture, at the University Centre younger students are typically more likely to withdraw than their more mature peers, however in the academic year 2019/20 including the first COVID campus closure this pattern reversed and fewer mature students continued with their studies than younger students (Office for Students, 2022). This reversal of withdrawal rates that resulted in more mature students withdrawing than their younger peers in the 2019/20 academic year could be due to the challenges for parent-students (Andrewartha, Knight, Simpson & Beattie, 2022) and pressure on students' wellbeing, including financial worries during the pandemic (Zainol & Salleh, 2021). My research indicates that in the second year of campus closures, 2020/21 when the survey data was collected there was no significant

difference between young and mature students' withdrawal contemplation. It will be interesting to compare this reported contemplation with actual non-continuation rates for 2020/21 when they are available from the Office for Students in 2023.

Students who are the first in their family to attend university are typically more likely to drop out of their studies than their peers (Cotton, Nash & Kneale, 2017; Elder, 2021). Within the survey sample, 55% of students identified as the first in their family to go to university, and although these students were more likely to have contemplated withdrawal it was not statistically significant.

Family challenges and financial pressures are often cited as reasons for students withdraw (Jevons & Lindsay, 2018; Rose-Adams & Hewitt, 2012; Zainol & Salleh, 2021). Seven percent of Andrewartha, Knight, Simpson and Beattie's (2022) Australian parent-students withdrew from their programme during COVID, and a further 10% took action to reduce their study load. Therefore, one might expect to see a difference in withdrawal contemplation between students who are parent/carers and their peers, and those with different employment commitments. However, there was no significant difference in withdrawal contemplation between these groups in my research.

Research that indicates students from some non-traditional groups – mature students, those with disabilities, the first in their family to attend university, parents/carers and those with work commitments – are less likely to continue with their studies. Arguably the reason there was no significant difference between these different demographic groups in the current study is because 90% of University Centre students are from at least one of these groups, or the Office for Students (2017) underrepresented student groups. Thus, at the University Centre support is provided for students in these groups, with an understanding of their unique needs and this has supported their persistence compared to their peers at more traditional universities who may feel in the minority.

Students studying Levels 5 and 6 were more likely to contemplate withdrawal than Level 4 first-year students

Phase 2 survey data revealed that the level of study a student was enrolled on was a significant predictor of whether they had contemplated withdrawal. Level 6 final year students were more likely to contemplate withdrawal than their Level 5 second year peers, who in turn were more likely to contemplate withdrawal than Level 4 first year students. This is contrary to prior research that suggests students in their first year of study are more likely to withdraw.

Previous research suggests there is a wide range of factors influencing withdrawal contemplation in students in the first year of their undergraduate studies (Thomas, 2012; Tinto, 2006; Willcoxson, 2010). Nobel, Flynn, Lee and Hilton (2007) refer to a conference presentation from Patrick Terenzini in 1987, in which they cite evidence from the US to suggest that first year withdrawals account for half of all undergraduate withdrawal, but there is little equivalent up to date UK data to corroborate this. Willcoxson (2010) identified that personal factors influencing first year students' withdrawal included lack of commitment to the institution, career or course, or feeling socially disengaged, and their withdrawal was also influenced by their academic preparation and support. Level 4 first year students in the current study reported lower levels of withdrawal contemplation than their peers further into their undergraduate journey. However, this simply could have been accounted for by the timing of the survey at the end of the academic year, when all those surveyed had continued with their studies and those who had withdrawn were not surveyed.

Yorke (2015) found evidence for the concept of sophomore, or second-year, slump impacting on attainment as well as students' withdrawal contemplation, with fewer second year students receiving grades of 60% or above, equivalent to a 'good-degree', than their first or final year peers. However, contrary to the prior research that considers second-year students most vulnerable to withdrawal contemplation and a slump in grades, this research found Level 6 final year students even more likely to contemplate withdrawal then their Level 5 or Level 4 peers. I believe the reason for this disparity is more to do with the structure of college higher education compared to traditional universities. College higher education, including the University Centre, typically operate a

'two plus one' model, meaning that students tend to first enrol on a two-year Foundation Degree, then progress onto a one-year Bachelors top-up degree. This means that participants studying Level 5, were not necessarily affected by the sophomore or second-year slump in the same way as students studying a typical three-year undergraduate, as they will have been nearing the end of their qualification and able to focus on completion. In contrast, Level 6 students on one-year Bachelors top-up degrees would have been influenced by a unique and under-research set of circumstances. They have already 'banked' their Foundation Degree or Level 5 Diploma, so if they withdraw during Level 6 they already have a qualification, but are easily able to return to complete their full Bachelors at a later date as it is only one year. This notion is supported by Willcoxson's (2010) observation that third year students' withdrawal is sometimes accounted for by student leaving for employment, which could have been a factor in the current study as students were able to leave their Level 6, secure in their Level 5 qualification.

Students who had a weekly tutorial were less likely to contemplate withdrawal

The University Centre's commitment to students is that they will have a timetabled weekly group tutorial with their personal tutor and course peers. During the second campus closure when the student survey was undertaken, the hybrid teaching protocol for the University Centre pledged students would have online teaching aligned to the planned timetable, including a weekly group tutorial. However, 27% of respondents reported either not having a weekly tutorial or not always having one. These students were significantly more likely to have contemplated withdrawal than their peers who always had weekly tutorials during the campus closure, and this was also a significant predictor of withdrawal contemplation.

Despite the complexities of the definition of personal tutoring in higher education (Lochtie, McIntosh, Stork & Walker, 2017), it is widely reported personal tutors can play a key role in supporting students to persist with their studies (Richardson & Radloff, 2014; Thomas, Hill, O'Mahony & Yorke, 2017). However, Webb and Cotton (2018) found although 37% of their student

participants felt that the number of meetings with their personal tutor was too low, withdrawal contemplation was not associated with perceptions of personal tutoring. Thus, the research literature is inconclusive about the role of personal tutoring in supporting students' persistence. But the findings of the current study demonstrate that at least in a university where weekly group tutorials are the norm, having them supports students to persist.

The factors identified in this study as influencing college higher education students' persistence during the COVID campus closure, both support and challenge some of the previous findings. Students' experience, particularly their online teaching and learning and wellbeing experience, was associated with their withdrawal contemplation. This finding supports prior research in the field and logical assumptions that unhappy students are less likely to stay on their course. However, literature that indicates non-traditional students are less likely to continue with their studies was not supported by the current research that found no significant difference between student demographic groups and their withdrawal contemplation during the COVID campus closures. Although this finding contradicts the established literature, it is likely accounted for by students from non-traditional backgrounds being in the majority at the UC. Thus, they may feel a greater sense of belonging and their needs being met. In contrast, the only factor found to have a significant difference impacting student withdrawal contemplation was whether they had a weekly group tutorial.

5.3 Contribution to knowledge: Utility of Tinto's (2017b) model of student persistence for college higher education students.

My contribution to knowledge was the exploration of the utility of Tinto's (2017b) psychological model of student persistence for college higher education students in the UK during the COVID-19 pandemic. Drawing together the findings from the first two research questions about *what* the student experience was and *what* factors influenced persistence, the findings broadly support Tinto's (2017b) model. Tinto's (2017b) model (Figure 19) illustrates the

importance and interconnectedness of self-efficacy, sense of belonging, perception of the curriculum, goals and motivation.
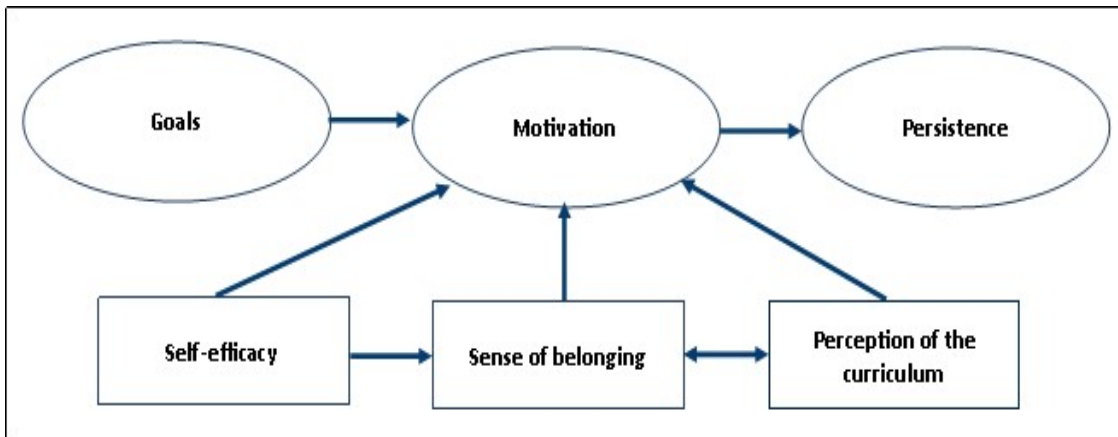
Figure 79. A model of student motivation and persistence adapted from Tinto (2017b).

In attempting to holistically interpret the research findings and explore the utility of Tinto's (2017b) model I have made some tentative adjustments to the model as depicted in Figure 20 below. To understand the college higher education student experience of my participants during the COVID campus closures, the model needed to be expanded for these non-traditional students to include the related conceptions of grit, resilience and determination; mattering; relationship-rich education; and possible selves.

.
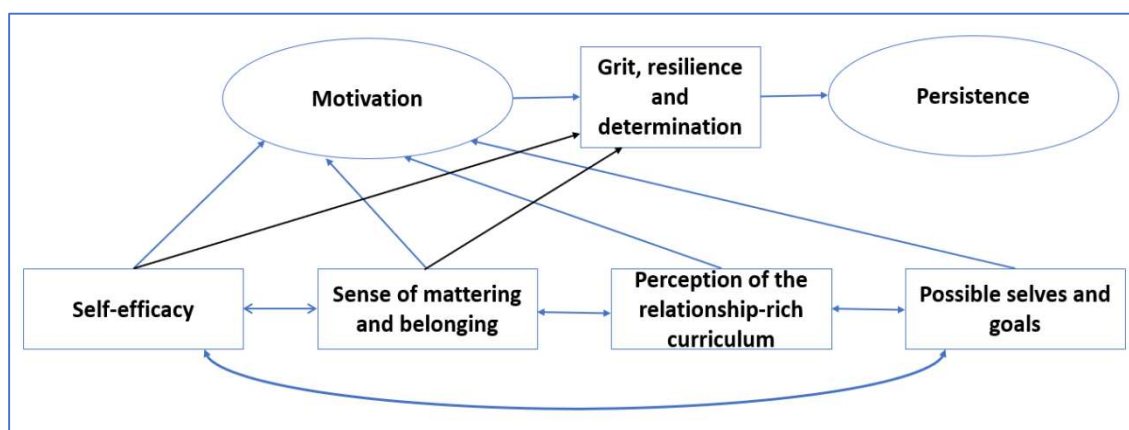
Figure 20: Proposed model for the psychology of college higher education students' persistence adjusted from Tinto (2017b) model.

There are two key adjustments, moving of goals, from its independent position directly influencing motivation in Tinto's (2017b) representation, to sit alongside and interconnect with the other psychological conceptions that influence motivation, and the inclusion of grit, resilience and determination as a moderator between motivation and persistence. The arrows from self-efficacy and sense of mattering and belonging, to grit, resilience and determination illustrate the role the constructs effecting grit, resilience and determination. I have also added double-ended arrows between the four constructs of self-efficacy, sense of mattering and belonging, perception of the relationship-rich curriculum and possible selves goals, to illustrate the two way impactful relationship between the constructs.

Grit, resilience and determination

Although grit, resilience and determination have distinct and specific meanings, I have grouped them into one conception as they encompass the traits or characteristics that enables people to behave in persistent manner. Thus, motivation is the drive to continue, but in the face of adversity or challenge, such as the COVID campus closures, people need grit, resilience and determination to actually persist. Hodge, Wright and Bennett (2018) found that students who were the first in their family to attend university exhibited significantly more effort-grit than their peers. Further, research by Datu (2017) identified that students with a high degree of relatedness to their teachers also demonstrated greater grit. Both these findings were illustrated in the experiences of the college higher education students in the current study. Participants show their grit and resilience when discussing the determination to continue studying to prove themselves, and how the relational support from the University Centre team enabled them to keep going when things were tough. Grit, resilience and determination have been positioned in my adjusted model between motivation and persistence, as the moderating force that enables one's motivation to be converted to persistence or to thwart it. It is reasonable to include grit, resilience and determination into the model of college higher education students' persistence due to the high number of students in college higher education who are the first in their family to attend university and the

relationship-rich educational approach of college higher education that fosters grit through relatedness and mattering.

Mattering

For college higher education students who are predominately commuter students, their sense of belonging relates more closely to their classroom and peers, rather than to wider university life. Although my participants implied they felt belonging to the University Centre, engaging in the community and feeling like a valued member of it, the sense of mattering preceded this for my college higher education students. "Mattering is the psychological tendency to perceive the self as significant to others" (Marshall, Liu, Wu, Berzosky & Adams, 2010, p. 367). Student participants spoke eloquently about how their personal tutors and other University Centre staff demonstrated that individual students mattered to them, and how that mattering was reciprocated. Tovar, Simon and Lee (2009) demonstrated that students who felt they mattered were more likely to participate in classroom culture. By participating in classroom culture, students will have improved their learning opportunities and in turn their self-belief and confidence. Thus, unlike Tinto's (2017b) proposition that self-efficacy can lead to belonging, but not the other way around, I would argue that the inclusion of mattering in the belonging concept would make the self-efficacy and belonging and mattering relationship two-way.

Relationship-rich education

Perhaps the most ill-defined concept of Tinto's (2017b) model is the perception of the curriculum. Tinto (2017b) describes it as about the perception of the value or relevance of studies, including an appraisal of the pedagogical approaches used. Elder (2021) and Cotton, Nash and Kneale (2017) found that students who had enrolled at their second-choice university or via the clearing process were less likely to complete their studies, arguably because they were comparing their experience to their envisaged perfect course elsewhere. In contrast, college higher education students have often chosen their course from the limited range available at their local college, rather than selecting the perfect

programme from those offered nationally for typical residential students. Thus, their perception of the curriculum is not necessarily appraised against a perceived perfect course, rather for how the curriculum is engaging. This could mean they are more open minded to the course content, and therefore how the course is taught becomes more important. Felten and Lambert's (2020) notion of relationship-rich education becomes more critical in this scenario, as the students are buying-into the course content via the people who deliver it. They are seeking teachers who care and inspire them to learn, rather than a specific course for a specific career goal.

Possible selves

My college higher education students tended had more present-orientated student focused aspirations, and few career goals. Stevenson and Clegg (2011) identified a subset of their present-orientated students who were student-focused, whom they described as orientated towards the survival in the present, and this reflects most of my college higher education students, particularly at the beginning of the course. Thus, one of the key aspects of the curriculum was the opening of opportunity. As their courses progressed and students realised they could study and achieve, and their self-efficacy and self-confidence began to increase, their ideas about their possible future selves began to grow to reflect goals beyond graduation. Students spoke about now being interested in jobs and careers that before their course they did not even know existed or would not have had the confidence to apply for. Therefore, I have included the notion of possible selves within the goals aspect and given it a close relationship to the concept of perception of the curriculum and self-efficacy.

Before Tinto's (2017b) simplified model of the psychology of student persistence, Bean and Metzner's (1985) model drew on both sociological and psychological conceptions to understand the influences on non-traditional students' persistence. They cite the importance of high school performance, but this contrasts to the broader prior educational and life experience which my participants discussed as influencing their grit, resilience and determination, as

well as their self-efficacy about studying. Bean and Metzner (1985) also include the psychological outcome of goal commitment, but as already discussed my participants' goals were present orientated and student-focused, rather than a typical undergraduate goal related to future career aspirations. The main element missing from Bean and Metzner's (1985) model, that was highlighted as essential to my college higher education students, was the notion of relationships and mattering, replacing Bean and Metzner's (1985) broad notion of social integration. Thus, although Bean and Metzner's (1985) model focuses on non-traditional students, and should have sociological and psychological utility to understanding college higher education students' persistence, my findings also highlight areas for adjustment in this model.

I have found that Tinto's (2017b) model of the psychology of student persistence remains broadly valid for college higher education students during COVID. However, the unique nature of college higher education and the non-traditional students who attend require the model to include the concepts of grit, resilience and determination; mattering; relationship-rich education; and possible selves, to provide a holistic representation of their persistence.

5.4 How did college higher education personal tutors foster students' persistence during the COVID-19 campus closures?

Having identified that having a weekly tutorial was the only factor that made a significant difference to whether students contemplated withdrawing during the COVID campus closure, this question sought to understand *how* personal tutors fostered that persistence to continue with their studies in their students. The findings draw on results from the Phase 1 focus groups and the Phase 2 online survey.

Meeting expectations

Survey respondents who had a weekly tutorial during the second campus closure, in accordance with the University Centre commitment to students, had a significantly more positive student experience than their peers who either did

not have a weekly tutorial, or did not always have one. The difference between students' experiences depending on their group tutorial regularity can be accounted for by two aspects, University Centre culture and values, and wellbeing. Participants in the Phase 1 focus groups made it clear that 'doing the job' of personal tutoring gave them confidence that tutors knew what they were doing, passing on a sense of reassurance and motivation. One of the aspects of 'doing the job' is fulfilling the commitment to have the weekly tutorial, thus demonstrating the University Centre culture and values by checking in on students' wellbeing, keeping them informed, and providing reassurance and motivation.

The frequency of university staff and student interactions has been found to be important for student engagement, satisfaction and student persistence (Richardson & Radloff, 2014). Conversely, although Webb and Cotton (2018) found 37% of their undergraduate participants felt the number of meetings with their personal tutor was too low, contemplation of withdrawal was not associated with the perception of their personal tutor. To further complicate the picture, there is a paucity of research about group tutorials, or the frequency of group tutorials and student satisfaction or persistence. This is partly due to the infrequent, but increasing, use of weekly group tutorials in UK higher education (Lochtie, McIntosh, Stork & Walker, 2018). One case study report from Stevenson (2009) explains how embedding tutorials into the curriculum help familiarise students with university expectations, norms and practices including study skills. This reflects the tutorial curriculum approach of the University Centre, whereby the tutor seeks to create a "safe, supportive and positive learning environment" (Lochtie, McIntosh, Stork & Walker, 2018, p. 190). Braine and Parnell (2011) also discuss the role of group tutorial, with their UK nursing student participants wanting more timetabled structured group tutorials with their personal tutors to support their development. This result implies tutorials did form part of their curriculum but there is a lack of detail to critically examine how their group tutorials contributed to students' experience or persistence. Although Stevenson (2009) and Braine and Parnell (2011) discuss the use of group tutorials, neither discuss the impact of such regular and structured interactions between students and their personal tutors in a group situation.

Lochtie, McIntosh, Stork and Walker (2018) summarise the wide-ranging role of the personal tutor including providing information about higher education processes, procedures and expectations, and embodying and representing the university. It could be that these factors were essential during the campus closures, as personal tutors were often the human face of the official messaging about the ever-changing COVID rules and expectations within the higher education sector. Indeed, not having regular tutorials may have led students to feel anxious about university arrangements and expectation due to lack of their tutor's confirmation and communication, as expressed by participants 8 and 9 in the focus groups.

Acceptance of the hypothesis that students who had a weekly tutorial would have a more positive view of their tutors' characteristics and values is consistent with the literature. Research suggests when students and tutors have time and space to get to know each other, the relationship that builds allows students to feel comfortable asking for support and feel cared for (Cotton, Nash & Kneale, 2017; Yale, 2019). It follows that if students feel supported and cared for, they are likely to express that they feel positively about their tutors' characteristics and values.

My findings, and those of the limited research about group tutorials, imply that having set the expectation that students would have a group weekly tutorial, those that did reported a better student experience and that their tutors were doing the job. As I have already demonstrated, students who reported a better student experience were less likely to contemplate withdrawal. Therefore, we can conclude that one aspect of tutors fostering persistence simply relates to them fulfilling the expectations set by the higher education provider, in this case, to have a weekly group tutorial. Conversely those who were not having the committed weekly tutorials created a more negative image of their student experience and the University Centre, and this impacted on their wellbeing due to unaddressed anxiety. If students were experiencing challenges with their wellbeing, the lack of weekly tutorials may have resulted in their wellbeing concerns not being picked up by the tutor or referred for wellbeing support, and ultimately students may have withdrawn from their studies.

Exceeding expectations

Focus group participants spoke often about how their personal tutors were going above and beyond the job, exceeding their expectations of the role of personal tutor. They recognised that tutors were working around the clock to fit in their work, home, and other responsibilities during the campus closure. This was evidenced by students receiving messages and replies outside of the working week and during holidays, and tutors demonstrating they were keeping students in mind by sending motivational messages near deadlines and job information via their own professional networks.

The demonstration that tutors were going over and above in the role is arguably a further demonstration that tutors cared about the students and felt they mattered. Tovar, Simon and Lee (2009) describe how students who feel they matter are more likely to participate in the classroom culture. The participation in classroom culture, or academic integration and engagement, has been shown to impact both on student experience and academic progress, both of which are associated with students' withdrawal contemplation (Skinner, Pitzer & Steele, 2016). Hagenauer and Volet (2014) presented a heuristic framework to understand teacher-student relationships. The affective dimension within the framework, when positively experienced by students and teachers offers a secure and effective relationship. Effective teacher-student relationships clearly affect students' course satisfaction, learning approaches, achievement, and retention (Hagenauer & Volet, 2014). Thus, we could conclude that the evidence presented in the current study supports the notion that students who feel like they matter, have a positive affective dimension within their teacher-student relationship, and that together these factors support the students' ability to persist with their studies.

Focus group participants emphasised that they had a genuine connection with their personal tutors, based on authenticity and honesty, not just doing their job. They spoke about tutors having had the same job-role as they aspire to, sharing their humour, spending time getting to know them as individuals, and celebrating their successes. Lochtie, McIntosh, Stork and Walker (2018) cite authenticity and valuing students as individuals as core values of the personal tutoring role. Within participants discourse there are echoes of Rogers' (1957)

proclamation that a supportive learning environment requires genuineness of the relationship, unconditional positive regard and empathy, and the principles associated with relationship-rich education (Felten & Lambert, 2020).

Student focus group participants were appreciative of their tutors going above and beyond to support them. However, they were aware and broadly empathetic of the cost of this for the personal tutors. They cited tutors using their non-work time to respond to their concerns and having to balance their own childcare and home-schooling responsibilities. It is possible that this was unique to the first campus closure, as during the second closure critical workers including educational staff, were able to send their children to school (Gov.uk, 2021). However, concerns about boundaries with the student-tutor relationship are not new. Research suggests that tutors struggle to maintain boundaries, particularly when supporting a student to achieve, either by over-supporting or not taking an active enough role (Gardner & Lane, 2010; Tait, 2004; Walker, 2020b). Tait (2004) investigated the distance-learning tutor-student relationship within the Open University, which has resonance with the campus closure time as all relationships were maintained at a distance. They found that getting the balance right in terms of giving encouragement but not putting too much pressure on to be particularly difficult at a distance. Similarly, Gardner and Lane (2010) reflected on the boundaries between tutor and counsellor. This challenge was articulated by my focus group participants who discussed their tutor checking in on them, being there for them at their lowest point, and being able to sense when they needed support or encouragement. Gardner and Lane (2010) felt that tutors needed to be aware of the limits of personal tutoring so that they could provide educational support and not therapy, similarly Walker's (2020b) tutor participants wanted more training to give them confidence in setting boundaries. Although my participants recognised the boundaries had slipped during the campus closures and tutors were going above and beyond, none suggested firmer boundaries were required.

The current research suggests *how* tutors helped to foster college higher education students' persistence during COVID campus closure was depended on how they met the expectations of students and exceeded the role. By

meeting the tutorial expectations of having weekly group tutorials, students were able to receive and confirm official communication with the tutor acting as the human face of the University Centre information and guidance, and continue to have social engagement with their peers and tutor in a safe and secure learning environment. Further, the weekly tutorials enable tutors to monitor students' academic and wellbeing progress, referring them for support as necessary which will have supported their persistence with the studies. In addition to meeting the expectations of the tutor, students greatly valued those tutors who went over and above to exceed their expectations. Students recognised that they mattered to tutors, that there was a genuine and authentic connection with the tutor, and that although the boundaries blurred during the campus closures these feelings of relatedness to the tutor mattered, and helped them to persist with their studies.

6. Recommendations for practice and research

Reflecting on the theory, research literature and findings from the current study there are implications and recommendations for the University Centre, and wider college higher education practice. Unlike in larger universities, college higher education providers often do not benefit from devolved responsibilities or the financial resources. Like myself, many colleagues within college higher education hold dual roles combining teaching in higher and further education, or teaching with their programme management responsibilities, or teaching with university centre leadership roles. Alongside these professional roles they are likely to be also undertaking research and/or further study in their spare time, as well as additional scholarship activities such as external examining or professional networking with employers. Thus, the recommendations made are for leadership teams within college higher education to consider how they can best be implemented without placing additional undue pressure on already college higher education practitioners.

Given the importance of relationships, relatedness and rapport with personal tutors, academic staff and other support staff, the overarching recommendation is one of embracing relationship-rich education (Felten & Lambert, 2020). To do this college higher education providers and staff can: genuinely welcome students and their families by recognising their prior experience; use a tutorial curriculum to develop students' confidence and skills in academic study and broaden their perceived future opportunities; provide individualised support and celebrations of achievement; make classroom learning relevant and connected to students' pasts, presents and futures; and support staff to develop student-centred relationship-rich pedagogies.

6.1 Genuine welcome to foster mattering

College higher education and non-traditional students typically feel anxious, and lack confidence about starting a degree (Mc Taggart, 2016). Their previous life, education, and employment experience might mean their self-esteem is low (Stagg, Eaton & Sjoblom, 2018). Consequently, they will need a lot of support

and encouragement from university staff, peers and importantly their family to persist with their studies. My research found that students wanted to make a strong relationship with university staff and their peers, so that they were comfortable to openly discuss their backgrounds, and prior educational and employment experience. They needed staff to understand, empathise, and care about how those experiences impact on their skills, confidence and self-esteem. They also need their family's support and encouragement to help them succeed. Therefore, college higher education providers and individual staff need to provide genuine and relentless welcomes to students and their families, to help them feel that they matter to individual staff and the organisation, enabling them to build a sense of belonging to foster their persistence.

The demonstration of a genuine and relentless welcome to students, whereby staff seek to get to know students, their life experiences and their aspirations, shows students that they matter. This is not a one-off occurrence, students need to be welcomed, cared for, and shown that they matter in all interactions with staff. As families are often non-traditional students' strongest champions and motivators, provide practical and emotional support during their studies, and are likely to not have a university experience themselves, providers need to make families welcome too and help them to understand the student experience. Providers can make students and their families welcome before enrolment with information on their website, invitations to students and their accompanying families to open and welcome events, ongoing opportunities for students to get to know staff and their peers, encouraging students to involve their families in important decisions, and providing opportunities for families to celebrate student successes whilst on the course and at graduation. With these actions in place, students should feel that they matter, develop a sense of belonging, have informed support from their families, and be comfortable sharing their experience and asking for help to support their persistence.

Isabel Hallam

6.2 Tutorial curriculum to improve academic self-efficacy and exploration of future selves

College higher education students typically have lower entrance tariff qualifications and are academically less prepared for university, have lower levels of human capital and a poor understanding of university processes, and have student-focused present-oriented goals and future self-aspirations (Blythman, Orr, Hampton, McLaughlin & Waterworth, 2006; Crawford, 2014; Sadowski, Stewart & Pediaditis, 2018). Poor academic skills can lead to poor academic performance and withdrawal contemplation (Zainol & Salleh, 2021), and lacking a strong goal can also impact on students' persistence with their studies (Burrus et al., 2013; Harrison & Waller, 2018; Nakajima, Dembo & Mossler, 2012). My findings that students valued weekly group tutorials and that they were significantly associated with withdrawal contemplation implies that college higher education providers should timetable group tutorials as part of their curriculum.

Findings demonstrate that regular group tutorials can contribute to students feeling secure and that they matter, and improve their academic self-efficacy and images of their future selves. Students felt secure because their tutors were knowledgeable and the human-face of the provider, gave them timely and accurate information, and answered questions to clarify concerns and alleviate anxieties. Students felt they mattered because their tutors took time in tutorial to get to know them and support them with their academic, personal and professional skills, and referred them to professional services teams to support with study, disability, wellbeing or employability concerns. The tutorial curriculum with embedded study skills, employability activities and personal development opportunities, enabled students to work collaboratively together in the classroom, where the activities were not related to module learning and assessment. The finding that having a weekly group tutorial was significantly associated with students' withdrawal contemplation implies that weekly group tutorial contributed to students' academic self-efficacy, sense of mattering and belonging, perception of the University Centre and their curriculum, and their future career and employability thinking and goals, contributing to motivation and persistence. Therefore, it is recommended that college higher education

providers incorporate weekly group tutorials into students' timetables, and these are used to address students' academic, personal and professional development.

6.3 Individualised support to strengthen academic skills and wellbeing, enhancing engagement in learning and assessment

Students enrolling at college higher education providers are likely to have lower tariff qualifications or a vocational background, and may have been out of education for some time (Thomas, 2015). As such, students typically lack confidence in their academic ability and may be nervous to start university (Mc Taggart, 2016). What is more, college higher education providers typically have a higher percentage of students with disabilities and wellbeing needs than traditional universities (Office for Students, 2022). Therefore, college higher education students will need individualised support to enhance their engagement in learning and assessments. My findings corroborate the typical view of college higher education students, and demonstrated their experience of receiving individualised support in the classroom, from their personal tutor and professional services teams greatly supported them to persist.

The research implies college higher education providers should make individualised provision available to all students. The individualised support could include studying, wellbeing and employability initiatives to enhance students' academic, personal and professional development. If students are encouraged to interact with different members of staff in the provider and develop positive relationships , this will help them to feel they matter. In turn, feeling they matter will support with their sense of belonging and persistence. The provision should allow for students' successes to be celebrated both personally and collectively. Also, individualised support should result in improved engagement in learning and assessment, and subsequent achievement. Staff should reach out to students to make connections and offer support, and show that they matter, rather than waiting for students, who may lack self-esteem, to come to them.

6.4 Connected classrooms to foster engagement and belonging

College higher education students are predominately commuter students who already have a support network and life activities in their home communities (Pokorney, Holley & Kane, 2017), therefore the classroom is the place for fostering connections where the social and academic worlds meet (Dwyer, 2017; Felten & Lambert, 2020, p. 50; Tovar, 2013). Connected, active and collaborative classrooms enable students to build valuable student-staff social interactions that can foster belonging and persistence (Dwyer, 2017). My findings validated this conclusion that for commuter students, like those at the University Centre, the classroom was the important place to make connections with peers and staff. Students discussed the significance of being able to ask questions, work and learn together, and personalise their learning. The importance of contextualising their learning in their past, present and future, enables students to develop their future selves.

Building on the research findings, college higher education providers should create a culture that enables practitioners to foster positive relationships and connections in their classroom pedagogies. This is important both for tutorials and other non-credit bearing activities, but also for module teaching. Relationship-rich pedagogies enable students to work with their peers to construct their learning, and to feel they and their experiences matter. In turn, this will help to foster belonging, peer learning and engagement in the learning content. Skinner, Pitzer and Steele (2016, p. 2100) describe classroom learning engagement as "students' constructive, enthusiastic, cognitively focused participation in learning activities" that contribute to their learning experience and performance, enabling students to persist with their studies.

6.5 Support staff development to promote consistent practice

Undoubtedly these recommendations for practice are already embedded in many curriculum areas within the University Centre and other college higher

education providers. Indeed, my focus group participants spoke about all these activities, but recognised they were not universally enacted by all staff, in all curriculum areas. Furthermore, research suggests that students often want more and improved quality contact with their academic staff and tutors (Braine & Parnell, 2011; Richardson & Radloff, 2014; Yale, 2019), implying the status quo is not always meeting students' expectations. Felten and Lambert (2020, pp. 41-57) cite some of the challenges for staff in implementing relationship-rich pedagogies including the physical space of the classroom, timetabling, and providers not valuing relationship-rich approaches. Further, some teachers may simply not be aligned to that approach, valuing their position, research responsibilities or subject knowledge more than student relationships. My findings demonstrated that most personal tutors were perceived to be approachable, genuine and caring, however students did suggest not everyone was like that. They recognised other teachers were less relationship-orientated or had competing demands or responsibilities.

College higher education providers can foster relationship-rich education and pedagogies through: structural changes in physical space, for example groupwork tables rather than lecture rows in classrooms; timetables that allow for students to get to know staff, for example the same staff teaching modules across the degree, no back-to-back classroom use so students can talk to staff after lessons; relationship-rich approaches advocated in teacher training and continuous professional development, for example discussing students background and agency, trauma informed approaches and active learning; curricula and schemes of learning that allow for students to consider their pasts, presents and futures, building on their prior learning and encouraging them to consider their possible future selves; and staff pay and reward mechanisms that allow for staff to be rewarded for relationship-rich activities such as personal tutoring. Lochtie, McIntosh, Stork and Walker (2018) discuss the core skills of an effective tutor and how those skills can be developed. College higher education providers should consider these core skills when considering who should act as personal tutor, as the role has a key place in supporting students to persist with their studies.

By implementing these relatively cheap recommendations to enhance the culture of the University Centre, or other college higher education providers, their students should have improved self-efficacy, sense of belonging, perception of the curriculum, goals, motivation and ultimately persistence (Tinto, 2017b). Although these recommendations for practice are specifically relevant to UK college higher education providers, they may be of relevance to similar community college providers internationally, and universities with a large non-traditional student population, particularly commuter and mature students.

Isabel Hallam

7.   Evaluation of research quality

This evaluation of the research quality and limitations of the study is based on a reflexive diary I kept throughout the research process. Using Gibbs' (1988, p. 67) reflective cycle, I consider how critical events within the research period potentially influenced the quality of the research.

Mårtensson et al. (2015) explain 'the practice of evaluation can be defined as an activity in which certain aspects of the quality of research practice are investigated'. However, they observe it is difficult to find a universal definition of what constitutes good quality research. I recognise that 'research quality' can be equated with research published in journals with high impact factors (Lindgreen, Di Benedetto & Brodie, 2021) and assessments based primarily on peer review such as the Research Assessment Exercise (Taylor, 2010), now replaced by the Research Excellence Framework. However, I have used the term 'research quality' here to encompass the evaluation of the mixed method research undertaken due to the often contradictory nature of evaluation criterion for such research. Creswell and Plano Clark (2011, pp. 266-270) advocate evaluating the quality of mixed methods research using the standards of both quantitative and qualitative research, and the emerging standards of mixed methods research. Thus, I have evaluated the phases of the research separately according to standards of quantitative and qualitative research, and collectively as mixed methods in the data analysis and interpretation section.

7.1   COVID-19 pandemic

Initially this research project aimed to investigate college higher education students' persistence and the role of their personal tutor. It was a three-phase mixed methods study: secondary data analysis to identify curriculum programmes with positive student experience and outcome metrics, online survey rating students' levels of the six elements of Tinto's (2017b) model, and finally focus groups with tutorial cohorts who had positive secondary data and survey ratings. The pandemic closed campuses across the UK just as I began

collecting survey data during the second phase. I had a fundamental choice, pause the research and sit out the pandemic, or embrace the ultimate challenge students are likely to face and reorientate the research to explore persistence during the COVID campus closures. With no idea of how long the pandemic would last, I chose to embrace the challenge. A rapid reorientation of the research in discussion with my supervisors and ethical approval resulted in an exploratory sequence (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p. 86) with follow-up quantitative methods in a qualitative study (Morgan, 1998). The design sought to take advantage of the unique situation using longitudinal focus groups for as long as the campus closures continued, and a subsequent quantitative survey to determine whether the focus groups findings could be generalised to the wider University Centre population.

The reorientation of the research resulted in considerable anxiety, but also excitement that the design could shift towards a more qualitative focus. Although remaining true to its pragmatic paradigmatic position, the redesign aligned more to my own increasingly phenomenological orientation. Considerable rapid response research related to student experience during the COVID campus closures was being discussed by academics around the world on Twitter and other professional networks, but most were utilising quantitative pulse survey methodologies. The opportunity to collect qualitative data about students' experience and persistence during the pandemic for a study that was already underway, thus data collection could commence quickly was too good an opportunity to miss. There were complications with such a rapid reorientation, which I will discuss below, but the decision to reorientate the research and embrace the challenge of the campus closures was vindicated when it became obvious that the pandemic and campus closures were not going to be over in a matter of weeks.

7.2   Phase 1 online focus groups

In response to an email invitation to all University Centre students, 13 students volunteered to take part, however, one was declined participation due to known mental health difficulties and two dropped out before the first focus group.

Allocated to groups of three or four, each student was invited to attend five online focus groups over the data collection period from May to October 2020, totalling 13 focus groups. The interview guide for each focus group was based on the six elements of Tinto's (2017b) model. Three key factors about the focus groups could have influenced quality: participant sample, online focus group mechanism, and interview guide.

Although a volunteer sample does not profess to be a representative sample, there was evidence of selection bias (Berndt, 2018). Six of the ten participants were known to me, only one participant was male, and they did not represent all the curriculum areas in the University Centre. The likelihood that students who knew me was anticipated, as it is understandable that people might be more confident to volunteer to someone they know. However, being known to me created further power imbalance and this was illustrated by the way participants slipped into the classroom dynamic with me as the teacher asking questions that they answered rather than the free-flow discussion anticipated in a focus group. I believe this question-and-answer pattern was further compounded by the online format that resulted in a less naturally flowing conversation (Richard et al., 2021). This resulted in the focus groups being perhaps more accurately described as group interviews.

The interview guide potentially intensified the question-and-answer format. My interview guide (Appendix 8) was devised from the six elements of Tinto's (2017b) model and the original pre-COVID online survey items I had already created for the initial research design. I was conscious to focus on the lived experience of the students, consistent with the phenomenological approach. I also sought to uncover how participants made meaning of their past and present experiences, whilst aware of the BERA (2018) ethical guidelines to protect the wellbeing of participants. I was aware some of the participants were likely to be struggling with their mental health during this unique period of campus closures, so endeavoured to navigate some questions carefully. This too may have contributed to the question-and-answer format whereby participants, both those known to each other and strangers before the groups, were conscious that they were revealing sensitive feelings, thus it was easier to talk to me rather than address the group. As such my role became interviewer rather than moderator, and therefore students did not make meaning between

themselves, rather I asked them to reflect on what others had said and discuss their responses.

Cyr (2019, pp. 71-78) discusses the role of the moderator in focus groups to move participants through the conversation, but in my focus groups it felt more formal, with each participant waiting their turn to be asked. I suspect, in part, this was due to my inexperience moderating focus groups. As part of my initial research design, I had intended to undertake focus group training before that final phase of data collection, but as COVID brought forward the focus group there was no time for training. I read Barbour's (2018) focus group guidance and endeavoured to incorporate it into my practice, but the question-and-answer format prevailed and then embedded in subsequent groups. Therefore, they were less aligned to a social constructivist epistemology which is characteristic of focus groups (Barbour, 2018, p. 35). However, the focus groups remained true to the phenomenological ontology of participants interpreting their experiences through the telling of those experiences, and the epistemology of phenomenology, whereby the researcher is open about being not bias-free.

Guba and Lincoln (1994) present five criteria of the trustworthiness of qualitative research: credibility or truth of the data and interpretations which Guba and Lincoln (1994, p. 114) recognise as paralleling internal validity; transferability of findings to other settings or groups paralleling external validity; dependability is the consistency of data over similar conditions and parallels reliability; confirmability is the researchers ability to represent participants responses free from the researchers' biases paralleling objectivity; and authenticity of the researchers' faithful representation of participants experiences.

