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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Beyond Graduation: trajectories of graduates from higher education in North Wales

Crew, Teresa

Award date:
2015

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**Beyond Graduation: trajectories of graduates from higher education
in North Wales**

**Teresa Crew
February 2014**

BEYOND GRADUATION: TRAJECTORIES OF GRADUATES FROM HIGHER EDUCATION
IN NORTH WALES.

A Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of
the School of Social Sciences
BANGOR UNIVERSITY

by
TERESA CREW
JANUARY 2013

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Dedication

To Nick, Jade and Zoe. At times like this you realise that words are not enough to express your gratitude. Research often does not capture how difficult it can be when a member of the family enters university. It is no exaggeration to say that without your endless love and support I would not have gotten to this stage. I give my deepest thanks for the sacrifices you have all made and I only hope I can repay these. My success is your success.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the support and guidance of my supervisor, Professor Howard Davis. Without his excellent guidance, breadth of knowledge, and patience I would not have finished this thesis. His style of supervision, good humour and wonderful book collection are to be admired. Thank you Howard!

I would also like to acknowledge the teaching and support assistance given to me by all the academic and support staff of the School of Social Sciences. Their combined work provided the foundation for undertaking this research and made me feel welcome in an environment I thought I would never fit in.

Finally, I would also wish to thank the respondents for taking the time to share their trajectories with me. I only hope that my work has done justice to your experiences.

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Abstract

Higher education is in a state of transformation, with the economic recession leading to an even greater emphasis on graduate outcomes. Existing UK-wide research suggests that graduate opportunities are influenced by pre-entry characteristics; institution attended and subject studied, as well as the individual's store of social capital. The research for this study uses data from a cohort of graduates in North Wales to explore the issues in further detail. The mixed methods design compares secondary data on access, student experience and destinations with original survey and interview data. A critique of the current emphasis on graduate outcomes six months after graduation leads to a focus on longer-term trajectories. The results from graduates from four different types of degree awarding institutions and three specific subjects – chosen for contrast and convenience – reveal both similarities and differences compared with existing studies. Whilst the findings support existing research on pre-entry factors, they also indicate that regional assets e.g. Welsh language skills, access to transport and local networks, influence the patterns of subsequent trajectories. The more biographical and extended longitudinal approach contributes to the literature on graduates by providing an analytical typology of their post-graduation trajectories. It also contributes to Bourdieu-inspired theoretical discussion of inequalities in higher education and beyond. The study has implications for policy and practice in universities, careers services and the Higher Educational Statistics Agency (HESA).

CHAPTER ONE. INTRODUCTION

“...This Government are committed to a Britain where social mobility is unlocked; where everyone, regardless of background, has the chance to rise as high as their talents and ambition allow them” (David Cameron, ‘The Coalition Manifesto’ 2010).

Overview and context

Strategies to widen the participation of nontraditional students (NTS)¹ in higher education (HE)² have been a central feature of both the previous Labour (1997–2010) and current Conservative–Liberal Democrat Coalition education policy (Bathmaker, Ingram and Waller, 2013). Widening participation (WP) in to HE was promoted on an individual level as a way in which NTS can improve their life-chances and secure economic prosperity (Byrom and Lightfoot, 2013). WP’s economic rationale was affirmed in a speech by Lord Mandelson who suggested that “*more of the knowledge that is generated in UK universities should be turned into jobs and growth*” (Goddard, 2009). Despite a proliferation of literature relating to under-represented groups ‘getting ready’, ‘getting in’ and ‘staying in’ HE, less attention has been devoted to how NTS ‘get on’, post graduation. Current research suggests that opportunities beyond graduation depend on pre-entry factors and graduate employability (Tomlinson, 2007). This thesis addresses these issues through an evaluation of the HE and post graduation experiences of a regional cohort of graduates. The following sections provide the policy, theoretical and personal context to this study.

Policy context

Whilst the policies of New Labour are often cited as the start of WP, the roots of these policies can be traced further back. An early indication of HE changing from an elite to a mass system can be traced back to a report by Robbins (1963) who recommended that university courses should be available for all those who qualified by ‘*ability and attainment*’. Following Labour’s general election victory in 1964, Anthony Crosland set up a HE system which consisted of autonomous universities combined with a public sector of technical and other further education colleges. The policy was aimed at

¹ See p.27-28 for a discussion of the definition of NTS.