Evaluating the Phase 1 online focus groups against this criterion identifies there is a high level of trustworthiness within the qualitative phase. The creditability of data is confirmed by the homogeneity of experience within the participant group, and the verifying of my interpretations by the participants throughout the research process (Cope, 2014). During focus groups, I used the active listening techniques of reflecting, clarifying and summarising to check my interpretation. I also shared the interim topic summaries with the focus group participants during the development of the online survey as a credibility check. Despite the

ideographic nature of this case study research at the University Centre, the transferability of findings has been tentatively explored through research presentations at conferences during 2020-2022 with UK Advising and Tutoring, the Association of Colleges and Advance HE. In both this thesis and my presentations, I have given rich and detailed descriptions of the University Centre context and participants, and been transparent about how I collected and analysed data to enable others to determine how applicable to information is to their own settings (Connelly, 2016). Dependability refers to consistency of the data in similar conditions and can be verified when another researcher concurs with the research decision and the findings were replicated (Cope, 2014). This case study in the unique situation of COVID campus closures is unlikely to be reproduceable to consider the research's dependability, but the aim was to provide rich data in this unique period rather than research that could be replicated and dependable. Cope (2014) describes confirmability as the researcher's ability to demonstrate the findings represent participants' views, and suggests this can be verified through clear description of methods and exemplifying how the findings derived from the participants contributions. I have demonstrated confirmability through a detailed and clear description of the qualitative data collection and analysis methods, and the accurate verbatim transcription and quoting of participants contributions to focus groups. The final criteria, authenticity is described by Guba and Lincoln (1994, p. 114) as fairness, ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, and catalytic authenticity. I have demonstrated authenticity in my reporting of the methods, findings and challenges when collecting and analysing data, not least the challenge of the ever changing impact of COVID on society, the University Centre and my research study. The participants' quotes within the main thesis have been selected to as representative of the phenomenon topics and themes being presented. For transparency, other quotes representing the topics and themes are presented in appendices 10 and 11.

The use of online focus groups was a necessity due to the campus closures and brought the advantage of recording and transcription, practicality of being able to participate from home, and the comfort of being in one's own environment. However, due to the volunteer sample, my in-experience facilitating focus groups and a more rigid interview guide than anticipated, the

quality of the findings will have been impacted. The transferability or external validity of the focus group data, whereby the findings can be generalised to the wider population, was always recognised to be limited due to the ideographic nature of the individual experience. However, despite the homogeneity of experience within the participant group, there was only one male participant and the creative, computing, business and engineering curriculum areas were unrepresented. This under-representation of male students and those from certain curriculum areas is likely to reflect my lack of familiarity to those student groups who are more likely to be based in other areas of the college campus, rather than the University Centre where I am situated, and their generalised lack of engagement in University Centre activities including the tutorial curriculum. Therefore, although there was a shared experience within my participant group, it cannot be said to represent all University Centre students, hence the Phase 2 survey was designed to determine if the factors raised by the focus group participants influenced the wider student experience and persistence.

7.3   Phase 2 online survey

An invite to the online survey was distributed to University Centre students in May 2021, at the end of the second national campus closure. The survey included items related to the five aspects identified in the focus groups as important for their student experience and persistence, items about their intention to persist and their experience of personal tutoring, and finally demographic questions. Despite four additional reminders using different medium, only 64 students completed the survey, a 9.6% response rate. The low response rate and survey items had implications for research quality.

The greatest threat to the quality of the online survey results comes from the temporal issues related to developing the survey, when it was distributed and the impact this had on the number of participants. The intension was to distribute the survey after the University Centre returned to in-person teaching in the Autumn term of 2020/21. However, it became clear in this period that the impact of COVID and campus closures continued, so I postponed the distribution of the survey until January 2021. Then, in response to the second

national campus closures from 1 December 2020, the survey had to be delayed again. I was prohibited by the University Centre from surveying students during the National Student Survey window from February to April 2021, therefore the only option was to distribute the survey following the return to in-person teaching on 17 May 2021, just three weeks before the end of the academic year. As such, all survey participants had continued with their studies to the end of the academic year, which will have biased the sample in favour of those who persisted. Inevitably these delays were frustrating and began to impact on my PhD progress, if I had postponed the survey once again to the Autumn 2021/22 term this would have meant I would not have been able to complete my write up in my planned timeframe. This would have cost another year of student fees which I could ill afford. Therefore, the pragmatic decision to develop and distribute the survey between May-July 2021 was made.

The student experience and persistence items were devised from the topic summaries and codes identified in the focus group semantic data analysis. Code wording was adapted into positively phrased statements appropriate for a Likert scale. Positively phrased items could have been considered leading questions which in turn risked social desirability bias (Dahlgren & Hansen, 2015) or yea-saying bias (Chyung, Barkin & Shamsy, 2018). These risks were offset by the need to avoid potentially sensitive questions impacting on students' wellbeing. The topic items were designed to test the generalisability of the topics identified in the focus group as contributing to student experience and persistence with a wider student population. Although the items were pilot tested with colleagues for face validity, the researcher-designed scales were not robustly tested for internal reliability before administration for purely practical and temporal reasons. To effectively pilot the study, determining internal reliability and the impact of individual items on each scale would have taken time, goodwill from participants, and impacted on the overall scores for each topic summary.

Guba and Lincoln (1994, p. 114) identify the conventional benchmarks of rigour in quantitative research as internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity. Internal validity, further defined by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018, p. 252) as seeking to demonstrate that the explanation given can be sustained by the data presented. The internal validity of the online survey is

illustrated through the lack of errors or anomalies in the data, and the consistency of the findings with previous research and the phase 1 qualitative data. This triangulation of qualitative and quantitative data demonstrates a consistency of experiences further emphasising the internal validity of the online survey. External validity refers to the extent to which findings can be generalised from the sample to the wider population (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018, p. 254). In phase 2 of this research, the sample was the 64 participants who completed the survey, and the wider population represents the entire student body of the University Centre. The external validity of phase 2 depends on the power estimation of the study. Jones, Carley and Harrison (2003) explain the power of a study is affected by the precision of measures within samples, the magnitude of significant difference, how important type I and type II errors are for the study, and the type of statistics used. Power and sample analysis was conducted retrospectively for the five hypotheses that were accepted based on the data analysed. Only one of the hypotheses met expectations of sample size and even distribution of participants across the groups, with two others meeting the size but with uneven distribution of participants, and finally two hypotheses not meeting either the size or even distribution of participants expectations. This indicates that the results of the inferential statistics should be treated with caution and considered tentative prior to any replication of the research with a larger and more evenly distributed sample.

Consequently, the survey used a largely untested scale that had not be piloted for internal reliability, and was distributed at a time when students were focused on their final assessments and had recently completed both the national surveys and the internal Support Services Survey, resulting in a 9.6% response rate. Despite this, the response demographics broadly reflected the entire student population, and the hypothesis that the student experience topic summaries would be significantly associated with withdrawal contemplation was accepted. Therefore, although the survey items and response rates were imperfect, arguably the survey did provide valid and generalisable results.

7.4   Data analysis and interpretation

The phenomenological focus group data was analysed using semantic and reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022), and the student survey results were analysed using a range of descriptive and inferential statistics. The data analysis and interpretation decisions relating to the integration of phenomenology and reflexive thematic analysis, and choice of inferential statistics had implications for research quality.

Three levels of thematic analysis were applied to the focus group data, semantic analysis focusing on the surface meaning (Clarke, Braun & Hayfield, 2015, p. 225) to identify topic summaries for the online survey used in Phase 2 of the research, and two levels of reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022) integrated with phenomenology to determine the student experience of persistence and the role of the personal tutor. The integration of phenomenology and reflexive thematic analysis is unusual in the research literature but not inconsistent. Indeed, Braun and Clarke (2022, pp. 189-190) cite examples of how hermeneutic phenomenology theory have been used to influence the interview guide and the bottom-up analytical approach focusing on participants' experiences. For me, the important elements of hermeneutic phenomenology incorporated into the data analysis approach were the relentless focus on the whole-part relationship in the lived experience, and acknowledging my own insider bias (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, pp. 35-36). Thus, I was exploring the individual elements that make up students' experience and persistence, to be able to see the whole picture. This involved the deliberate going back and forth between the different parts of the data, described as hermeneutic circles, to challenge my own preconceptions and initial impressions (Neubauer, Witkop & Varpio, 2019). I found this a liberating approach as I got to know my data and build patterns that shifted my perceptions of the students. I have always greatly respected students who take the plunge to study a degree later in life, but generally accepted them for who they are at that stage in life, rather than delve into their past too much. However, my participants emphasised the importance of their past learning and life experience, and how that has made them the resilient and determined characters that appear in my classes. Having worked with college higher

education students for seven years, this realisation that their past is as much about their present and future, as their present is, has changed the way I interact and support my tutees. Without the reflexive and hermeneutic circles used in combination, I am not sure this theme would have been so prominent.

The inferential statistical analysis of the quantitative data was designed to test eight hypotheses related to students' experience during COVID campus closures, withdrawal contemplation and personal tutoring. The greatest challenge to the statistical analysis was the small sample size. I aimed for a 20-30% response rate, which would have yielded between 130-200 responses, but only 64 students completed the survey. The demographic make-up of the sample broadly reflected the student population, suggesting that although selection bias would have influenced those who undertook the survey, the bias did not impact on the levels of demographic characteristics represented in the sample. Few authors will stipulate what is an acceptable sample size for inferential statistics, however Brysbaert (2019) suggests that for between-group variables or interactions, a sample of 100-200 or more is needed. However, Coolican (2014, p. 52) posits that if a significant difference has been demonstrated between two groups, then there is no need to repeat the test with a larger sample. Coolican's (2014, p. 52) proposition does give some reassurance, but as I was using multiple groups and variables, I remain concerned about the reliability of the statistical analysis due to the sample size. Therefore, although the results demonstrate statistically significant support for some hypotheses, the findings should be understood within the confines of a small sample size.

Creswell and Plano Clark (2011, pp. 267-270) explain the evaluation criteria for mixed methods research should reflect the individual qualitative and quantitative quality and evaluation criteria, plus additional element for mixed methods research. The focus for mixed methods evaluation is on the rationale, use and relevance of a mixed methods design for the student and research questions, and the transparency of those methods within the philosophical assumptions of the study. I have been explicit about how the mixed methods enabled the answering of different research questions within the study, but also how both the qualitive and quantitative phases contributed to the third and fourth research questions within a pragmatic paradigmatic position.

The research undertaken as part of this investigation into college higher education students' experience and persistence during the COVID-19 pandemic was robustly designed and implemented. However, due to the impact of the COVID campus closures, participant recruitment for both the focus groups and online survey was limited. The time commitment required to take part in the focus groups may have been off-putting to students already dealing with the pivot to online learning. Further, the timing of the online survey during final assessments at the end of a very COVID-disrupted academic year will also have impacted on students' willingness to take part in research. As a result, although the findings of the online survey give validity to the stories told in the focus groups, the findings ought to be recognised as unique to the University Centre and considered in the context of their sample.

7.5   Recommendations for future research

Evaluating the quality of the research and analysing the data collected, I propose several lines of inquiry that could be undertaken as future research: repeating the survey in non-COVID times, exploring how weekly tutorials reduce students' withdrawal contemplation, investigating the role of mattering in other non-traditional student groups, and testing the utility of my proposed amendments to Tinto's (2017b) model with other college higher education student populations.

Replicating the survey at the University Centre but in non-COVID times, will illuminate the impact of COVID on the students' experience and persistence including identifying which factors were particularly altered during the campus closures. Replicating the survey with the same population in non-COVID times, and potentially at different times in the academic year, may increase the sample size of participants as these temporal factors were considered to have reduced students' participation in the research. Having greater security about which factors influence students' experience and persistence would enable the University Centre to identify and focus on interventions to support students during their studies.

Future research to identify how and why weekly tutorials reduce students' withdrawal contemplation is already underway within the University Centre. The finding that having a weekly tutorial was the only factor that significantly predicted withdrawal contemplation prompted the University Centre leadership team to reiterate the importance of weekly tutorials and the role of the tutor to curriculum colleagues when they are timetabling academic staff in that role. Greenway (2022) talked about using weekly tutorials during COVID campus closures as a means of creating an inclusive learning community, with all members of academic staff leading tutor groups. They recognised that some staff were more committed to the role than others, but that the organisational buy-in enabled everyone to join the initiative that had positive impacts on students (Greenway, 2022). The University Centre's ongoing evaluation of the impact of weekly tutorial on students' experience and withdrawal contemplation is undertaken as part of our Access and Participation Plan monitoring for the Office for Students. The evaluation uses qualitative data to investigate students' and tutors' perception of weekly tutorials, particularly focusing on how they support students' success and continuation with their studies.

Mattering, as opposed to Tinto's (2017b) broader conception of belonging, appears key for college higher education students. Two tentative suggestions were put forward to explain this. Due to the non-traditional nature of college higher education students, who are less secure in their sense of self, they want to feel someone cares about them as an individual rather than to be part of something bigger. Further as almost all students are commuter students, they already have a strong sense of belonging to their community, work and family, and are in less need of feeling that they belong to their higher education provider as it does not form their major identity. Research to explore whether these propositions have validity both in the University Centre population and other non-traditional and commuter student populations would build on the current research and contribute to understanding their persistence.

The proposed amendments to Tinto's (2017b) model of student persistence presented in this thesis (Figure 20) should be tested for their utility in wider college higher education student populations, and other non-traditional and commuter student populations. To date, I have found no published research testing the reliability and validity of Tinto's (2017b) model, however some

authors have recently tested Tinto's previous models using different methodological approaches (Choi et al., 2019; Fincham et al., 2021). Choi et al. (2019) took a case study approach to holistically investigate the experience of four students who had experienced academic difficulties. They concluded that Tinto's (1975) model of student departure was applicable to these pharmacy students and that early identification of students' diverse background would enable interventions to support student persistence (Choi et al., 2019). In contrast, Fincham et al.'s (2021) large scale research analysed three decades of student enrolment data at an Australian university to test Tinto's (1987) model. Using graph embedding techniques they were able to successfully predict students grade point average and whether they would withdrawal from university (Fincham et al., 2021). The diverse methodologies undertaken by Choi et al. (2019) and Fincham et al. (2021) to test the validity of Tinto's (1975/1987) models imply that there is no fixed way to test the utility of conceptual models. As such, any future research to test Tinto's (2017b) latest model of student motivation and persistence and/or my proposed adaptation for college higher education students could use a range of methodological approaches relevant to the paradigmatic positioning of the researchers.

The current research as elucidated a range of future research opportunities to extend and clarify the findings of the current research. Some of this research is already underway as action research within the University Centre. Other research will require significant time and resource investment to maximise the potential outcomes for the benefit of college higher education providers and other providers with large non-traditional and commuter student populations.

8. Conclusions

This mixed methods exploration of persistence during the COVID-19 campus closures aimed to determine the utility of Tinto's (2017b) model of student persistence for UK college higher education students, and to understand the role of personal tutors in fostering that persistence. The outcomes informed recommendations for practice at the case study University Centre to improve continuation and success for undergraduate students. Although the research was a case study during the COVID campus closures, it is anticipated that the findings are applicable to other higher education providers with a dominant non-traditional and commuter student population, and during non-COVID times.

The research presents four contributions to knowledge and practice, the utility of Tinto's (2017b) model of student persistence for UK college higher education students, the importance of relationships and mattering to the persistence of college higher education students, the role of personal tutors in mitigating student withdrawal contemplation and the determination of college higher education students.

Previous theory and research identify non-traditional students, such as those attending college higher education, as having poorer success outcomes (Office for Students, 2022; █████, 2019) and different factors influence their persistence (Bean & Metzner, 1985). The current research found that college higher education students' persistence was influenced by the same psychological factors proposed by Tinto (2017b), but that additional and associated factors were also at play. Adapting Tinto's (2017b) model to accommodate these additional psychological factors, I moved goals from its independent influence on motivation, included grit, resilience and determination as one overarching concept, and added mattering, relationship-rich education, and possible selves to support persistence (Figure 21).
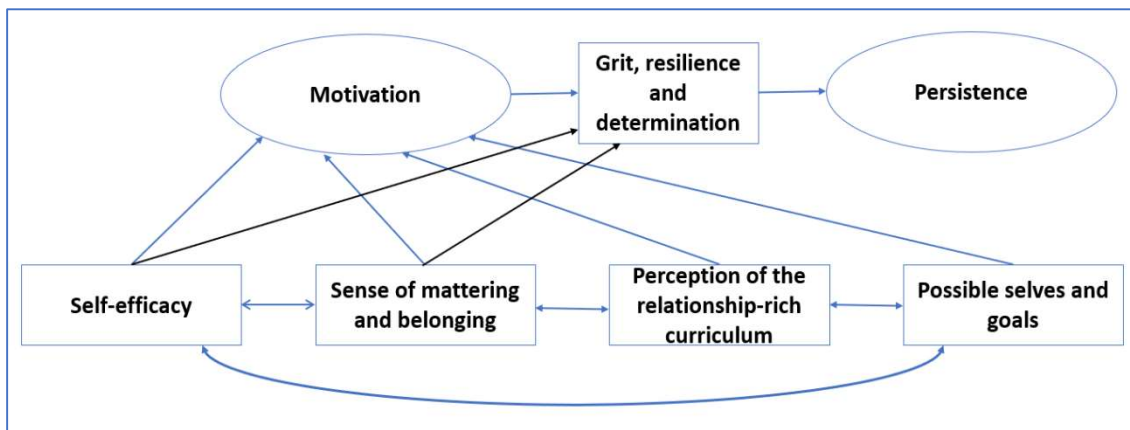
Figure 21: Proposed model for the psychology of college higher education students' persistence adjusted from Tinto's (2017b) model.

Relationship-rich education was personified by students' personal tutors who played a central, but not exclusive, role in demonstrating to students that they matter. Students expected their tutors to do their job, hosting a weekly group tutorial to support with study skills and employability, check on students' wellbeing, keep them informed, and provide reassurance and motivation. The delivery of a weekly tutorial was one of only two significant factors predicting whether students contemplated withdrawal during the second campus closure, the other being students' level of study. Further, students greatly appreciated those tutors who went over and above, demonstrating to students that they matter by creating a genuine, authentic and honest connection.

Tinto's (2017b) inclusion of belonging in the persistence model is challenged by the data from the University Centre students who alluded to the more personal factor of mattering, whereby students feel like they are "significant to others" (Marshall, Liu, Wu, Berzosky & Adams, 2010, p. 367). There is a paucity of research into the notion of mattering with under-represented, commuter or widening participation students. However, I contend that mattering is more relevant to college higher education students than the notion of belonging due to most being commuter students. Commuter students already have their own lives and community outside of university, thus instead of seeking to belong to the university, they are seeking to matter to individuals.

Tied closely to the notion of mattering is the importance of personal tutors and group tutorials. Students who had regular group tutorials contemplated withdrawal less, had a more positive student experience during COVID campus

closures and a more positive perception of their personal tutor. The role and importance of personal tutors and group tutorials is under-represented in the higher education literature, perhaps because the role of personal tutors and tutoring is so diverse across the higher education sector. Therefore, this research presents an intriguing insight into the potential of regular group tutorials to develop rich relationships with tutors who can demonstrate students matter, and support with students' academic, personal and professional development.

The determination demonstrated by the college higher education students in this study to persist with their studies during tough times appears to have acted as a mediator between students' motivation and persistence behaviours. I contend that their acts of determination were associated with their prior educational, personal and employment experiences, many of which were challenging. It is not clear whether their determination behaviours were because of gritty personalities (Warren & Hale, 2020) or a developed resilience enabling them to bounce back from stressful events or situations (Martin & Marsh, 2008; O'Connor, Mueller & Neal, 2014; Smith et al., 2008). Gritty individuals may have the capacity to overcome challenging experiences or those who had experienced challenges and bounced back from them might have the resilience to embark on and succeed in higher education studies.

This research has provided tentative and intriguing insights into the experience of college higher education students during the COVID-19 campus closures and the utility of Tinto's (2017b) model of student persistence. Further research on mattering, group tutorials and the determination of college higher education students in non-COVID times will further clarify the utility of the model for UK college higher education students.

The case study University Centre has acted on my emerging research findings, investing in more time for personal tutors and timetabled tutorials. My role as Student Development and Tutorial Manager was created in growing recognition of the essential role of personal tutoring in enhancing the students' experience and persistence. I have enhanced the tutorial offer to students, through tutorial curriculum developments, nurturing tutors' engagement with positive weekly tutoring practices, and training and support for personal tutors. These

developments have afforded personal tutors the opportunity to create rich relationships with students that are focused on the students' holistic personal, professional and academic development, to support their persistence.

This research demonstrates that due to their past educational and life experiences, college higher education students often lack confidence and self-efficacy about their ability to study at university but can have a grit, resilience and determination that supports their persistence. Through relationship-rich education, personal tutors and other university staff can demonstrate to students that they matter, building their self-belief and goals for their future selves. The University Centre, and other college higher education providers, can foster students' persistence by recognising the role of students' pasts, presents and futures, and giving staff, particularly personal tutors, time and space to develop rich relationships with their tutees so that they grow to believe they matter.

References

Aarons, H. (2020). *A practical introduction to survey design*. Sage.

Abel, W. H. (1966). Attrition and the student who is certain. *Personnel and Guidance Journal, 44*(10), 1042-1045.

Abowitz, D. & Knox, D. (2003). Goals of college students: Some gender differences. *College Student Journal, 37*(4), 550-556.

Adjei, M., Pels, N. N. A., & Amoako, V. N.D. (2021). Responding to COVID-19: Experiences of Ashesi University's Student Affairs Team. *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa, 9*(1), 135-156. https://doi.org/10.24085/jsaa.v9i1.1433

Ahmed, S. (2016). Reflections on conducting research on the 'war on terror': religious identity, subjectivity and emotions. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology, 19*(2), 177-190. https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2014.976488

Ajzen, I. (1991). The theory of planned behaviour. *Organisational behaviour and human decision processes, 50,* 179-211. https://doi.org/10.1016/0749-5978(91)90020-T

Akbağ, M. & Űmmet, D. (2017). Predictive role of grit and basic psychological needs satisfaction on subjective well-being for young adults. *Journal of Education and Practice, 8*(26), 127-135. https://www.iiste.org/Journals/index.php/JEP/article/view/38908

Aljohani, O. (2016). A review of the contemporary international literature on student retention in higher education. *International Journal of Education & Literacy Studies, 4*(1), 40-52. http://dx.doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijels.v.4n.1p.40

Allen, D. (1999). Desire to finish college: An empirical link between motivation and persistence. *Research in Higher Education, 40*(4), 461-485. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1018740226006

Allen, M. (2017). Survey: Leading questions. In M. Allen (Ed.), *The Sage encyclopaedia of communication research methods (Vols. 1-4).* https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781483381411.n605

American Psychological Association (2020). *APA dictionary of psychology.* https://dictionary.apa.org/persistence

Andrew, L., Costello, L., Robinson, K. & Dare, J. (2021). Going it alone: the university progression of women nursing students who are the first person in their intimate relationship to go to university. *Higher Education Research & Development.* https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2020.1867517

Andrewartha, L., Knight, E., Simpson, A., & Beattie, H. (2022). A balancing act: supporting students who are parents to succeed in Australian higher education. https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/publications/students-parents-higher-education/

Anselme, P., & Robinson, M. J. F. (2019). Incentive motivation. In K. A. Renninger & S. E. Hidi (Eds.), *The Cambridge handbook of motivation and learning* (pp.1-12). Cambridge University Press.

Arifin, M. H. (2018). The role of student support services in enhancing student persistence in the open university context: lesson from Indonesia open university. *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education, 19*(3), 156-168. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1183333

Armitage, C. J., & Conner, M. (2001). Efficacy of the theory of planned behaviour: A meta-analytic review. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 40* (4)*,* 471-499. https://doi.org/10.1348/014466601164939

Armsden, G. G., & Greenberg. M. T. (1987). The inventory of parent and peer attachment: Individual differences and their relationship to psychological well-being in adolescence. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 16*(5), 427–454. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02202939

Ashraf, R., Godbey, J. M., Shrikhande, M. M., & Widman, T. A. (2018). Student motivation and perseverance: Do they explain college graduation? *Journal*

of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, 18(3), 87-115.
https://doi.org/10.14434/josotl.v18i3.22649

Ashworth, P. (2015). Conceptual foundation of qualitative analysis. In J. A.
Smith (Ed.), *Qualitative psychology: A practical guide to research methods*
(3rd ed., pp. 4-24). Sage.

Association of Colleges (2018). *Higher education survey. Views of members on
topical HE Matters.*
https://www.aoc.co.uk/sites/default/files/AoC%20HE%20Survey%20Spring
%202018%20-%20report%20July%2

Association of Colleges (2019). *College key facts 2019/20.*
https://www.aoc.co.uk/sites/default/files/AoC%20College%20Key%20Fact
s%202019-20.pdf

Astin, A. W. (1984). Student involvement: A developmental theory for higher
education*. Journal of College Student Personnel, 25*(4), 297-308.

Astin, A. W. (1991). The changing American college student: Implications for
educational policy and practice. *Higher Education, 22,* 129-143.
https://www.jstor.org/stable/3447248

Bacon, M. (2012). *Pragmatism: An introduction.* Polity Press.

Bakadorova, O., Hoferichter, F., & Raufelder, D. (2020). Similar but different:
social relations and achievement motivation in adolescent students from
Montréal and Moscow. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and
International Education, 50*(6), 904-921.
https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2019.1576122

Baker, B. H. (2010). Faculty ratings of retention strategies for minority nursing
students. *Nursing Education Perspectives 31*(4), 216-220.

Baker, D. J., Arroyo, A. T., Braxton, J. M. & Gasman, M. (2020). Understanding
Student Persistence in Commuter Historically Black Colleges and
Universities. *Journal of College Student Development, 61*(1), 34-50.
https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2020.0002

Bandura, A. (1978). Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Psychological Review, 84,* 191-215. https://doi.org/10.1016/0146-6402(78)90002-4

Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory.* Prentice-Hall.

Bandura, A. (1989). Human agency in social cognitive theory. *American Psychologist, 44*(9), 1175-1184. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.44.9.1175

Bandura, A. (1997). *Self efficacy: The exercise of control.* W. H. Freeman & Co.

Bandura, A. (2012). On the functional properties of perceived self-efficacy revisited. *Journal of Management, 38*(1), 9-44. https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206311410606

Bandura, A., Pastorelli, C., Barabaranelli, C., & Caprara, G. V. (1999). Self-efficacy pathways to childhood depression. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 76*(2), 258-269. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.76.2.258

Barbour, R. (2018). *Doing focus groups* (2nd ed.)*.* Sage

Barstow, C. (2008) The power differential and the power paradox: Avoiding the pitfalls. *Hakomi Forum, 19-20*, 53-62.

Bartimote-Aufflick, K., Bridgeman, A., Walker, R., Sharma, M., & Smith, L. (2016). The study, evaluation, and improvement of university student self-efficacy. *Studies in Higher Education, 41*(11), 1918-1942. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2014.999319

Bathmaker, A-M. (2016). Higher education in further education: the challenges of providing a distinctive contribution that contributes to widening participation. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education, 21*(1-2), 20-32. https://doi.org/10.1080/13596748.2015.1125667

Baumfield, V., Hall, H., & Wall, K. (2013). *Action research in education* (2nd ed.). Sage.

Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin, 117*(3), 497-539. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.117.3.497

Bean, J. P. (1980). Dropouts and turnover: The synthesis and test of a causal model of student attrition. *Research in Higher Education, 12*(2), 155-187. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00976194

Bean, J. P. (1982). Conceptual models of student attrition: How theory can help the institutional researcher. *New Directions for Institutional Research, 36,* 17-33. https://doi.org/10.1002/ir.37019823604

Bean, J. P., & Eaton, S. B. (2000). Revising Tinto's theory: A psychological model of college student retention. In J. M. Braxton (Ed.) *Reworking the student departure puzzle* (pp. 48-61). Vanderbilt University Press.

Bean, J. P., & Eaton, S. B. (2001). The psychology underlying successful retention practices. *Journal of College Student Retention, 3*(1), 73-89. https://doi.org/10.2190/6R55-4B30-28XG-L8U0

Bean, J. P. & Metzner, B. A. (1985). A conceptual model of nontraditional undergraduate student attrition. *Review of Educational Research, 55* (4), 485-540. https://www.jstor.org/stable/1170245

Beauchamp, M. R, Crawford, K. L., & Jackson, B. (2019). Social cognitive theory and physical activity: Mechanisms of behavior change, critique, and legacy. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise, 42,* 110-117. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2018.11.009

Becker, H. S. (1963). *Outsiders: Studies in the sociology of deviance.* The Free Press.

Bergmark, U., & Kostenius, C. (2018). Appreciative student voice model – reflecting on an appreciative inquiry research method for facilitating student voice processes. *Reflective Practice, 19*(5), 623-637. https://doi.org/10.1080/14623943.2018.1538954

Berndt, A. E. (2020). Sampling methods. *Journal of Human Lactation, 36*(2), 224-226. https://doi.org/10.1177/0890334420906850

Bhaskar, R. (1978). *The possibility of naturalism.* Harvester Press.

Bhaskar, R. (1989). *Reclaiming reality.* Verso.

Bieg, S., Reindl, M., & Dresel, M. (2017). The relation between mastery goals and intrinsic motivation among university students: a longitudinal study. *Educational Psychology, 37*(6), 666-679. https://doi.org/10.1080/01443410.2016.1202403

Biesta, G. (2015). Pragmatism and philosophical foundations of mixed methods research 1. In A. Tashakkori & C. Teddlie (Eds.) *SAGE handbook of mixed methods in social & behavioral research* (pp. 95-118). Sage. https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781506335193

Bishop, F. L. (2015). Using mixed methods research designs in health psychology: An illustrated discussion from a pragmatist perspective. *British Journal of Health Psychology, 20,* 5-20. https://doi.org/10.1111/bjhp.12122

Blythman, M., Orr, S., Hampton, D., McLaughlin, M., & Waterworth, H. (2006). Strategic approaches to the development and management of personal tutoring systems in UK higher education. In L. Thomas & P. Hixenbaugh (Eds.), *Personal tutoring in higher education* (pp. 103-114). Trentham Books.

Bollen, K. A., & Hoyle, R. H. (1990). Perceived cohesion: A conceptual and empirical examination. *Social Forces, 69*(2), 479-504. https://doi.org/10.2307/2579670

Bolton, P. (2018). *Higher education student numbers.* House of Commons Library, Briefing Paper number 7857. http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-7857/CBP-7857.pdf

Bonfiglio, R. A. (2017). Grit is not enough. *About Campus, November-December,* 29-31. https://doi.org/10.1002/abc.21304

Bong, M. & Skaalvik, E. M. (2003). Academic self-concept and self-efficacy: How different are they really? *Educational Psychology Review, 15*(1), 1-40. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1021302408382

Bonwell, C. C., & Eison, J. A. (1991). *Active learning: Creating excitement in the classroom.* Association for the Study of Higher Education. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED336049.pdf

Bonneville-Roussy, A., Evans, P., Verner-Filion, J., Vallerand, R. J. & Bouffard, T. (2017). Motivation and coping with the stress of assessment: Gender differences in outcomes for university students. *Contemporary Educational Psychology, 48,* 28-42. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2016.08.003

Booth, T., & Ainsworth, M. (2002). *Index for inclusion: Developing learning and participation in schools (CSIE and EENET website version).* http://www.eenet.org.uk/resources/docs/Index%20English.pdf

Bourne, V. (2017). *Starting out in methods and statistics for psychology: A hands-on guide to doing research.* Oxford University Press.

Bowden, J. (2008). Why do nursing students who consider leaving stay on their courses? *Nurse Researcher, 15*(3), 45-58. https://doi.org/10.7748/nr2008.04.15.3.45.c6456

Bowles, T. V., & Brindle, K. A. (2017). Identifying facilitating factors and barriers to improving student retention rates in tertiary teaching courses: a systematic review. *Higher Education Research & Development, 36*(5), 903-99. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2016.1264927

Boyd, V., & Mckendry, S. (2012). Staying the course: Examining enablers and barriers to student success within undergraduate nursing programmes. *European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults, 3*(1), 59-76. http://www.rela.ep.liu.se/issues/10.3384_rela.2000-7426.201231/rela0059/rela0059.pdf

Braxton, J. (Ed.) (2000). *Reworking the student departure puzzle*. Vanderbilt University Press.

Braxton, J. M., Doyle. W. R., Hartley III, H. V., Hirschy, A. S., Jones, W. A., & McLendon, M. K. (2014). *Rethinking college student retention.* Jossey-Bass, John Wiley & Sons.

Brailovskaia, J., Teismann, T., Friedrich, S., Schneider, S. & Margraf, J. (2021). Suicide ideation during the COVID-19 outbreak in German university

students: Comparison with pre-COVID 19 rates. *Journal of Affective Disorders Reports, 6*, 100228. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadr.2021.100228

Braine, M. E., & Parnell, J. (2011). Exploring student's perceptions and experience of personal tutors. *Nurse Education Today, 31,* 904-910. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2011.01.005

Braun V. & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77-101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Braun V. & Clarke, V. (2013). *Successful qualitative research: A practical guide for beginners*. Sage.

Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2019a). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, *11*(4), 589-597. https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806

Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2019b). To saturate or not to saturate? Questioning data saturation as a useful concept for thematic analysis and sample-size rationales. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, *13*(2), 201-216. https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1704846

Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2020). One size fits all? What counts as quality practice in (reflexive) thematic analysis? *Qualitative Research in Psychology.* https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2020.1769238

Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2022). *Thematic analysis: A practical guide.* Sage.

Bray, I., Noble, S., Robinson, R., Molloy, L., & Tilling, K. (2017). Mode of delivery affected questionnaire response rates in a birth cohort study. *Journal of Clinical Epidemiology, 81,* 64-71. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jclinepi.2016.09.004

Brewer, M. L., van Kessel, G., Sanderson, B., Naumann, F., Lane, M., Reubenson, A., & Carter, A. (2019). Resilience in higher education students: a scoping review. *Higher Education Research & Development, 38*(6), 1105–1120. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2019.1626810

British Educational Research Association [BERA]. (2018). *Ethical guidelines for education research* (4th ed.). https://www.bera.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/BERA-Ethical-Guidelines-for-Educational-Research_4thEdn_2018.pdf?noredirect=1

British Psychological Society [BPS]. (2014). *Code of human research ethics* (2nd ed.). https://www.bps.org.uk/sites/bps.org.uk/files/Policy/Policy%20-%20Files/BPS%20Code%20of%20Human%20Research%20Ethics.pdf

British Psychological Society [BPS]. (2018). *Code of ethics and conduct.* https://www.bps.org.uk/sites/bps.org.uk/files/Policy/Policy%20-%20Files/BPS%20Code%20of%20Ethics%20and%20Conduct%20%28Updated%20July%202018%29.pdf

Brooks, M., Jones, C., & Burt, I. (2013). Are African-American male undergraduate retention programs successful? an evaluation of an undergraduate African-American male retention program. *Journal of African American Studies, 17,* 206-221. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12111-012-9233-2

Brooks, R. (2002). 'Edinburgh, Exeter, East London - or employment?' A review of research on young people's higher education choices. *Educational Research, 44*(2), 217-227. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131880110107405

Brooks, S. K., Webster, R. K., Smith, L.E., Woodland, L., Wessely, S., Greenberg, N. & Rubin, G. J. (2020). The psychological impact of quarantine and how to reduce it: rapid review of the evidence. *The Lancet, 395,* 912-920. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(20)30460-8

Bryan, V. D., Lindo, J., Anderson-Johnson, P. & Weaver, S. (2015). Person-centered model to explain interpersonal relationships at a school of nursing. *Journal of Professional Nursing*, 31(2), 141-148. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.profnurs.2014.07.003

Brysbaert, M. (2019). How many participants do we have to include in properly powered experiments? A tutorial of power analysis with reference tables. *Journal of Cognition, 2*(1), 16. http://doi.org/10.5334/joc.72

Bryson, C., & Hand, L. (2007). The role of engagement in inspiring teaching and learning. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International, 44*(4), 349-362. https://doi.org/10.1080/14703290701602748

Burrus, J., Eliot, D., Brenneman, M., Markle, R., Carney, L., oore, G., Betancourt, A., Jackson, T., Robbins, S., Kyllonen, P. & Roberts, R. D. (2013). Putting and keeping students on track: toward a comprehensive model of college persistence and goal attainment. *ETS Research Report Series, 2013*(1), i-61. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2333-8504.2013.tb02321.x

Bushe, G. (2013). Generative process, generative outcome: The transformational potential of appreciative inquiry. Advances in Appreciative Inquiry, 4, 89-113. https://doi.org/10.1108/S1475-9152(2013)0000004003

Buskirk-Cohen, A. A., & Plants, A. (2019). Caring about success: students' perceptions of professors' caring matters more than grit. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, 31*(1), 108-114. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1206948

Cabrera, A., Castaneda, M., Nora, A., & Hengstler, D. (1992). The convergence between two theories of college persistence. *Journal of Higher Education, 2,* 143-164. https://www.jstor.org/stable/1982157

Cabrera, A. F., Stampen, J. O., & Hansen, W. L. (1990). Exploring the effects of ability to pay on persistence in college. *The Review of Higher Education, 13*(3), 303-336. https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.1990.0020

Calabrese, G., Leadbetter, D-L. M., Trindade, N. D. S. M. D., Jeyabalan, A., Dolton, D. & ElShaer, A. (2022). Personal tutoring scheme: Expectations, perceptions and factors affecting students' engagement. *Frontiers in Education, 6,* 727410. https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2021.727410

Calandri, E., Graziano, F., Begotti, T., Cattelino, E., Gattino, S., Rollero, C., & Fedi, A. (2021). Adjustment to COVID-19 lockdown among Italian university students: The role of concerns, change in peer and family relationships and in learning skills, emotional, and academic self-efficacy on depressive symptoms. *Frontiers in Psychology, 12*, 643088. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.643088

Calarco, J. (2021, July 23). *Journal word limits make publishing mixed-methods research about as easy as fitting a mattress in a pillowcase.* [Tweet] Twitter. https://twitter.com/JessicaCalarco/status/1418557178227613698

Callaghan, G. (2005). Accessing habitus: Relating structure and agency through focus group research. *Sociological Research Online, 10*(3). http://www.socresonline.org.uk/10/3/callaghan.html

Camara-Zapata, J. M., & Morales, D. (2019). Cooperative learning, student characteristics, and persistence: an experimental study in an engineering physics course. *European Journal of Engineering Education*. https://doi.org/10.1080/03043797.2019.1569593

Cameron, J., Roxburgh, M., Taylor, J., & Lauder, W. (2011). An integrative literature review of student retention in programmes of nursing and midwifery education: why do students stay? *Journal of Clinical Nursing, 20,* 1372-1382. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2702.2010.03336.x

Capps, R. (2012). Supporting adult-student persistence in community colleges. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning, 44*(2), 38-44. https://doi.org/10.1080/00091383.2012.655218

Carini, R. M., Kuh, G. D. & Klein, S. P. (2006). Student engagement and student learning: Testing the linkages. *Research in Higher Education, 47*(1), 1-32. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-005-8150-9

Carreira, P. & Lopas A. S. (2020). Mature vs young working students: Similarities, differences, and drivers of graduation and dropout. *Studia Paedagogica, 25*(4). https://doi.org/10.5817/SP2020-4-4

Carroll, D., Ng, E., & Birch, D. (2009). Retention and progression of postgraduate business students: an Australian perspective. *Open Learning: The Journal of Open, Distance and e-Learning, 24*(3), 197-209. https://doi.org/10.1080/02680510903201599

Carter, J., Hollinsworth, D., Raciti, M., & Gilbey, K. (2018). Academic 'place-making': fostering attachment, belonging and identity for Indigenous students in Australian universities. *Teaching in Higher Education, 23*(2), 243-260. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2017.1379485

Castle, P., & Buckler, S. (2018). *Psychology for teachers* (2nd ed). Sage.

Castles, J. (2004). Persistence and the adult learner: Factors affecting persistence in Open University students. *Active Learning in Higher Education, 5*(2), 166-197. https://doi.org/10.1177/1469787404043813

Cavanagh, M. (2011). Students' experiences of active engagement through cooperative learning activities in lectures. *Active Learning in Higher Education, 12* (1), 23-33. https://doi.org/10.1177/1469787410387724

Chang, C-C., & Wand, Y-H. (2021). Using phenomenological methodology with thematic analysis to examine and reflect on commonalities of instructors' experiences in MOOCs. *Education Science, 11,* 203-218. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci11050203

Charlton, J. P., Barrow, C., & Hornby-Atkinson, P. (2006). Attempting to predict withdrawal from higher education using demographic, psychological and educational measures. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education, 11*(1), 31-47. https://doi.org/10.1080/13596740500507904

Child, D. (2007). *Psychology and the teacher* (8th ed.). Bloomsbury.

Chin, W. W., Salisbury, W. M. D., Pearson, A. W., & Stollak, M. J. (1999). Perceived cohesion in small groups: Adapting and testing the Perceived Cohesion Scale in a small group setting. *Small Group Research, 30*(6), 751-767. https://doi.org/10.1177/104649649903000605

Chipuer, H. M., & Pretty, G. M. H. (1999). A review of the sense of community index: Current uses, factor structure, reliability, and further development. *Journal of Community Psychology, 27*(6), 643-658. https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1520-6629(199911)27:6<643::AID-JCOP2>3.0.CO;2-B

Choi, A. N., Curran, G. M., Morris, E. J., Salem, A. M., Curry, B. D. & Flowers, S. K. (2019). Pharmacy students' lived experiences of academic difficulty and Tinto's theory of student departure. *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education, 83*(10), Article 7447. https://doi.org/10.5688/ajpe7447

Chyung, S. Y., Barkin, J. R, & Shamsy, J. A. (2018). Evidence-based survey design: The use of negatively worded items in surveys. *Performance Improvement, 57*(3), 16-25. https://doi.org/10.1002/pfi.21749

Chyung, S. Y., Kennedy, M., & Campbell, I. (2018). Evidence-based survey design: The use of ascending or descending order of Likert-type response options. *Performance Improvement, 57*(9), 9-16. https://doi.org/10.1002/pfi.21800

Chyung, S. Y., Roberts, K., Swanson, I., & Hankinson, A. (2017). Evidence-based survey design: The use of a midpoint on the Likert scale. *Performance Improvement, 56*(10), 15-23. https://doi.org/10.1002/pfi.21727

Ciani, K. D., Sheldon, K. M., Hilpert, J. C., & Easter, M. A. (2011). Antecedents and trajectories of achievement goals: A self-determination theory perspective. *British Journal of Educational Psychology, 81,* 223-243. https://doi.org/10.1348/000709910X517399

Clarke, V., Braun, V., & Hayfield, N. (2015). Thematic analysis. In J. A. Smith (Ed.) *Qualitative psychology: A practical guide to research methods* (pp. 222-248). Sage.

Cohen, J. (1992). A power primer. *Psychological Bulletin, 112*(1), 155-159. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.112.1.155

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2018). *Research methods in education* (8th ed.). Routledge.

Connelly, L. M. (2016). Trustworthiness in qualitative research. *Understanding Research, 25*(6), 435-436.

Conway, M. L., & Foskey, R. (2015). Apprentices thriving at work: looking through an appreciative lens. *Journal of Vocational Education & Training, 67*(3), 332-348. https://doi.org/10.1080/13636820.2015.1054863

Coolican, H. (2014). *Research methods and statistics in psychology* (6th ed). Psychology Press.

Cooperrider, D. L., & Whitney, D. (2005). *Appreciative inquiry: A positive revolution in change.* Berrett-Koehler Publishers Inc.

Cope, D. G. (2014). Methods and meaning: Credibility and trustworthiness of qualitative research. *Oncology Nursing Forum, 41*(1), 89-90. https://doi.org/ 10.1188/14.ONF.89-91

Copeland, K. J., & Levesque-Bristol, C. (2011). The retention dilemma: effectively reaching the first-year university student. *Journal of College Student Retention, 12*(4), 485-515. https://doi.org/10.2190/CS.12.4.f

Costley, C., Elliot, G., & Gibbs, P. (2010). *Doing work based research: Approaches to enquiry for insider-researchers.* Sage.

Cotton, D. R. E., Nash, T., & Kneale, P. (2017). Supporting the retention of non-traditional students in Higher Education using a resilience framework. *European Educational Research Journal, 16*(1), 62–79. https://doi.org/10.1177/1474904116652629

Coughlan, S. (2019, September 26). The symbolic target of 50% at university reached. *BBC News*. https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-49841620

Cousin, G. (2009). *Researching learning in higher education: An introduction to contemporary methods and approaches.* Routledge.

Crawford, C. (2014). *Socio-economic differences in university outcomes in the UK: drop-out, degree completion and degree class.* Report for Institute for Fiscal Studies, IFS Working Paper W14/31. https://ifs.org.uk/uploads/publications/wps/WP201431.pdf

Credé, M. (2018). What shall we do about grit? A critical review of what we know and what we don't know. *Educational Researcher, 47*(9), 606-611. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X18801322

Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2011). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research* (2nd ed.). Sage.

Cross, K. P. (1981). *Adults as learners.* Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Cross, S., & Markus, H. (1991). Possible selves across the life span. *Human Development, 34,* 230-255. https://doi.org/10.1159/000277058

Crotty, M. (1989). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspectives in the social research process.* Sage.

Croxford, L., & Raffe, D. (2015). The iron law of hierarchy? Institutional differentiation in UK higher education. *Studies in Higher Education, 40*(9), 1625-1640. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2014.899342.

Cullen, K., & Ramoutar, L. (2003). Building fresh perceptions of a class: Turning 'horrors into lovelies'. *Educational and Child Psychology, 20*(4), 116-130.

Cyr, J. (2019). *Focus groups for the social science researcher.* Cambridge University Press.

Dadaczynski, K., Okan, O., Messer, M., & Rathmann, K. (2021). University students' sense of coherence, future worries and mental health: findings from the German COVID-HL-survey. *Health Promotion International, 37*, daab070. https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/daab070

Dahlgren, G. H., & Hansen, H. (2015). I'd rather be nice than honest: An experimental examination of social desirability bias in tourism surveys. *Journal of Vacation Marketing, 21*(4), 318-325. https://doi.org/10.1177/1356766715577503

Dale, A. (2006). Quality issues with survey research. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology, 9*(2), 143-158. https://doi.org/10.1080/13645570600595330

Data Protection Act 2018, c.12, https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2018/12/contents/enacted

Datu, J. A. D. (2017). Sense of relatedness is linked to higher grit in a collectivist setting. *Personality and Individual Differences, 105,* 135-138. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2016.09.039

Davis, D. W., & Silver, B. D. (2003). Stereotype threat and race of interviewer effects in a survey on political knowledge. *American Journal of Political Science, 47*(1), 33-45. https://doi.org/10.2307/3186091

Day, L., Gomez-Becerra, J. J., Humphrey, C., Bedetti, G., Hermes S. S., & Carpenter, R. (2022). Setting our students up for success: Relationship-

rich education in general education programs. *The National Teaching and Learning Forum, 31*(2), 8-10. https://doi.org/10.1002/ntlf.30315

Deci, E. L. (1976). *Intrinsic motivation.* Plenum Press.

Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1985). *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior.* Plenum.

Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). The "What" and "Why" of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behaviour. *Psychological Inquiry, 11*(4), 227-268. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327965PLI1104_01

Department for Education (2011/2013). *Teachers' Standards guidance for school leaders, school staff and governing bodies, July 2011 (introduction updated June 2013).* https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/665520/Teachers__Standards.pdf

Department for Education. (2017). *Teaching excellence and student outcomes framework specification.* https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/658490/Teaching_Excellence_and_Student_Outcomes_Framework_Specification.pdf

Department for Education. (2019a). *Participation rates in Higher Education: academic years 2006/2007 – 2017/2018 (Provisional).* https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/834341/HEIPR_publication_2019.pdf

Department for Education. (2019b). Specification of the Individualised Learner Record for 2019 to 2020. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/800443/ILR_Specification_2019-2020v2.pdf

Department of Business, Innovation and Skills. (2014). *Learning from Futuretrack: Dropout from higher education.* Research report no. 168. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/287689/bis-14-641-learning-from-futuretrack-dropout-from-higher-education-bis-research-paper-168.pdf

de Place, A.-L., & Brunot, S. (2020). Motivational and behavioral impact of possible selves: when specificity matters. *Imagination, Cognition and Personality: Consciousness in Theory, Research, and Clinical Practice, 39*(4), 329-347. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0276236619864275

Devlin, M., & O'Shea, H. (2012). Effective university teaching: views of Australian university students from low socio-economic status backgrounds. *Teaching in Higher Education, 17*(4), 385-397. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2011.641006

Dewar, B. & MacBride, T. (2017). Developing caring conversations in care homes: An appreciative inquiry. *Health and Social Care in the Community, 25*(4), 1375-1386. https://doi.org/10.1111/hsc.12436

Dewey, J. (1915). The School and Society. University of Chicago. https://brocku.ca/MeadProject/Dewey/Dewey_1907/Dewey_1915a.html

Dhar, B. K., Ayittey, F. K. & Sarkar, S. M. (2020). Impact of COVID-19 on Psychology among the University Students. *Global Challenges, 4,* 2000038. https://doi.org/10.1002/gch2.202000038

Dobinson-Harrington, A. (2006). Personal tutor encounters: understanding the experience. *Nursing Standard, 20*(50), 35-42. https://doi.org/10.7748/ns2006.08.20.50.35.c4485

Dodorico-McDonald, J. (2008). Measuring personality constructs: The advantages and disadvantages of self-reports, informant reports and - behavioural assessments. *Enquire, 1*(1), 75-94. https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/sociology/documents/enquire/volume-1-issue-1-dodorico-mcdonald.pdf

Donkin, L., Hickie, I. B., Christensen, H., Naismith, S. L., Neal, B., Cockayne, N. L. & Glozier, N. (2012). Sampling bias in an internet treatment trial for depression. *Translational Psychiatry, 2,* e174. https://doi.org/10.1038/tp.2012.100

Donnelly, M. & Gamsu, S. (2018). *Home and away: Social, ethnic and spatial inequalities in student mobility.* The Sutton Trust.

https://www.suttontrust.com/our-research/home-and-away-student-mobility/

Douglas, J. A., Douglas, A., McClelland, R. J., & Davies, J. (2015). Understanding student satisfaction and dissatisfaction: An interpretive study in the UK higher education context. *Studies in Higher Education, 40* 2), 329-349. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2013.842217

Drabble, L., Trocki, K. F., Salcedo, B., Walker, P. C., & Korcha, R. A. (2016). Conducting qualitative interviews by telephone: Lessons learned from a study of alcohol use among sexual minority and heterosexual women. *Qualitative Social Work, 15*(1), 118–133. https://doi.org/10.1177/1473325015585613

Duckworth, A. L., Peterson, C., Matthews, M. D., & Kelly, D. R. (2007). Grit: Perseverance and passion for long-term goals. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 92*(6), 1087-1101. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.92.6.1087

Duckworth, A. L., & Quinn, P. D. (2009). Development and Validation of the Short Grit Scale (Grit–S). *Journal of Personality Assessment, 91*(2), 166–174. https://doi.org/10.1080/00223890802634290

Dunnett, A., Moorhouse, J., Walsh, C. & Barry, C. (2012). Choosing a University: A conjoint analysis of the impact of higher fees on students applying for university in 2012. *Tertiary Education and Management, 18*(3), 199-220. https://doi.org/10.1080/13583883.2012.657228

Duong, V., Luo, J., Pham, P., Yang, T., & Wang, Y. (2020). The ivory tower lost: How college students respond differently than the general public to the COVID-19 pandemic. *2020 IEEE/ACM International Conference on Advances in Social Networks Analysis and Mining (ASONAM),* 126-130, https://doi.org/10.1109/ASONAM49781.2020.9381379

Durdovic, M. (2018). Generative hermeneutics: proposal for an alliance with critical realism. *Journal of Critical Realism, 17*(3), 244-261. https://doi.org/10.1080/14767430.2018.1511189

Durkheim, E. (1951). *Suicide.* (J.A. Spaulding & G. Simpson, Trans.) The Free Press.

Dweck, C. S. & Leggett, E. L. (1998). A social-cognitive approach to motivation and personality. *Psychological Review, 95*(2), 256-273. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.95.2.256

Dwyer, T. (2017). Persistence in higher education through student–faculty interactions in the classroom of a commuter institution. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International, 54*(4), 325–334. https://doi.org/10.1080/14703297.2015.1112297

Earwaker, J. (1992). *Helping and Supporting Students.* Society for Research into Higher Education and Open University Press. from https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED415731

Elder, A. C. (2021). Holistic factors related to student persistence at a large, public university. *Journal of Further and Higher Education, 45*(1), 65-78. https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2020.1722802

Elliott, E. S., & Dweck, C. S. (1988). Goals: An Approach to Motivation and Achievement. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 54*(1), 5-12.

Elsharkawy, N. B. & Abdelaziz, E. M. (2020). Levels of fear and uncertainty regarding the spread of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) among university students. *Perspectives in Psychiatric Care, 57,* 1356–1364. https://doi.org/10.1111/ppc.12698

Embury-Dennis, T. (2020, March 21). Coronavirus: A timeline of how Britain went from 'low risk' to an unprecedented national shutdown. *The Independent.* https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/coronavirus-uk-timeline-deaths-cases-COVID-19-nhs-social-distancing-a9416331.html

Evans, B. J., Baker, R. B., & Dee, T. S. (2016). Persistence patterns in Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). *The Journal of Higher Education, 87*(2), 206-242. https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2016.11777400

Fawaz, M. & Samaha, A. (2020). E-learning: Depression, anxiety, and stress symptomatology among Lebanese university students during COVID-19 quarantine. *Nursing Forum, 56,* 52-57. https://doi.org/10.1111/nuf.12521

Fearon, C., Nachmias, S., McLaughlin, H., & Jackson, S. (2018). Personal values, social capital, and higher education student career decidedness: a new 'protean'-informed model. *Studies in Higher Education, 43*(2), 269-291. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2016.1162781

Felton, P. & Lambert, L. M. (2020). *Relationship-rich education: How human connections drive success in college.* Johns Hopkins University Press.

Fernandes, A., Ford, A., Rayner, G., & Pretorius, L. (2017). Building a sense of belonging among tertiary commuter students: The Monash Non-Residential Colleges program. *Student Success, 8*(2), 31-42. https://doi.org/10.5204/ssj.v8i2.380

Fincham, E., Rózemberczki, B., Kovanović, V., Joksimović, S., Jovanović, J., & Gašević, D. (2021). Persistence and performance in co-enrollment network embeddings: An empirical validation of Tinto's student integration model. IEEE Transactions on Learning Technologies, 14(1), 106-121. https://doi.org/10.1109/TLT.2021.3059362

Finlay, L. (2006). The body's disclosure in phenomenological research. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(1), 19-30. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp051oa

Fishbein, M., & Ajzen, I. (1975). *Belief, attitude, intention and behavior.* Addison-Wesley.

Fishbein, M., & Ajzen, I. (2011). *Predicting and changing behavior: The reasoned action approach.* Routledge.

Fishbein, M., Triandis, H. C., Kanfer, F. H., Becker, M., Middlestadt, S. E., & Eicher, A. (2001). Factors influencing behaviour and behaviour change. In A. Baum, T. A. Revenson & J. E. Singer (Eds.), *Handbook of health psychology* (pp. 3-17). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Flaherty, C. (2020, March 24). Working from home during COVID-19 proves challenging for faculty members. *Inside Higher Ed.*

https://www.insidehighered.com/print/news/2020/03/24/working-home-during-COVID-19-proves-challenging-faculty-members

Flanagan, K. M., & Einarson, J. (2017). Gender, math confidence, and grit: Relationships with quantitative skills and performance in an undergraduate biology course. *CBE—Life Sciences Education, 16*(47), 1-11. https://doi.org/10.1187/cbe.16-08-0253

Florian, L., & Black-Hawkins, K. (2011). Exploring inclusive pedagogy. *British Educational Research Journal, 37*(5), 813-828. https://doi.org/10.1080/01411926.2010.501096

Folk, A. (2018). Drawing on students' funds of knowledge: using identity and lived experience to join the conversation in research assignments. *Journal of Information Literacy, 12*(2), 44–59. http://dx.doi.org/10.11645/12.2.2468

Fosnacht, K., Copridge, K., & Sarraf, S. A. (2019). How valid is grit in the postsecondary context? a construct and concurrent validity analysis. *Research in Higher Education, 60,* 803–822. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-018-9524-0

Fowler, K. (2004). Perseverance and persistence. *IEEE Instrumentation and Measurement Magazine, 7*(4), 4-6.

France, M. K., Finney, S. J., & Swerdzewski. P. (2010). Students' group and member attachment to their university: A construct validity study of the university attachment scale. *Educational and Psychological Measurement 70*(3), 440–458. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013164409344510

Freedman, M. B. (1956). The passage through college. *Journal of Social Issues, 12*, 13–27. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.1956.tb00385.x

Freeman, T. M., Anderman, L. H., & Jensen, J. M. (2007). Sense of belonging in college freshmen at the classroom and campus levels. *The Journal of Experimental Education, 75*(3), 203-220. https://doi.org/10.3200/JEXE.75.3.203-220

Freeman, S., Eddy, S. L., McDonough, M., Smith, M. K., Okoroafor, N., Jordy, H., & Wenderoth, M. P. (2014). Active learning increases student performance in science, engineering, and mathematics. *Proceedings of*

the *National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America,*
11(23), 8410-8415. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1319030111

Frick, T. W., Chadha, R., Watson, C., Wand, Y., & Green, P. (2009). College
student perceptions of te(aching and learning quality. *Educational
Technology Research and Development, 57,* 705-720.
https://doi.org/10.1007/s11423-007-9079-9

Friedman, H. H. & Amoo, T. (1999). Rating the rating scale. *The Journal of
Marketing Management, 9*(3), 114-123.

Furrer, C., & Skinner, E. (2003). Sense of relatedness as a factor in children's
academic engagement and performance. *Journal of Educational
Psychology, 95,* 148–162. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.95.1.148

Fuse-Nagase, Y., Marutani, T., Tachikawa, H., Iwami, T., Yamamoto, Y.,
Moriyama, T. & Yasumi, K. (2021). Increase in suicide rates among
undergraduate students in Japanese national universities during the
COVID-19 pandemic. *Psychiatry and Clinical Neurosciences.*
https://doi.org/10.1111/pcn.13293

Ganguli, M., Lytle, M. E., Reynolds, M. D., Dodge, H. H. (1998). Random versus
volunteer selection for a community-based study. *Journal of Gerontology,
53A*(1), M39-M46.

Ganguly, R., & Perera, H. N. (2019). Profiles of psychological resilience in
college students with disabilities. *Journal of Psychoeducational
Assessment, 37*(5), 635-651. https://doi.org/10.1177/0734282918783604

Gardner, L. D., & Lane, H. (2010). Exploring the personal tutor–student
relationship: an autoethnographic approach. *Journal of Psychiatric and
Mental Health Nursing, 17*, 342-347. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-
2850.2009.01527.x

Gilbert, T. (2006). The practical, the technical and the political. *Journal of
Research in Nursing, 11*(3), 205-217.
https://doi.org/10.1177/1744987106064634

Gough, B., & Madill, A. (2012). Subjectivity in psychological science: From problem to prospect. *Psychological Methods, 17*(3), 374–384. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0029313

Gray, J., & Hackling, M. (2009). Wellbeing and retention: A senior secondary student perspective. The Australian Educational Researcher, 36(2), 119-145. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF03216902

Green, J., Liem, G. A. D., Martin, A. J., Colmar, S., Marsh, H. W., & McInerney, D. (2012). Academic motivation, self-concept, engagement, and performance in high school: Key processes from a longitudinal perspective. *Journal of Adolescence, 35,* 1111-1122. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2012.02.016

Grey, D., & Osborne, C. (2018). Perceptions and principles of personal tutoring. *Journal of Further and Higher Education.* 1-15. https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2018.1536258

Ghenghesh, P., (2018). Personal tutoring from the perspectives of tutors and tutees. *Journal of Further and Higher Education, 42*(4), 570-584. https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2017.1301409

Gibbs, G. (1988). *Learning by doing: A guide to teaching and learning methods.* Further Education Unit, Oxford Polytechnic.

Giorgi, A. (1994). A phenomenological perspective on certain qualitative research methods. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology, 25*(2), 190–220.

Giorgi, A., Giorgi, B., & Morley, J. (2017). The descriptive phenomenological psychological method. In *The SAGE Handbook of qualitative research in psychology* (pp. 176-192). Sage.

Goldman, L. (2014). Appreciative reflection, a wide-angle lens for changing perception. *AI Practitioner, 16*(3), 53-58. https://dx.doi.org/10.12781/978-1-907549-20-5-8

Goodenow, C. (1993). The psychological sense of school membership among adolescents: Scale development and educational correlates. *Psychology*

in the Schools, 30, 79-90. https://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6807(199301)30:1<79::AID-PITS2310300113>3.0.CO;2-X

Goodman, A. & Gatward, R. (2008). Who are we missing? Area deprivation and survey participation. *European Journal of Epidemiol, 23,* 376-387. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10654-008-9248-0

Gov.uk (2019a). *Further education courses and funding.* https://www.gov.uk/further-education-courses

Gov.uk (2019b). *Help if you're a student with a learning difficulty, health problem or disability: Eligibility.* https://www.gov.uk/disabled-students-allowances-dsas/eligibility

Gov.uk (2019c). *Help if you're a student with a learning difficulty, health problem or disability: What you'll get.* https://www.gov.uk/disabled-students-allowances-dsas

Gov.uk (2019d). *Student finance.* https://www.gov.uk/student-finance/who-qualifies

Gov.uk (2021). *Guidance: Critical workers and vulnerable children who can access schools or educational settings.* https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-educational-provision

Graham, M. J., Frederick, J., Byars-Winston, A., Hunter, A.-B., & Handelsman, J. (2013). Increasing Persistence of College Students in STEM. *Science, 341*(6153), 1455-1456. https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1240487

Grant, A. (2006). Personal tutoring: A system in crisis? In L. Thomas & P. Hixenbaugh (Eds.) *Personal tutoring in higher education* (pp. 11-20). Trentham Books.

Grasha, A. F. (1996). *Teaching with style: A practical guide to enhance learning by understanding learning and teaching style*. Alliance Publishers.

Griggs, D. M. & Crain-Dorough, M. (2021). Appreciative inquiry's potential in program evaluation and research. *Qualitative Research Journal, 21*(4), 375-393. https://doi.org/1*0.1108/QRJ-06-2020-0059*

Grimm, P. (2010). Social Desirability Bias. In J. N. Sheth & N. K. Malhotra (Eds.), *Wiley International Encyclopaedia of Marketing, Part Two: Marketing Research.* John Wiley & Son Ltd. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444316568

Graham, M.J., Frederick, J., Byars-Winston, A., Hunter, A. B., & Handelsman, J. (2013). Increasing persistence of college students in STEM. *Science Education, 341*(6153)*,* 1455-1456. https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1240487

Gray, L. (2020). Evidence-based policy-making and exam board insider researchers: creating communicative spaces. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice, 27*(2), 142-159. https://doi.org/10.1080/0969594X.2020.1749557

Greenway, C. (2022). *Everyone is welcome in our tutorials* [Webinar].UK Advising and Tutoring. https://www.ukat.ac.uk/events/webinars/archive/everyone-is-welcome-in-our-tutorials/

Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin, & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitive research* (pp. 105-117). Sage.

Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2005). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions and emerging confluences. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.) *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 163-188). Sage.

Hagenauer, G. & Volet, S. E. (2014). Teacher–student relationship at university: an important yet under-researched field. *Oxford Review of Education, 40*(3), 370-388. https://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2014.921613

Hagerty, M. R. (1999). Testing Maslow's hierarchy of needs: National quality-of-life across time. *Social Indicators Research, 46*, 249-271. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1006921107298

Hammersley, M. (2012). Troubling theory in case study research. *Higher Education Research & Development, 31*(3), 393-405. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2011.631517

Hammond, M. (2013). The contribution of pragmatism to understanding education action research: value and consequences. *Educational Action Research, 21*(4), 603-618. https://doi.org/10.1080/09650792.2013.832632

Hampton, N. Z., & Mason, E. (2003). Learning disabilities, gender, sources of efficacy, self-efficacy beliefs, and academic achievement in high school students. *Journal of School Psychology, 41,* 101-112. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0022-4405(03)00028-1

Hanley, S. J., & Abell, S. C. (2002). Maslow and relatedness: creating an interpersonal model of self-actualization. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology, 42*(4), 37-57. https://doi.org/10.1177/002216702237123

Hanna, P., & Mwale, S. (2017). 'I'm Not with You, Yet I Am …'. In V. Braun, V. Clarke, & Gray D. (Eds.), *Collecting Qualitative Data A Practical Guide to Textual, Media and Virtual Techniques* (pp. 235-255). Cambridge University Press.

Harland, T. (2014). Learning about case study methodology to research higher education. *Higher Education Research & Development, 33*(6), 1113-1122. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2014.911253

Harrison, N. (2018). Using the lens of 'possible selves' to explore access to higher education: A new conceptual model for practice, policy, and research. *Social Sciences, 7*(209), 1-21. https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci7100209

Harrison, N., Davies, S., Harris, R., & Waller, R. (2018) Access, participation and capabilities: theorising the contribution of university bursaries to students' well-being, flourishing and success. *Cambridge Journal of Education, 48*(6), 677-695. https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764X.2017.1401586

Hartley, M. T. (2011). Examining the relationships between resilience, mental health, and academic persistence in undergraduate college students. *Journal of American College Health, 59*(7), 596-604. https://doi.org/10.1080/07448481.2010.515632

Hausmann, L. R. M., Schofield, J. W., & Woods, R. L. (2007). Sense of belonging as a predictor of intentions to persist among African American and white first-year college students. *Research in Higher Education, 48*(7), https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-007-9052-9

Hausmann, L. R. M., Ye, F., Schofield, J. W., & Woods, R. L. (2009). Sense of belonging and persistence in white and African American first-year students. *Research in Higher Education, 50,* 649-669. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-009-9137-8

Hefferon, K., & Boniwell, I. (2011). *Positive psychology: Theory, research and applications.* Open University Press.

Heidegger, M. (1927/1996). *Being and time: A translation of Sein und Zeit* (J. Stambaugh, Trans.). State University of New York Press.

Heim, C. (2012). Tutorial facilitation in the humanities based on the tenets of Carl Rogers. *Higher Education,* 63, 289-298. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-011-9441-z

Henry, C. D. (2017). Humanistic psychology and introductory textbooks: a 21st-century reassessment. *The Humanistic Psychologist, 45*(3), 281–294. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/hum0000056

HESA. (2019). *Non-continuation: UK performance indicators 2016/17.* https://www.hesa.ac.uk/news/07-03-2019/non-continuation-tables

Hewitt, J. P. (2009). The social construction of self-esteem. In S. J. Lopez and C. R. Snyder (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of positive psychology* (2nd ed.) (pp. 217-224). Oxford University Press.

Hidi, S. E. & Renninger, K. A. (2019). Introduction: Motivation and its relationship to learning. In K. A. Renninger & S. E. Hidi (Eds.), *The Cambridge handbook of motivation and learning* (pp.1-12). Cambridge University Press.

Higher Education Academy. (2016). *Enhancing student success in higher education.* https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/system/files/downloads/higher_education_academy_-_white_paper_-_student_success_-_210416.pdf

Higher Education Academy. (2018). *Mind the Gap…How can we help commuter students get the most out of their studies?* https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/blog-entry/mind-gaphow-can-we-help-commuter-students-get-most-out-their-studies

Higher Education Policy Institute. (2018). *Homeward Bound: Defining, understanding and aiding 'commuter students'.* https://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/HEPI-Homeward-Bound-Defining-understanding-and-aiding-%E2%80%98commuter-students%E2%80%99-Report-11429_11_18Web-1.pdf

Higher Education Statistics Agency. (2020). *Non-continuation summary: UK Performance Indicators 2018/19.* https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/performance-indicators/non-continuation-summary-1819

Higher Education Statistics Agency. (2022). *Non-continuation: UK Performance Indicators.* https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/performance-indicators/non-continuation

Hillman, N. (2021). *A short guide to non-continuation in UK universities.* HEPI Policy Note 28. https://www.hepi.ac.uk/2021/01/07/a-short-guide-to-non-continuation-in-uk-universities

Ho, K. H. M., Chiang, V. C. L., & Leung, D. (2017). Hermeneutic phenomenological analysis: The 'possibility' beyond 'actuality' in thematic analysis. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 73*(7), 1757-1766. https://doi.org/10.1111/jan.13255

Hockings, C. (2010) *Inclusive learning and teaching in higher education: a synthesis of research.* https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/system/files/inclusive_teaching_and_learning_in_he_synthesis_200410_0.pdf

Hodge, B., Wright, B., & Bennett, P. (2018). The role of grit in determining engagement and academic outcomes for university students. *Research in Higher Education, 59,* 448-460. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-017-9474-y

Hu, X. (2018). Methodological implications of critical realism for entrepreneurship research. *Journal of Critical Realism, 17*(2), 118-139. https://doi.org/10.1080/14767430.2018.1454705

Husbands, C., & Natalie D. (2020, March 30). *Eight interventions for mitigating the impact of COVID-19 on higher education.* Higher Education Policy Institute. https://www.hepi.ac.uk/2020/03/30/eight-interventions-against-COVID-19-for-the-higher-education-sector/

Humphrey, O., & Lowe T. (2017). Exploring how a 'Sense of Belonging' is facilitated at different stages of the student journey in Higher Education. *Journal of Educational Innovation, Partnership and Change, 3*(1). http://dx.doi.org/10.21100/jeipc.v3i1.583

Hunt, N. & Loxley, A. (2021). Student perspectives on integration in part-time, flexible higher education in Ireland;' we don't socialise here'. *Journal of Further and Higher Education, 45*(4), 451-463. https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2020.1779677

Irvine, J. (2018). A framework for comparing theories related to motivation in education. *Research in Higher Education Journal, 35*, 1-30. https://eric.ed.gov/contentdelivery/servlet/ERICServlet?accno=EJ1194268

Jackson, J. J., Hill, P. L., & Roberts, B. W. (2012). Misconceptions of traits continue to persist: a response to Bandura. *Journal of Management, 38*(3), 745-752. https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206312438775

Jackson, A. (2020, July 15). The expectation gap: students' experience of learning during COVID-19 and their expectations for next year. *Wonkhe.* https://wonkhe.com/blogs/the-expectation-gap-students-experience-of-learning-during-COVID-19-and-their-expectations-for-next-year/

Jackson, L. (2020). Academic freedom of students. *Educational Philosophy and Theory.* https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2020.1773798

Jevons, C. & Lindsay, S. (2018). The middle years slump: addressing student-reported barriers to academic progress. *Higher Education Research & Development,* 37(6), 1156-1170. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2018.1462305

JISC. (2021, August 29). *Accessibility.*
https://www.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/accessibility/

Johnson, B. & Gray, R. (2015). A history of philosophical and theoretical issues for mixed methods. In A. Tashakkori & C. Teddlie (Eds.), *SAGE Handbook of mixed methods in social and behavioral research.* (pp. 69-94). Sage.

Johnson, R. B. & Onwuegbuzie, A. J. (2004). Mixed methods research: A research paradigm whose time has come. *Educational Researcher, 31*(7), 14-26. https://www.jstor.org/stable/3700093

Johnson, R. B., Onwuegbuzie, A. J., & Turner, L. A. (2007). Towards a definition of mixed methods research. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research, 1*(2), 112-133. https://doi.org/10.1177/1558689806298224

Jojoa, M., Lazaro, E., Garcia-Zapirain, B., Gonzalez, M. J. & Urizar, E. (2021). The Impact of COVID 19 on University Staff and Students from Iberoamerica: Online Learning and Teaching Experience. International *Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 18,* 5820. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18115820

Jones, S. R., Carley, S., & Harrison, M. (2003). An introduction to power and sample size estimation. *Emergency Medicine Journal, 20,* 453-458. https://doi.org/10.1136/emj.20.5.453

Karaman, O. & Cirak, Y. (2017). The belonging to the university scale. *Acta Didactica Napocensia, 10*(2), 1-20. http://padi.psiedu.ubbcluj.ro/adn/v10n2a1.htm

Kardong-Edgren, S. (2013). Bandura's self-efficacy theory… Something is missing. *Clinical Simulation in Nursing, 9,* 327-328. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecns.2013.07.001

Kember, D. (1999). Integrating part-time study with family, work and social obligations. *Studies in Higher Education, 24*(1), 109-124. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079912331380178

Kember, D., Lee, K., & Li, N. (2001). Cultivating a sense of belonging in part-time students. *International Journal of Lifelong Education, 20*(4), 326-341. https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370117754

Kershaw, A. (2019, September 27). More than half of young people now going to university, figures show. *The Independent.* https://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/university-students-young-people-over-half-first-time-a9122321.html

Kettle, M. (2011). Academic practice as explanatory framework: reconceptualising international student academic engagement and university teaching. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education, 32*(1), 1-14. https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2011.537067

King, N., Horrocks, C., & Brooks, J. (2019). *Interviews in qualitative research* (2nd ed.). Sage.

Kite, J., & Phongsavan, P. (2017). Insights for conducting real-time focus groups online using a web conferencing service [version 1; peer review: 2 approved with reservations]. *F100 Research, 6*(122). https://doi.org/10.12688/f1000research.10427.2

Klingner, J. K. & Boardman, A. G. (2011). Addressing the "research gap" in special education through mixed methods. *Learning Disability Quarterly, 34*(3), 203-218. https://www.jstor.org/stable/23053308

Koelen, J. A., Mansueto, A. C., Finnemann, A., de Koning, L., van der Heijde, C. M., Vonk, P., Wolters, N.E., Klein, A., Epskamp, S., & Wiers, R. W. (2021). COVID-19 and mental health among at-risk university students: A prospective study into risk and protective factors. *International Journal of Methods in Psychiatric Research,* e1901. https://doi.org/10.1002/mpr.1901

Krafona, K. (2014). A sense of belonging in a university community: A study of undergraduate students. *International Journal of Psychology and Behavioral Sciences, 4*(1), 16-20. http://article.sapub.org/10.5923.j.ijpbs.20140401.03.html

Krosnick, J. A., & Presser, S. (2009). *Question and questionnaire design.* https://web.stanford.edu/dept/communication/faculty/krosnick/docs/2009/2009_handbook_krosnick.pdf

Kuh, G. D., Cruce, T. M., Shoup, R., Kinzie, J., & Gonyea, R. M. (2008). Unmasking the effects of student engagement on first-year college grades

and persistence. *The Journal of Higher Education, 79*(5), 540-563. https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2008.11772116

Kuo, Y.-C., Walker, A. E., Belland, B. R., & Schroder, K. E. E. (2013). A predictive study of student satisfaction in online education programs. *The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning, 14*(1), 16-39. https://doi.org/10.19173/irrodl.v14i1.1338

Kurcer, M. A., Erdogan, Z. & Kades, V. C. (2021). The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on health anxiety and cyberchondria levels of university students. *Perspectives in Psychiatric Care, 58,* 132-140. https://doi.org/10.1111/ppc.12850

Langdridge, D. (2007). *Phenomenological psychology: Theory, research and method.* Pearson: Pentice Hall.

Larson, R. B. (2018). Controlling social desirability bias. *International Journal of Market Research,* 1-14. https://doi.org/10.1177/1470785318805305

Le, H., Casillas, A., Robbins, S. B., & Langley, R. (2005). Motivational and skills, social, and self-management predictors of college outcomes: constructing the student readiness inventory. *Educational and Psychological Measurement, 65*(3), 482-508. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013164404272493

Leach, L. (2016). Enhancing student engagement in one institution. *Journal of Further and Higher Education, 40*(1), 23-47. https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2013.869565

Leach, L., & Zepke, N. (2011). Engaging students in learning: a review of a conceptual organiser. *Higher Education Research & Development, 30*(2), 193-204. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2010.509761

Leondari, A., Syngollitou, E., & Kiosseoglou, G. (1998). Academic Achievement, Motivation and Future Selves. *Educational Studies, 24*(2), 153-163. https://doi.org/10.1080/0305569980240202

Lewis, S. (2015). *Positive psychology and change: How leadership, collaboration, and appreciative inquiry create transformational results.* Wiley Blackwell.

Lewis, J., & Ritchie, J. (2003). Generalising from qualitative research. In J. Ritchie & J. Lewis (Eds.), *Qualitative research practice: A guide for social science students and researchers* (pp. 263-286). Sage.

Lillie, R. E. & Wygal, D. E. (2011). Virtual Office Hours (VOH) in accounting coursework: Leveraging technology to enhance an integrative learning environment. *Journal of Accounting Education, 29*, 1-13. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaccedu.2011.10.002

Lim, M. (2020, March 20). Educating despite the COVID-19 outbreak: lessons from Singapore. *Times Higher Education.* https://www.timeshighereducation.com/blog/educating-despite-COVID-19-outbreak-lessons-singapore

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (2005). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences. In N. K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed., pp. 191-216). Sage.

Lindgreen, A., Di Benedetto, C. A., & Brodie, R. J. (2021). Research quality: What it is, and how to achieve it. *Industrial Marketing Management, 99,* A13-A19. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2021.10.009

Lochtie, D., McIntosh, E., Stork, A., & Walker, B. W. (2018). *Effective personal tutoring in higher education.* Critical Publishing.

London Higher. (2019). *Commuter Students in London: Results of a pilot project on factors affecting continuation.* https://www.londonhigher.ac.uk/news/report-publication-commuter-students-in-london/

Loughlin, W. A., Gregory, S-J., Harrison, G. & Lodge, J. M. (2013). Beyond the first year experience in science: identifying the need for a supportive learning and teaching environment for second year science students. *International Journal of Innovation in Science and Mathematics Education, 21*(4), 13-26.

Love, B., Vetere, A., & Davis, P. (2020). Should Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) be used with focus groups? Navigating

the bumpy road of "iterative loops," idiographic journeys, and "phenomenological bridges". *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 19,* 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406920921600

Lubicz-Nawrocka, T., & Bunting, K. (2019). Student perceptions of teaching excellence: an analysis of student-led teaching award nomination data. *Teaching in Higher Education, 24*(1), 63-80. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2018.1461620

Luck, C. (2010). Challenges faced by tutors in higher education. *Psychodynamic Practice, 16*(3), 273–287. https://doi.org/10.1080/14753634.2010.489386

Lufi, D., & Cohen, A. (1987). A scale for measuring persistence in children. *Journal of Personality Assessment, 51*(2), 178–185. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327752jpa5102_2

Maddux, J. E. (2009). Self-efficacy: The power of believing you can. In S. J. Lopez and C. R. Snyder (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of positive psychology* (2nd ed., pp. 277–287). Oxford University Press.

Madriaga, M., & Goodley, D. (2010). Moving beyond the minimum: socially just pedagogies and Asperger's syndrome in UK higher education. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 14*(2), 115-131. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603110802504168

Markle, G. (2015). Factors influencing persistence among nontraditional university students. *Adult Education Quarterly, 65*(3), 267-285. https://doi.org/10.1177/0741713615583085

Markus, H., & Nurius, P. (1986). Possible selves. *American Psychologist, 41*(9), 954–969. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.41.9.954

Marshall, S. K., Liu, Y., Wu, A., Berzonsky, M. & Adams, G. R. (2010). Perceived mattering to parents and friends for university students: A longitudinal study. *Journal of Adolescence, 33*, 367-375. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2009.09.003

Mårtensson, P., Fors, U., Wallin, S-B., Zander, U. & Nilsson, G. H. (2015). Evaluating research: A multidisciplinary approach to assessing research

practice and quality. *Research Policy, 45,* 593-603. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.respol.2015.11.009

Martin, A. J., & Marsh, H. W. (2008). Academic buoyancy: Towards an understanding of students' everyday academic resilience. *Journal of School Psychology, 46*(1), 53-83. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2007.01.002

Martiny, K. M., Toro, J., & Høffding, S. (2021). Framing a phenomenological mixed method: from inspiration to guidance. *Frontiers in Psychology, 12,* 602081. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.602081

Masika, R., & Jones, J. (2016). Building student belonging and engagement: insights into higher education students' experiences of participating and learning together. *Teaching in Higher Education, 21*(2), 138-150. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2015.1122585

Maslow, A. H. (1943). A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review, 50*(4), 370–396. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0054346

Maslow, A. H. (1987). *Motivation and personality* (3rd ed.). HarperCollins.