² Two significant reports, *Learning Works* and *Higher Education in a Learning Society* (the Kennedy and Dearing reports - both published in 1997) are often cited as establishing and explaining Widening Participation policies (Jary and Jones, 2010).

meeting new demands for recruitment through upgrading the status of technical education to equal that of the universities. In 1987 the Conservative government produced a White Paper which revised access to HE by providing three clear routes - academic qualifications, vocational qualifications and access courses for adults (David et al, 2008). After their election in 1997, the New Labour administration, in what is incorrectly seen as the birth of WP policies (Thompson, 2012)³, followed the recommendations of the Dearing report with the aim of providing *'the opportunity of higher education to all those who have the potential to benefit'* (ibid: 6). They encouraged a 50 percent participation rate for 18-30 year olds, they drew up policies to encourage those from disadvantaged groups and low participation neighbourhoods to participate in HE and they promoted the need to provide courses which satisfied both students and employers (David et al, 2008).

Following the worldwide recession of 2007 government policies regarding access to HE were now required to consider new funding regimes and mechanisms. New Labour commissioned a cross-party review headed by Lord Browne. *The Browne Review*⁴ launched in 2009 and published in 2010, proposed that the cost of HE in England should move from the taxpayer to undergraduates and the cap on tuition fees be removed (Browne, 2010). In 2008 the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) announced the establishment of the *Jones Review* led by Professor Merfyn Jones. The review of the purpose, role and funding for HE in Wales drew a direct link between the success of the Welsh university sector and the future of the Welsh economy. The Conservative led coalition government, elected in 2010, adopted the vast majority of the 'main thrust' of Browne's proposals, whilst the Welsh Assembly announced that although fees would rise as in England, the government would meet the extra cost to Welsh students studying at any UK university (Hocking et al, 2008) as non traditional students were still less likely to enter HE.

Whilst HE was promoted as being likely to increase social mobility of NTS existing research on graduates suggests that pre-existing entry factors outlined above may also have an effect post graduation. There is evidence that graduates who were NTS

³ David W Thompson notes that policies to increase participation amongst previously excluded groups were not constructed by New Labour. He refers to the industrial revolutions of the late 18th and 19th century as the real impetus for change and reform in the education system (2012: 41).

⁴ or Independent Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance

disproportionately experience problems in the graduate labour market, progressing to jobs with lower status and pay (Reay, 2001), or are only able to secure temporary, unskilled or part time employment (Furlong & Cartmel, 2005). They are less likely to be able to offset the 'cost' of a period of unpaid work in prestigious 'internships' often necessary to apply for higher status paid posts. Furthermore, evidence from a study by Wilton (2011) found that labour market disadvantage continued even when employability skills were developed. Further to this, first generation graduates and students from post-1992 universities are less likely to undertake postgraduate study (Pollard et al, 2008). Gorard *et al* (2006) highlight the lack of research on the impact of widening participation on postgraduate study: for example, little is known about the social characteristics of postgraduate students or the regional context. The status of the HEI attended is linked to success in the graduate labour market. For example, the legal profession prefers to recruit its trainees from traditional or elite universities (Sommerlad, 2008). Students from traditional universities progress to higher degrees in greater proportions, regardless of class background (Wakeling and Kyriacou, 2010). Subject is also an important factor as graduates with degrees in sciences and vocational subjects are more likely to go on to gain graduate level employment compared to those with arts degrees (Brennan and Tang, 2008).

Theoretical context

This study is also influenced by the concepts of Pierre Bourdieu, one of the key theorists of the 20th century. There are few fields and theoretical issues that Bourdiesian concepts are not applicable to as his body of work covers subject areas such as sociology, philosophy, gender and cultural studies, globalisation and education to name but a few. He has had a major influence on sociology of education researchers such as Stephen Ball; Diane Reay; Mike Savage and Fiona Devine, who have utilised his concepts of field, habitus and capital as a way of understanding educational disparities.

Habitus, according to Bourdieu refers to “*durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures*” (Bourdieu and Waquent, 1992: 53). Bourdieu conceptualises these dispositions as those that generate perceptions, appreciations and practices (Webb, Schirato and Danaher, 2002). Bourdieu ‘refers to habitus as “*something historical, and being linked to individual*

history” (Bourdieu, 1993: 86, cited in Reay et al, 2004:1104). Individuals inherit “*procedures to follow, paths to take*” (Bourdieu, 1992: 53), and then adapt them to a new situation (Robbins, 2000 cited in Hillier and Rooksby, 2005). These dispositions, or “*ways to behave*” (Robbins, 2000 cited in Hillier and Rooksby, 2005), will often shape a person’s views of future education and employment options. This is often described as either ‘fitting in’ with a specific institution or place, or in the negative form, as place of study or employment ‘*not being for the likes of me*’ (Reay, 2004). Habitus is neither a result of agency, nor determined by structures (Bourdieu 1984: 170), and it is both durable and transposable, and allows for improvisations. For instance Desmarchelier (1999) explains that “*the acquisition of cultural capital through education enables the student to develop new facets of self, a new habitus*” (p281, cited in Morley, 2005: 11). She goes onto compare this to a diamond e.g. “*where the individual sparkles more brilliantly and reflects different ‘aspects of themselves’*” (Desmarchelier, 1999: 282, cited in *ibid*). However as dispositions are both shaped by past events and structures, and shape current practices and structures (Bourdieu 1984: 170), family and class conditioning tend to take precedence.

A second important concept introduced by Bourdieu is that of ‘capital’ e.g. “*accumulated labour (in its materialized form or its ‘incorporated,’ embodied form) which, when appropriated on a private, i.e., exclusive, basis by agents or groups of agents, enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labor*” (Bourdieu, 1986: 241). Bourdieu highlights how capital takes time to accumulate and has “*a potential capacity to produce profits and to reproduce itself in identical or expanded form*” (Bourdieu, 1986: 241), and be transferred from one arena to another (Navarro 2006). Bourdieu’s development of the concept is useful for an understanding of the benefits of HE, as it extends beyond the notion of the material assets (economic capital) used to access HE, but also includes other forms of capital (social or cultural) that provide additional resources (Bourdieu 1986 cited in Navarro 2006: 16). Bourdieu’s discussion of capital suggests that it can be a source of social advantage and social class differentiation in terms of HE and beyond graduation. *Economic capital* is self explanatory but it useful in so much that it not only widens university choice, but is also helpful post graduation e.g. having the financial resources needed to move to areas in order to undertake prestigious unpaid internships. Social capital refers to resources which are based on relationships and networks of influence e.g. knowing

the right people can provide valuable advice regarding university and career choice; and cultural capital e.g. forms of knowledge, skills, education, and advantages that a person has, gives them a higher status in society⁵.

Bourdieu discusses how cultural capital exists in three forms. Embodied cultural capital suggests that those who are more likely to engage with highbrow culture, for instance opera and arts programmes, may feel more like a “fish in water” (adapted from Reay, 2004: 1104) at high status HE and subsequent employment institutions. Consequently those more acquainted with popular culture (reality, soaps and variety/chat shows) may not only be underrepresented in HE, but also if they do enter university perhaps struggle beyond graduation to enter typical graduate roles. I wish to avoid being stereotypical here by stressing that this does not mean that *all* NTS will engage with lowbrow culture. However the point that Bourdieu is making is that the capacity to appreciate and engage with highbrow culture is a work in itself (1986: 244). The investment of time and economic resources needed means that some may not be able to extend their cultural activities, particularly if they are already investing in their university education. Second, cultural capital, in the objectified state, refers to the ability to ‘consume’ “*material objects e.g. writings, paintings, and instruments*” (1986: 244). The opportunity to consume these material goods is likely to be influenced by economic resources, and as such is more likely to be accessed by a core clientele who may not include those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The institutionalized state e.g. academic qualifications, confers on its holder between the officially recognized, guaranteed competence and simple cultural capital, which is constantly required to prove itself. By conferring institutional and subject recognition on the cultural capital possessed by any given agent, the academic qualification also makes it possible to compare qualification holders. However Bourdieu comments in *Distinction* (1984) that the status of a qualification is likely to be devalued if the number of ‘holders’ increase rapidly (p128).