Maslow, A. (2014). *Towards a psychology of being.* Sublime Books. (Original work published in 1962)

Mason, S. (2018). The impact of transformational learning for mature adults studying a Foundation Degree. *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning, 20*(2), 8-27. https://doi.org/10.5456/WPLL.20.2

Masuyama, A., Sugawara, D., Karawekpanyawong, N., Juntasopeepun, P., Likhitsathian, S., Reznik, A., & Isralowitz, R. (2021). Japan and Thailand: A Cross National Comparison of COVID 19 Impact on University Student Health and Well-Being. *Journal of Loss and Trauma.* https://doi.org/10.1080/15325024.2021.1999063

Matera, C., Bosco, N. & Meringolo, P. (2019). Perceived mattering to family and friends, self-esteem, and well-being. *Psychology, Health & Medicine, 25*(5), 550-558. https://doi.org/10.1080/13548506.2019.1626454

Matera, C., Paradisi, M., Boin, J. & Nerini, A. (2021). Perceived mattering in the face of COVID-19: links with emotion regulation and psychological well-

being. *Psychology & Health,* 1-12.
https://doi.org/10.1080/08870446.2021.2002860

Maunder, R. E. (2018). Students' peer relationships and their contribution to university adjustment: the need to belong in the university community. *Journal of Further and Higher Education, 42*(6), 756-768. https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2017.1311996

Maxwell, J. A. (2012). *A realist approach to qualitative research.* Sage.

Maxwell, J. & Mittapalli, K. (2010). Realism as a stance for mixed methods research. In A. Tashakkori & C. Teddlie (Eds.), *SAGE handbook of mixed methods in social & behavioral research* (pp. 145-168). Sage. https://www.doi.org/10.4135/9781506335193

Mayoh, J. & Onwuebguzie, A. J. (2015). Toward a conceptualization of mixed methods phenomenological research. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research, 9*(1), 91–107. https://doi.org/10.1177/1558689813505358

McCabe, A., & O'Connor, U. (2014). Student-centred learning: the role and responsibility of the lecture. *Teaching in Higher Education, 19*(4), 350-359. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2013.860111

McFarlane, K. J. (2016). Tutoring the tutors: Supporting effective personal tutoring. *Active Learning in Higher Education, 17*(1), 77-88. https://doi.org/10.1177/1469787415616720

McLeod, J. (2011). Student voice and the politics of listening in higher education. *Critical Studies in Education, 52*(2), 179-189. https://doi.org/10.1080/17508487.2011.572830

McIntosh, E. (2019, January 17). *Tutoring matters - the UKAT Research Committee webinar.* [Webinar]. UK Advising and Tutoring. https://www.ukat.uk/events/webinars/archive/the-ukat-research-committee-webinar/

McKendrey, S., Wright, M., & Stevenson, K. (2014). Why here and why stay? Students' voices on the retention strategies of a widening participation university. *Nurse Education Today, 34,* 872-877. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2013.09.009

McLaughlin, G. W., Brozovsky, P. V., & McLaughlin, J. S. (1998). Changing perspectives on student retention: A role for institutional research. *Research in Higher Education, 39*(1), 1-17. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1018779611043

McLaughlin, K., Moutray, M., & Muldoon, O. T. (2008). The role of personality and self-efficacy in the selection and retention of successful nursing students: a longitudinal study. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 61*(2), 211-221. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2648.2007.04492.x

Mc Taggart, B. (2016). Modern higher education students within a nontraditional higher education space: not fitting in, often falling out. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education, 21*(1-2), 86-97. https://doi.org/10.1080/13596748.2015.1126420

Meehan, C., & Howells, K. (2018). 'What really matters to freshers?': Evaluation of first year student experience of transition into university. *Journal of Further and Higher Education, 42*(7), 893-907. https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2017.1323194

Meehan, C., & Howells, K. (2019). In search of the feeling of 'belonging' in higher education: undergraduate students transition into higher education. *Journal of Further and Higher Education, 43*(10), 1376-1390. https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2018.1490702

Melguizo, T., Kienzl, G. S., & Alfonso, M. (2011). Comparing the Educational Attainment of Community College Transfer Students and Four-Year College Rising Juniors Using Propensity Score Matching Methods. *The Journal of Higher Education, 82*(3), 265-291. https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2011.11777202

Mercer, J. (2007). The challenges of insider research in educational institutions: wielding a double-edged sword and resolving delicate dilemmas. *Oxford Review of Education, 33*(1), 1-17. https://doi.org/10.1080/03054980601094651

Mercer, T., & Kythreotis, A. (2020, April 4). We're managing to be academics and primary school teachers. *Times Higher Education.*

https://www.timeshighereducation.com/blog/were-managing-be-academics-and-primary-school-teachers

Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2015). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.)*.* Jossey-Bass.

Mertens, D. M. (2015). *Research and evaluation in education and psychology* (4th ed.). Sage.

Meyer, G., Shatto, B., Kuljeerung, O., Nuccio, L., Bergen, A., & Wilson, C. R. (2020). Exploring the relationship between resilience and grit among nursing students: A correlational research study. *Nurse Education Today, 84*(104246), 1-5. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2019.104246

Merrill, M. D. (2002). First principles of instruction. *Educational Technology Research and Development, 50*, 43-59. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02505024

Michie, S., Johnston, M., Abraham, C., Lawton, R., Parker, D., & Walker, A. (2005). Making psychological theory useful for implementing evidence based practice: a consensus approach. *Quality and Safety in Health Care, 14,* 23-33. https://doi.org/10.1136/qshc.2004.011155

Mohammed, Z., Arafa, A., Atlam, E-S., El-Qerafi, N., El-Shazly, M., Al-Hazazi, O. & Ewis, A. (2021). Psychological problems among the university students in Saudi Arabia during the COVID-19. *International Journal of Clinical Practice, 75,* e14853. https://doi.org/10.1111/ijcp.14853

Moore, A. (2012). *Teaching and learning: Pedagogy, curriculum and culture.*2nd edn. Routledge.

Morgan, D. L. (1998). Practical strategies for combining qualitative and quantitative methods: Applications to health research. *Qualitative Health Research, 8*(3), 362-376. https://doi.org/10.1177/104973239800800307

Morgan, D. L. (2014). Pragmatism as a paradigm for social research. *Qualitative Inquiry, 20*(8), 1045-1053. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800413513733

Morse, J. M. (1996). Is Qualitative Research Complete? *Qualitative Health Research, 6*(1), 3-5. https://doi.org/10.1177/104973239600600101

Mortenson, T. G. (2005). Measurement of persistence. In A. Seidman (Ed.) *College student retention: Formula for student success* (pp. 35-60). American Council on Education and Praeger Publishers.

Muenks, K., Allan, W., Yang, J, S., & O'Neal, C. R. (2017). How true is grit? Assessing its relations to high school and college students' personality characteristics, self-regulation, engagement, and achievement. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 109*(5), 599-620. https://doi.org/10.1037/edu0000153.supp

Multon, K. D., Brown, S. D., & Lent, R. W. (1991). Relation of self-efficacy beliefs to academic outcomes: A meta-analytic investigation. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 38*(1), 30-38. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0167.38.1.30

Mynott, G. (2016). Personal tutoring: Positioning practice in relation to policy. *Innovations in Practice, 10*(2), 103-112. https://doi.org/10.24377/LJMU.iip.vol10iss2article95

Nakajima, M. A., Dembo, M. H., & Mossler, R. (2012). Student Persistence in Community Colleges. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice, 36*(8), 591-613. https://doi.org/10.1080/10668920903054931

National Student Survey. (2019). *About the NSS.* https://www.thestudentsurvey.com/about.php

Neale, B. (2021). *The craft of qualitative longitudinal research.* Sage.

Neher, A. (1991). Maslow's theory of motivation: A critique. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology, 31*(3), 89-122. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022167891313010

Nelson, R. (2018). Failing with student success: the hidden role of bad luck and false empowerment. *Higher Education Research & Development, 37*(5), 1050-1061. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2018.1462306

Neubauer, B. E., Witkop, C. T., & Varpio, L. (2019). How phenomenology can help us learn from the experiences of others. *Perspectives on Medical Education, 8,* 90-97. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40037-019-0509-2

Nicholls, J. G. (1984). Achievement motivation: Conceptions of ability, subjective experience, task choice, and performance. *Psychological Review, 91*(3), 328-346. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.91.3.328

Ní Raghallaigh, M., & Cunniffe, R. (2013). Creating a safe climate for active learning and student engagement: An example from an introductory social work module. *Teaching in Higher Education, 18*(1), 93-105. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2012.694103

Nobel, K., Flynn, N. T., Lee, J. D., & Hilton, D. (2007). Predicting successful college experiences: evidence from a first year retention program. *Journal of College Student Retention, 9*(1), 39-60.

O'Connor, C., Mueller, J., & Neal, A. (2014). Student resilience in urban America. In H. R. Milner & K. Lomotey (Eds.), *Handbook of urban education* (pp. 75–96). Routledge.

Office for Students. (2018a). *Regulatory Notice 1: Access and participation plan guidance for 2019-20.* https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/1093/ofs2018_03.pdf

Office for Students. (2018b). *Securing student success: Regulatory framework for higher education in England.* https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/1406/ofs2018_01.pdf

Office for Students. (2019a). *Analysis of degree apprenticeships: Disadvantage*. https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/analysis-of-degree-apprenticeships/disadvantage/

Office for Students. (2019b). *Continuation and transfer rates.* https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/continuation-and-transfer-rates/continuation-non-continuation-and-transfer-rates/

Office for Students. (2019c). *Refused registration decisions.* https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/the-register/refused-registration-decisions/

Office for Students. (2019d). *What we do.*

https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/about/our-strategy/

Office for Students. (2020a). *Access and participation data dashboard.*

https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/access-and-participation-data-dashboard/

Office for Students. (2020b). *Conditions of registration.*

https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/regulation/conditions-of-registration/initial-and-general-ongoing-conditions-of-registration/

Office for Students. (2020c). *Continuation and transfer rates.*

https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/continuation-and-transfer-rates/definitions-and-methodology/

Office for Students. (2020d). *NSS 2020 Core Questions.*

https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/d462a46b-0eba-42fd-84a1-c8b6dc883c99/nss-2020-core-questionnaire-and-optional-banks.pdf

Office for Students. (2020e, March 30). *Provider guide to coronavirus.*

https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/coronavirus/provider-guid e-to-coronavirus/questions-and-answers/

Office for Students. (2020f). *TEF outcomes.*

https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/teaching/tef-outcomes/#/tefoutcomes/

Office for Students. (2020g). *About the TEF?*

https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/teaching/what-is-the-tef/

Office for Students. (2021). *The National Student Survey: Student experience during the pandemic.* https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/the-national-student-survey-student-experience-during-the-pandemic/

Office for Students. (2022). *Access and participation data dashboard.*

https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/access-and-participation-data-dashboard/

Oluremi, O. A. (2014). Academic perseverance, class attendance and students'
academic engagement: A correlational study. *European Journal of
Educational Sciences, 1*(2), 133-140.
https://eric.ed.gov/contentdelivery/servlet/ERICServlet?accno=EJ1236796

Ormerod, R. J. (2020). Pragmatism in professional practice. *Systems Research
and Behavioral Science, 38*(6), 797-81. https://doi.org/10.1002/sres.2739

O'Neill, G., & McMahon, T. (2005). Student–centred learning: what does it
mean for students and lecturers? In O'Neill, G., Moore, S., & McMullin, B.
(Eds) *Emerging issues in the practice of university learning and teaching*
(pp. 30-39). AISHE.

O'Reilly, M. & Kiyimba, N. (2015). *Advanced qualitative research: A guide to
using theory.* Sage.

O'Shea, S., May, J., Stone, C., & Delahunty, J. (2018). *First-in-family students,
university experience and family life: Motivations, transitions and
participation.* Palgrave Macmillian.

Osterman, K. F. (2000). Students' need for belonging in the school committee.
Review of Educational Research, 70(3), 323-367.
https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543070003323

O'Thomas, M. (2018). *The TEF and student success – why participation is key
to learning and teaching.* https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/blog/tef-and-
student-success-%E2%80%93-why-participation-key-learning-and-
teaching

Owen, M. (2002). 'Sometimes you feel you're in niche time' The personal tutor
system, a case study. *Active Learning in Higher Education, 3*(1), 7-23.
https://doi.org/10.1177/1469787402003001002

Oyserman. D., Bybee, D., Terry, K., & Hart-Johnson, T. (2004). Possible selves
as roadmaps. *Journal of Research in Personality, 38,* 130-149.
https://doi.org/10.1016/S0092-6566(03)00057-6

Oyserman. D., Destin, M., & Novin, S. (2004). The context-sensitive future self:
possible selves motivate in context, not otherwise. *Self and Identity, 14*(2),
173-188. https://doi.org/10.1080/15298868.2014.965733

Ozga, J. & Sukhnandan, L. (1998). Undergraduate non-completion: Developing an explanatory model. *Higher Education Quarterly, 52*(3), 316-333. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2273.00100

Papafilippou, V., & Bentley, L. (2017). Gendered transitions, career identities and possible selves: the case of engineering graduates. *Journal of Education and Work, 30*(8), 827-839. https://doi.org/10.1080/13639080.2017.1375088

Parry, G., Callender, C., Scott, P., & Temple, P. (2012). *Understanding higher education in further education colleges.* Department for Business, Innovation and Skills Research Paper number 69. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/32425/12-905-understanding-higher-education-in-further-education-colleges.pdf

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods.* 3rd edn. Sage.

Payne, T., Muenks, K., & Aguayo, E. (2021). "Just Because I am First Gen Doesn't Mean I'm Not Asking for Help": A Thematic Analysis of First-Generation College Students' Academic Help-Seeking Behaviors. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000382

Pearson & Wonkhe (2020). *Pearson/Wonkhe student expectations survey July 2020.* https://wonkhe.com/wp-content/wonkhe-uploads/2020/07/Pearson-Wonkhe-student-expectations-survey-published-version.pdf

Peoples, K. (2021). *How to write a phenomenological dissertation: A step-by-step guide.* Sage.

Perrone, K. M., Sedlacek, W. E. & Alexander, C. M. (2001). Gender and ethnic differences in career goal attainment. *The Career Development Quarterly, 50,* 168-178.

Perry, R. P., Hladkyj, S., Pekrun, R. H., & Pelletier, S. T. (2001). Academic control and action control in the achievement of college students: A longitudinal field study. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 93*(4), 776-789. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.93.4.776

Pittman, L. D., & Richmond, A. (2008). University belonging, friendship quality, and psychological adjustment during the transition to college. *The Journal of Experimental Education, 76*(4), 343–361. https://doi.org/10.3200/JEXE.76.4.343-362

Pleasance, S. (2016). *Wider professional practice in education and training.* Sage.

Pokorny, H., Holley, D. & Kane, S. (2017). Commuting, transitions and belonging: the experiences of students living at home in their first year at university. *Higher Education, 74*(3), 543-558. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-016-0063-3

Porter, S. R., Whitcomb, M. E., & Weitzer, W. H. (2004). Multiple surveys of students and survey fatigue. *New Directions for Institutional Research, 121,* 63-73. https://doi.org/10.1002/ir.101

Price, L. & Martin, L. (2018). Introduction to the special issue: applied critical realism in the social sciences. *Journal of Critical Realism, 17*(2), 89-96, https://doi.org/10.1080/14767430.2018.1468148

Pritchard, A., & Woollard, J. (2010). *Psychology for the classroom: Constructivism and social learning.* Routledge.

Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education. (2004). *Guidelines on the accreditation of prior learning.* https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/quality-code/accreditation-prior-learning-guidelines.pdf?sfvrsn=edadf981_12

Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education. (2020, March 23). *COVID-19: Initial guidance for higher education providers on standards and quality.* https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/guidance/COVID-19-initial-guidance-for-providers.pdf

Quinn, J., Thomas, L., Slack K., Casey, L., Thexton, W. & Noble, J. (2005). *Rethinking working-class 'drop-out' from university. A report for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.* https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/rethinking-working-class-drop-out-university

Raufelder, D., Bakadorova, O., Yalcin, S., Dibek, M. I., & Yavuz, H. C. (2017). Motivational relations with peers and teachers among German and Turkish

adolescents: A cross-cultural perspective. *Learning and Individual Differences, 55,* 13-20. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.lindif.2017.02.004

Rawls, J. (1999). *A theory of justice.* Revised Edition. Oxford University Press.

Reason, R. D. (2009). An examination of persistence research through the lens of a comprehensive conceptual framework. *Journal of College Student Development, 50*(6), 659-682. https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.0.0098

Reeve, J., & Lee, W. (2019). Motivational neuroscience. In R. M. Ryan (Ed.) *The Oxford handbook of human motivation* (2nd ed.). https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190666453.013.20

Reiss, S. (2012). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. *Teaching of Psychology, 39*(2), 152-156. https://doi.org/10.1177/0098628312437704

Reynolds, W. M., Ramirez, M. P, Magrina, A., & Allen, J. E. (1980). Initial development and validation of the academic self-concept scale. *Educational and Psychological Measurement, 40,* 1013-1016. https://doi.org/10.1177/001316448004000428

Richard, B., Sivo, S. A., Orlowski, M., Ford, R. C., Murphy, J., Boote, D. N., & Witta, E. L. (2021). Qualitative research via focus groups: Will going online affect the diversity of your findings? *Cornell Hospitality Quarterly, 62*(1), 32-45. https://doi.org/10.1177/1938965520967769

Richardson, M., Abraham, C., & Bond, R. (2012). Psychological correlates of university students' academic performance: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin, 138*(2), 353-387. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0026838

Richardson, S., & Radloff, A. (2014). Allies in learning: critical insights into the importance of staff–student interactions in university education. *Teaching in Higher Education, 19*(6), 603–615. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2014.901960

Robinson R.S. (2014). Purposive Sampling. In A. C. Michalos (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Quality of Life and Well-Being Research.* Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-0753-5_2337

Rogers, C. R. (1957). The necessary and sufficient conditions of therapeutic personality change. *Journal of Consulting Psychology, 21,* 95-103. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0045357

Rogers, C. R. (1983). *Freedom to learn for the 80's.* Charlies E. Merrill Publishing Company.

Rogers, C. R., Lyon, H. C. Jr., & Tausch, R. (2014). *On becoming an effective teacher: Person-centred teaching, psychology, philosophy, and dialogues with Carl R. Rogers and Harold Lyon.* Routledge.

Romyn, D. M. (2001). Disavowal of the behaviorist paradigm in nursing education: What makes it so difficult to unseat? *Advanced Nursing Science, 23* (1), 1-10. https://doi.org/10.1097/00012272-200103000-00002

Rose-Adams, J. (2013). Leaving university early: exploring relationships between institution type and student withdrawal and implications for social mobility. *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning, 15*(2), 96-112. https://doi.org/10.5456/WPLL.15.2.96

Rose-Adams, J. & Hewitt, L. (2012). What 'retention' means to me: the position of the adult learner in student retention. *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning, 14,* 146-164. https://doi.org/10.5456/WPLL.14.S.146

Roszkowski, M. J. & Soven, M. (2010). Shifting gears: consequences of including two negatively worded items in the middle of a positively worded questionnaire. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, 35*(1), 113-130. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02602930802618344

Royer, D. W. & Latz, A. O. (2016). Community College Leadership Transition Through the Framework of Appreciative Inquiry. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice, 40*(8), 695-705. https://doi.org/10.1080/10668926.2015.1072594

Rudenstine, S. McNeal, K., Schulder, T., Ettman, C. K., Hernandez, M., Gvozdieva, K., & Galea, S. (2021). Depression and Anxiety During the COVID-19 Pandemic in an Urban, Low-Income Public University Sample. *Journal of Traumatic Stress, 34,* 12–22. https://doi.org/10.1002/jts.22600

Ryan, R. M. (2019). Inside the Black Box: Motivational Science in the 21st Century. In R. M. Ryan (Ed.) *The Oxford handbook of human motivation* (2nd ed.). https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190666453.013.1

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000a). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations: classic definitions and new directions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology, 25,* 54-67. https://doi.org/10.1006/ceps.1999.1020

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000b). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist, 55*(1), 68-78. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.1.68

Ryle, A. (1969). *Student Casualties.* Allen Lane/The Penguin Press.

Sadowski, C., Stewart, M., & Pediaditis, M. (2018). Pathway to success: using students' insights and perspectives to improve retention and success for university students from low socioeconomic (LSE) backgrounds. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 22*(2), 158-175. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2017.1362048

Satici, S. A., & Can, G. (2016). Investigating academic self-efficacy of university- students in terms of socio-demographic variables. *Universal Journal of Educational Research, 4*(8), 1874-1881. https://doi.org/10.13189/ujer.2016.040817

Sauvé, L., Fortin, A., Viger, C., & Landry, F. (2018). Ineffective learning strategies: a significant barrier to post-secondary perseverance. *Journal of Further and Higher Education, 42*(2), 205-222. https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2016.1224329

Schaufeli, W., & Bakker, A. (2004). *Utrecht work engagement scale: preliminary manual.* https://www.wilmarschaufeli.nl/publications/Schaufeli/Test%20Manuals/Test_manual_UWES_English.pdf

Schlossberg, N. K. (1989). Marginality and mattering: Key issues in building community. *New Directions for Student Services, 48*, 5–15. https://doi.org/10.1002/ss.37119894803

Schriesheim, C. A., & Hill, K. D. (1981). Controlling acquiescence response bias by item reversals: The effect on questionnaire validity. *Education and Psychological Measurement, 41,* 1101-1114. https://doi.org/10.1177/001316448104100420

Scull, J., Phillips, M., Sharma, U. & Garnier, K. (2020). Innovations in teacher education at the time of COVID19: an Australian perspective. *Journal of Education for Teaching.* https://doi.org/10.1080/02607476.2020.1802701

Seligman, M. E. P., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000). Positive psychology: An introduction. *American Psychologist, 55*(1)*,* 5-14. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.1.5

Shaari, A. S., Yusoff, N. M., Ghazali, I. M., Osman, R. H., & Dzahir, N. F. M. (2014). The relationship between lecturers' teaching style and students' academic engagement. *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences, 118,* 10-20. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.02.002

Silverman, D. (2017). *Doing qualitative research* (5th ed.). Sage.

Simons, J., Beaumont, K., & Holland, L. (2018). What factors promote student. resilience on a level 1 distance learning module? *Open Learning: The Journal of Open, Distance and e-Learning, 33*(1), 4-17. https://doi.org/10.1080/02680513.2017.1415140

Skinner, E. A., Furrer, C., Marchand, G., & Kinderman, T. (2008). Engagement and disaffection in the classroom: Part of a larger motivational dynamic? *Journal of Educational Psychology, 100*(4)*,* 765–781. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0012840

Skinner, E. A., Kindermann, T. A., Connell, J. P., & Wellborn, J. G. (2009). Engagement as an organizational construct in the dynamics of motivational development. In K. Wentzel, & A. Wigfield (Eds.), *Handbook of motivation in school* (pp. 223–245). Erlbaum.

Skinner, E. A., Pitzer, J. R., & Steele, J. S. (2016). Can student engagement serve as a motivational resource for academic coping, persistence, and learning during late elementary and early middle school? *Developmental Psychology, 52*(12), 2099-2117. https://doi.org/10.1037/dev0000232

Slaten, C. D., Elison, Z. M., Deemer, E. D., Hughes, H. A., & Shemwell, D. A. (2018). The development and validation of the University Belonging Questionnaire. *The Journal of Experimental Education, 86*(4), 633-651, https://doi.org/10.1080/00220973.2017.1339009

Slaten, C. D., Elison, Z. M., Lee, J-Y., Yough, M. & Scalise, S. (2016). Belonging on campus: A qualitative inquiry of Asian international students. *The Counseling Psychologist, 44*(3), 383-410. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000016633506

Smith, B. W., Dalen, J., Wiggins, K., Tooley, E., Christopher, P. & Bernard, J. (2008). The brief resilience scale: Assessing the ability to bounce back. *International Journal of Behavioral Medicine, 15,* 194-200. https://doi.org/10.1080/10705500802222972

Smith, J. A. (2021, July 16). *Travelling in time: using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to examine temporal process in personal experience* [Keynote address]. British Psychological Society, Qualitative Method in Psychology Conference, Online.

Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2009). *Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, method and application.* Sage.

Smith, J. M., & Lucena, J. C. (2016). Invisible innovators: how low-income, first-generation students use their funds of knowledge to belong in engineering. *Engineering Studies, 8*(1), 1-26. https://doi.org/10.1080/19378629.2016.1155593

Solberg, V. S., Gusavac, N., Hamann, T., Felch, J., Johnson, J., Lamorn, S., & Torres, J. (1998). The adaptive success identity plan (ASIP): A career intervention for college student. *The Career Development Quarterly, 47,* 48-95. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-0045.1998.tb00728.x

Solberg, V. S., O'Brien, K., Villareal, P., Kennel, R., & Davis, B. (1993). Self-efficacy and Hispanic college students: Validation of the College Self-Efficacy Instrument. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences, 15*(1), 80-95. https://doi.org/10.1177/07399863930151004

Sorrell, K. (2013). Pragmatism and moral progress: John Dewey's theory of social inquiry. Philosophy and Social Criticism *39*(8), 809–824. https://doi.org/10.1177/0191453713494967

Spady, W. (1970). Dropouts from higher education: An interdisciplinary review and synthesis. *Interchange, 1*(1), 64-85. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02214313

Spiers, J. & Riley, R. (2019). Analysing one dataset with two qualitative methods: The distress of general practitioners, a thematic and interpretative phenomenological analysis. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 16*(2), 276-290. https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2018.1543099

Stagg, S. D., Eaton, E., & Sjoblom, A. M. (2018). Self-efficacy in undergraduate students with dyslexia: a mixed methods investigation. *British Journal of Special Education, 45*(1). https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8578.12200

Starks, H., & Trinidad, S. B. (2007). Choose your methodology: A comparison of phenomenology, discourse analysis and grounded theory. *Qualitative Health Research, 17*(1), 1372-1380. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732307307031

Stec, J. A. (2008). Bias. In P.J. Lavrakas (Eds.), *Encyclopaedia of survey research methods* (pp. 57-60). Sage. https://www.doi.org/10.4135/9781412963947.n39

Stephen, D. E, O'Connell, P. & Hall, M. (2008). 'Going the extra mile', 'fire-fighting', or laissez-faire? Re-evaluating personal tutoring relationships within mass higher education. *Teaching in Higher Education, 13*(4), 449-460. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562510802169749

Stevenson, J. (2019). Imagining a future: Refugee women, possible selves and higher education. In H. Henderson, J. Stevenson, & A-M. Bathmaker (Eds). *Possible selves in higher education: New interdisciplinary insights.* (pp.127-150). Routledge.

Stevenson, J., & Clegg, S. (2011). Possible selves: students orientating themselves towards the future through extracurricular activity. *British*

Educational Research Journal, 37(2), 231-246.
https://doi.org/10.1080/01411920903540672

Stevenson, J., & Clegg, S. (2013). 'My past is a double edge sword': temporality and reflexivity in mature learners. *Studies in Continuing Education, 35*(1), 17-29. https://doi.org/10.1080/0158037X.2012.684794

Stevenson, N. (2009). Enhancing the student experience by embedding personal tutoring in the curriculum. *The Journal of Hospitality Leisure Sport and Tourism, 8*(2). https://doi.org/10.3794/johlste.82.218

Stoll, L., Bolam, R., McMahon, A., Wallace, M., & Thomas, S. (2006). Professional learning communities: A review of the literature. *Journal of Educational Change, 7,* 221-258. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10833-006-0001-8

Stork, A. & Walker, B. (2015). *Being an outstanding personal tutor: Supporting learnings through personal tutoring and coaching*. Critical Publishing.

Student Loan Company, The. (2021). *Early-in-Year Student Withdrawal Notifications, Academic Year 2018/19 to 2021/22, up to 29/11/21.* https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/early-in-year-student-withdrawal-notifications-academic-year-201819-to-202122-up-to-29112021/early-in-year-student-withdrawal-notifications-academic-year-201819-to-202122-up-to-29112021

Student Survey, The. (2021). *National Student Survey: Frequently Asked Questions.* https://www.thestudentsurvey.com/faqs/

Su, C-Y., & Guo, Y. (2021). Factors impacting university students' online learning experiences during the COVID-19 epidemic. *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning, 37*, 1578-1590. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcal.12555

Suhail, A., Iqbal, N. & Smith, J. (2020). Lived experiences of Indian Youth amid COVID-19 crisis: An interpretative phenomenological analysis. *International Journal of Social Psychiatry, 1–8.* https://doi.org/10.1177/0020764020966021

Sundler, A. J., Lindberg, E., Nilsson, C., & Palmér, L. (2019). Qualitative thematic analysis based on descriptive phenomenology. *Nursing Open, 6,* 733–739. https://doi.org/10.1002/nop2.275

Suresh, K. P. & Chandrashekara, S. (2012). Sample size estimation and power analysis for clinical research studies. *Journal of Human Reproductive Sciences, 5*(1), 7-13. https://doi.org/10.4103/0974-1208.97779

Sutton Trust, The (2017a). *Social mobility and economic success: How social mobility boosts the economy*. https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Oxera-report_WEB_FINAL.pdf

Sutton Trust, The (2017b). *The state of social mobility in the UK.* https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/BCGSocial-Mobility-report-full-version_WEB_FINAL.pdf

Szollosi, A. & Donkin, C. (2021). Arrested theory development: The misguided distinction between exploratory and confirmatory research. *Perspectives on Psychological Science,* 1-8. https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691620966796

Tabvuma, V., Carter-Rogers, K., Brophy, T., Smith, S. M., & Sutherland, S. (2021). Transitioning from in person to online learning during a pandemic: an experimental study of the impact of time management training. *Higher Education Research & Development.* https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2021.2010665

Tait, J. (2004). The tutor/facilitator role in student retention. *Open Learning: The Journal of Open, Distance and e-Learning, 19*(1), 97-109. https://doi.org/10.1080/0268051042000177872

Tajfel, H. & Turner, J. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W.G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 33-47). Brooks/Cole Publications.

Tay, L., & Diener, E. (2011). Needs and subjective well-being around the world. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 101, 354-365. doi:10.1037/a0023779

Tangney, S. (2014). Student-centred learning: a humanist perspective. *Teaching in Higher Education, 19*(3), 266-275. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2013.860099

Tashakkori, A., Johnson, R. B., & Teddlie, C. (2020). *Foundations of mixed methods research* (2nd ed.). Sage.

Tashakkori, A., & Teddlie, C. (Eds.). (2003). *Handbook of mixed methods in social and behavioral research*. Sage.

Taylor, J. (2010). The assessment of research quality in UK universities: peer review or metrics? *British Journal of Management, 22*(2), 202-217. https://www.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8551.2010.00722.x

Teddlie, C. & Tashakkori, A. (2015). Overview of contemporary issues in mixed methods research. In A. Tashakkori & C. Teddlie (Eds.) *SAGE handbook of mixed methods in social & behavioral research* (pp. 1-42). Sage. https://www.doi.org/10.4135/9781506335193

Teddlie, C. & Yu, F. (2007). Mixed methods sampling: a typology with examples. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research, 1*(1), 77-100. https://doi.org/10.1177/2345678906292430

Tessema, M.T., Ready, K., & Yu, W. C. (2012). Factors affecting college students' satisfaction with major curriculum: Evidence from nine years of data. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science, 2*(2), 34-44. http://www.ijhssnet.com/journals/Vol_2_No_2_Special_Issue_January_2012/5.pdf

Tett, L., Cree, V. E., & Christie, H. (2017). From further to higher education: transition as an on-going process. *Higher Education, 73,* 389-406. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-016-0101-1

Thomas, L. (2006). Widening participation and the increased need for personal tutoring. In L. Thomas & P. Hixenbaugh (Eds.) *Personal tutoring in higher education* (pp. 21-32)*.* Trentham Books.

Thomas, L. (2011). Do pre-entry interventions such as 'Aimhigher' impact on student retention and success? *Higher Education, Quarterly, 65*(3), 230-250. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2273.2010.00481.x

Thomas, L. (2012). *Building student engagement and belonging in Higher Education at a time of change: final report from the What Works? Student Retention & Success programme.* The Higher Education Academy. https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/system/files/what_works_final_report.pdf

Thomas, L. (2015). *Access and widening participation in college HE Briefing Paper 2: Student retention. Attainment and experience in college-based higher education.* Association of Colleges. https://www.aoc.co.uk/sites/default/files/Briefing%20Paper%202%20Student%20Retention.%20Attainment%20and%20Experience%20in%20College-Based%20Higher%20Education_3.pdf

Thomas, L., Hill, M., O'Mahony, J., & Yorke, M. (2017). Supporting student success: Strategies for institutional change. What Works? Student Retention & Success programme. The Higher Education Academy. https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/system/files/hub/download/what_works_2_-_full_report.pdf

Thompson, D. W. (2019). Widening participation research and practice in the United Kingdom on the twentieth anniversary of the Dearing report, reflections on a changing landscape. *Educational Review, 71*(2), 182-197. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2017.1380606

Thornton, C., Miller, P., & Perry, K. (2019). The impact of group cohesion on key success measures in higher education. *Journal of Further and Higher Education.* https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2019.1594727

Tickle-Degnen, L., & Rosenthal, R. (1990). The nature of rapport and its nonverbal correlates. *Psychological Inquiry, 1*(4), 285-293. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327965pli0104_1

Tight, M. (2017). *Understanding case study research.* Sage.

Tight, M. (2019). Student retention and engagement in higher education. *Journal of Further and Higher Education.* https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2019.1576860

Isabel Hallam

Tinto, V. (1975). Dropout from higher education: A theoretical synthesis of recent research. *Review of Educational Research, 45* (1), 89-125. https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543045001089

Tinto, V. (1987). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition.* Chicago Press.

Tinto, V. (1993). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition* (2nd ed.). University of Chicago Press.

Tinto, V. (1997). Classrooms as Communities. *The Journal of Higher Education, 68*(6), 599-623. https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.1997.11779003

Tinto, V. (2006). Research and Practice of Student Retention: What Next? *Journal of College Student Retention, 8*(1), 1-19. https://doi.org/10.2190/4YNU-4TMB-22DJ-AN4W

Tinto, V. (2017a). Reflections on Student Persistence. *Student Success, 8*(2), 1-8. https://doi.org/10.5204/ssj.v8i2.376

Tinto, V. (2017b). Through the eyes of students. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory and Practice, 19*(3), 254-269. https://doi.org/10.1177/1521025115621917

Tomkins, L. & Eatough, V. (2010). Reflecting on the use of IPA with focus groups: Pitfalls and potentials. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 7,* 244–262. https://doi.org/10.1080/14780880903121491

Tong, A., Sainsbury, P., & Craig, J. (2007). Consolidated criteria for reporting qualitative research (COREQ): a 32-item checklist for interviews and focus groups. *International Journal for Quality in Health Care, 19*(6), 349–357. https://doi.org/10.1093/intqhc/mzm042

Tovar, E. (2013). *A conceptual model on the impact of mattering, sense of belonging, engagement/involvement, and socio-academic integrative experiences on community college students' intent to persist* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Claremont Graduate University.

Tovar, E., Simon, M. A., & Lee, H. B. (2009). Development and validation of the college mattering inventory with diverse urban college students.

Measurement and Evaluation in Counseling and Development, 42(3), 154-178. https://doi.org/10.1177/0748175609344091

Trowler, P. (2016). *Doing insider research in universities.* Paul Trowler.

Trowler, V. (2010). *Student engagement literature review.* Higher Education Academy. https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/system/files/studentengagementliteraturereview_1.pdf

Troxel, W. (2010). Synthesis Student persistence and success in United States higher education: a synthesis of the literature. https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/system/files/us_retention_synthesis_1.pdf

Tryon, W. W. (1981). A methodological critique of Bandura's self-efficacy theory of behavior change*. Journal of Behavioural Therapy and Experimental Psychiatry, 12*(2), 113-114. https://doi.org/10.1016/0005-7916(81)90003-3

Tuckey, M., Brewer, N., & Williamson, P. (2002). The influence of motives and goal orientation on feedback seeking. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology, 75,* 195-216. https://doi.org/10.1348/09631790260098677

██████ (2017). ████████████████ *TEF 2017-18.* Internal ██████ report. Unpublished.

██████ (2019). *Access and Participation Plan.* https://www██████ac.uk/student-life/essential-information/access-and-participation-plan/

██████ (2020). ████████████████ *Student Profile survey responses.* Internal ██████ report. Unpublished.

██████ (2021a). *Student Consultative Forum.* Internal ██████ report. Unpublished.

██████ (2021b). ████████████████ *Student Profile survey responses.* Internal ██████ report. Unpublished.

UK Advising and Tutoring. (2019*). Professional Framework for Advising and Tutoring*. https://www.ukat.uk/professional-development/professional-framework-for-advising-and-tutoring/

UK Government (2012). Social Justice: transforming lives.
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/49515/social-justice-transforming-lives.pdf

UNESCO (1994). *The Salamanca statement and framework for action on special needs education.* UNESCO.
http://www.unesco.org/education/pdf/SALAMA_E.PDF

Universities UK (2004). *Measuring and recording student achievement.*
https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2005/measuring-and-recording-student-achievement.pdf

Usher, E. L., Li, C. R., Butz, A. R., & Rojas, J. P. (2019). Perseverant grit and self-efficacy: are both essential for children's academic success? *Journal of Educational Psychology, 111*(5), 877–902.
http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/edu0000324

Vancouver, J. B. (2012). Rhetorical reckoning: A response to Bandura. *Journal of Management, 38*(2), 465-474.
https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206311435951

Van Manen, M. (1997). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Van Manen, M. (2014). *Phenomenology of practice: Meaning-giving methods in phenomenological research and writing.* Routledge.

Van Rooijen, L. (1986). Advanced students' adaptation to college. *Higher Education, 15,* 197–209. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00129211

Vansteenkiste, M., Timmermans, T., Lens, W., Soenens, B., & Van den Broeck, A. (2008). Does extrinsic goal framing enhance extrinsic goal-oriented individuals' learning and performance? an experimental test of the match perspective versus self-determination theory. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 100*(2), 387-397. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.100.2.387

Vuong, M., Brown-Welty, S., & Tracz, S. (2010). The effects of self-efficacy on academic success of first-generation college sophomore students. *Journal*

of College Student Development, 51(1), 50-64.
https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.0.0109

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: Development of higher psychological processes.* Harvard University Press.

Walker, B. W. (2018). A Defining Moment for Personal Tutoring: Reflections on Personal Tutor Definitions and their Implications. *Impact: The University of Lincoln Journal of Higher Education Research*, *1*(1). https://doi.org/10.25507/limp2018118

Walker, B. W. (2020a). Professional standards and recognitions for UK personal tutoring and advising. *Frontiers in Education*, 5, 531451. https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2020.531451

Walker, B. W. (2020b). Tackling the personal tutoring conundrum: A qualitative study on the impact of developmental support for tutors. *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1177/1469787420926007

Walter, J. G. & Hart, J. (2009). Understanding the complexities of student motivations in mathematics learning. *The Journal of Mathematical Behavior, 28*, 162-170. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jmathb.2009.07.001

Wang, L. (2021). The role of students' self-regulated learning, grit, and resilience in second language learning. *Frontiers in Psychology, 12,* 800488. https://doi.org/0.3389/fpsyg.2021.800488

Ward, K., Gott, M., & Hoare, K. (2015). Participants' views of telephone interviews within a grounded theory study. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 71*(12), 2775-2785. https://doi.org/10.1111/jan.12748

Warren, J. M. & Hale, R. W. (2020). Predicting grit and resilience: exploring college students' academic rational beliefs. *Journal of College Counseling, 23*(2), 154-167. https://doi-org.plymouth.idm.oclc.org/10.1002/jocc.12156

Webb, O. J., & Cotton, D. R. E. (2018). Early withdrawal from higher education: a focus on academic experiences. *Teaching in Higher Education, 23*(7), 835-852. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2018.1437130

Webb, O. J., & Cotton, D. R. E. (2019). Deciphering the sophomore slump: changes to student perceptions during the undergraduate journey. *Higher Education, 77*, 173-90. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-018-0268-8

Webb, O., Wyness, L., & Cotton, D. (2017). *Enhancing access, retention, attainment and progression in higher education: A review of the literature showing demonstrable impact.* The Higher Education Academy. https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/enhancing-access-retention-attainment-and-progression-higher-education

Weiner, B. (1986). *An attributional theory of motivation and emotion.* Springer-Verlag.