Although the emphasis in this thesis is on Pierre Bourdieu any discussion regarding forms of capital would be poorer without drawing upon the work of James Coleman (1990), John Goldthorpe (1996), and Robert Putnam (2000). Whilst Bourdieu (1997) places economic capital at the root of other capitals, Goldthorpe (1996) views

⁵ As economic capital is self explanatory I will concentrate on social and cultural capital.

economic capital as more significant (than other forms of capital) as opportunities to participate in cultural activities depend on one's economic resources (Silva and Edwards, 2004: 3). This could perhaps illuminate one of the reasons why graduates from economically disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to undertake post graduate study e.g. financial concerns. In contrast to this, James Coleman (1990) suggests that social capital is actually capable of mitigating the effects of such economic disadvantage. Coleman points out that as parents invest in their children, those children will then increase their human capital, which in turn enables them to gain greater economic rewards, not only for themselves and their parents but also for the community (ibid). Robert Putnam (2000) takes a different approach, and instead conceives social capital as being a form of public good, e.g. civic engagement. Bourdieu's view of capital – social, cultural and economic – is that it effectively places people differently in the social hierarchy (ibid). An example of this, in the context of higher education, is that those individuals with friends or family who have been in HE are more likely to be aware of funding streams that can aid one's pathway into a university education. The apparent differences between those with a family background in HE and those without (more commonly understood as the much utilised division between traditional and non traditional students) can be explained that the expectation in some families is that you would attend university (traditional students) in order to gain a graduate role, whilst for others (non traditional students) the expectation is often more focused towards entering the labour market and, if possible, aspiration is achieved through 'working one's way up'.

Bourdieu's third concept which will be used throughout this thesis is field. He describes a field as a setting in which agents and their social positions are located. An agent's position in the field is a result of interaction between the field, their habitus and capital (Bourdieu, 1984). A field is a network, structure or institutions which may be intellectual, religious, educational or cultural (Navarro, 2006: 18). The *academic field* is understood as a complex space composed of producers (researchers and academics), distributors (professors and disseminating bodies), consumers (students, researchers and scholars), legitimating entities and distributors of goods (universities and research institutes). Internally, fields can be seen in terms of power relationships. For instance in the academic field, journal editors have power over other academics e.g. the power to publish work or not; university vice chancellors have power over

academics e.g. the power to 'support' research agendas, or not, and academics have power over students e.g. the power to 'pass' the students work, and so on. In this era of WP policies one might find that it is not now the degree qualification itself that gives an actor power in a specific field, but instead the type of degree obtained e.g. where the qualification was gained, in what subject and what classification.

I have found it more difficult to apply the concept of field to post graduation experiences. Prior to the massification of HE the types of occupations, and thus fields, that graduates would be expected to occupy were fairly well understood e.g. management roles in fields such as Law, Business, Government. However, since the development of the knowledge economy and the evolving HE system, there appears to be an 'over supply' of suitably qualified candidates (Brown, Hesketh, and Williams, 2003). As such what constitutes the field beyond graduation is rather vague. A further reason for this difficulty arises when one considers that Bourdieu introduces the concept of field whilst making a general point regarding habitus. In this he lists "*fields of sport, or music, or food, or decoration or politics*" (1984: 203). Language can be used in a creative manner to apply field to different employment sectors, however, Bourdieu does not explicitly discuss graduate fields, except in the case of the academic field.

The concept of field can be more easily applied to post graduation outcomes when one considers that "*fields have their own set of rules, rituals, designations, and titles which constitute an objective hierarchy, and which produce and authorise certain discourses and activities*" (Webb, Shirato, and Danaher, 2002: 43). In this instance post graduation outcomes are more easily relatable when we consider that in specific employment fields such as finance; medicine and law there is a whole process of professionalisation leading to specific ways to behave e.g. "*the use of professional terms that distance the bearer from the uninitiated; the wearing of specific attire, and the joining of professional bodies*" (ibid). Each field has structured positions, e.g. manager and trainee, where people accumulate capital: economic capital (money), social capital (network of connections), and cultural capital (prestige and standing) (Warde, 2004). Each of these forms may be converted to some other form of capital and to other fields. As Sullivan (2002) notes, 'success' in the education system is facilitated by the possession of capitals and of "*higherclass*" habitus (p 144). This

thesis explores how far these attributes are needed beyond graduation, or if gaining a degree bestows these qualities on a graduate.

Personal context

Acker commented that many researchers study aspects of their autobiographies which are partially disguised as a "detached choice of an interesting problem" (1981: 12). I would concur with this statement. Whilst remaining objective during the study, I immediately recognised the value of my own experiences in HE - firstly as a NTS⁶ and then as a graduate. This was never more apparent when reading the academic and policy literature. Whilst feeling dismayed with the dominant discourse on NTS 'groups'⁷, my appreciation of the work of those who argue against this deficit view (i.e. Diane Reay, Louise Archer, Miriam David, Jocey Quinn and Kim Allen to name but a few) inspired my interest in reclaiming the term NTS to one that signifies achievement. My first step forward towards this aim involved reflecting on my own experiences.

I was born in 1972, the eldest of four children. For the majority of my childhood I lived in Runcorn, Cheshire in one of the social housing developments built in the 'new town' for young families. As the Thatcher revolution of the 1980's was still to come, working class families like mine did not tend to own their own home. I mention my childhood as there is a weight of evidence which shows that a combination of positive parenting, a good home learning environment and parents' qualifications can transform children's life chances (Field, 2010). I had the first two in abundance, but my parent's lack of academic qualifications, alongside my dad's 'choice' of employment meant that my habitus, and how I would conceptualise my own career 'choices', would be solidly working class. I asked my father recently why he did not try to gain higher qualifications. He reminded me that *"In those days if you were born with a silver spoon in your mouth or passed the 11 + then you'd go to university⁸. Otherwise you would have to work, work, work so you could look after your family"*. Like many people where we lived, my father worked in factories whilst my mother was a 'stay at home mum'.

My father was brought up in a large, solidly working class family from Nottingham, he, alongside his most of his brothers worked in the primary employment in that area –

⁶ I am a non traditional student by virtue of my age and economic background, being the first in my family to attend university and due to having epilepsy. NTS is a term that I embrace, but reject due to its current connotations.

⁷ See page 27 for further discussion

⁸ The grammar school system, whilst transformative, remained predominantly middle class as only a handful of carefully selected working class students, approximately 10 percent, passed their 11+ (Ball, 2008)

coal mining. However despite my father's hard work he appeared to be affected by a poverty of opportunity, described in studies such as Paul Willis (1977), that is noticeable among working class males (particularly those who had lost their fathers – and potential role models - to war or ill health). My father says he doesn't mind this lack of opportunities as he just hoped that it would be easier for my generation. I however can't help but feel sad that opportunities were so few for people such as my parents. One of my uncles was particularly inspiring when I was growing up. He would create the most outstanding 3d art, made from reclaimed material – before it was fashionable to be 'green'. He would also write and perform his own musical compositions. My favourite was his song "*Life on the dole*". Despite not knowing what the 'dole' was, I understood his emotive lyrics: "*Is it worth the pain I ask myself each day, Is it worth the strain how much more will I take, my troubles won't go away...*". However people outside of my family would, perhaps, be more inclined to define him by his extended periods of unemployment, as opposed to his artistic talents.

In contrast, my mother's family biography was more of an aspirational working class background. When my mum was a child my grandparents used contacts from his time in military service, and with a small pot of savings they began to run a corner shop in a small area of Liverpool. This experience of running their own business, and being comparably affluent in their local area, meant that they encouraged my uncles to consider options that were beyond their immediate social background. All of my uncles were encouraged to go to university, but did so by combining employment with their studies - as opposed to receiving financial support from my grandparents. As such all my uncles were able to gain professional occupations e.g. Teaching (one uncle worked as the head teacher in a well performing primary school for many years, whilst another was the head of a service department in an English university) and Business (One uncle worked at director level for various companies, whilst another uncle had management roles within a well known car company). Conventional notions of male/female roles in the 1950's, alongside the lack of family friendly working policies that we take for granted today, meant that the opportunities afforded to my uncles, were not available to my mother. However since my younger siblings left home she has worked in a variety of research support roles.

My family background explains a lot about the research areas that interest me: aspiration, power and the duality in people and places. Evaluating my childhood from

the perspective of Bourdieu I can see that my cultural capital was developed early. In what I now recognise as a display of middle class educational practices, my parents, particularly my mother would often be the lone voice amongst other parents in asking the school about homework, and after school activities⁹. A typical Saturday night at home included playing Scrabble or card games with my parents, brother¹⁰ and grandparents, as opposed to just watching television. Sundays were spent going on day trips to areas of natural beauty such as Delamere Forest and Bala Lake in my grandparent's camper van. I enjoyed school immensely; however my habitus meant that gaining employment, as opposed to entering further study, would be my primary concern. After leaving school I went on to work in a series of routine roles as a waitress, a chambermaid and working in customer service for a variety of organisations. Such roles are often described as being menial, however I recognise that they were responsible for teaching me what would now be defined as employability skills e.g. team working; IT and communication skills. Alongside this I had two children, so all my capacity for learning went into instilling in them a critical understanding of the world around us, coupled with an often contradictory notion, that they could achieve anything they wanted to as long as they worked hard. I decided to take my own advice and attempt to gain a career that fulfilled me on an academic level. I was also driven by a simple desire to read the Guardian newspaper and not feel alienated.