Wentzel, K. R., Muenks, K., McNeish, D., & Russell, S. (2017). Peer and teacher supports in relation to motivation and effort: A multi-level study. *Contemporary Educational Psychology, 49,* 32-45. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2016.11.002

White, J., & Nonnamaker, J. (2008) Belonging and mattering: How doctoral students experience community. *NASPA Journal, 45*(3), 350-372. https://doi.org/10.2202/1949-6605.1860

Wigfield, A. (1994). Expectancy-value theory of achievement motivation: A developmental perspective. *Educational Psychology Review, 6*(1), 49-78. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02209024

Wigfield, A., & Eccles, J. S. (1992). The development of achievement task values: A theoretical analysis. *Developmental Review, 12,* 265-310. https://doi.org/10.1016/0273-2297(92)90011-P

Wiggins, S. (2017). *Discursive psychology: Theory, method and applications.* Sage.

William, M., Pollard, E., Langley, J., Houghton, A. M., & Zozimo, J. (2017) *Models of support for students with disabilities. Institute for Employment Studies report to HEFCE.* https://www.employment-studies.co.uk/resource/models-support-students-disabilities

Willcoxson, L. (2010). Factors affecting intention to leave in the first, second and third year of university studies: a semester-by-semester investigation.

Isabel Hallam

Higher Education Research & Development, 29(6), 623-639. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2010.501071

Willcoxson, L., Cotter, J., & Joy, S. (2011). Beyond the first-year experience: the impact on attrition of student experiences throughout undergraduate degree studies in six diverse universities. *Studies in Higher Education, 6*(3), 331-352. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070903581533

Wilkins, A., & Burke, P. J. (2015). Widening participation in higher education: the role of professional and social class identities and commitments. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 36*(3), 434-452. https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2013.829742

Wilkins, S., Butt, M. M., Kratochvil, D., & Balakrishnan, M. S. (2016). The effects of social identification and organizational identification on student commitment, achievement and satisfaction in higher education. *Studies in Higher Education*, *41*(12), 2232-2252. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2015.1034258

Williams, P., Wray, J., Farrall, H., & Aspland, J. (2014). Fit for purpose: traditional assessment is failing undergraduates with learning difficulties. Might eAssessment help? *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 18*(6), 614-625. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2013.802029

Wilson, P. M., Petticrew, M., Calnan, M., & Nazareth, I. (2010). Effects of a financial incentive on health researchers' response to an online survey: A randomized controlled trial. *Journal of Medical Internet Research, 12*(2), e13. http://doi.org/10.2196/jmir.1251

Whitchurch, C. (2013). *Reconstructing identities in higher education: The rise of third space professionals.* Society for Research into Higher Education/ Routledge.

Wong, B. (2018). By chance or by plan?: The academic success of nontraditional students in higher education. *AERA open, 4*(2), 1-14. https://doi.org/10.1177/2332858418782195

Woodyatt, C. R., Finneran, C. A., & Stephenson, R. (2016). In-person versus online focus group discussions: A comparative analysis of data quality.

Qualitative Health Research, 26(6), 741-749.
https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732316631510

World Health Organization (WHO). (2019). Promotion of mental well-being.
http://www.searo.who.int/entity/mental_health/promotion-of-mental-well-being/en/

Xiong, W., Jiang, J., & Mok, K. H. (2020, August 3). Hong Kong University
students' online learning experiences under the COVID-19 pandemic.
HEPI. https://www.hepi.ac.uk/2020/08/03/hong-kong-university-students-online-learning-experiences-under-the-COVID-19-pandemic/

Yale, A. T. (2019). The personal tutor–student relationship: student
expectations and experiences of personal tutoring in higher education.
Journal of Further and Higher Education, 43(4), 533-544.
https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2017.1377164

Yale, A. T. (2020). What's the deal? The making, shaping and negotiating of
first-year students' psychological contract with their personal tutor in
higher education. Frontiers in Education, 5(60), 1-12.
https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2020.00060

Yatsuya, H. & Ishitake, T. (2021). Health of university students under job and
financial insecurity during COVID-19 pandemic. Journal of Occupational
Health, 63, e12223. https://doi.org/10.1002/1348-9585.12223

Yin, R. K. (2018). Case study research and application: Design and Methods
(6th ed.). Sage.

Yorke, M. (2015). Why study the second year? In C. Milsom, M. Stewart, M.
Yorke, & E. Zaitseva (Eds.), Stepping up to the second year at university:
academic, psychological and social dimensions (pp. 1–13). Routledge.

Yorke, M., & Knight, P. (2004). Self-theories: Some implications for teaching
and learning in higher education. Studies in Higher Education, 29(1), 25–37. https://doi.org/10.1080/1234567032000164859

Young-Jones, A. D., Burt, T. D., Dixon, S., & Hawthorne, M. J. (2013).
Academic advising: does it really impact student success? Quality

Assurance in Education, 21(1), 7-19.
https://doi.org/10.1108/09684881311293034

Yuliani, E. L., Adnan, H., Colfer, C. J. P. & Indriatmoko, Y. (2015). Problem-solving versus appreciative inquiry approaches in community-based conservation. *Forests, Trees and Livelihoods, 24*(2), 97-111. https://doi.org/10.1080/14728028.2014.954638

Zachariadis, M., Scott, S., & Barrett, M. (2013). Methodological implications of critical realism for mixed-methods research. *MIS Quarterly, 37*(3), 855-879. https://www.jstor.org/stable/43826004

Zahavi, D. (2019). Applied phenomenology: why it is safe to ignore the epoché. *Continental Philosophy Review.* https://doi.org/10.1007/s11007-019-09463-y

Zainol, Z., & Salleh, Z. (2021). Factors influencing students academic withdrawal during COVID-19 pandemic. *Global Business and Management Research: An International Journal, 13*(4), 296-305.

Zepke, N. (2015). Student engagement research: thinking beyond the mainstream. *Higher Education Research & Development, 34*(6), 1311-1323. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2015.1024635

Zepke, N., & Leach, L. (2005). Integration and adaptation: Approaches to the student retention and achievement puzzle. *Active Learning in Higher Education, 9*(1), 46-59. https://doi.org/10.1177/1469787405049946

Zepke, N., & Leach, L. (2010). Improving student engagement: Ten proposals for action. *Active Learning in Higher Education, 11*(3), 167-177. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1469787410379680

Zhang, M. X., Mou, N. L., Tong, K. K., & Wu, A. M. S. (2018). Investigation of the effects of purpose in life, grit, gratitude, and school belonging on mental distress among Chinese emerging adults. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 15*(2147), 1-12. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph15102147

Appendices

2. University Centre ethics form and approval notification

1.1 Application form for COVID research

Formative Ethics Template

This template is to be used in preparation to submit your ethics application using the online form. Please complete sections 1, 2 and 3 (Social Science) *or* 4 (Education) and email to your supervisor. Your supervisor will give feedback and support the preparation of a final online submission.

Section 1

1. **Title of project:** Appreciating the role of personal tutoring in fostering college HE students' persistence during the COVID-19 pandemic

2. **Name of lead researcher:** Issy Hallam

3. **Lead researcher email address:**

   issyhallam@southdevon.ac.uk

4. **Name(s) of supporting researcher(s):**

5. **Estimated start date (dd/mm/yy) and duration of project:** Data collection March-December 2020 (approximately), analysis and interpretation until PhD submission in June 2022.

6. **Project supervisor:** ████ Alastair Wilson, University of Exeter – Anna Mountford-Zimdars.

7. **Summary (rational, aims and objectives):**

   This application is for revisions to my ongoing PhD research which was granted approval on 25/6/19 in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. The basis of the project appreciating the role of personal tutoring in fostering college higher education students' persistence remains, but the focus will now shift to persistence during the COVID-19 pandemic with a revised methodology.

Context

I am mid-way through my data collection for 'appreciating the role of personal tutoring in fostering college higher education students' persistence'. Phase 1 involved a desk analysis of organisational metrics from the last three years (attendance, attainment, continuation, student satisfaction). This was completed in January 2020. Phase 2, the student survey was commenced just before the transition to online teaching (w/c 16 March 2020). I have collected data from only seven of 58 tutorial groups, 33 participants from the total population of 750. I collected the data by visiting tutorial groups myself, supplying tutors with resources to introduce the survey and I had prepared some videos to introduce the survey and debrief the participant as the virus began to impact on attendance. However, understandably, tutors reported that the survey was down their priority in these challenging times.

I am now unable to collect survey data by visiting tutorial groups in person and would be unable to conduct face-to-face focus groups for the Phase 3 data collection. Perhaps more importantly, the disruption and anxiety triggered by COVID-19 is having a substantial impact on students' capacity to study and thus their persistence, so any continuation with the planned research would have challenges to the quality of the research.

Proposed re-orientation

Abandon the Phase 1 and Phase 2 data collection and move directly to online focus groups with volunteer students who would meet virtually several times during this shut down to discuss their own persistence during this unusual time. The research question would be adjusted to something along the lines of 'What is the role of personal tutoring in fostering college HE students' persistence during the COVID-19 transition to online learning?'.

I would still use most of my Literature Review and Tinto's (2017) model as my basis but explore how those aspects are impacted by the transition to online and everything else that is going on for them during this period. I have done research related to online learning and pedagogy in the past so would be able to pick up these ideas quickly. Anecdotally, students are reporting a number of changes to their motivation and persistence including job loss, caring for children, caring for sick relatives, being poorly themselves, mental health difficulties, working more/less and difficulty with online teaching and learning. I am interested in how these things are impacting their own self-efficacy, belonging, perception of curriculum (online pedagogy), goals and motivation, and ultimately persistence (Tinto's conceptions).

Adjusted research question

What is the role of personal tutoring in fostering college HE students' persistence during the COVID-19 transition to online learning?

8. **Summary (methodological approach):**

This research will take an organisational case study approach using a phenomenological design at a college Higher Education provider (my employer). It will be situated within the social constructivist paradigm seeking to answer the overall research question of 'What is the role of personal tutoring in fostering college HE students' persistence during the COVID-19 transition to online learning?' The research question will be operationalised with a longitudinal phenomenological approach.

Isabel Hallam

## 1.	Methodology

A longitudinal phenomenological approach will be taken to answer the research question. The longitudinal approach will enable data collection throughout the COVID-19 closure from now until students return to face-to-face teaching. The research timeframe is currently unknown but is anticipated to be until December 2020 (assuming we are teaching again in September 2020). The phenomenological approach will enable a rich exploration of relatively small number of students' perceptions of their lived experience of the transition to online learning during the COVID-19 closure. The framework will remain appreciative inquiry, emphasising the positive 'what is working well?'. This will remain consistent with the college values, will protect against discussions becoming negative and impacting on wellbeing, and support the promotion of positive practice for tutors.

## 2.	Methods

An invite email will be sent to all 750 students at ▇▇▇▇ asking for volunteers to take part in online focus groups every four weeks during the shutdown and once we have returned to face-to-face teaching. Participants will be grouped into focus groups of four, from similar cognate areas to foster some initial rapport. A total number of approximately 20 participants will be sought but if more are forthcoming, I will try to incorporate them. Four participants per group has been chosen as MS Teams allows for four participants to be seen at any one time and this will enable all participants to feel part of the group. If students are less familiar with online groups chats they may be uneasy about sharing in this setting, but as this is our means of online learning during this period students familiar with it. I anticipate that most volunteers will be students that I have some sort of personal connection with, those who are seeking some sort of regular supportive group or those who feeling positive about the situation and can give up the time. I will try to maintain the same focus groups through the study but recognise due to drop-out some focus groups may reduce in size during the project.

Online focus groups will enable dialogue to between participants, but I recognise that the conversation will be more stilted and less free-flowing due to the online nature and internet connectivity. The focus groups will be video/audio recorded in MS Team (which is held within our secure network) to aid transcription. All participants will be made aware of this initially and it will be reiterated for each group. My intention at this stage is to use discursive psychology within discourse analysis to analyse the focus groups, enabling a deeper level of interpretation of the way participants talk, cognitive interpret and reflect on the reality of their persistence in the current situation (Wiggin, 2017).

Expected outcomes: I intend to submit for publication or presentation the findings. As a member of UK Advising and Tutoring (UKAT) and the British Psychological Society's (BPS) Division of Academics, Researchers and Teachers of Psychology (DART-p) this will include submissions for their conferences and publications.

9. **Cost/benefit analysis (What are the benefits for the scientific community to justify the costs of then project?):** The focus groups will last approximately 45 mins each and take place every four weeks for up to six/seven months, therefore participants could be involved in up to eight focus groups each which is a substantial commitment (although they will not have to attend each one). No incentives will be given for participation, but participants may feel a benefit of taking part is regular opportunities to reflect on their studies during this period and the support of the member of the wellbeing team who will observe the focus groups.

10. **Is there any participant less than 18 years old or belonging to vulnerable groups involved in the research?**

   Yes (Track B)   **No (Skip next question)**

11. **Please identify the individuals or groups that you intend to approach for participation in your research and explain how participants will be recruited:** All ▓▓▓▓ students will be invited to take part via their student email accounts using a Moodle message.

Section 2

Declaration of interest:

☐   I declare to the best of my knowledge, I don't have interests which may conflict with the conduction of the present research project.

☐   **I declare interests below for consideration, along with remedial actions in place to minimise the risks of these interests coming into conflict with the conduction of the project.**
    As HE Tutorial and Social Mobility Manager and based in the Student Support Hub I have an interest in ensuring that students are receiving the best support available.

In accordance with GDPR (2018) and Data Protection Act (2018) data processing is not likely to cause substantial damage or distress and will be processed on the legal basis of:

☐   **Consent**
☐   Task in the public interest

Remember to submit supporting documents:

Section 4: Education (BERA Guidelines)

1. **How will you meet your responsibilities to participants, consider: consent, transparency, right to withdraw, incentives, harm arising from participation in research, privacy and data storage, and disclosure?**
The wellbeing of student participants will remain paramount. At this time of heightened anxiety and stress, I do not want to increase this by asking participants to reflect on their persistence in a manner that might harm their wellbeing. To mitigate this, participants will be given a detailed Participant Information sheet (appendix 2) and consent form (appendix 3) before enrolling in the research and reminded of it before each data collection focus group. This will include a statement about the voluntary nature of their participation, that the information given will be treated confidentially both the research team and participant peers, to stay on positive aspects of persistence and what is working well, signposting to further support and the involvement of one of our Wellbeing support workers in the focus group as an observer who can check in with each participant after each focus group if they raise anything of concern. Participants will be able to withdraw at any time, either from individual focus groups or the entire study with impunity. All participants will be asked to nominate their own pseudonym to be used in the research write-up, that only they and I know. All recordings and transcripts will be held on my secure ████ OneDrive account before being anonymised and moved to my Exeter OneDrive account at which stage the original recordings and transcripts will be removed (June 2021?).

2. **How will you meet your responsibilities to sponsors, clients and stakeholders in the research?** I will undertake the research in accordance with the ethical approval to be gained from ████ and Exeter. In doing so I am conscious of the need for modelling good research practice to my students and colleagues. I will share the anonymised findings with ████ to help further develop our student support and online learning provision, particularly for students experiencing stress and questions over their persistence in their studies. I am conscious of my professional responsibilities within my job role as Tutorial and Social Mobility Manager and will seek guidance from my line manager (Alastair) and/or HR if negative issues are raised by students.

3. **How will you meet your responsibilities to the community of educational researchers?** I aim to protect the integrity and reputation of both ████ and Exeter in the research I undertaken by complying with my ethical approvals and research quality best-practice. ████'s name will be anonymised in all write ups and publications, but it is unreasonable to think it would be totally anonymous as my name is linked to the college.

4. **How will you meet your responsibilities for publication and dissemination?** I intend to submit my findings to journals and conferences for publication. I will inform participants of the intention and any confirmed publications

5. **How will you meet your responsibilities for researchers' wellbeing and development?** To safeguard my own wellbeing I will have regular catch ups with my line manager, who acts as my ████ research supervisor and my own research support network at ████, as well as my Exeter supervisors. A risk-assessment for

lone online working has been completed by ▮▮▮▮ for this period of home-working and I will ensure I am adhering to this.

6. **Have you emailed the risk assessment and relative supporting documents to your supervisor?** Yes, participant information and consent forms attached.

7. **Please explain how you intend to mitigate any ethical issues in your project:** As above.

Appendices

1. Draft text of email inviting participation in the focus groups
2. Draft focus group information sheet
3. Draft focus group consent form
4. Email of in-principle support for the research from ▮▮▮▮, subject to ethical approval (27/3/20)
5. Email of support from supervisor, Anna Mountford-Zimdars (27/3/20)

2.3   Email confirming University Centre ethical approval

Issy Hallam

From:	Samantha Smith
Sent:	27 March 2020 14:28
To:	▮▮▮▮ Issy Hallam
Subject:	Ethical Approval

Hi Issy,

The UCSD Ethics Panel reviewed your ethics application today (09 March 2020) for your proposed project for:

Appreciating the role of personal tutoring in fostering college HE students' persistence (Phase 2)

The panel were pleased to **approve** your application.

Please retain a cop▮▮▮▮il as proof of ethical approval

Best wishes,

Sam

Sam Smith | Lecturer Psychology |Level 6 Research Coordinator
samanthasmith@southdevon.ac.uk |01803 540621
Room 3.027

3. University of Exeter ethics form and approval notification

2.1 Application form for COVID amendments research

COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

All staff and students within SSIS should use this form; those in Egenis, the Institute for Arab and Islamic Studies, Law, Politics, the Strategy & Security Institute, and Sociology, Philosophy, Anthropology should return it to ssis-ethics@exeter.ac.uk. Staff and students in the **Graduate School of Education** should use ssis-gseethics@exeter.ac.uk.

Before completing this form please read the Guidance document

which can be found at http://intranet.exeter.ac.uk/socialsciences/ethics/

Applicant details	
Name	**Isabel Hallam**
Department	**Graduate School of Education**
UoE email address	**Ich208@exeter.ac.uk**
Duration for which permission is required	

Please check the meeting dates and decision information online before completing this form; your start date should be at least one month after the Committee meeting date at which your application will be considered. You should request approval for the entire period of your research activity. Students should use the anticipated date of completion of their course as the end date of their work. Please note that retrospective ethical approval will never be given.

Start date:01/07/2019	**End date:01/07/2023**	**Date submitted:27/03/2020**
Students only		

All students must discuss (face to face or via email) their research intentions with their supervisor/tutor prior to submitting an application for ethical approval. **Your application must be approved by your first or second supervisor (or dissertation supervisor/tutor) prior to submission and you MUST submit evidence of their approval with your application, e.g. a copy of an email stating their approval.**

Student number	**650049070**
Programme of study	**Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)**

Name of Supervisor(s) or Dissertation Tutor	**Chris Boyle and Anna Mountford-Zimdars**
Have you attended any ethics training that is available to students?	No, I have not taken part in ethics training at the University of Exeter

However, I am a member of my own HEPs ethics committee, have undertaken internal training and review student and staff applications regularly. |

Certification for all submissions

I hereby certify that I will abide by the details given in this application and that I undertake in my research to respect the dignity and privacy of those participating in this research. I confirm that if my research should change significantly I will seek advice, request approval of an amendment or complete a new ethics proposal. Any document translations used have been provided by a competent person with no significant changes to the original meaning.

Isabel Hallam

Double click this box to confirm certification ⊠

Submission of this ethics proposal form confirms your acceptance of the above.

TITLE OF YOUR PROJECT

Appreciating the role of personal tutoring in fostering college higher education students' persistence during the COVID-19 pandemic.

ETHICAL REVIEW BY AN EXTERNAL COMMITTEE

No, my research is not funded by, or doesn't use data from, either the NHS or Ministry of Defence.

MENTAL CAPACITY ACT 2005

No, my project does not involve participants aged 16 or over who are unable to give informed consent (e.g. people with learning disabilities)

SYNOPSIS OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

Maximum of 750 words.

This application is for revisions to my ongoing PhD research which was granted approval on 23/5/19 (ref: D1819-049) in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. The basis of the project appreciating the role of personal tutoring in fostering college higher education students' persistence remains, but the focus will now shift to persistence during the COVID-19 pandemic with a revised methodology.

Context

I am mid-way through my data collection for 'appreciating the role of personal tutoring in fostering college higher education students' persistence'. Phase 1 involved a desk analysis of organisational metrics from the last three years (attendance, attainment, continuation, student satisfaction). This was completed in January 2020. Phase 2, the student survey was commenced just before the transition to online teaching (w/c 16 March 2020). I have collected data from only seven of 58 tutorial groups, 33 participants from the total population of 750. I collected the data by visiting tutorial groups myself, supplying tutors with resources to introduce the survey and I had prepared some videos to introduce the survey and debrief the participant as the virus began to impact on attendance. However, understandably, tutors reported that the survey was down their priority in these challenging times.

I am now unable to collect survey data by visiting tutorial groups in person and would be unable to conduct face-to-face focus groups for the Phase 3 data collection. Perhaps more importantly, the disruption and anxiety triggered by COVID-19 is having a substantial impact on students' capacity to study and thus their persistence, so any continuation with the planned research would have challenges to the quality of the research.

Proposed re-orientation

Abandon the Phase 1 and Phase 2 data collection and move directly to online focus groups with volunteer students who would meet virtually several times during this shut down to discuss their own persistence during this unusual time. The research question would be adjusted to something along the lines of 'What is the role of personal tutoring in fostering college HE students' persistence during the COVID-19 transition to online learning?'.

I would still use most of my Literature Review and Tinto's (2017) model as my basis but explore how those aspects are impacted by the transition to online and everything else that is going on for them during this period. I have done research related to online learning and pedagogy in the past so would be able to pick up these ideas quickly. Anecdotally, students are reporting a number of changes to their motivation and persistence including job loss, caring for children, caring for sick relatives, being poorly themselves, mental health difficulties, working more/less and difficulty with online teaching and learning. I am interested in how these things are impacting their own self-efficacy, belonging, perception of curriculum (online pedagogy), goals and motivation, and ultimately persistence (Tinto's conceptions).

Adjusted research question
What is the role of personal tutoring in fostering college HE students' persistence

during the COVID-19 transition to online learning?

INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH

My research is UK-based.

The following sections require an assessment of possible ethical consideration in your research project. If particular sections do not seem relevant to your project please indicate this and clarify why.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research will take an organisational case study approach using a phenomenological design at a college Higher Education provider (my employer). It will be situated within the social constructivist paradigm seeking to answer the overall research question of
What is the role of personal tutoring in fostering college HE students' persistence during the COVID-19 transition to online learning? The research question will be operationalised with a longitudinal phenomenological approach.

1. Methodology

A longitudinal phenomenological approach will be taken to answer the research question. The longitudinal approach will enable data collection throughout the COVID-19 closure from now until students return to face-to-face teaching. The research timeframe is currently unknown but is anticipated to be until December 2020 (assuming we are teaching again in September 2020). The phenomenological approach will enable a rich exploration of relatively small number of students' perceptions of their lived experience of the transition to online learning during the COVID-19 closure. The framework will remain appreciative inquiry, emphasising the positive 'what is working well?'. This will remain consistent with the college values, will protect against discussions becoming negative and impacting on wellbeing, and support the promotion of positive practice for tutors.

2. Methods

An invite email will be sent to all 750 students at ███ asking for volunteers to take part in online focus groups every three-four weeks during the shutdown and once we have returned to face-to-face teaching. Participants will be grouped into focus groups of four, from similar cognate areas to foster some initial rapport. A total number of approximately 20 participants will be sought but if more are forthcoming, I will try to incorporate them. Four participants per group has been chosen as MS Teams allows for four participants to be seen at any one time and this will enable all participants to feel part of the group. If students are less familiar with online groups chats they may

be uneasy about sharing in this setting, but as this is our means of online learning during this period students familiar with it. I anticipate that most volunteers will be students that I have some sort of personal connection with, those who are seeking some sort of regular supportive group or those who feeling positive about the situation and can give up the time. I will try to maintain the same focus groups through the study but recognise due to drop-out some focus groups may reduce in size during the project.

Online focus groups will enable dialogue to between participants, but I recognise that the conversation will be more stilted and less free-flowing due to the online nature and internet connectivity. The focus groups will be video/audio recorded in MS Team (which is held within our secure network) to aid transcription. All participants will be made aware of this initially and it will be reiterated for each group. My intention at this stage is to use discursive psychology within discourse analysis to analyse the focus groups, enabling a deeper level of interpretation of the way participants talk, cognitive interpret and reflect on the reality of their persistence in the current situation (Wiggin, 2017).

Expected outcomes: I intend to submit for publication or presentation the findings. As a member of UK Advising and Tutoring (UKAT) and the British Psychological Society's (BPS) Division of Academics, Researchers and Teachers of Psychology (DART-p) this will include submissions for their conferences and publications.

PARTICIPANTS

When considering how participants will be involved in my research I have been mindful of both the British Educational Research Association (2018) ethical guidelines and those of the British Psychological Society (2014).

An invite email (appendix 1) will be sent to all 750 students at █████ asking for volunteers to take part in online focus groups every three weeks during the shutdown and once we have returned to face-to-face teaching. Participants will be grouped into focus groups of four, from similar cognate areas to foster some initial rapport. A total number of approximately 20 participants will be sought but if more are forthcoming, I will try to incorporate them. Four participants per group has been chosen as MS Teams allows for four participants to be seen at any one time and this will enable all participants to feel part of the group.

Responsibilities to participants: The wellbeing of student participants will remain paramount. At this time of heightened anxiety and stress, I do not want to increase this by asking participants to reflect on their persistence in a manner that might harm their wellbeing. To mitigate this, participants will be given a detailed Participant Information sheet (appendix 2) and consent form (appendix 3) before enrolling in the

Isabel Hallam

research and reminded of it before each data collection focus group. This will include a statement about the voluntary nature of their participation, that the information given will be treated confidentially both the research team and participant peers, to stay on positive aspects of persistence and what is working well, signposting to further support and the involvement of one of our Wellbeing support workers in the focus group as an observer who can check in with each participant after each focus group if they raise anything of concern. Participants will be able to withdraw at any time, either from individual focus groups or the entire study with impunity. All participants will be asked to nominate their own pseudonym to be used in the research write-up, that only they and I know. All recordings and transcripts will be held on my secure ███ OneDrive account before being anonymised and moved to my Exeter OneDrive account at which stage the original recordings and transcripts will be removed (June 2020?).

THE VOLUNTARY NATURE OF PARTICIPATION

In addition to the information given above:

The total population of ███ students will be invited to volunteer to join the online focus groups. The email introducing the research will inform potential participants about the nature of the project and their voluntary involvement (Appendix 1). The Participant Information sheet) will reiterate the nature of participation, information regarding their consent and right to withdraw, and explain how their data will be anonymised and kept confidential in line with the Data Protection Act 2018 (Appendix 2). Participants will be asked to confirm their consent to take-part in the research prior to each online focus group and will be reminded of their right to withdraw and information on how to do.

A concern with using a volunteer sample is the potential influence of power differential, as participants are likely to be interesting in taking part because of some personal connection to me. Barstow (2008, p. 53) describes power differential as 'an enhanced amount of role power that accompanies any position of authority' and considers that once in a position of power peoples' tendency to empathise and be altruistic degrades. The enhanced amount of role power relates to teacher-student power relations. Barstow's (2008) observation could influence the way participants interact and contribute during data collection. To mitigate this, participants will be briefed about the importance of a range of views and that there are no wrong answers. At the beginning of the focus groups the information will be reiterated and participants will be asked to re-confirm their consent.

SPECIAL ARRANGEMENTS

The online focus groups should not require any special arrangements as it will be managed through ███'s virtual learning platform and MS Teams which students have been engaging in since the transition to online learning in the week commencing 16

March 20020.

THE INFORMED NATURE OF PARTICIPATION

Please see Appendices 1 and 2 for examples of the informed consent information.

ASSESSMENT OF POSSIBLE HARM

No psychological, legal, political, economic or physical harm to the participants or researcher is anticipated because of this research. However, given the nature of the COVID-19 pandemic and tutorial support, some participants may discuss information that could potentially cause distress. To mitigate this all participants will be sign-posted to ████'s wellbeing team at the end of the online focus groups. Additionally, one of the wellbeing team will be an observer in the online focus groups and be a point of contact for any focus group participants who require support following the focus group discussion. All participants will be made of the observer.

DATA PROTECTION AND STORAGE

In compliance with University of Exeter best practice, the Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulation 2018, all collected and analysed data will be stored on a password protected computer via my ████ OneDrive/Office 365 account. Processed data, my interpretations of data and thesis will be stored on my password protected home computer and/or University of Exeter OneDrive account. ████'s name will be anonymised throughout the reporting stage, but as this is practitioner research and my name is openly associated with ████, it is unrealistic to assume the organisation will be kept anonymous, therefore comprehensive efforts to anonymise students' personal details will be made.

During online focus group participants will be asked to create or be allocated a pseudonym which will be used throughout transcription, analysis, interpretation and reporting. All video/audio recordings will be destroyed following transcription and cross-referencing with the notes taken during the focus group. Participants will be told they have a right to withdraw their data from the research within specified timeframes by emailing their pseudonym to the HE Study team, who will in turn ask the researcher to withdraw the data related to that pseudonym. The confidentiality of participants will be ensured. Tutors will be naturally curious about their tutees' responses within the focus group, but only anonymised or generalised information will be shared unless express permission is granted by the participant.

DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

The research has the full support of ▮▮▮▮ as the case study organisation, subject to ethical approval (Appendix 6). As I am employed as a lecturer, personal tutor, programme lead and Tutorial Manager at ▮▮▮▮ I have a declared interest in the research outcomes. Although my PhD fees are being part-paid by ▮▮▮▮, my academic freedom to research with impunity has been reassured.

USER ENGAGEMENT AND FEEDBACK

The themes emerging from the analysis of the online focus groups will be shared with participants for their consultation and comments. Participants will be informed of any intention to submit the research for publication or conference presentation, and given access to any subsequent publications.

INFORMATION SHEET

Appendix 1: Email inviting participation in the research

CONSENT FORM

Appendix 2: Participant information sheet

Appendix 3: Consent form

2.2 Certificate of ethical approval for the original proposal

UNIVERSITY OF EXETER

GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

St Luke's Campus
Heavitree Road
Exeter UK EX1 2LU

http://socialsciences.exeter.ac.uk/education/

CERTIFICATE OF ETHICAL APPROVAL

Title of Project: Appreciating the role of personal tutoring in fostering college higher education students' persistence.

Researcher(s) name: Isabel Hallam

Supervisor(s): Chris Boyle
Anna Mountford-Zimdars

This project has been approved for the period

From: 01/07/2019
To: 01/07/2023

Ethics Committee approval reference: D1819-049

Signature: Date: 23/05/2019
(Professor Justin Dillon, Professor of Science and Environmental Education, Ethics Officer)

3.3 Email confirming approval for COVID amendments

SSIS - GSE Ethics Submission & Queries
Fri 03/04/2020 10:09
To: Hallam, Isabel
Cc: SSIS - GSE Ethics Submission & Queries; Mountford-Zimdars, Anna; Boyle, Christopher

D1819-049 Hallam appro...
324 KB

Dear Isabel

Ref D1819-049

Your requested amendment to this study has been approved by the Ethics Reviewers. Please see attached the approved amended version of your application. You may now commence work on the aspects of your research covered by the amendment.

Please retain this email with your ethics approval documentation.

Best wishes for your continuing research.

Kind regards

Mark Slater
Research Ethics Officer

Research Ethics and Governance
University of Exeter 01392 72 3499

G14 Lafrowda House, St Germans Road, Exeter, Devon, EX4 6TL (Mon, Tue, Fri)
RB20 Richards Building, St Lukes Campus, Exeter, Devon EX1 2LU (Thurs)

Humanities Ethics | SSIS Ethics | GSE Ethics | SSHS Ethics

4. University Centre gatekeeper consent

Redacted permission from gatekeeper for access to phase one organisational data and in-principle support for the research project.

Issy Hallam

From:	Alastair Wilson
Sent:	28 February 2019 10:50
To:	Issy Hallam
Cc:	Isabel Hallam; Matthew Harbour
Subject:	RE: Tutorial research

Good Morning Issy,
I can confirm on behalf o████████████ that having been fully appraised of your research and subject to the conditions you have identified we are happy to support your research as outlined in your email. Should you require this as a written letter please let me know.
Best wishes, and good luck with your research.
Alastair Wilson

Head of Higher Education and Academic Registrar

From: Hallam, Isabel <ich208@exeter.ac.uk>
Sent: 24 February 2019 14:22
To: Alastair Wilson <AWILSON@████████████>
Cc: Issy Hallam <issyhallam@████████>
Subject: Tutorial research

Hi Alastair

Further to our conversations about my thesis research on the tutorial system a█████. The research has a working title of Appreciating the role of personal tutoring in fostering college HE students' persistence. The research will be in three phases:

1. Secondary data analysis of organisational metrics on retention, achievement and student satisfaction. (Summer 2019)

2. Online survey to a█████ students to measure their responses to statements relating to their personal tutoring experience (based on the core skills and values of effective personal tutoring identified by Lochtie, McIntosh, Stork and Walker in 2018) and how tutoring supports their persistence. (Dec 2019 – Feb 2020)

   Phases 1 and 2 will enable the identification of courses (or groups of JACS code based courses) that have positive metrics and positive perceptions of tutoring. These courses will then be invited to take part in Phase 3 (note the intention is to not include courses from my own department due to the power differentials and ethical implications, but this may be reviewed).

3. In depth qualitative exploration of the tutorial experience and how it contributes to students' persistence. The plan is to gather data through student focus groups. Ideally four courses would be involved, two from each of the departments outside of my own. (June 2020 - Dec 2020)

On behalf o█████ can you please confirm that you are, subject to University of Exeter an█████ ethical approval, supportive of my outline research plan and the sharing of organisational data for secondary data analysis, and that my academic freedom is assured? The organisational data will be held on OneDrive in accordance with organisational guidance. The Data Protection Act and GDPR will be adhered to in the use of data, and BPS ethical guidelines in terms of my conduct.

Thanks

5. Call for focus group participants: email

Redacted copy of the email sent on 22 April 2020 via the University Centre's virtual learning environment Moodle calling for focus group participants:

Dear ▮▮ student,

I would like to invite you to take part in a research project regarding your persistence with your studies during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the role of personal tutoring in fostering your persistence. Please read the information below and if you are interested, click on the link at the end of the email to read the full participant information and register your interest in volunteering in the research.

▮▮ is committed to supporting you to succeed in your undergraduate qualification. Personal tutoring is part of this support. However, the COVID-19 pandemic and the transition to online learning has created unique challenges for students and personal tutors alike. As a ▮▮ personal tutor, I have always been interested in the relationship between tutors and students, and how the relationship can sometimes help students to persist to complete their studies. Tinto (2017) defines persistence as the 'quality that allows someone to continue in pursuit of a goal even when challenges arise'.

I am currently undertaking PhD research with the University of Exeter and my research focuses on understanding how personal tutoring can help to foster students' persistence during the COVID-19 pandemic. I would like to invite you to take part in a longitudinal qualitative research project. This will involve you joining an online focus group using MS Teams every month during the COVID-19 pandemic and our transition back to face to face teaching or the completion of your course. The focus groups will be made up four other ▮▮ students.

If you wish to take part, please click on the link below. The link will take you to detailed Participant Information and ask you to register your interest before 5pm on Monday 27 April.
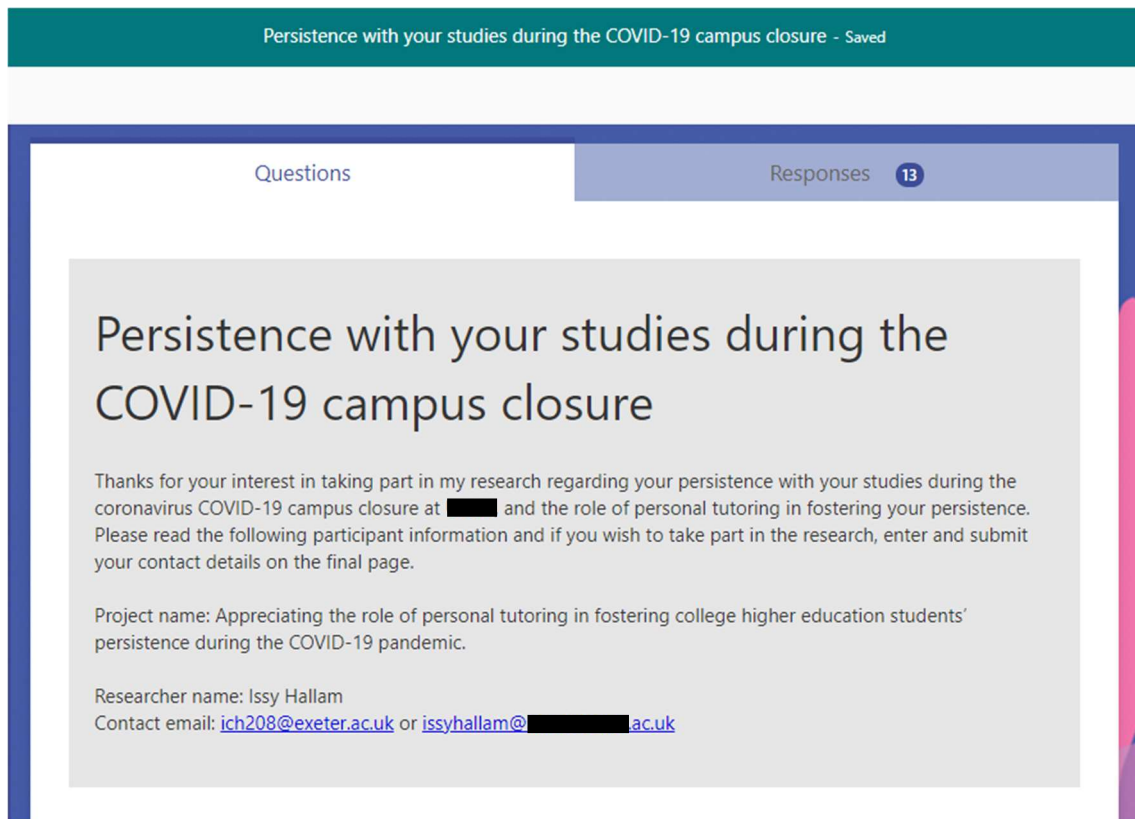
Participant Information link

Thank you.

Issy Hallam
Psychology and education lecturer

6. Focus group participant information and consent form

Redacted copy of the online participant information and consent form for the focus groups:

Persistence with your studies during the COVID-19 campus closure - Saved

Questions	Responses 13

Persistence with your studies during the COVID-19 campus closure

Thanks for your interest in taking part in my research regarding your persistence with your studies during the coronavirus COVID-19 campus closure at ▇▇▇ and the role of personal tutoring in fostering your persistence. Please read the following participant information and if you wish to take part in the research, enter and submit your contact details on the final page.

Project name: Appreciating the role of personal tutoring in fostering college higher education students' persistence during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Researcher name: Issy Hallam
Contact email: ich208@exeter.ac.uk or issyhallam@▇▇▇▇▇▇.ac.uk

Participant information

⬛ is committed to supporting you to succeed in your undergraduate qualification. Personal tutoring is part of this support. However, the COVID-19 pandemic and the transition to online learning has created unique challenges for students and personal tutors alike. As a ⬛ personal tutor, I have always been interested in the relationship between tutors and students, and how the relationship can sometimes help students to persist to complete their studies. Tinto (2017) defines persistence as the 'quality that allows someone to continue in pursuit of a goal even when challenges arise'.

I am currently undertaking PhD research with the University of Exeter and my research focuses on understanding how personal tutoring can help to foster students' persistence during COVID-19. I would like to invite you to take part in a longitudinal qualitative research project. This will involve you joining an online focus group using MS Teams every month during the COVID-19 pandemic and our transition back to face to face teaching or the completion of your course. The focus groups will be made up four other ⬛ students. Please take time to read this Information Sheet and carefully consider whether you wish to take part.

Purpose of the research

The aim of this research is to appreciate factors that are present within students, and the tutor-student relationship, when students are persisting and succeeding with their studies during online teaching prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic. By identifying these factors, I will support ⬛ to develop a tutoring programme that is based on students' feedback about what they value in tutoring during challenging times.

Why have I been approached?

All ⬛ students have been invited to take part in the online focus groups as the research takes the form of an organisational case study regarding ⬛s personal tutoring provision.

What would taking part involve?

The research involves online focus groups with students from across ⬛ You will be asked to take part in several 45-minute online focus group using MS Teams every month throughout the online teaching period of the COVID-19 pandemic with a final focus group once we have returned to face-to-face teaching.

The focus groups will be semi-structured with questions exploring your experiences of online personal tutoring and how that is impacting on your persistence with your studies. You will be asked to contribute as much or as little as you wish. All the focus groups will be video and/or audio-recorded using MS Teams and later transcribed. Following the focus group, the themes identified will be shared with you as a group in case you want to add any additional information or clarify concerns. All video/audio recordings of the focus groups will be deleted at this stage.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

There will be no direct benefits or payments to you for taking part. However, you may feel a benefit in terms of understanding how you and your peers are persisting during online teaching.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

There should not be any disadvantages or risks to taking part. However, if you are uncomfortable about any of the topics discussed or it raises issues you want addressed, please contact your personal tutor or the HE wellbeing team on the HEwellbeing@s███████.ac.uk email address.

What will happen if I don't want to carry on with the study?

If you do not wish to participate with the focus group once it has started, you will be free to go at any time. A member of the HE wellbeing team will be present throughout the online focus group to assist with transcription and to provide independent support.

If you choose to withdraw during the focus group, the member of the HE wellbeing team will contact you to offer support if you were uncomfortable about any of the issues raised, and to determine if you want your contributions removed from the transcript. Please be assured that if you wish your data to be withdrawn following the focus group, this is also possible by contacting HEstudy@████████.ac.uk Please be assured that there will be no negative consequences if you leave the focus group or ask for your data to be removed.

How will my information be kept confidential?

Confidentially will be reiterated through the research, both between and within the focus groups. Participants will be asked to respect their fellow participants' confidentiality by not sharing the discussions outside of the focus groups. The member of the ████ wellbeing team and myself will respect your confidently and not discuss or share matters outside the focus group unless you give us express permission to do so.

Tutors will be naturally curious about students' responses within the focus group, but only anonymised or generalised information will be shared unless you give express permission. To facilitate anonymity, focus group participants will be asked to create a pseudonym (or fake name) that will be used in the write up and dissemination of the research.

All your comments will be anonymised using your chosen pseudonym, kept confidential within ████ and all the data kept safe in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and General Data Protection Procedure 2018. Your answers will be kept anonymous once they have been transcribed and assigned to your chosen pseudonym. To withdraw, please email me before the last focus group (date TBC).

What will happen to the results of this study?

The overall findings of the study will be shared within ▮▮▮ to improve tutorial practice and the support we give to students, and disseminated to the UK higher education community through conferences and academic publications.

Who has reviewed this study?

This project has been reviewed and approved by the SSIS Research Ethics Committee at the University of Exeter (Reference Number: D1819-049) and the ▮▮▮ Ethics Committee.

Further information and contact details

If you wish to ask any questions, please contact me on my University of Exeter student email account ich208@exeter.ac.uk or my supervisors Chris Boyle on C.Boyle2@exeter.ac.uk or Anna Mountford-Zimdars on A.Mountford-Zimdars@exeter.ac.uk Thank you for your interest in this project.

Do you want to take part?

If you are still interested in volunteering to taking part, please leave your contact details below and I will contact you to arrange the first focus group.

1. Name *

> Enter your answer

2. Student email address (number@_____.ac.uk) *

> Enter your answer

3. Which programme are you studying at ____? *

> Select your answer ⌄

4. What undergraduate level of are you studying? *

○ Level 4 (first year) e.g. FdA, FdSc, Level 4 Certificate, HNC

○ Level 5 (second year) e.g. FdA, FdSc, HND

○ Level 6 (third year) e.g. BA (Hons), BSc (Hons)

5. Please confirm that you have read and understood the Participant Information above and consent to take part in the focus groups as part of Issy's student persistence during COVID-19 research. *

○ I understand the research project and consent to take part

○ No, I do not wish to take part in the research

7. Notification to personal tutors regarding focus groups

Redacted email sent to on 22 April to personal tutors informing them of the focus group research:

Issy Hallam

From:	Issy Hallam
Sent:	22 April 2020 14:28
To:	HE Personal Tutors; HE Team
Subject:	Research into persistence during COVID-19

Hi all

As you know I am undertaking PhD research into student persistence and the role of personal tutoring in fostering this persistence. Due to the current 'situation' I have had to rapidly re-orientate my research to take account of the campus closures due to COVID-19. I have had ethical approval from the University of Exeter and ███ for the revised project.

Today, a call will go out for ███ student participants to take part in online focus groups about their motivation, goals, sense of belonging, self-efficacy and perceptions of the curriculum, and how these factors are impacting on their persistence during campus closures. It will probably only involve about 20 students from across the UC. A copy of the information that students will receive shortly is below.

You will understand that what they say in the research will be kept confidential and reported anonymously, but I wanted to reassure you that anyone who raises anything that causes concern will be referred to the wellbeing team for support.

If you have any questions, drop me a line.

Thanks, Is

8. Timeline activity for first focus groups

The redacted timeline activity emailed to participants a week before the first focus group asking them to reflect on their feelings during this period to use as a prompt to use during the focus group:
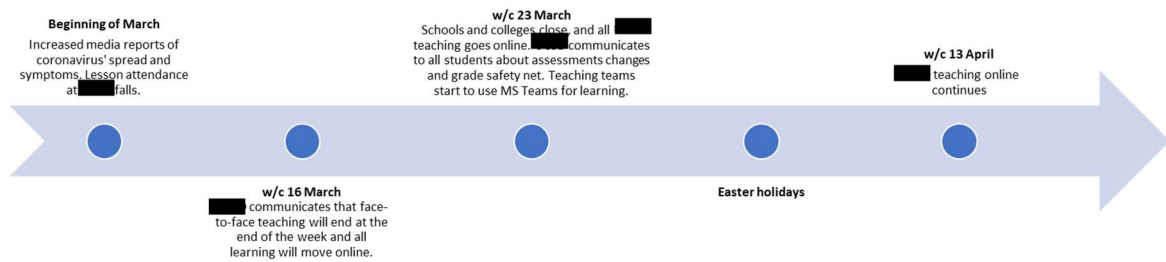
9. Focus group interview guide

Prompts

- Hello and introductions

- Thank you for reading the participant information online and confirming that you understand the research project and consent to take part

- Each FG I will ask you to consent to record, transcribe and analysis

- Can withdraw at anytime from FG or data before last FG

- Pseudonym

- Rules: respect, let everyone speak and keep the conversation confidential

- Principles: appreciative lens – what is working well, psychology.

- To you have your timeline and have you been able to note down some ideas?

April A1/B1/C1	**Timeline activity before the focus group asking Ps to reflect on the initial weeks pre/post lockdown (with prompts)**
	Introductions and ground rules
	Initial weeks pre/post lockdown
	• Can you recall how it felt in the last few weeks of classes when media reports about the virus were suggesting some people should self-isolate?
	• How did the atmosphere in the UC feel between you, your peers and the ▮▮▮▮ teaching and support staff?
	• Can you give me an example of how your tutor communicated with you when the decision was made to close the campus?
	• How did you feel about your tutors' communication in this period?
	• Once the decision to close the campus had been made, how did you feel?
	• Why do you think you felt like this?
	• In the first week of online teaching (before Easter), can you give me some positive examples of how your tutor and teachers supported your learning?
	• How did you feel about your relationship with your tutor and teachers in this time?
	• How did you feel about your relationship with your peers in this time?
	• Did you seek support from anyone at ▮▮▮▮ before Easter, if so, how did this help with your learning and wellbeing?
	• During the Easter holidays, how was your motivation for your studies impacted by COVID-19?

Isabel Hallam

	• How did this make you feel? • Did you seek support from anyone at ▮▮▮▮ during the Easter break, if so, how did this help with your learning and wellbeing? • Can you describe how you now feel about your academic studies?

May **A2/B2/C2**	**Motivation** • How would you describe your motivation for your studies at the moment? • Why do you think some things are positively influencing that motivation? • Can you describe some things that are reducing your motivation at the moment? • What new things have you been learning about in the last few weeks? • Can you describe how you feel when you are learning new things, either in a lesson or in preparation for an assessment? • Can you give me an example of how you have been interacting with your peers during online teaching and how you feel about this? • Can you describe the pleasure you get from studying? • How do you imagine your life after your course? • How has your 'imagined life' changed in recent months? • When you communicate with your tutor, how does this impact on your motivation? • Can you explain what is motivating you to keep going at this stage in your course?

June **A3/B3/C3**	**Sense of belonging** Reflecting on your time at ▮▮▮▮: • Can you describe how you feel about being a ▮▮▮▮ student? • Can you give me examples of time when you felt valued by your tutor or other members of the teaching team? • In what way do you think your personal values are similar to those of ▮▮▮▮ and your tutor? • How would you describe your relationship with your peers? • How do you feel about the academic and wellbeing support you get at ▮▮▮▮? • What sort of connection do you feel with your personal tutor? Reflection on the period of campus closures: • Did your perception of being a ▮▮▮▮ student change in this period? • How did your tutor demonstrate that they value you and your contributions during the campus closures? • Do you think your values or those of ▮▮▮▮ and your tutor changed during the campus closure, if so in what way? • How did you maintain positive relations with your peers during the closure? • In what way did these relationships change? • Did you feel you were still able to seek academic and wellbeing

Isabel Hallam

	support during the campus closure, if this changed, why do you think this was? • Can you give examples of how your connection with your personal tutor changed during the campus closures?

July A4/BC4	**Self-efficacy, curriculum and goals** Thinking back to when you started the course: • Why did you decided to go to university to study for a degree? • How did your career goal match up with your initial impression of the curriculum you would be studying? • Can you describe how confident you felt about taking part in lessons (note taking, contributing to class, asking questions etc.)? • How have the teaching team make the programme interesting, enjoyable and engaging for you? • Can you describe how confident you have felt about preparing for assessments (researching, managing your time, writing, verbally presenting and/or tests, getting draft feedback and finalising your assessments for submission etc.)? • Can you explain how you feel about receiving assessment feedback and how you respond to feedback? • How do you think your course is preparing you for future employment or study? • How has your personal tutor helped you to develop academically? • How has your personal tutor helped you to develop your employability and future goals? Reflection on the period of campus closures: • Can you describe how confident you have felt about taking part in online lessons (note taking, contributing to forums/chatroom, asking questions etc.)? • During online learning, how positive do you feel about the teaching and learning? How have the teaching team made it interesting, enjoyable and engaging for you? • Can you describe how confident you have felt about preparing for assessments (researching, managing your time, writing, verbally presenting and/or tests, getting draft feedback and finalising your assessments for submission etc.)? • How do you think studying remotely during the campus closure has prepared you for future employment or study? • How has your personal tutor helped you to develop academically when working remotely? • How has your personal tutor helped you to develop your employability and future options when working remotely?

September/ October	**Rejoining F2F teaching** • How have you prepared for returning to your studies? • How has your tutor welcomed you back to your studies?

Isabel Hallam

AB5/BC5	• How do you feel about returning to studying in the classroom and being onsite? • Do you anticipate using the building in a different way? • How prepared do you feel about studying and assessments after the break? • What could have been better during COVID to help you engage with your learning and stay motivated? • Reflecting on taking part in the research, how do you think it influenced your attitudes to your studies during lock down? **Progressing from** █████ • How did your personal tutor end their tutoring relationship, and how did that feel? • Did you keep in contact with your tutor during the summer and in the run up to Graduation? • What are you doing now you have graduated? • How did you feel about starting work/further study after lockdown? • Did you feel as prepared for work/further study as you might have done if teaching had continued until June? • What could have been better during COVID to help you engage with your learning and stay motivated? • Reflecting on taking part in the research, how do you think it influenced your attitudes to your studies during lock down?

10. Topic summaries from focus groups for survey development

During the first level of reflexive thematic analysis of Phase 1 qualitative data, five topic summaries were identified for use in the online survey in Phase 2 of the research. The five topic summaries are constructed from 25 codes and 114 sub-codes which are outlined below with illustrative quotes from the data. The quotes are attributed to the participant, focus group code and transcript line number. Thus, P4 (A1, 561) indicates that this quote comes from participant 1, and the quote starts on line 561 of the transcript from focus group A1.

9.1 Topic summary 'Online teaching and learning'

Topic summary 'Online teaching and learning'		
Code	**Sub-code**	**Illustrative quote**
Empathy		
	Teachers' comm	P4 (A1, 561) 'Our lecturer has to deal with her toddler coming in and wanting her attention, but she's still got her focus on the class.'
Future		
	Online	P8 (C3, 433) 'I might have to be online next year just for the start, if they're not gonna, if I know that they are not following the rules.'
	Planning	P4 (A2, 225) 'I would really rather have an opportunity to do face to face so if that's the only offer come September and I note that Cambridge University said yesterday that their lectures will again to be online'
Learning Experience		
	Choose to study	P4 (A3, 89) 'And because we are all adults, and because we were choosing to be there in that place very consciously'
	Environment	P4 (A4, 222) 'It really was not what I had been expecting and it knocked me off my stride'
	Learning adapts	P5 (B3, 264) 'Cause we've got Microsoft Teams. I still see [the tutor]. I see all my peers. I don't know if this is the same for everyone, but our lessons in our timetable didn't change'
	Looking forward	P9 (C1, 391) 'And being able to go back to lessons face to face in September and ask questions about things I don't understand, it's going to be a lot more helpful, so I'm kind of I'm eager to get back, I wanna get back to normal'
	Online not effect	P5 (B2, 248) 'And I think there's one occasion where it worked out fantastic for me with a tutor who said right go on, log off and try and find some references and come back in 15 minutes... It was only me that came back.'
	Positive Online	P10 (C3, 392) 'They've had to explain each slide they've done on PowerPoint or whatever, and sort of guide us a bit more

		because they know we haven't got access to books and things. So yeah, so so I think in that way they've supported us more.'
	Replicate UC	P1 (A1, 425) 'A kind of artificial, kind of, thing where I have to prepare my man cave and then it's kind of visualize myself walking into a room, which is the uni room where we go and do our learning. And that's the only way I could cope with it on a Thursday when we have lesson times.'
	Social interaction	P3 (A1, 425) 'In terms of like when we're talking online and the chatting that's changed because you can't express as much as you as you would, and sometimes 'cause we're not using the mic coz, trying to be respectful of one another.'
	Teacher's pedagogy	P5 (B2, 157) 'I also feel like from a teaching point of view nothing's changed like the delivery just been as good as it would have been if we were in like in the classroom. and I think that the fact it's being recorded as well that doesn't necessarily happen in the classroom, so being able to go back onto something is really, really helpful for me.'
	Uncertainty	P9 (C1, 150) 'But yeah I think I was initially a bit, uh, uneasy to kind of going online. Just I don't know how it's going to work, but I think it's worked out OK.'
Own learning		
	Assume not suit	P6 (B1, 153) 'Me and a couple of my friends were quite nervous about the whole online thing because I quite like to be able to speak to my teachers in person or just pop into the office if I have a question.'
	Create structure	P4 (A2, 202) 'I do something every single day towards my goal.'
	Learning preference	P1 (A3, 134) 'With it being one day a week, I just thought this isn't good enough. It's not doing me any good for my learning which is why I used to come in on my set days. And then I also use come in on the extra day.'
	Organise self	P2 (A1, 587) 'My dissertation, I managed to submit it before lockdown, so I've well, just yeah, I think it was just before the lockdown, as I thought I need to get it done. If it's going to happen then I can't be doing my dissertation with my children at home.'
Peer Social		
	Separation	P4 (A1, 400) 'There was a sense of loss and alienation because now it's, you know, I'm talking on a PC to talk to you.'

Table 15: Topic summary 'Online teaching and learning' with codes and data quotes

10.3   Topic summary 'Peers on my course'

Topic summary 'Peers on my course'		
Code	**Sub-code**	**Illustrative quote**
Empathy		
	Peers' diversity	P6 (B3, 206) 'Some of them won't speak to anyone outside of lessons. I don't think it's a personal and I think everyone is different and everyone's got a lot of different things going on at home and. Yeah, I mean it's not like no one dislikes each other

		and no one is horrible to each other.'
Motivation		
	Social	P2 (A2, 176) 'I think for me it's the social aspect that's helped my motivation, so being on like the chat will be on at like 6 in the morning. Because for me, that's a time where no ones awake.'
Own learning		
	Assume not suit	P7 (B1, 193) 'A lot of what you learn is off other people and it's been really hard to get your head into it mentally.'
	Missing out	P9 (C2, 201) 'I find it more difficult learning on my own. Because I I sometimes need someone else to be able to explain it in a way that helps it makes sense to me 'cause the way it's written in a textbook is not necessarily going to be the way that everybody is going to understand it'
Peers social		
	Challenging	P5 (B2, 244) 'But I just felt like we were meant to help each other, and it just wasn't happening.'
	Learning benefits	P10 (C2, 244) 'It is nice to log on on a Monday and carry on doing the class and seeing everyone on the screen.'
	Relations	P9 (C3, 116) 'There are a few individuals that I don't get on with, but I'm well aware that it is very difficult to get on with everyone you meet in life. Um, so I've kind of just let them be them.'
	Separation	P2 (A1, 430) 'I would say it with the people it has becomes very apparent who I really can rely on.'
	Strengthening	P3 (A1, 445) 'I've realized on the positive side of who really is there for one another, and that it that has been amazing at dealing with this whole thing like there's been some really strong friendships that you just know how hands down that after this it's not just going to be oh, I was on a uni course with them that it will be, but that's my friend.'
	Supporting	P5 (B1, 378) 'I think, between me and [another student]. We've kind of taken that role to encourage everyone else, which I guess is kind of just making us do the same.'

Table 16: Topic summary 'Peers on your course' with codes and data quotes

10.4   Topic summary 'University Centre culture and values'

Topic summary 'University Centre culture and values'		
Code	**Sub-code**	**Illustrative quote**
Appreciate the University Centre		
	Caring	P6 (B3, 100) 'So just like really eager to help you. It doesn't feel like you have with bothering anyone, which is what I sometimes worry about.'
	Community	P5 (B3, 87) 'Everyone kind of together and you don't like, feel like you're on your own, like the peers, everyone works together in class.'
	Feedback	P6 (B3, 133) 'just makes you feel like they actually do listen to you and you're not just filling out, kind of, you know, tick some boxes really. Which I know a lot of places, it is probably more about that, just make them seem like they're doing something.'
	Personalised	P4 (A3, 69) 'Uhm, I haven't been to another University, so I don't

		know if I can say it's unique ... Smaller and bespoke because it is possible to get to know individual students and for us to get to know our lecturers.'
	Proud	P5 (B3, 73) 'I'm proud. Being part of a like for me in part of a smaller community rather than like a University that's too big, like I probably wouldn't manage.'
	Responsive	P4 (A1, 300) 'I felt very much that you know the University was on the ball and really kept us in the loop and I was grateful for that.'
Belonging		
	Community	P2 (A3, 318) 'I think in the first two years because our cohorts so small we really grew together, and I think we were really quite close.'
	Identity	P2 (A3, 109) 'It being a centre for more mature students, so I felt really comfortable stepping into the Center like it just initially from just going to the open evening, three years ago.'
	Missing out	P1 (A1, 261) 'And how it felt to me. Just as I put [on social media] this feels like the end of the world as we know it.'
	Outsider	P1 (A3, 370) 'One my immediate sort of fears when first starting uni was people who are a lot lot younger would have completely differing views and one of my greatest uhm, how can I say pushes of ensuring I get my work done is only in her young 20s and it's just great to see that sort of age has sort of I'm sort of, uhm, effect, UM, on friendship when it when it comes to this and that, that makes me really, really humble, actually.'
	Pedagogy	P4 (A3, 76) 'I like to ask the question in the moment and that there wouldn't have been the capacity to do that, and the smaller size rooms, groups. Yeah, a privileged position. It was just yes much much appreciated and on a practical level, for me it meant that it's it's a short drive away from my front door.'
	Personalised	P1 (A3, 50) 'You are a name and a person. Rather than just a number, and it is very apparent with every member of staff, wellbeing, tutors alike.'
	Space	P4 (A1, 392) 'For me, um, it was with the University Center closing. I had driven past there to go to Sainsbury's and I thought I'm never ever going to have to turn left again.'
Disability		
	Hiding	P1 (A3, 301) 'It was like a massive weight had been lifted and that is where everybody at UC has made that incredible change within main both academically and personally, which would not have happened had I been at another University in just a number . Yeah, for me, you know it really has been a journey of personal self discovery.
Empathy		
	Teachers time off	P6 (B3, 323) 'Even over like half term in that some of our other lecturers, which is fair enough 'cause technically you don't have to answer us over half term, but she still she has.'
Own learning		
	Create structure	P7 (B1, 399) 'I spoke to one the Tutors and said that was really struggling. He knows what I'm like and he was like right OK by next week you need to have written your introduction. And, just give me a start somewhere to start.'

Student experience		
	Assessment	P4 (A4, 278) 'I was surprised that it was every six weeks because I thought somehow that the assessment period you would learn over the course of a year and then be tested, which was the way it worked when I was at school.'
	Comparison	P4 (A4, 211) 'I just thought that it would be a place of learning and we were all going to be there with the same aim in mind and the same focus... But it was much louder, much more disruptive. Not at all the environment that I thought that I was going to be coming into for a learning environment.'
	Ending	P4 (A1, 395) 'The third year had started really well, uUm and and I hoped that I was going to have a happy ending and then it it it ended abruptly.'
	Identity	P1 (A2, 112) 'There is this is hole in my life all of a sudden everything that I've been striving and working for.'
Student-centred		
	Responsive	P6 (B3, 103) 'Everyone is so approachable and friendly…even if they can't help you may be there and then, they're really quick to get back to you or find someone that can help you.
Tutor		
	Approachable	P6 (B1, 285) 'Still having a weekly tutorial, even if it's a really quick one like today was five minutes, but it's nice to see everyone. It's also just nice to know that you Tutor is are still there.'
	Boundaries	P9 (C3, 168) 'I get on with my tutor really well. I think we all do . Uh, [they are] very good at having that boundary of firmness, if she needs to be firm with you, but also being approachable if you need to go and speak to her about anything.'
	Caring	P5 (B2, 358) '[Tutor] just know when to call us. [Tutor] knows when something's wrong. I just feel like [Tutor] has got this likes an antenna on [their] head that need to call that person that day, the everyone feels the same.'
	Experienced	P9 (C3, 197) 'I think she just knows what she's doing and I don't know where that comes across that she's just, she's never like it, never feels like she's unsure of anything and it's kind of like OK, I know what I'm doing. She knows how to help us. Yeah, she knows.'
	Genuine	P1 (A3, 211) 'it's a genuine 'How are things going' and, Yeah, it's when I have gone to her with queries or anything, she's taking that time out.'
	Guidance	P5 (B2, 361) 'Like every week we get that email off [Tutor] which explains everything and it reminds us when our deadlines are and stuff.'
	High expectations	P6 (B1, 292) 'She's like 'right. Let's try and get this much done'. So it's not like spoon feeding but sometimes you just need that little bit of a push rather than thinking.'
	Positive	P1 (A1, 411) '[The tutor has] kept it going. There's a kind of upbeat tempo, sense of humour.'
	Relates	P9 (C3, 71) 'it's helped that and it's also helped that our tutor has also had that so she worked for a while and then decided to go back and do her teaching degree so she understands how bizarre is for us to kind of change our mindset and get back into

Isabel Hallam

		the education zone if you like, urm yeah.'
	Responsive	P4 (A3, 223) 'You know she would be responding to emails at 7:00 o'clock in the morning. And she's got her own family to be dealing with, and she was absolutely in my corner.'
	Valued as individual	P8 (C3, 43) 'I didn't really feel like I was much use in the in the Class I'm a bit older than the others, so I'd be like you know why am I here? But [my tutor] would always be like, you know, actually … you're so valuable to them, because you've actually been in the industry and you've been working, whereas they haven't, so they don't have any of that experience.'

Table 17: Topic summary 'University Centre culture and values' with codes and data quotes

9.4 Topic summary 'Wellbeing'

Topic summary 'Wellbeing'		
Code	**Sub-code**	**Illustrative quote**
Identity and roles		
	Carer	P3 (A1, 194) 'people were starting to self isolate at that point and because I was caring for dad, I was really, that's when I started to think should I be going where there's lots of people or keeping myself in, and I chose not to.'
	Mature student	P9 (C3, 68) 'I think it's helped that I'm not the only person that's kind of left education and come back, so there are a few of us that have been in the same situation, and we've worked or we've done other things, and then we kind of decided to come back.'
	Parent	P2 (A2, 179) 'And in doing it [6am only study group] first thing in the morning removes that Mun guilt as well, because I'm trying to, you know, help home-school three children all at different level and educate and finish my degree myself.'
	Student	P4 (A1, 620) 'There's a part of me that doesn't want to complete my degree because, you know, then what I don't have any particular plan after this, and you know that leaves me is a rudderless ship.'
Motivation		
	Despondent	P1 (A1, 508) 'it's just not the same as physically being there for me to sort of understand and I just took a complete downward spiral of I can't do this anymore.'
	Effort	P4 (A4, 378) 'I know that I haven't given 100% cause I have, um, still prioritized the other elements of my life. I know that when my children were students, it was central...I haven't done because I stayed home for my degree.'
	End in sight	P7 (B1, 209) 'I'm feeling quite enthusiastic at the moment. I think, knowing that I can do it, just getting my head around, actually, do you know what, you've only got your assignment and this to do, then I've done all my work for my assignments.'
	Motivation dips	P2 (A2, 183) 'For me, motivation is dependent on how I'm feeling this whole pandemic to me has been a rollercoaster. I've been up on cloud 9 and then the next day I'm really not very well

		at all and it's just I have to take the good days with the bad days.'
Own learning		
	Attitude	P3 (A4, 332) 'I guess I feel kind of, sometimes if [feedback is] negative or or if I've not done as well as I want to do. Sometimes I'm disappointed and sometimes I get frustrated with myself.'
	Create structure	P6 (B1, 336) 'I don't feel like I need kind of them to set little tasks, when I'm at uni because I'm in the building. I'm fine then then myself 'cause I've got no other distractions; I can just sit and get on with that. But at home, you've got a million and one other distractions.'
	Focus	P6 (B1, 453) 'when I'm at Uni, I can, I can focus and I can sit there for hours, whereas at home I kind of don't sit and work solidly. I kind of do a little bit and then I'll go off and do something and then I'll come back.'
	Missing out	P5 (B1, 71) 'It was quite frustrating [missing lessons] because I'm quite a practical learner, so I learn very much from the group work that we do in class.'
	Organise self	P2 (A2, 192) 'I feel really positive [when I've done early morning study group], something there for me as well and it's 'cause usually you know what it's like when you are parent you are doing everything for everybody else. But it's just a time that you take out for yourself. And it's not just wasted, and I just feel I'm ready for the day then 'cause I know I've done some work.'
	Pressure	P5 (B2, 115) 'I mean, I'm not. I'm not behind. I'm behind it. It's like I could get it done by tomorrow if I wanted to, but I want to now. I've got that 10 days and I use the 10 days on the last assignment and I got a really good grade.'
Reality of COVID-19		
	Anxiety	P9 (C1, 71) 'I'm just going to look at it once a day 'cause too much was causing me to have panic attacks again and haven't had those for years and it was causing me to feel really uncomfortable being around people.'
	Boredom	P9 (C1, 284) 'it's the same thing the next day. And it's not going out. It's not seeing friends, not seeing family. All of the things we kind of had to look forward to over the summer have been cancelled. So now it's like we just need to get through this year.'
	Denial	P1 (A1, 126) 'I went into kind of Ostrich Mode. I kind of knew it was coming 'cause I was doing a lot of research on what was going on out in China.'
	Growing realisation	P4 (A1, 295) 'messages started coming through and the the 20th was going to be the last day and then I know it hit me like a 10-ton truck.'
	Health implications	P8 (C1, 43) 'I wasn't like all chill about it, like 'oh, it's just a virus is like nothing's gonna happen', um, but like when it starts getting released of like the type of people that you know we're going to have to [self-isolate]. I was one of those groups, so that was a lot more like, OK.'
	Social isolation	P10 (C2, 147) 'What I am finding hard, I think, is not speaking to other adults, I just need some down time. And I really miss my mum as well. She's she's been like a real support.'
	Study implications	P9 (C1, 88) 'I know there are conversations with some of us in in my class that were kind of like why, why is the college not being

		shut down yet when other schools are so? We were kind of just waiting. We were just stuck in Limbo of like we don't know what's going on.'

Responsibilities to others		
	Family	P2 (A2, 558) 'family is my Mum and Dad and my husband and they're the ones that keep me going with the belief in me and I am doing it to show my children that hard work does pay off and actually don't wait. Don't wait until you're my age to do it.'
	Peers	P1 (A2, 546) 'friends from uni should I say that they're the ones that are keeping me sort of held together, giving me the occasional private message.'
	UC	P1 (A1, 648) 'I think it would be doing a great disservice to University Centre and to the lecturers if I just kind of just fizzled out now.'

Same boat		
	Camaraderie	P1 (A2, 102) 'But in a collective way, others who are kind of in a similar boat and now sort of rallying around each other. And now we're sort of individually messaging and sort of poking each other.'
	Recognition	P10 (C2, 265) 'Talking to other people, Uhm, realizing that everyone's in the same boat, but I think it's your mindset as well. Whether you're in a mindset to want to learn or if you're in a mindset of feeling depressed or if you were in the mindset of thinking, now I'm gonna get on with this so yeah, it it's your mindset.'

Uncertainty		
	Anxiety	P9 (C1, 78) 'I think we still had half the people were like 'it's just a cold'. It will be fine. People are overreacting and then other people were kind of going to this this is probably more serious than they're letting on.'
	Online learning	P5 (B1, 136) 'I know we're going online, but how's it gonna work? am I going to be able to because of my dyslexia and things like that?'
	Social uncertainty	P1 (A1, 140) 'it's just that prospect of being kind of wrenched away from everyone.'
	Surreal	P1 (A1, 258) 'We just stood as a group meandering around outside for little while, um?'

Wellbeing		
	Emotions fluctuate	P2 (A1, 593) 'the emotions of that whole pandemic is one day I'm on top of the world and the next day I'm just I'm just not very happy at all and I would say to my most motivation really over the Easter was fine. I think it's now that I'm struggling more.'
	Mindset	P10 (C2, 265) 'Talking to other people, Uhm, realizing that everyone's in the same boat, but I think it's your mindset as well. Whether you're in a mindset to want to learn or if you're in a mindset of feeling depressed or if you were in the mindset of thinking, now I'm gonna get on with this so yeah, it it's your mindset.'
	Poor wellbeing	P8 (C1, 307) 'I just felt horrible the whole week and quite low. So I didn't because I just like it's bad for my health if I don't put stress on it, which is what kind of my motive is, if I get too stressed I can't. I have to stop doing what I'm doing 'cause it's

		just bad for my health.'

Table 18: Topic summary 'wellbeing' with codes and data quotes

9.5   Topic summary 'Confidence'

Topic summary 'Confidence'		
Code	**Sub-code**	**Illustrative quote**
Confidence		
	Belief	P3 (A4, 242) 'at first I thought yes I can do this, and then I realized that I started comparing myself to other people around the room and I started to think, uh. They've got lots more experience and I have. I don't know anything, and I did start to doubt.'
	Never thought	P2 (A1, 675) 'I never thought I'd do this, and I'm proving so many people wrong so this is a big thing.'
	Personal growth	P1 (A2, 387)' Personally, academically, professionally. Yeah, it it's it is changed me as as a person. Someone I think I like.'
	Self-esteem	P8 (C3, 53) 'Makes you feel better, I think [when tutors value your contribution]. It ups your self esteem a bit. I'm not very confident person so I think it just. Raise my esteem a bit.'
	Self-talk	P3 (A2, 133) 'I've got a post it note on my mirror actually in the bedroom and it's like 'you want this work for it' with exclamation mark and then saying 'be proud of yourself of what you've achieved so far''
Continuation or withdrawal		
	Belief	P1 (A4, 296) 'Confidence levels with zero. Um, as far as I remember leading up to the first Um, assignments I'd already walked out of Uni. I'd had enough.'
	Defiance	P3 (A1, 660) 'I feel so determined more than ever that I want to get this degree , but it's just taking so it so long and it was something that I didn't think I could do.'
	Just complete	P9 (C1, 389) 'I got four weeks till the end of the year and now I'm like, meh just wanna get it done.'
	Peers negative influence	P1 (A3, 293) 'I think with everything going on in my home life and everything going on at University. Uhm, I felt pretty, sort of, kind of miserable in the beginning, urm, I think that reflected on my grades, which is my only real sort of sadness, is looking at those grades.'
	Peer withdrawn	P4 (A2, 220) 'I spent a lot of time just kind of listening to their rationale [for withdrawing] and and sort of occasions thinking yeah I feel the same. But then on the other hand we are too close to the deadline for me to just say I know. Well, I'll just I'll take another year and and and do it all again. I don't have an an exit strategy.'
	Ploughing on	P3 (A1, 491) 'I kept ploughing towards the deadline.'
	Valued as individual	P2 (A3, 243) '[The tutor has] been there on the end of the phone emails, you know even now ... Yeah um but yeah I just you know it's just been invaluable really because I don't think I would have finished.'

Disability		
	Hiding	P1 (A4, 310) 'I finally mentioned that I had a disability. And that was huge. It really was just saying that I've got a problem...Yeah, you know from there it it did help. It did help immensely, even though during that time I still felt I I've admitted failure.'
	Online benefits	P4 (A3, 167) 'For one thing, these sessions can be taped. You can go over it again and get the learning needed uhm and it also means that people with access issue s they don't have to worry.'
	Worry	P5 (B2, 281) 'I feel like I wanted to achieve a degree like is something I've always want, but I've just never seen it in my path before, 'cause I can't do that like I'm not with my dyslexia in that I'm not. I can't. I'm not very good at spelling.'
Empathy		
	Compare to peers	P8 (C2, 120) 'Just like other people just getting on with their lives and doing stuff. And then you think well, you know I don't have half of that, and why can't I get on with it?'
Employability		
	Enhance employ	P10 (C2, 345) 'hence why I'm really wanna get this [course] under my belt. Because I want to be more employable.'
	Link to practice	P8 (C2, 213) 'so I've worked in the industry and everything that I've learned like I kind of already knew but it was like building on that experience in being like 'Oh so when I'm on session, I'd do it like this', ah this makes sense and this is how it applied to practice and like learning new things is great.'
	Work opportunities	P10 (C2, 343) 'I'm a bit worried about the whole economic situation.'
Future		
	Graduation	P1 (A2, 93) 'Um, what's been motivating me? Um? Posting things all over my wall graduation pictures.'
	Motivator	P3 (A2, 168) 'I started looking for a while I wasn't like I didn't want to look at next steps, but I've now kind of looked at next steps and that's becoming a a motivation for me.'
	Online	P8 (C3, 292) 'If this ever happened again, having a uni wide thing that everyone did kind of the same thing rather than one lecturer being like I'm going to do this, another lecturer doing this.'
	Opportunities	P1 (A2, 475) 'If I get onto a masters and just see where that takes me from there, um, yeah, the whole imagined future, it's. It's been kind of blown out the water shall we say.'
	Planning	P4 (A2, 264) 'nobody knows what the job situation is going to be, there's going to be a glut of graduates and and no jobs, and in the space like this. And then you know there are no further opportunities.'
	Work confidence	P1 (A2, 468) 'That [initial career idea] was the only route I could see. Um, now it's kind of an open door.'
Goals and dreams		
	Career aspirations	P6 (B2, 294) 'it's a bit kind of up in the air at the minute like I I have this really great plan and COVID just kind of ruined every single aspect of its while I'm into kind of revisit that.'
	Family experience	P3 (A4, 112) '[Going to university] wasn't really in my sphere because my parents had not gone to Uni, I didn't have that like

			expectation.'
	Peer influence	P3 (A4, 50) 'There was someone else that had done a degree. Uhm, and I was talking to my partner and saying that it's amazing. Look at all these things that she's done and she's overcome all of this and had like a like hard experiences and come through done this degree is going on to this that's amazing and he said well, why can't you do that?'.
	Personal goal	P10 (C2, 78) 'But I'm determined because I am getting a little bit bored of all this home schooling and stuff. I want to concentrate on myself and you know further myself really uhm 'cause otherwise I'm kind of bit stuck in a rut.'
	Work confidence	P5 (B2, 288) 'If I didn't do my degree, I wouldn't be where I am now, and I love my job
Life changing		
	Loved learning	P4 (A1, 617) 'I have learned so much. And it has been thrilling.'
	Personal growth	P1 (A2, 387) 'Personally, academically, professionally. Yeah, it it's it is changed me as as a person. Someone I think I like.'
	View world differently	P3 (A2, 368) 'it changed the way I see things. Uhm, and my confidence has just grown massively 'cause I I do lack confidence, but I don't lack as much confidence as I used to.'
	Work confidence	P2 (A2, 344) 'Makes me more confident practitioner and I can then question what sort of things are in place … and say, Well, actually, you know that's not going to work so let's try this and it's giving me that confidence to go off and apply for jobs.'
Motivation		
	End in sight	P6 (B2, 61) 'It's alright, like knowing that I'm so close to the end. Is what's keeping me going.'
	Feedback boost	P5 (B1, 495) 'we got our feedback back last week and it was the best result I've had and I think as we got the 10 day extension and I was at home and it was kind of like Oh well I can't go out, so I might as well do my work and yet give me a massive boost.'
	Learning as motivating	P8 (C2, 233) 'it's just like seeing my progress little by little like the end goal is great.'
Own learning		
	Attitude	P3 (A4, 266) 'I just knew initially you're not going to be perfect the first time. You never really gonna be perfect, but I wanted to just do better each time then my last mark.
	New ways	P5 (B2, 141) 'I think I've grown a lot in confidence, uhm, I feel like in my head I thought I relied on my peers quite a lot when actually I don't think I do. I can do it myself. I'm more than able to.'
	Response to feedback	P4 (A4, 396) 'I always check the grade, you know did I pass? Yeah, OK now I can hear the feedback and you know now I can gain the learning points.'
	Research	P4 (A2, 211) 'And one of my motivations was actually putting myself as a participant for your project so that I don't have a way out.'