From 21 to just before I entered HE, aged 30, I took baby steps to change careers. I enrolled on a creative writing course; studied for a history A level, and managed, with support from my partner, to somehow undertake an Open University (OU) course in sociology. I can empathise with why some individuals may not complete their formal further education, as like numerous studies have suggested (Thomas, 2002 provides a good overview of these issues), family and economic concerns meant that some friends I met on such courses were unable to complete. Despite my inroads in to further study, I did not consider I was university 'material' until my tutor at OU suggested I should consider enrolling on an undergraduate course. This is again typical of NTS as the validation of an authority figure in education is needed before many consider HE (Archer and Leathwood, 2003)¹¹. University was everything I expected and more,

⁹ I fully appreciate my mum for this now as I do not feel that my natural inclination to learning would have developed without her input

¹⁰ My younger brother and sister were born 12 years later

¹¹ Although I shared many characteristics with NTS I also differed in some capacity. For instance I consulted the prospectuses of various universities within a three hour travel distance of my local area, however distance became key as I realised that it would be difficult to combine my studies with travel. I decided to go to Bangor University as it was local to me, and it felt

however I was expecting to get a tap on the shoulder or an email to say there had been a terrible mistake and I should leave the premises forthwith. Perhaps due to this pressure that I placed on myself, I worked extra hard and utilised the support from lecturers as much as possible. After this, and after gaining and completing a scholarship for my MA, I was lucky enough to be employed throughout, and I worked in various graduate roles e.g. researcher or project coordinator.

In some ways this should signify the end of the story: I graduated and gained graduate level employment. At first I enjoyed the research or policy work that I was asked to do for local councils and the voluntary sector, the work was interesting and I felt like I was contributing to the local area. However, there were underlying issues that were difficult to ignore. I felt a clear social division between myself and the people who were in similar roles. In terms of where I lived¹², for instance, I generally had more in common with people in the types of roles that I had worked in prior to university e.g. retail and service industries. However as I was in a more advantaged financial position than colleagues working in administrative roles, my preferred social and cultural activities would often differ. I also found myself having to keep my temper in check at times as colleagues would make ill informed, prejudicial statements about individuals who lived in social housing (as I do); who did not have HE qualifications (as is the case for some of my friends) or were unemployed (something my family has experienced). At times my criminology degree felt like a hindrance, as I would continually observe power differences between the individuals delivering support services, and the recipients¹³. The 'support' appeared to be about keeping service users 'in their place', as opposed to enabling them to be self sufficient. Alongside this there were practical problems to contend with. North Wales is an area that relies heavily on funding from various sources to subsidise projects relating to research, policy, and support services. Thus my roles would generally be for approximately six-twelve months. I followed the advice that graduates today are given: for example, gain work experience in your sector; offer to work for free; volunteer, develop more skills. My roles remained temporary and my patience and confidence began to run thin.

like a 'proper' university. The latter criteria was surprisingly more important to me than I had realised. However research on this theme by Baker and Brown (2005) ,who interviewed Welsh students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, such students often wanted to attend a 'proper university'. I will pick up on this theme in later chapters and in the conclusion.

¹² I live in a Communities First area in North Wales.. Communities First areas correspond to the 100 most deprived electoral divisions according to the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation 2000 (Welsh Assembly Government, 2013).

¹³ There also appeared to be a lack of desire to see certain groups as being self sufficient.

Beyond discussions with my supervisor, I have struggled to acknowledge the personal context to this study. When I have previously conducted research I have been an interested bystander. Whilst I stress that I have always cared deeply about the subject matter I am researching, I would generally have no direct experience of the phenomena I would be discussing¹⁴. For instance in my previous employment I coordinated a North Wales Gypsy Traveller Accommodation Assessment. My natural inclination towards research on excluded groups meant I wanted to represent that community to the best of my abilities, however I personally, had no personal links with the Gypsy and Traveller community, nor did I have direct experience of the issues they encountered. Researching experiences and people that I am familiar with e.g. being a graduate, was a new experience. An acknowledgement of my somewhat¹⁵ privileged position within this study led me to consult the literature on standpoint theory.