Table 19: Topic summary 'confidence' with codes and data quotes

11. Student experience themes

During the second level of reflexive thematic analysis of Phase 1 qualitative data, four themes were identified to explain the student experience of persisting during COVID campus closures. Figure 20 illustrates the theme, sub-themes and codes.
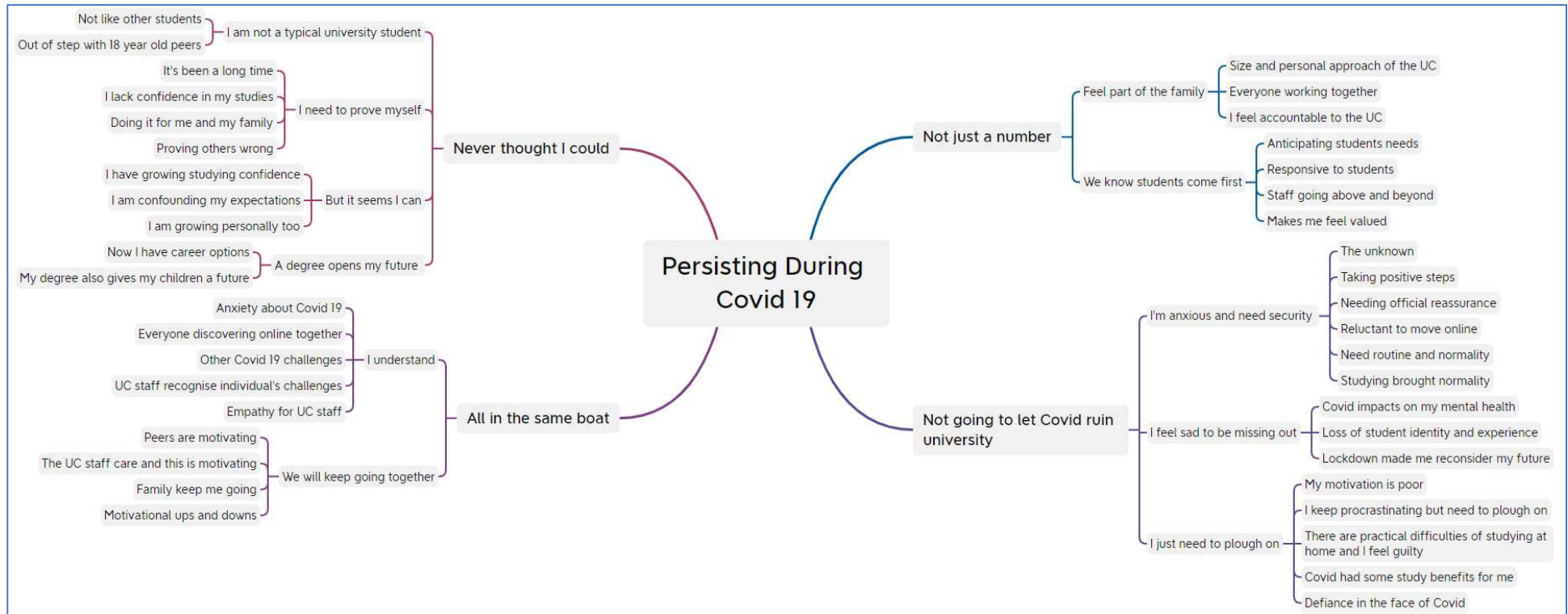
Figure 22: The student experience of persisting during COVID 19 themes, sub-themes and codes

The four student experience of persisting themes were constructed from 11 sub-themes codes and 40 codes which are outlined below with illustrative quotes from the data. The quotes are attributed to the participant, focus group code and transcript line number. Thus, Participant 4 (A1, 561) indicates that this quote comes from participant 4, and the quote starts on line 561 of the transcript from focus group A1.

10.1 Theme 1: 'Never thought I could'

Theme 1 'Never thought I could'		
Sub-theme	**Code**	**Illustrative quote**
I am not a typical university student		
	Not like other students	**Participant 9 (C3, 123)** "They are a lot younger, they literally just come straight from college, so it's a very different situation that they are in mentally than me." **Participant 4 (A3, 85)** "I was the oldest swinger in town in my class actually." **Participant 10 (C3, 481)** "We're all from different backgrounds and in the lessons... I'm kind of not really in anybody's sort of bracket or bubble." **Participant 1 (A3, 370)** "One my immediate sort of fears when first starting Uni was people who are a lot lot younger would have completely differing views and one of my greatest, uhm, how can I say pushes of ensuring I get my work done is only in her young 20s and it's just great to see that sort of age has sort of I'm sort of, uhm, no effect, uhm, on friendship when it when it comes to this and that, that makes me really, really humble, actually."
	Out of step with 18 year old peers	**Participant 1 (A4, 154)** "Those people that I thought who were at Uni were sort of way out of my league." **Participant 3 (A4, 127)** "So most of the peers that I was around at that time we're doing, we're working in jobs and apprenticeships or like me, join the service and that's what I was surrounded with, so I didn't really think about a degree at that time." **Participant 4 (A4, 101)** "I was out of step with my peer group. All my friends had gone off to university at the right time. You know, I, uh. It it wasn't the right time for me, but I always knew that was something I was definitely going to come back and do. Um, so I did it." **Participant 5 (BC4, 300)** "But I don't feel like I've missed out on anything. I feel like my confidence grew so much from being [former job]."
I need to prove myself		
	It's been a long	**Participant 10 (C2, 176)** "When I handed in my first

time		assignment, I was a bit worried like 'cause I haven't done it for a long time and I'll a bit like, have I done it right."
		Participant 1 (A3, 141) "I think where I hadn't done any kind of academia for around, good grief about 15 years, 15-16 years uhm, coming back into it, um, that was a little bit of a shock."
	I lack confidence in my studies	**Participant 1 (A4, 165)** "Created a huge barrier for me when I first started uni, the self-doubt was absolutely unreal."
		Participant 3 (A4, 242) "I realized that I started comparing myself to other people around the room and I started to think, uh, they've got lots more experience and I have. I don't know anything, and I did start to doubt."
		Participant 9 (C2, 110) "You feel like you're the one that's falling behind and you're the only one that's in that situation until you talk to someone else and suddenly like OK. Maybe I'm not doing as bad I thought it was."
	Doing it for me and my family	**Participant 10 (C2, 78)** "But I'm determined because. I am getting a little bit bored of all this home schooling and stuff. I want to concentrate on myself, and you know further myself really uhm 'cause otherwise. I'm kind of bit stuck in a rut."
		Participant 2 (A2, 504) "For me achieving this BA is going to be the best thing in the world because I'm the first one in my family to do it."
		Participant 5 (B2, 281) "I feel like I wanted to achieve a degree like is something I've always want, but I've just never seen it in my path before, 'cause I can't do that like I'm not with my dyslexia in that I'm not, I can't, I'm not very good at spelling."
	Proving others wrong	**Participant 1 (A4, 162)** "At 18, um, according to my parents and my aunt, who's a head teacher, I was sort of person that would amount to nothing ... I'm one of those people who have been told consistently that I'm never going to amount to anything."
		Participant 2 (A1, 675) "I never thought I'd do this, and I'm proving so many people wrong, so this is a big thing."
		Participant 5 (BC4, 291) "I went to ... sixth form and I remember the PE teacher there saying get yourself an apprenticeship. And that kind of just stuck in my head … Maybe they're telling me something that you are more of a practical learner than I am academic."
But it seems I can		
	I have growing studying confidence	**Participant 5 (BC4, 382)** "I know that there will always be errors, but I feel like it has improved, and I think it is from the feedback that I've improved."
		Participant 8 (C2, 233) "It's just like seeing my progress little by little, like the end goal is great."
	I am confounding expectations	**Participant 5 (B1, 136)** "I know we're going online, but how's it gonna work? Am I going to be able to because of my dyslexia and things like that?"
		Participant 4 (A3, 170) "There are definite bonuses for some students [of online learning], and I I I think it would be really useful if this vehicle would continue even beyond lockdown."
		Participant 5 (B2, 158) "I think that the fact it's being recorded as well that doesn't necessarily happen in the classroom, so being able to go back onto something is really, really helpful for

		me because I think sometimes when you're in a bright room, I do just kinda zone out."
	I am growing personally too	**Participant 1 (A1, 651)** "Not only has it provided education, it is also made me grow personally. I'm glad I come here." **Participant 4 (A1, 288)** "Lots of little things that I had not expected to gain, just insights, and it's just shifted the way I see the world and and I share it with people." **Participant 2 (A1, 360)** "Well, I think yeah, it's just that questioning or not believing everything on face value. I think that's definitely changed for me."
A degree opens my future		
	Now I have career options	**Participant 2 (A2, 346)** "Makes me more confident practitioner and I can then question what sort of things are in place for children and say, Well, actually, you know that's not going to work, so let's try this. And it's giving me that confidence to go off and apply for jobs." **Participant 6 (BC4, 122)** "I don't know what I want to do is the degree has opened up so many different ideas like of jobs that I didn't necessarily even know existed." **Participant 1 (A2, 495)** "If I get onto a masters and just see where that takes me from there, um, yeah, the whole imagined future, it's. It's been kind of blown out the water shall we say."
	My degree also gives my children a future	**Participant 4 (A1, 694)** "It is about role modelling" **Participant 1 (A2, 548)** "My daughter… and hopefully, her seeing what I'm doing it. Will motivate her to carry on when times are tough." **Participant 2 (A2, 558)** "I am doing it to show my children that hard work does pay off and actually don't wait. Don't wait until you're my age to do it."

Table 20: Theme 1 'Never thought I could' with sub-themes, codes and data quotes

10.2 Theme 2: 'Not just a number'

Theme 2 'Not just a number'		
Sub-theme	**Code**	**Illustrative quote**
Feel part of the family		
	Size and personal approach of the UC	**Participant 5 (B3, 182)** "Like the small class sizes. I think it does make a difference. I think if I was sat in a hall of 100, I probably wouldn't have any friends." **Participant 4 (A3, 76)** "I like to ask the question in the moment and that there wouldn't have been the capacity to do that, and the smaller size rooms, groups. Yeah, a privileged position. It was just yes much, much, appreciated." **Participant 2 (A3, 114)** "So I think if I had gone to a bigger University and not had the, the, wellbeing support and just the support from all the lecturers, well the majority of them anyway, um, I just feel really privileged to be a part of that and, and, it was, and I did feel really comfortable all the time."

Isabel Hallam

		Participant 1 (A3, 50) "There is more of a family approach and it's a family friendly environment. You are a name and a person. Rather than just a number, and it is very apparent with every member of staff wellbeing, tutors alike."
	Everyone working together	**Participant 8 (C2, 52)** "I've got, like, the support of, like, my lecturer and, like, my classmates, so I mean that's helpful." **Participant 5 (B3, 87)** "Collaboratively, everyone kind of together and you don't, like, feel like you're on your own, like, the peers, everyone works together in class." **Participant 6 (B3, 157)** "They don't ever make anyone feel like you don't matter or what you're saying, doesn't matter which. I think it's important for such a small like community really, compared to other universities, everyone's got to feel comfortable. Being around each other and working with each other." **Participant 5 (BC5, 137)** "Every email said, like, if you need anything then just drop us a line to any of us and stuff. And also said about the wellbeing team, saying that they are there to help."
	I feel accountable to the UC	**Participant 1 (A1, 648)** "I think it would be doing a great disservice to University Centre and to the lecturers if I just kind of just fizzled out now."
We know students come first		
	Anticipating students' needs	**Participant 5 (B2, 358)** "[Tutor] just know when to call us. [Tutor] knows when something's wrong. I just feel like [Tutor] has got this likes an antenna on [their] head that need to call that person that day, everyone feels the same." **Participant 7 (B1, 399)** "I spoke to one the tutors and said that I was really struggling. He knows what I'm like and he was like, right OK by next week you need to have written your introduction, and just give me somewhere to start."
	Responsive to students	**Participant 4 (A3, 431)** "Our tutor has been really strong. She has listened to feedback and um, she has taken on board and taken action where required. She's been very proactive so I think the students will feel that she has had their back and she's provided a listening ear. She has been scrupulously fair with there has been a disconnect between points of view." **Participant 6 (B1, 347)** "I think it was flagged up to her by a few of us that you know we're struggling to work at home and stay focus, and I think that's when she [the tutor] thought right hang on, actually I need to kind of help a few people along."
	Staff going over and above	**Participant 3 (A1, 316)** "What I thought was kind, when [the tutor] did communicate with us, it was clear that she not been very well, but she'd made that effort to check in with all of us and come back early and it was, I thought that was really, really nice, nice of her to do that." **Participant 1 (A3, 183)** "I did feel really valued, um, right from the outset, and [the tutor is] so supportive as well and was always there, probably above and beyond." **Participant 2 (A3, 243)** "[The tutor has] been there on the end of the phone emails, you know even now ... Yeah um but yeah I just, you know, it's just been invaluable really because I don't think I would have finished."

	Makes me feel valued	**Participant 6 (B3, 274)** "I feel quite lucky 'cause I'm on Twitter.... other people like they really slate their universities, all over, you know they've been saying we've all been forgotten, and they've been going off about, you know how they don't have a clue what's going on. I just feel really lucky that actually [the University Centre] have kept, you know the HE staff in general, and personal tutors, they've kept us updated at every single stage as much as they can." **Participant 8 (C3, 32)** "I don't know whether this is the same every uni, like a proper uni, but I feel like I am me, like I'm, not just a number, so there's a lot more, like personal kind of, I don't know what the word is, you know? I mean, it was like a personal connection than just you turn up to a lecture and you're just there and you're a fly on the wall and no one really cares." **Participant 5 (B3, 313)** "Yeah, it just makes you feel like you're worth it, like whatever you're doing is worth it. And the time that [the tutor] spends with us makes us feel like we're doing a good job and that we're worth it, and we are on the course for a reason."

Table 21: Theme 2 'Not just a number' with sub-themes, codes and data quotes

10.3 Theme 3: 'All in the same boat'

Theme 3 'All in the same boat'		
Sub-theme	Code	Illustrative quote
I understand		
	Anxiety about COVID 19	**Participant 5 (B1, 130)** "It kind of felt a bit that me and another student, we were kind of just a bit blasé about it, like we weren't really taking it seriously, because obviously the impact on us quite minimal in comparison to a lot of people and yeah."
	Everyone discovering online learning together	**Participant 7 (B1, 190)** "[Tutor] has been really good. [They] set up the Teams thing for us and we have like a Teams call the other day, just so we can see each other. And it just makes it more real." **Participant 4 (A1, 564)** "[Lecturer] was very professional and yes, it was it was powerful, and I came away with new learning. And so that was huge for me because I didn't think I could learn in in this sort of environment." **Participant 8 (C2, 238)** "Being social is great, but you can just hear, like, other people's point of views and how they see things and how their brain works completely different... It's just, yeah, that's what I miss." **Participant 2 (A3, 388)** "But I still felt part of University, you know, right? It didn't change. You know everyone was still there, you know, all the staff was still there to support us."
	Other COVID 19 challenges	**Participant 9 (C2, 108)** "You always think that somebody is doing better than you, and then you talk to them and then go,

		actually they're juggling two kids or husband that's back to work. They have to do both the kids work and their own work, and they're having to look after the husband 'cause he's bit useless."
		Participant 5 (B3, 365) "But I think because quite a lot of my peers have children and they're at home, they're stressed, and they've got a lot on. I feel like people are, like people that maybe wouldn't message in the group chat, have been, like with encouragement as well, uhm."
	UC staff recognise individual's challenges	**Participant 3 (A1, 573)** "Um [the tutor] said to me, give yourself some grace ... I was told have some grace, you have those extra 10 days if you need it, uhm and maybe take them and that's what I have done."
		Participant 8 (C3, 225) "[The tutor]'s like a lot more supportive and understanding. Now he's like '[students name] just do a summer retake or go for an extension'... I think it's just like we've gotten to know each other a bit more."
	Empathy for UC staff	**Participant 4 (A1, 561)** "Our lecturer has to deal with her toddler coming in and wanting her attention, but she's still got her focus on the class."
		Participant 5 (B2, 251) "Everyone's in quite a hard situation and I feel like [other students] forget that that... like it's hard when you know that your tutors, and that, have families at home. But I think quite a lot of the time they forget that and it's kind of all about not all about that, that's rude, but like they have their lives."
		Participant 6 (B2, 194) "I mean [I feel] awful, because it's actually our exam is on in two weeks and ... we've actually not had a single lesson at all that has been relevant to either."
We will keep going together		
	Peers are motivating	**Participant 1 (A3, 532)** "This sort of checking up on each other, and particularly when I've had some really low moments by not going into uni, uhm, that that has really hit me the hardest, and when I've had a very difficult time on an assignment and I was just thinking I cannot, I physically cannot do this anymore. And then all of a sudden some of the people that have not heard from a while, all of a sudden ping, instant messages flying everywhere."
		Participant 9 (C3, 261) "I'm still having a lot of contact with people, which is kinda helping me through that whole, I'm struggling to get like to do research to find the time or to motivate myself, so at least I'm getting some support."
	The UC staff are caring and this is motivating	**Participant 1 (A3, 452)** "If anything, I think sometimes she's over doing the amount of work, you know, like ridiculous times at the night. You know, like she, she just responds to an email or be chatting during the weekend and even one particular mail said, oh, I chat to you tomorrow and I had to remind her know you won't it's Saturday tomorrow, what are you doing?"
		Participant 6 (B1, 170) "It felt like they actually cared about how we felt rather than oh, you know, 'you need to get your grades. You need to graduate'."
		Participant 5 (B3, 297) "My tutor has encouraged me throughout. When I have had about wobbles, I have support, um, either like a text to me personally or a text to the group. So,

		like we've had it all angles, that we've not like been left just a think, oh I can't do this. Every like every lesson or every tutorial we've had a message to see if you need any help let us know." **Participant 2 (A3, 243)** "[The tutor has] been there on the end of the phone emails, you know even now ... Yeah um but yeah I just you know it's just been invaluable really because I don't think I would have finished."
	Family keeps me going	**Participant 3 (A1, 665)** "We've got a big white board, um, in my, in my lounge and that's like my study area and sometimes it's like *gestures writing* 'I can' and 'I will do this' and now it's like 'you can do it mummy' and things like that that come up on the board and I think, he's watching me, so I guess I've got that extra [motivation]."
	Motivational ups and downs	**Participant 2 (A2, 183)** "For me, motivation is dependent on how I'm feeling this whole pandemic to me has been a rollercoaster. I've been up on cloud 9 and then the next day I'm really not very well at all and it's just I have to take the good days with the bad days." **Participant 3 (A3, 548)** "And it's like I don't want to, kind of, I don't want to let anyone down. Don't want to let myself down."

Table 22: Theme 3 'All in the same boat' with sub-themes, codes and data quotes

10.4 Theme 4: 'Not going to let COVID ruin university'

Theme 4 'Not going to let COVID ruin university'		
Sub-theme	Code	Illustrative quote
I am anxious and need security		
	The unknown	**Participant 2 (A1, 120)** "Just about how it would impact on our lives. Would we get it, you know, and what would it do for studying and, and, life just, everything." **Participant 8 (C1, 39)** "I think, like, I knew it was happening, I didn't really know, like, the extent it was going to, obviously I don't think anyone knew the extent it was going to go to, so it was just kind of like an unknown feeling." **Participant 1 (A1, 238)** "The realization, just walking in that final day, of what was going on and everybody was just sort of nervously chatting to each other about the potential of what is likely to happen… It was very surreal. It was almost like you was waiting for [something]."
	Taking positive steps	**Participant 5 (B1, 64)** "I didn't wanna come in coughing, scare anyone... I kinda just took it on myself not to come in because I think, I didn't want to be that person that spread it. Even though I knew it didn't have it, I just didn't want that responsibility." **Participant 9 (C1, 71)** "I am also in a high-risk group. But I was the same. I kind of wanted, just to get on with my normal life until I was told you're not allowed to go to Uni, not allowed to go to work, um. Although I was putting in, I was doing, steps like

		washing my hands a lot more regularly and I was a bit OCD over it than I've ever been before."
	Needing official reassurance	**Participant 9 (C1, 95)** "The government guidelines weren't clear whether those that were high risk have no choice but to be isolating, or if it's, if they want to, they can, and there was no clear guidance for the University either." **Participant 8 (C1, 200)** "We've been told to do assignments that are due next week. What happens after that?" **Participant 5 (BC5, 90)** "I think for me it would be not knowing what to do and fear of doing something wrong and I'd be like oh my God, I'm so sorry but yeah, I knew what I was doing so that made a big difference." **Participant 6 (B3, 343)** "I wasn't, I didn't think I was expecting to be kept up to date as much as we have great just because obviously everyone's got a lot of other things going on."
	Reluctant to move online	**Participant 4 (A1, 555)** "I'm not going to sit at a computer and exchange messages because you cannot hear a tone in a chat and, and there's no facial expression. You don't know what the intent is, you know, and that kind of thing drives me crazy." **Participant 9 (C3, 274)** "I don't motivate myself. I'm not very good with all that. That's why I decided to go to [the University Centre] rather than doing an OU course, maybe I should have just done an OU course. But then after that, like a week of teething problems, it kind of felt a bit more like, this is just a bit of a weird situation. I'm still in uni student, I'm just not going in, so I'm saving money on petrol."
	Need routine and normality	**Participant 4 (A3, 158)** "I came in most days of the week [before COVID]. I just found a room... and I found that I could work more quietly that way and sometimes with study buddies." **Participant 5 (B1, 260)** "But the routine is definitely needed. So yeah, I get up the same time every morning as if I was going to work." **Participant 7 (B1, 391)** "I'm very structured so I don't like it when it's not quite as structured. So, I tend to give up and just go the bathroom needs the flooring or the cupboards need coming out or I have to paint the hallway."
	Studying brought normality	**Participant 3 (A1, 380)** "I still had that bit of norm of, this is my study, this is what I do." **Participant 1 (AB5, 88)** "When I finally submitted and then I just broke down into tears, um, and it is just such for me, um, such a, such a very sort of sad way [to end]."
I feel sad to be missing out		
	COVID impacts on my mental health	**Participant 8 (C1, 203)** "But yeah, I mean it's, it's been OK, it is very tough but..." **Participant 2 (A1, 593)** "The emotions of that whole pandemic is one day I'm on top of the world and the next day I'm just, I'm just not very happy at all." **Participant 1 (A2, 98)** "In reality I've got that juxtaposition of feelings where I'm trying to get myself motivated and then there are periods where I'm extremely down and feel like this just isn't gonna happen." **Participant 4 (A2, 200)** "Uhm, I have found the last few weeks, um very up and down, and in some instances, uhm, you know

		more down than up. I don't mean mental state, but my my focus and motivation.
	Loss of student identity and experience	**Participant 2 (A1, 227)** "I suppose I think it was the reality of never coming back to uni, not being able to say goodbye to your friends and you guys, you know, you've been there for three years for us."
		Participant 1 (A1, 111) "Yeah [loss], more as a student, but more as a sort of family bit, like it was the last time... There is this is hole in my life, all of a sudden everything that I've been striving and working for."
		Participant 1 (AB5, 94) "I expected and hoped, yeah, that that we'd have to full regalia and um, a graduation and all those final sort of get together, um, and it never come to fruition."
		Participant 6 (AB5, 190) "I was really keen to like attend it when the idea was floating around at the beginning, but then as the time got closer and… I just I don't know... I was just like, you know, big stroppy child like it shouldn't be like this. I should be in cap and gown [at graduation venue]."
		Participant 3 (AB5, 234) "I know it sounds like a bit like a child, but I want [graduation] as it's meant to be or I don't want it like that, yeah."
	Lockdown made me reconsider my future	**Participant 10 (C2, 343)** "I'm a bit worried about the whole economic situation."
		Participant 4 (A2, 264) "Nobody knows what the job situation is going to be, there's going to be a glut of graduates and no jobs, and in the space like this, and then you know there are no further opportunities."
		Participant 6 (B2, 294) "It's a bit kind of up in the air at the minute like I have this really great plan and COVID just kind of ruined every single aspect of its while I'm into kind of revisit that."
I just need to plough on		
	My motivation is poor	**Participant 6 (B1, 209)** "And then Easter came, and the sun came out and things just dropped off the radar a little bit... scheduled lessons, kind of, keep me going, erm, and things did start to kind of, I didn't fall behind us such, but I maybe wasn't on top of things as much as I was the week before."
		Participant 10 (C2, 360) "I'll start thinking about it at night thinking I really need to get that done. I really need to type something tonight and then I'll make tea or whatever and then wash up and then I'm like, oh, I'm really tired... It gets the weekend and then I'm like no, really do need to get it done there and then I have to send my husband now with little one just so I can sit and do it."
		Participant 4 (A2, 204) "My dissertation, which I kicked into the long grass of summer, which I'm quite pleased about."
		Participant 3 (A2, 133) "I've got a post it note on my mirror actually in the bedroom and it's like 'you want this work for it' with exclamation mark and then saying 'be proud of yourself of what you've achieved so far'."
	I keep procrastinating but need to	**Participant 3 (A1, 491)** "I kept ploughing towards the deadline."
		Participant 1 (A4, 307) "Well, that [an assessment] passed and just try and plod on the year."

	plough on	**Participant 5 (B2, 53)** "The suns out and I want to be able to sit in it and not do my uni work." **Participant 9 (C1, 358)** "I got four weeks till the end of the year and now I'm like, meh, just wanna get it done." **Participant 6 (B2, 63)** "It's alright, like knowing that I'm so close to the end. That's what's keeping me going."
	There are practical difficulties of studying at home and I feel guilty	**Participant 2 (A2, 192)** "I feel really positive [when I've done early morning study group]. Something there for me as well and it's 'cause usually you know what it's like when you're a parent you do everything for everybody else. But it's just a time that you take out for yourself. And it's not just wasted, and I just feel I'm ready for the day then 'cause I know I've done some work." **Participant 10 (C2, 72)** "Um, my partner took [daughter] away on Saturday, so I literally can just sit here on my computer and just type away. So, because I just need like complete the silence to concentrate, um, so when I've got somebody going 'Mummy Mummy' every 5 minutes so it's just impossible." **Participant 3 (AB5, 289)** "It's been really difficult six months. You know, having all the children home and, and not being able to go and see my mum and dad who I'm so close to which is been really frustrating for me."
	COVID had some study benefits for me	**Participant 9 (BC5, 350)** "And with lockdown I couldn't work, I couldn't go see anyone. Everything I had planned was cancelled. I had less time to faff about and more time to actually get on with it, and get it done and get it done on time." **Participant 5 (B1, 502)** "I'm sat at it, I don't have to travel anywhere, so I feel like I just find it, then I'm still in that zone, so I just carry on and like with my partner, he works shift work so if he's not here, it's completely, I've got nothing to do, so I feel like I've, I feel like I've had the opportunity to read a lot more than what I would have done." **Participant 6 (AB5, 306)** "Lockdown actually really worked for me. Like I had had nothing else to do...hindsight now actually I don't think I would have graduated with a first if lockdown hadn't have happened."
	Defiance in the face of COVID	**Participant 1 (A1, 502)** "We stopped [coming onsite], I still had it sort of, uhm defiance about me that I don't know, you know, nothing's gonna affect me. Nothing is going to affect me." **Participant 3 (A1, 660)** "I feel so determined more than ever that I want to get this degree, but it's just taking so it so long and it was something that I didn't think I could do." **Participant 2 (AB5, 358)** "I'm an adult and you know, I know that this is something for me and I had to finish it for myself because I was determined to prove everyone wrong and that I could do it."

Table 23: Theme 4 'Not going to let COVID ruin university' with sub-themes, codes and data quotes

12. University Centre ethical approval notification for survey tool

Email trail confirming approval for the survey tool from University Centre supervisor and research ethics coordinator:

RE: Ethics please!

Andrea Gaion
To ● Issy Hallam; ○ Alastair Wilson
Cc ○ Isabel Hallam

Mon 26/04/2021 09:51

↩ Reply ↩ Reply All → Forward ⋯

ⓘ You replied to this message on 26/04/2021 12:10.

Hello Issy,
Once you have Alastair's approval as you supervisor, I can pass it on to another person (I've already checked it and I think it's fine).

Just 2 comments from me:
1) You need to correct the sentence "The answers that you give will be anonymise" into "The answers that you give will be anonymised"
2) I think you may have too many questions in the first 4 or 5 tables, and this could discourage the participants to complete the questionnaire.
   Do you think you can maybe merge some of them and reduce the visual "effect" of seeing 10-12 questions?

But apart from that, I think it's very interesting and well set

Let me know

Andrea

From: Issy Hallam <issyhallam@███████ac.uk>
Sent: 25 April 2021 17:21
To: Alastair Wilson <AWILSON@███████ac.uk>; Andrea Gaion <andreagaion@███████ac.uk>
Cc: Isabel Hallam <ich208@exeter.ac.uk>
Subject: Ethics please!

Hi Al and Andrea

As you both know I am mid-data collection about students persistence during Covid. I did longitudinal focus groups throughout the 2020 campus closures and have analysed that data to create an online survey to send out in the next couple of weeks to current students.

The ethics form is here and include a link to the online survey on onlinesurveys.ac.uk I have given you both access rights so you should either be able to see it in preview mode from the first link or the editors link below.

The items on the questionnaire principally come from focus group responses, but I have been mindful when phrasing the statements of my professional role and ███ perspective. As the whole project is framed in Appreciative Inquiry, most questions are positively phrased, which helps from an organisational perspective.

Al, you technically remain my supervisor, do you want to talk about the items in more depth and agree them before Andrea finds a panel member to review it with him? Or can you both review it as a panel?

Thanks both

Is

13. **Video introducing the survey to potential participants**

12.1   PowerPoint slide as part of the weekly tutorial slides

13.3   Link to the introductory video

The link to the video is only accessible within the @exeter.ac.uk community:

https://universityofexeteruk-my.sharepoint.com/:v:/g/personal/ich208_exeter_ac_uk/EVvATRvbYj9FpO7gSRx6bjkBRp_1GstKwHYBaxCN7fdChg?e=El3doi

14. **Call for survey participants: text for personal tutors to disseminate to potential participants**

Copy of redacted request included in the weekly Tutor Update email on 24 May 2021, asking for tutors to disseminate the call for participants in their own communications with their tutor groups:

- **Student persistent during Covid research**
  Similarly, please copy the following text and hyperlink into your Teams channel about my PhD research about studying during the Dec-May Covid campus closure. Thanks:

  ███

  - Studying during Covid campus closures has been hard for everyone. Issy Hallam, UCSD's Student Development and Tutorial Manager, is conducting PhD research into the factors that helped you to keep motivated, keep studying and complete the academic year, whilst you have been studying online. To take part in the research, please complete the online questionnaire. If you want to know more about the research, you can watch a 5 minute video Issy has recorded where she explains the research.

15. Call for survey participants: email to student accounts

Copy of redacted email sent to all higher education students' email accounts on 14 June 2021 from the official university@ email account:

Hello

Many congratulations of getting towards the end of this academic year, it has been a really tough one for many of us with all the Covid restrictions on top of university studying. I am conducting PhD research, outside of my job role as ███'s Student Development & Tutorial Manager, about the experiences of ███ students studying during this year's Covid campus closures.

I would be really grateful if you could spare 20 minutes to complete the online survey as part of my PhD. It will help in the understanding of the psychological factors that helped students to persist with their studies during Covid and how the role of the personal tutor fostered this persistence.

https://███████.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/covid-persistence

Thank you. If you have any questions drop me a message on Teams @issyhallam or email issyhallam@███████.ac.uk

Cheers and congratulations once again, Issy

16. Call for survey participants: text from letter sent from Head of HE

Copy of relevant paragraph from the end-of-year congratulatory letter from the Head of Higher Education emailed to all University Centre students on 2 July 2021:

Student Perception Questionnaire Results
You have provided so much positive and developmental feedback throughout the year, through formal surveys, modules reviews and via programme meetings and student consultative forums.

We were really pleased to receive the results of the recent Student Perception Questionnaire. Thank for your feedback, we are delighted that you have recorded over 94% positive satisfaction. Programme teams are now accessing the data to inform their programme developments for next year.

Thank you to everyone who has already completed Issy Hallam's PhD research questionnaire about studying during the Covid 19 campus closures. If you have not already had a chance to do so, please take 20 minutes to complete the online questionnaire by clicking this link, thank you.

17. Survey: participant information and consent text

p. 1 **Participant information**

Hello and thank you for showing an interest in completing this research survey. My name is Issy Hallam, I am a psychology and education lecturer here at the ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ ▮▮▮▮ and the HE Student Development & Tutorial Manager. I am also a PhD student at the University of Exeter investigating the psychology of student persistence during Covid-19. I am researching what enabled college higher education students to continue with their studies during Covid-19 campus closures and how personal tutors helped to foster that persistence.

In this survey I will ask you to rate how you felt about your studies during the December 2020 - May 2021 online teaching, and what enabled you to keep going even when things were hard. It should take no longer than 20 minutes to complete. The answers that you give will be anonymise when you submit and confidentially analysed by myself and my supervisors at the University of Exeter. You will be asked to provide some basic demographic information to determine if particular groups of students responded differently to the campus closures and online teaching. The survey will create a unique receipt number for you to use if you wish to withdraw your answers before 30 July 2021. To do so please email university(▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ ac.uk with your receipt number, quoting 'Covid-19 Persistence' survey. The survey and wider research project have been approved by the ▮▮▮▮ ethics committee (approval date: 9/3/2020 and 27/4/2021) and the ethics committee at the University of Exeter (approval code: D1819-049).

The research will be conducted in accordance with the British Educational Research Association (BERA) ethical guidelines. To comply with the Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulation, your answers will be stored securely on the OnlineSurveys network on a password protected file with the analysed data held on my University of Exeter password protected account. Individual data will be deleted from OnlineSurveys at the end of 2023 (when I intend to submit my PhD). The compiled results will be shared with the University Centre leadership team to improve ▮▮▮▮ tutorial provision. The compiled results from the survey will be included in my PhD thesis and academic submissions to conferences and journals. If you are interested in receiving a summary of the results, please contact me on my University of Exeter email ich208@exeter.ac.uk

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me on my University of Exeter email ich208@exeter.ac.uk or the survey supervisor at ▮▮▮▮ Alastair Wilson, Head of HE on awilson@ ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ c.uk, or research supervisor at the University of Exeter, Chris Boyle on C.Boyle@exeter.ac.uk

Isabel Hallam

1 ⊙ Were you a University Centre South Devon (UCSD) student during the 2020/2021 academic year? *

I confirm that I was UCSD student during 2020/21.

Add item

Add item

2 ⊙ Have you read and understood the participant information above? *

I confirm I have read and understood the participant information.

Add item

Add item

3 ⊙ Do you recognise that you can withdraw from this research questionnaire at any time by closing the internet browser window, or asking for your answers to be withdrawn before 30 July 2021 by emailing university@southdevon.ac.uk ? *

I confirm I am aware of my right to withdraw and how to do this.

Add item

Add item

4 ⊙ Do you wish to proceed with the survey and consent to your answers being used in the Covid-19 Persistence research project? *

I confirm I wish to proceed with the survey and consent to my answers being used in the research.

Add item

Add item

If you have not confirmed any of the above statements or do not want to continue with the survey, please close this browser window. Thank you for your interest in my student persistence during Covid-19 research.

18. Survey: items related to topic summaries

p. 3 **Online teaching and learning (classroom programmes)**

Add item

These questions are about how you felt about online learning between December 2020-May 2021 when the campus was closure to most students due to Covid. If your practical course returned to classroom delivery before mid-May 2021, please answer the online questions in relation to the period of study when you were predominantly online.

Add item

6 Please rate your agreement with the following statements, from 'Strongly agree' to 'Strongly disagree'. *

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
In December 2020 when we transferred to online learning, I was confident I would be able to engage online learning and continue to progress with my studies	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Due to the increase in Covid cases locally and nationally, I felt safer studying online	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Generally, I found online learning to be effective for me	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I was able to effectively adapt my way of learning to online methods	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Keeping to the usual timetable helped to adjust to online learning	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Teachers were able to make online lessons feel as normal as possible	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
My peers and I continue to interact in online lessons as much as we would in class	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Online learning had some benefits for me and my learning preferences	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I love learning	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Learning makes me see the world differently	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel motivated when I am making progress in my learning	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Feedback in the class and from assessments generally makes me motivated to do better next time	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I persevered with my studies as I knew I was so close to finishing	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Even though we were studying online, I still felt like a ███ student	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Add item

Isabel Hallam

Add item

These questions are about how you felt about your online studies during the campus closures between December 2020-May 2021.

Add item

7 Please rate your agreement with the following statements, from 'Strongly agree' to 'Strongly disagree'. *

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
In December 2020 when the campus closed, I was confident I would be able to engage online learning and continue to progress with my studies	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Due to the increase in Covid cases locally and nationally in December 2020, I felt safer studying online	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Generally, I find online learning to be effective for me	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Teachers are able to make online lessons feel as normal as possible	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
My peers and I continue to interact in online lessons	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Online learning had some benefits for me and my learning preferences	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I love learning	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Learning makes me see the world differently	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel motivated when I am making progress in my learning	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Feedback in the class and from assessments generally makes me motivated to do better next time	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I persevered with my studies as I knew I was so close to finishing	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Even though we are studying online, I still felt like a ████ student	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Add item

Add item

Add item

The questions on this page are about your relationship with your course peers and teaching team.

Add item

8 Please rate your agreement with the following statements: *

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I find the social side of learning important	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Working with my peers is motivating	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
During online learning there was a sense of camaraderie with my peers, that we were all in this together	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
When we were studying online I was able to support my peers when they were struggling and they supported me	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Friendships grew when we were working online within my peer group	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I did not feel socially isolated from my peers during online learning	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I was able to concentrate on my own progression rather than compare myself to my peers when we were studying online	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I did not want to let my peers down when studying online and this motivated me to study	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I became closer to a few of my peer group more than others during online learning	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Studying during Covid made me more appreciative of the different things impacting on my peers lives and their backgrounds	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Studying during Covid made me more appreciative of the time my teachers put in to support us	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Seeing some of my peers struggle with their learning or perhaps withdraw from our course made me more determined to continue	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I have felt part of the class group throughout the lockdown period	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Add item

Add item

📖 These questions are about the learning and teaching approach on your course, and ▮▮ as a higher education provider.

Add item

9 ▦ ✅ Please rate your agreement with the following statements: *

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
My tutor values me as an individual and makes efforts to get to know me	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
My tutor gives me personalised support	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
My tutor made efforts to keep everyone positive and motivated during online learning	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
My tutor demonstrates that they genuinely care about me, both personally and in my studies	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
My tutor has the knowledge and skills to support me during Covid	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel like the staff at ▮▮ and ▮▮ care about me	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The teaching and University Centre staff make me feel part of the community	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I appreciated the regular communications from the University Centre about Covid and the implications for my learning	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
If I needed to discuss my wellbeing, a health difficulty or a disability, I would be confident that the University Centre would support me	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel comfortable and part of the University Centre community	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I appreciated the Covid Safety Net (e.g. ECs) that the University Centre put in place	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Add item

These questions are about your wellbeing and family life when studying.

Add item

10 Please rate your agreement with the following statements: *

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strong disagree
I was relieved to be studying online due to the health risks of Covid	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I remained motivated with my studies throughout online learning	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I never questioned whether I would withdraw from my studies during online learning	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I felt positive about my █████ experience during Covid compared to other university students I heard about in the media	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I do not feel like I have missed out on my university experiences during online learning	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Due to lockdown, my family responsibilities did not change (e.g. related home schooling, working more hours, caring for relatives)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I am proud to be a university student	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I am proud to be studying at █████	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
My studies are a role model and inspiration to others in my family	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel a responsibility to family to complete my course	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I was able to balance my family and study commitments	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I felt confident and happy with my online learning most of the time	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Add item

The questions on this page ask about your confidence in studying. They relate to your whole ▮▮▮▮ experience rather than just Covid online learning, unless it is stated specifically.

Add item

11 📊 ✓ Please rate your agreement with the following statements: *

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strong disagree
I always knew I would be able to study for a degree	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Completing a degree and graduating has always been a goal of mine	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
When I started my degree, I was confident I would be able to do the studying and assessments	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Before going online in December, I thought I would be able to study effectively online due to my learning preference	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I believe graduating with a degree will open career opportunities for me	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I sometimes find myself visualising graduation	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Studying has given me confidence in the workplace	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I have become a more confident person whilst studying	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Since I started studying, I believe in myself more and know I can complete my course	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Most of the time I know I am good enough to study at university	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I often have to say to myself things like 'you can do this'	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Whilst studying online I am able to organise my studying effective	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

19. Survey: items related to persistence and personal tutoring

p. 9 Persistence

Add item

These questions are about your intentions to continue with your studies and your beliefs about your academic progress.

Add item

12 On a scale of 10 to 1, where 10 is 'Very likely' and 1 is 'Not at all likely', please rate the following statements: *

	10 - Very likely	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1 - Not at all likely
I will definitely complete my current programme of study	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I will definitely pass (gain 40% or above) my current programme of study	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I will definitely gain a 'good' degree (pass mark of 60% or above) in my current programme of study	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I will definitely gain a first class/distinction degree (pass mark of 70% or above)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Add item

Add item

13 Did you contemplate withdrawing or suspending from your studies during this academic year?

Yes

No

Add item

a Please rate how serious your withdrawal or suspension contemplations were on a scale from 10 to 1, where 10 indicates that you did not contemplate withdrawal, and 1 indicates that you filled in the withdrawl paperwork but chose to continue with your studies:

	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	
I did not contemplate withdrawing	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	I filled in the withdrawal paperwork but chose to continue with your studies

Add item

Add item

The questions on this page are about your experiences of personal tutoring at ▮▮▮▮ By personal tutoring we mean the weekly face-to-face and/or online tutorial sessions and the pastoral support you get from your named personal tutor.