The beginnings of standpoint theory can be observed in Hegel's discussion of the master/slave dialectic, the ideas of Marx in relation to the proletariat, and, particularly, Lukacs' development of the idea of the standpoint of the proletariat (Bowell, 2011). This idea was then extended and reframed during second wave feminism so that seldom heard perspectives of marginalized groups were used to help create more objective accounts of the social world (Allen, 1996). Examples of this can be found in the work of Nancy Hartsock (1987 and 1998); Sandra Harding (1987); Patricia Hill Collins (2000) and Alison Wylie (2000; 2004). These perspectives that include feminist, queer, and race theory, focus on the identity and concerns of particular sectors of society (Bowell, 2011), but have broader implications for the way in which research is carried out. As I have been a non traditional student and a graduate I feel I am able to point to patterns of behaviour that those immersed in the dominant group culture may be unable to recognise. Some of the experiences I have encountered could challenge taken for granted assumptions about students in HE and beyond graduation.

Research Design and Methodology.

Overview

¹⁴ to the best of my knowledge,

¹⁵ I say somewhat because at times it has not felt like a privileged position as it is not always pleasant to see and hear NTS discussed in such disparaging terms.

Guided by the policy, theoretical and personal concepts outlined above, the overall aim of this research was to *contribute to the study of students and graduates in a regional context*. As will be discussed more fully in the methods chapter my objectives included an interest in critiquing the existing literature on how graduates access post graduation opportunities, using primary data. I am informed by a broadly realist perspective e.g. there is an external reality alongside my own understanding of the phenomena I describe. I also have a critical appreciation of feminist research in the sense that I not only “*document aspects of reality, but take a personal and political and stance*” (Sarantakos, 2004: 53). In light of these concerns I chose a mixed methods design (statistical analysis, survey, interviews and social media) in order to capture both quantitative and qualitative data. As will be discussed in Chapter Four, I focused on graduates from three specific subjects (Business and administration; Engineering and technology and Social studies) from four institutions in North Wales (a traditional university, a post-1992 university, an FE college providing HE courses and a distance learning institution).

Scope of the study

The scope of this study concentrates on graduates and issues relating to age, gender and socio-economic class, but does not include disability and ethnicity. This decision was not taken lightly as my literature review highlighted that there were interesting differences in terms of ethnicity and disability. For instance a report by Mok (2006) on a 2003/04 graduate cohort found that white graduates were generally less likely to be unemployed in comparison with graduates from ethnic minorities. However there were variations between ethnic groups, for example, at Masters level Black Caribbean and Indian graduates showed slightly higher full-time employment rates than White graduates. When I considered the literature on disability and post graduation experiences a report by AGCAS Disability Task Group (2013) is typical. This study suggested that overall, graduates without disabilities fare better than disabled graduates e.g. they have higher rates of employment and lower rates of unemployment. Although it should be noted that the difference in outcomes between graduates with disabilities and those without disabilities is not as pronounced as previously believed. However, graduates with unseen disabilities fare best among disabled groups, on occasions almost matching the non-disabled graduate population. Whilst these were interesting themes that I would have enjoyed exploring further I felt

that there was a need to keep the study within a manageable framework. As I had already committed myself to looking at the outcomes of graduates from four different institutions and three specific subjects, I felt there was a need to be strict with regards to any other criteria that I would evaluate. Despite this decision, throughout the data collection process I looked out for any data I could collect relating to disability or ethnicity, and endeavoured to report on any such findings.

Key definitions.

This section outlines the key terms that will be discussed throughout the thesis.