Add item

14 ◉ Do you have a weekly timetabled group tutorial with your personal tutor? *

Yes, and we always have a weekly tutorial

Yes, but we did not always have a tutorial when we were online

No

Add item

Add item

15 ▦ ✅ Please rate your agreement with the following statements about your personal tutor: *

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
My tutor challenges me to give my maximum effort and work independently to achieve my best	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
My tutor is approachable, friendly and easy to talk to	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
My tutor is non-judgemental about my life and background	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
My tutor is authentic and their concern for me is genuine	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
My tutor is student-focused and values me as an individual	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Add item

Add item

16 ▤ Please describe the relationship you have with your personal tutor, and your feelings about that relationship.

20. Survey: items related to student demographics

p. 11	About you

Add item

The questions on this final page are demographic questions about you, so that I can analyse how particular student populations were impacted by Covid-19 campus closures.

Add item

17 ◎ What level of study are you currently undertaking? *

Level 4 (e.g. first year of a Foundation Degree, HNC, AAT, Level 4 Higher Apprenticeship)

Level 5 (e.g. second year of a Foundation Degree, DET)

Level 6 (e.g. Bachelors top-up degree)

Add item

Add item

18 ◎ Please indicate to what extent your university teaching was online during the December 2020 to May 2021 period. When answering this question, please select the option that reflects the overall teaching approach, rather than what you chose to do. *

All teaching and learning was online

We had some practical classroom delivery from January with additional online lessons

All our teaching and learning was classroom based from January onwards

Show all (8)

Add item

a T If you selected Other, please specify: *

Add item

19 ⊙ What is your gender? *

Female

Male

Non-binary

Prefer not to say

Show less

Add item

Add item

20 ⊙ Do you consider yourself to have a physical, learning or mental health disability or long term health condition? *

Yes and I have been awarded Disabled Students Allowances or apprentice Disability Support

Yes, but I do not have disabled students' support

No

Add item

Add item

21 ⊙ Are you considered a mature student - someone who was aged 21 or above at the start of their current course? *

Yes, I was 21 or above at the start of my current course

No, I was under 21 when I started my current course

Add item

Add item

22 ☑ Has anyone else in your immediate family studied at university (tick all that apply)? *

No, I am the first person in my family to attend university

Yes, at least one of my parents studied at university

Yes, at least one of my siblings studied at university

Yes, at least one of my children studied at university

23 ☑ Are you a parent/guardian of a child under 18 years of age or a carer (tick all that apply)? *

Yes, I am a parent/guardian of a child under 18 years of age

Yes, I am a carer for a disabled or poorly relative or friend

No, I am neither a parent or carer

Add item

Add item

24 ◎ What was your paid employment status for most of the period between December 2020 and May 2021? *

I was not in paid employment

I continued to work less than 16hrs a week

I continued to work more than 16hrs a week

I was put on furlough due to Covid-19 but am back in work now

I was put on furlough due to Covid-19 but am now out of work

I lost my job and remain unemployed

Show less

Add item

Isabel Hallam

21. Survey: debrief

p. 12   Final page

Add item

Thank you for completing this survey. Please be reassured that your answers are anonymous and that if you change your mind about your answers being included in the research you can withdraw your answers by emailing university@███████ac.uk by 10 June 2021 with your receipt number and the survey name 'Covid-19 Persistence'.

This survey is the second phase of a mixed-method research project entitled 'Appreciating the role of personal tutoring in fostering college higher education students' persistence during Covid-19'. During the first phase of the research, I conducted longitudinal focus groups with ████ students during the first campus closures between March-September 2020, and themes identified from their responses have contributed to the construction of this survey. Through this research I hope to enable more students to complete their studies when things are tough, by enhancing ████s tutorial programme and wider support for students.

If the survey has prompted questions about your own persistence or wellbeing, please speak to your Tutor or contact the ████ Wellbeing team on HEwellbeing@███████ac.uk.

If you have any questions regarding the research please contact me on my University of Exeter account, ich208@exeter.ac.uk or find me in the ████Student Support Hub. If you have any concerns about the research please contact my University of Exeter supervisor, Chris Boyle on C.Boyle@exeter.ac.uk

Thank you once again for your support completing the survey.

21. Statistical analysis of survey data

Student experience during COVID-19 campus closures

i.   **Hypothesis 1:** Students with various demographic characteristics would have a different student experience during COVID-19 campus closure compared to their peers

Gender (IV), Student experience (DV): one-way between-subjects ANOVA

Descriptive Statistics

Dependent Variable: Total scores

Gender	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Female	324.4306	74.89591	49
Male	296.0000	66.54927	13
Non-binary	354.4500	1.90919	2
Total	319.5937	72.72620	64

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Dependent Variable: Total scores

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	10812.928ª	2	5406.464	1.023	.366	.032
Intercept	1591063.959	1	1591063.959	301.038	.000	.832
Gender	10812.928	2	5406.464	1.023	.366	.032
Error	322400.389	61	5285.252			
Total	6870183.880	64				
Corrected Total	333213.317	63				

a. R Squared = .032 (Adjusted R Squared = .001)

Disability (IV), Student experience (DV): one-way between-subjects ANOVA

Descriptive Statistics

Dependent Variable: Total scores

Disability	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Non-disabled	318.4619	69.48162	42
Disabled DSA	317.0056	80.04629	18
Disbled non-DSA	343.1250	89.37298	4
Total	319.5937	72.72620	64

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Dependent Variable: Total scores

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	2389.262[a]	2	1194.631	.220	.803	.007
Intercept	2907543.220	1	2907543.220	536.116	.000	.898
Disability	2389.262	2	1194.631	.220	.803	.007
Error	330824.056	61	5423.345			
Total	6870183.880	64				
Corrected Total	333213.317	63				

a. R Squared = .007 (Adjusted R Squared = -.025)

Age (IV), Student experience (DV): one-way between-subjects ANOVA

Descriptive Statistics

Dependent Variable: Total scores

Age	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Young, Under 21	311.2765	85.15259	17
Mature, over 21	322.6021	68.46080	47
Total	319.5937	72.72620	64

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Dependent Variable: Total scores

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	1601.377[a]	1	1601.377	.299	.586	.005
Intercept	5016247.809	1	5016247.809	937.865	.000	.938
Age	1601.377	1	1601.377	.299	.586	.005
Error	331611.940	62	5348.580			
Total	6870183.880	64				
Corrected Total	333213.317	63				

a. R Squared = .005 (Adjusted R Squared = -.011)

Isabel Hallam

Level of study (IV), Student experience (DV): one-way between-subjects ANOVA

Descriptive Statistics

Dependent Variable: Total scores

Level of study	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Level 4	317.1808	74.02386	26
Level 5	316.9087	75.27748	23
Level 6	327.8933	70.81525	15
Total	319.5937	72.72620	64

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Dependent Variable: Total scores

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	1350.450[a]	2	675.225	.124	.884	.004
Intercept	6227258.672	1	6227258.672	1144.638	.000	.949
Level_Study	1350.450	2	675.225	.124	.884	.004
Error	331862.868	61	5440.375			
Total	6870183.880	64				
Corrected Total	333213.317	63				

a. R Squared = .004 (Adjusted R Squared = -.029)

First in family (IV), Student experience (DV): one-way between-subjects ANOVA

Descriptive Statistics

Dependent Variable: Total scores

First in family	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
First in family	312.9771	73.91982	35
Chn at uni	362.9000	49.70339	4
Parent at uni	361.2778	75.20965	9
Sibling at uni	284.2500	49.03267	10
Multiple at uni	325.7000	84.55055	6
Total	319.5937	72.72620	64

Isabel Hallam

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Dependent Variable: Total scores

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	37387.555[a]	4	9346.889	1.864	.129	.112
Intercept	4133401.234	1	4133401.234	824.373	.000	.933
First_in_family	37387.555	4	9346.889	1.864	.129	.112
Error	295825.762	59	5013.996			
Total	6870183.880	64				
Corrected Total	333213.317	63				

a. R Squared = .112 (Adjusted R Squared = .052)

Parent/Carer (IV), Student experience (DV): one-way between-subjects ANOVA

Descriptive Statistics

Dependent Variable: Total scores

Parent	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Not carer	299.6314	76.03880	35
Carer for relative	286.7500	12.23295	2
Parent of under 18	346.7682	66.88790	22
Multiple carer	352.9000	34.01529	5
Total	319.5937	72.72620	64

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Dependent Variable: Total scores

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	37897.149[a]	3	12632.383	2.567	.063	.114
Intercept	2136780.490	1	2136780.490	434.134	.000	.879
Parent	37897.149	3	12632.383	2.567	.063	.114
Error	295316.168	60	4921.936			
Total	6870183.880	64				
Corrected Total	333213.317	63				

a. R Squared = .114 (Adjusted R Squared = .069)

Parent/Carer (IV), Student experience (DV): one-way between-subjects ANOVA

Descriptive Statistics

Dependent Variable: Total scores

Employment	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Worked <16hrs	361.0800	66.76378	5
Worked >16hrs	313.3964	65.88165	28
Lost job, unemployed	295.4000	.	1
Not in employment	324.0762	75.41596	21
Furlough	308.0556	95.23353	9
Total	319.5937	72.72620	64

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Dependent Variable: Total scores

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	11886.380[a]	4	2971.595	.546	.703	.036
Intercept	1840467.866	1	1840467.866	337.935	.000	.851
Employment	11886.380	4	2971.595	.546	.703	.036
Error	321326.938	59	5446.219			
Total	6870183.880	64				
Corrected Total	333213.317	63				

a. R Squared = .036 (Adjusted R Squared = -.030)

ii. **Hypothesis 2:** Students who had weekly tutorials would have had a more positive COVID-19 campus closure student experience than those students who did not have a weekly tutorial.

Tutorial (IV). Student experience (DV): one-way between-subjects ANOVA

Descriptive Statistics

Dependent Variable: Total scores

Tutorial	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
No weekly tutorial	266.0636	68.69134	11
Yes, always weekly tutorial	338.0106	66.14048	47
Yes, not always onliine tutorial	273.4667	70.10055	6
Total	319.5937	72.72620	64

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Dependent Variable: Total scores

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	60227.994[a]	2	30113.997	6.729	.002	.181
Intercept	2761598.009	1	2761598.009	617.094	.000	.910
Tutorial	60227.994	2	30113.997	6.729	.002	.181
Error	272985.323	61	4475.169			
Total	6870183.880	64				
Corrected Total	333213.317	63				

a. R Squared = .181 (Adjusted R Squared = .154)

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	Online T&L	2286.840[a]	2	1143.420	4.287	.018	.125
	Peers on course	823.430[b]	2	411.715	1.891	.160	.059
	UC Culture	9160.991[c]	2	4580.496	16.202	.000	.351
	Wellbeing	3221.008[d]	2	1610.504	5.503	.006	.155
	Confidence	591.393[e]	2	295.696	1.335	.271	.043

a. R Squared = .125 (Adjusted R Squared = .096)

b. R Squared = .059 (Adjusted R Squared = .028)

c. R Squared = .351 (Adjusted R Squared = .329)

d. R Squared = .155 (Adjusted R Squared = .127)

e. R Squared = .043 (Adjusted R Squared = .011)

Power and sample analysis

Power Analysis Table

	N[b]	Actual Power[c]	Power	Std. Dev.	Effect Size[d]	Sig.
				Test Assumptions		
Overall Test[a]	54	.820	.8	72.73	.546	.05

a. Test the null hypothesis that population mean is the same for all groups.

b. Total sample size across groups.

c. Based on noncentral F-distribution.

d. Effect size measured by the root-mean-square standardized effect.

Group Size Allocation for Overall Test

	N
Group 1	18
Group 2	18
Group 3	18
Overall	54

Isabel Hallam

iii. **Hypothesis 3:** Students who had not contemplated withdrawal would have had a more positive COVID-19 campus closure student experience than those students who had contemplated withdrawal.

Contemplated withdrawal (IV), Student experience (DV): one-way between-subjects ANOVA

Descriptive Statistics

Dependent Variable: Total scores

Contemplate withdraw	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
No	335.3814	70.92154	43
Yes	287.2667	66.81893	21
Total	319.5937	72.72620	64

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Dependent Variable: Total scores

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	32663.586[a]	1	32663.586	6.738	.012	.098
Intercept	5470072.188	1	5470072.188	1128.414	.000	.948
Withdraw	32663.586	1	32663.586	6.738	.012	.098
Error	300549.732	62	4847.576			
Total	6870183.880	64				
Corrected Total	333213.317	63				

a. R Squared = .098 (Adjusted R Squared = .083)

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	Online T&L	1860.711[a]	1	1860.711	6.909	.011	.102
	Peers on course	661.490[b]	1	661.490	3.051	.086	.048
	UC Culture	1071.875[c]	1	1071.875	2.610	.111	.041
	Wellbeing	4524.008[d]	1	4524.008	16.974	.000	.218
	Confidence	336.794[e]	1	336.794	1.517	.223	.024

a. R Squared = .102 (Adjusted R Squared = .087)
b. R Squared = .048 (Adjusted R Squared = .032)
c. R Squared = .041 (Adjusted R Squared = .025)
d. R Squared = .218 (Adjusted R Squared = .205)
e. R Squared = .024 (Adjusted R Squared = .008)

Power and sample analysis

Power Analysis Table

| | N[b] | Actual Power[c] | Test Assumptions | | | |
			Power	Std. Dev.	Effect Size[d]	Sig.
Overall Test[a]	74	.802	.8	72.73	.468	.05

a. Test the null hypothesis that population mean is the same for all groups.

b. Total sample size across groups.

c. Based on noncentral F-distribution.

d. Effect size measured by the root-mean-square standardized effect.

Group Size Allocation for Overall Test

	N
Group 1	37
Group 2	37
Overall	74

Hypothesis 4: Students who had weekly tutorials during COVID-19 campus closure would have more positive perceptions of their personal tutors' characteristics and values.

Tutorial (IV), Tutor's characteristics (DV): one-way between-subjects ANOVA

Descriptive Statistics

Dependent Variable: Tutor

Tutorial	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
No weekly tutorial	14.2727	7.00130	11
Yes, always weekly tutorial	22.4894	4.38313	47
Yes, not always onliine tutorial	14.6667	5.85377	6
Total	20.3438	6.12105	64

Isabel Hallam

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Dependent Variable: Tutor

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	815.178ª	2	407.589	16.090	.000	.345
Intercept	9485.008	1	9485.008	374.426	.000	.860
Tutorial	815.178	2	407.589	16.090	.000	.345
Error	1545.260	61	25.332			
Total	28848.000	64				
Corrected Total	2360.438	63				

a. R Squared = .345 (Adjusted R Squared = .324)

Power and sample analysis

Power Analysis Table

			Test Assumptions			
	Nᵇ	Actual Powerᶜ	Power	Std. Dev.	Effect Sizeᵈ	Sig.
Overall Testª	30	.825	.8	6.12	.757	.05

a. Test the null hypothesis that population mean is the same for all groups.

b. Total sample size across groups.

c. Based on noncentral F-distribution.

d. Effect size measured by the root-mean-square standardized effect.

Group Size Allocation for Overall Test

	N
Group 1	10
Group 2	10
Group 3	10
Overall	30

Withdrawal contemplation

v.   **Hypothesis 5:** There will be an association between students with various demographic characteristics and their withdrawal contemplation.

Demographic characteristics (IVs), withdrawal contemplation (DV): Chi square test

Contemplate withdraw * Gender

Contemplate withdraw * Gender - Chi-Square Tests

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	1.878[a]	2	.391
Likelihood Ratio	2.521	2	.284
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.800	1	.180
N of Valid Cases	64		

a. 3 cells (50.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .66.

Contemplate withdraw * Disability

Contemplate withdraw * Disability - Chi-Square Tests -

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	3.358[a]	2	.187
Likelihood Ratio	3.249	2	.197
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.161	1	.281
N of Valid Cases	64		

a. 2 cells (33.3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.31.

Contemplate withdraw * Age

Contemplate withdraw * Age - Chi-Square Tests - October 28, 2021

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.121[a]	1	.727		
Continuity Correction[b]	.002	1	.962		
Likelihood Ratio	.123	1	.726		
Fisher's Exact Test				1.000	.488
Linear-by-Linear Association	.120	1	.730		
N of Valid Cases	64				

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 5.58.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Isabel Hallam

Contemplate withdraw * Level of study

Contemplate withdraw * Level of study - Chi-Square Tests - Oc

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	2.464[a]	2	.292
Likelihood Ratio	2.465	2	.292
Linear-by-Linear Association	2.426	1	.119
N of Valid Cases	64		

a. 1 cells (16.7%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 4.92.

Contemplate withdraw * First in family

Contemplate withdraw * First in family - Chi-Square Tests - Oct

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	2.944[a]	4	.567
Likelihood Ratio	4.191	4	.381
Linear-by-Linear Association	.029	1	.865
N of Valid Cases	64		

a. 6 cells (60.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.31.

Contemplate withdraw * Parent

Contemplate withdraw * Parent - Chi-Square Tests -

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	2.994[a]	3	.393
Likelihood Ratio	3.488	3	.322
Linear-by-Linear Association	.056	1	.812
N of Valid Cases	64		

a. 4 cells (50.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .66.

Contemplate withdraw * Employment

Contemplate withdraw * Employment - Chi-Square Tests - O

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	8.488[a]	4	.075
Likelihood Ratio	9.996	4	.041
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.893	1	.169
N of Valid Cases	64		

a. 5 cells (50.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .33.

Demographic characteristics (dichotomous IVs), withdrawal contemplation (DV): Chi square test

Isabel Hallam

Contemplate withdraw * Disabled or not

Contemplate withdraw * Disabled or not - Chi-Square Tests - October

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	2.430[a]	1	.119		
Continuity Correction[b]	1.635	1	.201		
Likelihood Ratio	2.384	1	.123		
Fisher's Exact Test				.163	.101
Linear-by-Linear Association	2.392	1	.122		
N of Valid Cases	64				

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 7.22.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Contemplate withdraw * First in family or not

Contemplate withdraw * First in family or not - Chi-Square Tests - October

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.657[a]	1	.418		
Continuity Correction[b]	.295	1	.587		
Likelihood Ratio	.662	1	.416		
Fisher's Exact Test				.439	.295
Linear-by-Linear Association	.647	1	.421		
N of Valid Cases	64				

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 9.52.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Contemplate withdraw * Parent/Carer

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.076[a]	1	.783		
Continuity Correction[b]	.000	1	.993		
Likelihood Ratio	.076	1	.783		
Fisher's Exact Test				1.000	.498
Linear-by-Linear Association	.075	1	.784		
N of Valid Cases	64				

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 9.52.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Contemplate withdraw * Employ or not

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.195[a]	1	.659		
Continuity Correction[b]	.031	1	.861		
Likelihood Ratio	.195	1	.659		
Fisher's Exact Test				.791	.430
Linear-by-Linear Association	.192	1	.662		
N of Valid Cases	64				

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 10.17.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Isabel Hallam

vi. **Hypothesis 6:** Students who had weekly tutorials would be less likely to contemplate withdrawal.

Weekly tutorial (IVs), withdrawal contemplation (DV): Chi square test

Crosstabs

Crosstabs - Chi-Square Tests - October 28, 2021

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	15.920[a]	2	.000
Likelihood Ratio	17.191	2	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.875	1	.171
N of Valid Cases	64		

a. 3 cells (50.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.97.

Power and sample analysis

Power Analysis Table

				Test Assumptions		
	N[b]	Actual Power[c]	Power	Std. Dev.	Effect Size[d]	Sig.
Overall Test[a]	126	.805	.8	2.63	.345	.05

a. Test the null hypothesis that population mean is the same for all groups.
b. Total sample size across groups.
c. Based on noncentral F-distribution.
d. Effect size measured by the root-mean-square standardized effect.

Group Size Allocation for Overall Test

	N
Group 1	42
Group 2	42
Group 3	42
Overall	126

vii. **Hypothesis 7:** Students with certain characteristics and/or experiences would be more likely to contemplate withdrawal.

Demographics/experiences (IV), Contemplate withdrawal (DV): Binomial Logistic Regression

Omnibus Tests of Model Coefficients

		Chi-square	df	Sig.
Step 1	Step	22.068	10	.015
	Block	22.068	10	.015
	Model	22.068	10	.015

Model Summary

Step	-2 Log likelihood	Cox & Snell R Square	Nagelkerke R Square
1	58.936[a]	.292	.406

a. Estimation terminated at iteration number 20 because maximum iterations has been reached. Final solution cannot be found.

Classification Table[a]

			Predicted		
			Contemplate withdraw		Percentage Correct
	Observed		No	Yes	
Step 1	Contemplate withdraw	No	37	6	86.0
		Yes	12	9	42.9
	Overall Percentage				71.9

a. The cut value is .500

Variables in the Equation

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1[a]	Level of study			4.920	2	.085	
	Level of study(1)	-2.382	1.076	4.900	1	.027	.092
	Level of study(2)	-1.805	1.064	2.876	1	.090	.165
	Gender			1.138	2	.566	
	Gender(1)	20.664	27373.320	.000	1	.999	942331313.153
	Gender(2)	19.725	27373.320	.000	1	.999	368408873.201
	Age(1)	.018	.880	.000	1	.984	1.018
	Disabled_binary(1)	-1.365	.738	3.415	1	.065	.255
	FirstFamily_binary(1)	-.247	.713	.120	1	.729	.781
	Parent_binary(1)	.083	.774	.012	1	.914	1.087
	Employed_binary(1)	-1.097	.858	1.635	1	.201	.334
	Tutorial_binary(1)	2.700	.890	9.201	1	.002	14.881
	Constant	-18.898	27373.320	.000	1	.999	.000

a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: Level of study, Gender, Age, Disabled_binary, FirstFamily_binary, Parent_binary, Employed_binary, Tutorial_binary.

Isabel Hallam

Power and sample analysis

Power Analysis Table

	N[b]	Actual Power[c]	Test Assumptions			
			Power	Std. Dev.	Effect Size[d]	Sig.
Overall Test[a]	45	.817	.8	.2	.600	.05

a. Test the null hypothesis that population mean is the same for all groups.

b. Total sample size across groups.

c. Based on noncentral F-distribution.

d. Effect size measured by the root-mean-square standardized effect.

Group Size Allocation for Overall Test

	N
Group 1	15
Group 2	15
Group 3	15
Overall	45

viii. **Hypothesis 8:** Students who had contemplated withdrawing would have different grade and completion expectations than those who had not contemplated withdrawing.

Contemplate withdrawal (IV), Grade and completion expectations (DV): Kruskal-Wallis one-way between-subjects

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Complete programme	64	9.2656	1.54552	1.00	10.00
Gain pass grade	64	8.8594	1.86758	1.00	10.00
Gain good degree	64	7.4375	2.53781	1.00	10.00
Gain 1st class	64	4.9844	3.11419	1.00	10.00
Contemplate	63	7.9841	2.63042	2.00	10.00
Contemplate withdraw	64	1.3281	.47324	1.00	2.00

	Complete programme	Gain pass grade	Gain good degree	Gain 1st class	Contemplate
Kruskal-Wallis H	1.923	.041	.829	.367	35.365
df	1	1	1	1	1
Asymp. Sig.	.166	.840	.363	.545	.000

a. Kruskal Wallis Test

b. Grouping Variable: Contemplate withdraw

Glossary

Academic advising: UKAT (2019), the UK Advising and Tutoring group, explain that academic advising is about supporting students to achieve their academic aspirations. A purposeful personal relationship with their advisor enables students to become autonomous, confident learners and engaged members of society. *Synonyms:* Academic advising is more common in the US literature. In some HE providers in the UK they combine academic advising with personal tutoring, and others separate the role.

Acceptance: Rogers (1983, p. 124) explains 'an acceptance of this other individual as a separate person, having worth in her own right. It is a basic trust – a belief that this other person is somehow fundamentally trustworthy'.

Access: The Higher Education Academy define access as 'the extent to which groups can gain entrance to different types of higher education institution' (Webb, Wyness & Cotton, 2017, p. 4)

Achievement: Achievement is often viewed in terms of the final degree classification awarded to an undergraduate student, and increasingly the transcript giving marks at module level (Universities UK, 2004).

Appreciative inquiry: Appreciative Inquiry (AI) seeks to identify and maximise an organisations' positive core through the 4-D cycle: Discovery, Dream, Design and Destiny (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005, p. 16).

Appreciative lens: Conway and Foskey (2015) refer to an appreciative lens as focusing attention on relationships in the learning environment and avoiding deficit discourse.

Attainment: The Higher Education Academy define attainment as 'the extent to which students are enabled to fulfil their potential; sometimes discussed in terms of achieving a 2.1 or first class degree' (Webb, Wyness & Cotton, 2017, p. 4).

Attrition: Webb and Cotton (2018) define attrition as whether a student leaves an institution, the opposite to retention.

Belonging: Thomas (2012, p. 12) explains that student belonging is closely related to academic and social engagement. Belonging can be viewed sociologically, the mismatch between students' backgrounds and their HE provider, or psychological at an individual level involving subjective feelings of connection to the HE provider (Thomas, 2012, p.12). Belonging, or a sense of psychological membership as Goodenow (1993) refers to it, is the subjective feeling a student has towards being personally accepted, respected, included and supported by others in the learning environment.

College HE (CHE): The Association of Colleges (2018) refers to higher education taught with in further education colleges as College HE. *Synonyms:* HE in FE, college-based HE.

Commuter student: The Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) (2018) describe students who live away from campus – often in the parental home – and who commute long distances to study as commuter students. However, the Higher Education Academy (HEA) (2018) describe commuter students as those who have decided to stay at home and study. Their decision to be a commuter student might be financial, given that maintenance costs do not cover the true costs of living away from home. They may also choose to be close to family for other reasons, health, friendship networks, already in employment or have caring responsibilities (HEA, 2018).

Completion: Thomas (2011) explains that in the UK, student retention has a narrow definition of completion rates, those students who continue until they obtain their qualification with no more than one year away from their studies.

Disabled students: The UK Government considers a student to be eligible for Disabled Students Allowances, and thus disabled, if they have a disability that affects their ability to study, such as: a learning difficulty, for example dyslexia or ADHD; mental health condition like anxiety or depression; physical disability, for example if you are partially sighted or have to use

crutches; and/or long-term health condition such as cancer, chronic heart disease or HIV (Gov. uk, 2019c). Hocking (2010, p. 3) finds the category disabled student problematic, noting that although it can administrative useful and potentially empowering for some, it can be negative and stigmatising for others. *Synonym:* Student with disabilities (SwD).

Disabled Students Allowance (DSA): Higher education students can apply for Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs) to cover some of the extra costs because of a mental health problem, long term illness or any other disability. Following a needs assessment, students can be awarded a specialist equipment allowance, non-medical helper allowance and/or a general allowance (Gov.uk, 2019c).

Disadvantaged: The Office for Students (OfS) (2019a) use two measures to identify disadvantage. For young entrants to HE (under 21) the POLAR4 measure is used to group areas across the UK based on the proportion of the young population that participates in higher education. With quintile 1 and 2 from the POLAR4 measure having the lowest participation in HE. To assess participation across all age groups the OfS use a different measure of disadvantage called the index of multiple deprivation (IMD). This is a measure of multiple deprivation of small areas in England. There is a degree of consistency in the patterns of disadvantage from both measures.

Empathy: Rogers (1983, p. 125) refers to empathy as 'when the teacher has the ability to understand the student's reactions from the inside, has a sensitive awareness of the way the process of education and learning seems *to the student'* [italics in the original].

Engagement: Kuh (2009, p. 683) has defined student engagement as 'the time and effort students devote to activities that are empirically linked to desired outcomes of college and what institutions do to induce students to participate in these activities'.

First-generation student: Young-Jones, Burt, Dixon and Hawthorne (2012) define first-generation students as those who did not have a parent or grandparent who had attended higher education. The term first-generation appears to be used in more US journals. *Synonym:* First-in-family

First-in-family: First-in-family refers to being the first member of your family to university (O'Shea, May, Stone & Delahunty, 2017, p. 3). The term first-in-family seems more common in UK journals. *Synonym:* First-generation

Further education: Further education (FE) includes any study after secondary education that's not part of higher education (that is, not taken as part of an undergraduate or graduate degree) (Gov.uk, 2019a).

Future selves: Harrison (2018), noting that future or possible selves are the future-tense for self-concept *Synonym:* Possible selves

Genuineness: Rogers (1957) describes genuineness in the relationship as one of the conditions of a therapeutic change. He describes it as 'in the relationship he [the therapist] is freely and deeply himself, with his actual experience accurately represented by his awareness of himself. It is the opposite of presenting a façade, either knowingly or unknowingly' (p. 828). *Synonym:* Realness; Congruence; Integrated person.

Goals: Nicholls (1984) explains that goals can prompt achievement behaviour which in turn can demonstrate a high ability to ourselves or others. The orientation of that goal in achievement situations is either towards acquisition, mastering or working hard for a learning goal, or a performance goal to seek positive judgements about our ability from others (Nicholls, 1984; Tuckey, Brewer & Williamson, 2002).

Grit: Duckworth et al. (2007, pp. 1087-88) define grit as 'perseverance and passion for long-term goals'. They say it 'entails working strenuously towards challenges, maintaining effort and interest over years despite failure, adversity and plateaus in progress'. Duckworth et al. (2007) appear to equate grit with perseverance, citing the Perseverance Scale for Children (Lufi & Cohen, 1987) as one of the potential measures. *Synonym:* Perseverance.

Higher Education Providers (HEPs): The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) (2019) use the umbrella term higher education provider to include all publicly funded universities and other higher education institutions (HEIs) in the UK, alternative HE providers (APs) that offer HE courses but do not receive annual public funding, and further education colleges (FECs) in

Wales which provide some HE level courses. *Synonym:* higher education institutions (HEIs).

Inclusion: Although the UNESCO (1994) Salamanca statement discusses inclusion in terms of learners with special educational needs and/or disabilities, in today's HE environment, inclusion refers to access to and participation in HE for students from range of groups who were traditionally denied those opportunities (Williams et al., 2017).

Inclusive pedagogy: Inclusive pedagogy 'indicate[s] a focus on the act of teaching' (Florian and Black-Hawkins, 2011, p. 814). Hockings (2010, p. 1) describes the notion of inclusive pedagogy as the way 'pedagogy, curricula and assessment are designed and delivered to engage students in learning that is meaningful, relevant and accessible to all'.

Inclusive practice: Booth and Ainsworth (2002, p. 3) define inclusive education practice as an 'unending process of increasing learning and participation for all students'. Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011, p. 814, italics in the original) assert that inclusive practices are 'the things that people *do* to give meaning to the concept of inclusion'.

Learning community: Stoll, Bolma, McMahon, Wallace and Thomas (2006, p. 223) suggest there is consensus around a broad definition of a professional learning community as 'a group of people sharing and critically interrogating their practice in an ongoing, reflective, collaborative, inclusive, learning-oriented, growth-promoting way'.

Low tariff: The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) (2014, p. 15) refer to a low tariff HE provider as one that has an average entry offer of less than 240 UCAS points (equivalent to the new UCAS tariff of 96 points or CCC at A-Levels). A medium provider offers 240-359 old UCAS points (96-144 new points or AAA at A-Level) and a high tariff provider has an entry requirement of over 360 points (over 144 new UCAS points or more than AAA at A-level). BIS (2014, p. 22) explain that students who have the lowest tariff entry scores have the greatest risk of dropping out of their studies.

Mattering: "Mattering is the psychological tendency to perceive the self as significant to others" (Marshall, Liu, Wu, Berzosky & Adams, 2010, p. 367).

Motivation: From a humanistic psychology perspective, motivation is typically understood in terms of Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, with deficiency needs (physiological, safety, love and belonging, and self-esteem) being met before growth needs can be sought towards self-actualisation. People are motivated to secure their lower order deficiency needs before they can seek self-actualisation. However, Maslow (1962, p. 27) notes that 'no good behavioural definition of motivation has yet to be found'.

Non-continuation: The Office for Students (2019b) define non-continuation as 'The proportion of students who had left higher education without gaining a qualification 1 year and 14 days after starting their course'.

Non-traditional: Non-traditional students, in UK higher education and policy discourses, include first-generation university students, students from low-income households, students from minority ethnic/racial backgrounds, mature students (age 21 or over on university entry), and/or students with a declared disability (Wong, 2018). ***Near synonym:*** underrepresented

Pastoral tutor: Traditionally the pastoral tutor acts *in-loco parentis* supporting students 'beyond academic issues' (Lochtie, McIntosh, Stork and Walker, 2018, p. 22).

Persistence: Defining persistence, Tinto (2017a) notes that it can be another way of talking about motivation and is the 'quality that allows someone to continue in pursuit of a goal even when challenges arise' (Tinto, 2017a, p. 2).

Personal tutor: Stork and Walker (2015, p. 3) define a personal tutor as 'one who improves the intellectual and academic ability, and nurtures the emotional well-being of learners through individualised holistic support'.

Possible selves: Markus and Nurius (1986) introduced the concept of possible selves to describe how individuals think about their future and their potential. The possible selves include our ideal selves, the ones we would like to become, and those we are afraid of becoming. ***Near synonym:*** Future selves.

Progression: The Higher Education Academy define progression as 'successful transitions within the programme of study and afterwards to employment or further study' (Webb, Wyness & Cotton, 2017, p. 4).

Rapport: Tickle-Degnen and Rosenthal (1990) describe rapport as a dynamic structure of three interrelating components: mutual attentiveness, positivity and coordination. The weighting of these components changes during a developing relationship between individuals.

Relationship-rich education: Relationship-rich seek to foster higher education student success through four principles, every student must experience genuine welcome and deep care, must be inspired to learn, develop a web of significant relationships, and explore questions of meaning and purpose (Felton & Lambert, 2020, pp.17-18). ***Near synonym:*** Relationship-rich pedagogy, relationship-based

Resilience: In their 2018 meta-analysis of resilience studies related to the big-five trait theories, Oshio, Taku, Hirano and Saeed (2018) use the definition of resilience as a 'dynamic process that encompasses positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity'.

Retention: The Higher Education Academy define retention as 'participants' likelihood of continuing or withdrawing from study' (Webb, Wyness & Cotton, 2017, p. 4).

Self-efficacy: Bandura (1978, 1989) discusses self-efficacy as part of Social Cognitive Theory, explaining that 'expectations of personal efficacy determine whether coping behavior will be initiated, how much effort will be expanded, and how long it will be sustained' when faced with adversity (Bandura, 1978, p. 139). Bandura (1978) explains that self-efficacy is influenced by sources of efficacy: performance accomplishments, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion and physiological states.

Social capital: John Dewey is one of the first to talk about education's contribution to social capital, specifically reading, writing and arithmetic: 'These subjects are social in a double sense. They represent the tools which society has evolved in the past as the instruments of its intellectual

pursuits. They represent the keys which will unlock to the child the wealth of social capital which lies beyond the possible range of his limited individual experience' (Dewey, 1915, p. 104).

Social identity: Tajfel and Turner (1979) proposed social identify theory, the cognitive processes used to identify a person as in an in-group or out-group: social categorisation (which group someone is in), social identification (whether you/other identify with the in-group norms and attitudes), and social comparison (how you self-concept becomes closely meshed in the perceptions of the group memberships).

Social justice: Social justice is defined by Rawls (1999, p. 6) as 'the way in which the major social institutions distribute fundamental rights and duties and determine the division of advantages from social cooperation'. The UK Government (2012, p. 4) explain that social justice is 'about making society function better – providing the support and tools to help turn lives around'.

Social mobility: The Sutton Trust (2017a, p. 3) describe social mobility as 'a good in and of itself; it represents equality of opportunity for all'. Further, they explain that 'social mobility is critical for a fair society where people from any background are able to succeed in life. Social mobility is important in terms of creating a fairer society, fostering social cohesion and maximising society's productivity. A fairer society rewards merit and hard work, rather than having success determined by inherited advantage' (The Sutton Trust, 2017b, p 5). The UK Government (2012, p. 4) explain their 'Social Mobility Strategy is about ensuring people are able to move up the social ladder, regardless of background; [this] Social Justice Strategy is about ensuring everybody can put a foot on that ladder'.

Student satisfaction: Student satisfaction is usually measured through student surveys. The most widespread UK survey is the National Student Survey (NSS) taken by final year student to assess how satisfied they were in a range of academic areas, from teaching to personal development opportunities.

Student voice: McLeod (2011) discusses how student voice is used to frame and support inclusive learning and celebrate diversity, creating space for

students who are deemed 'different' or non-traditional to have their say, express their point of view and be heard around issues that are important to them. ***Near synonym:*** learner voice; children's voice.

Student-centred: O'Neill and McMahon (2005) and Tangney (2014) acknowledge, student-centred learning is poorly defined and can mean different things to different people. Tangney (2014) notes that it is generally associated with constructivist ideas of building on prior knowledge, purposeful active learning and sense-making. Yet, it is often paraphrased as the educator caring for students as individuals and seeking to engage students in the learning process so that they have more responsibility for their learning (Lillie and Wygal, 2011; McCabe and O'Connor, 2014). ***Synonym:*** learner-centred.

Students with disabilities: The UK Government considers a student to be eligible for Disabled Students Allowances, and thus disabled, if they have a disability that affects their ability to study, such as: a learning difficulty, for example dyslexia or ADHD; mental health condition like anxiety or depression; physical disability, for example if you're partially sighted or have to use crutches; and/or long-term health condition such as cancer, chronic heart disease or HIV (Gov.uk, 2019b). ***Synonym:*** Disabled students.

Success: The Higher Education Academy (2016, p. 1) note that 'trying to pin down a watertight definition of 'student success' is a reductive exercise', as success means different things to different students. However, the Office for Students (2018, p. 88) judge whether a higher education provider is delivering successful outcomes for all students by reviewing student outcomes related to: 'continuation and completion rates; degree and other outcomes, including differential outcomes for students with different characteristics; and graduate employment and, in particular, progression to professional and managerial jobs and postgraduate study'.

Tutorial method: Distinguishing between the tutorial method and tutoring, Lochtie, McIntosh, Stork and Walker (2018, p.2) explain that the tutorial method of subject teaching, associated with Oxbridge, uses the Socratic method of teaching engaging small numbers of students in discussion, supporting them to learn and think for themselves.

Tutoring: In contrast to the tutorial method of subject teaching, tutoring is often undefined and unstructured in many institutions (Lochtie, McIntosh, Stork & Walker, 2018, p.2). Earwaker (1992) and Owen (2002) describes three models of tutoring: the pastoral model with tutors assigned to students for the duration of their course to guide them on pastoral and moral issues as well as give academic support; the professional model which advocates the immediate referral of students to professional counsellors, housing officers, disability advisors and other professional advisors; and the curriculum model. The curriculum model aims to 'provide support through the actual course that students follow. Helping and supporting students then appears not as some extra-curricular activity for which time has to be found, but as a normal part of the course' (Earwaker, 1992, p. 115).

Unconditional positive regard: A condition of a therapeutic relationship, Rogers (1975) describes unconditional positive regard as 'experiencing a warm acceptance of each aspect of the client's experience as being a part of that client' (p. 829). He explains there are no conditions of acceptance.

Underrepresented: Underrepresented students are those who share the following characteristics that data shows have gaps in equality of opportunity in relation to access, success and/or progression: students from areas of low HE participation, low household income or low socioeconomic status; students of particular ethnicities; mature students; disabled students; and care leavers. Additionally, students with specific barriers are included in the definition of underrepresented: carers; those estranged from their families; people from Gypsy, Roma or Traveller communities; refugees; people with mental health difficulties or specific learning difficulties; and children from military families (Office for Students, 2018). *Near synonym:* non-traditional

Well-being: The World Health Organization (2019) describes mental well-being as 'a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community'.

Widening participation (WP): Dearing's *Higher Education in the Learning Society* report in 1997 initiated initiatives and policies related to widening

participation and lifelong learning in the UK (Thompson, 2019). WP has been associated with the expansion and 'massification' of HE and in redressing the under-representation of certain groups in HE (Wilkins & Burke, 2015).