Non traditional student

The term non traditional student (NTS) has been used to describe entrants to higher education who have characteristics that are not normally associated higher education (Harvey, 2003). Morey et al. (2003) list these students as being: mature students; those from lower socio-economic backgrounds; first generation students; ethnic minorities and individuals with disabilities¹⁶. There are other terms that are used to describe these disparate group of students who are often entering HE for the first time e.g. non traditional entrants (Bowl, 2003); widening participation target groups (Moore et al, 2013)¹⁷. A further approach is to concentrate on specific characteristics of specific groups of student e.g. mature students; ethnic minority students, and first generation students. However in recent times there has been a growing acknowledgment that the term can be problematic (Morley, 2010). Despite the existence of more nuanced literature which stresses that “*Widening participation students’ are not a homogeneous group. They will have a range of identities, diverse social characteristics and come from a variety of backgrounds*” (Moore et al, 2013), these students are generally discussed in a manner that fails to focus on the differences in their experience, in terms of access, success and outcome (Gorad, 2006). The categories ‘traditional’ and ‘non-traditional’ should be approached with caution as, an individual may identify with both descriptors, for example, a Black 22 year old female student from a middle class family background, with A levels, a

¹⁶ I took the decision early on in this study to not concentrate on the experiences of graduates according to ethnicity. This is because I felt that my small sample of regional graduates would offer little illumination to ethnicity and gender, rather than a lack of interest in these graduates. As will be suggested in the conclusion to this study there is scope to analyse the experience of a non traditional cohorts.

¹⁷ This definition also includes Part-time learners; Vocational and work-based learners and Care leavers

vocational qualification, and the second in the family to go to university would not 'fit' neatly into either non-traditional or traditional categories.

Describing students according to their family engagement with HE (first generation students) or their age (mature students) can also effectively mask differences. First generation students are generally defined as those individuals where 'neither parent has had access to a university education and completed a degree' (Thomas and Quinn, 2007: 50). Whilst this foray into HE should be applauded, these students are often associated with a deficit view e.g. the assumption of 'poor or rusty study skills' (Kimbrough and Weaver, 1999); lack of awareness academic material (Hockings, 2010). Discussed in terms of what they supposedly lack (see above), as opposed to what they have (the confidence to enter the unknown that is the university?) there is the suggestion that the inclusion of such 'groups' would result in a 'dumbing down', or lowering of academic standards (Hockings, 2010). Although there are those who have produced studies that give a balanced view of NTS (see, above, page 26), overall the literature presents an arms' length approach to this academic oddity (Edwards, 1990).

When we consider the 'case' of mature students, whilst it may appear to be straightforward to define a student according to age, Thomas and Quinn (2007) note how there are international variations in terms of the cut of age for who is a mature student (21 in the UK; 23 in Ireland; 24 in the US AND 25 in Australia) that means that this descriptor is not reliable. Despite the concentration on age, there is also often an underlying discourse that point to the mature student also being economically disadvantaged. Findings from two large scale studies of mature student decision-making and HE by Osbourne, Marks and Turner (2004), to be discussed in the next chapter, points to further diversity within the mature student category. As such where possible when I use the term mature student I will include additional details about their entry into HE or other circumstance. I will also use the term mature student to refer to individuals aged 21-40, whilst those aged 40 and over are referred to as being older, mature students. With regards to other groups of students who are defined as being NTS I will refer to specific characteristics e.g. first in family to go to university; or those from economically disadvantaged background. For clarity the latter includes those individuals whose parents or own occupation defines them as belonging to social

groups IV-VIII, whilst the former refers to students whose parents, sibling, grandparents and aunts and uncles have not been to university.

The over-used, sometimes wrongly defined and misunderstood NTS label unhelpfully masks the diversity of experience and need amongst such a large cohort of underrepresented groups. In her introduction to *Widening Participation in Higher Education: Casting the Net Wide?* Tamsin Hinton Smith (2012) notes how despite the depth of research on NTS, little has changed. Engaging such 'groups' often appears to be a quota filling exercise and there is a largely unmoderated concentration on NTS in post 1992 institutions (p1-4). The ability and attitude of NTS are critiqued to such an extent that much of the research reinforces the notion that these students are out of their depth. Apart from sociology of education studies that concentrate on notions of capital or habitus, there appears to be a lack of research that celebrates the success of some students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Dissected in policy papers and journal articles, NTS continue to be 'tolerated rather than prized' (Woodley and Wilson, 2002, cited in Hinton Smith: 2012: 4). Those who become graduates remain largely absent from the literature except when there is a need to point out their continued deficiencies e.g. supposed lack of employability skills. In light of these concerns I was particularly loath to utilise this term, I also had little desire to divide my respondents into traditional and non traditional students. However like Thomas and Quinn (2007) I do note its utility as a readily understood descriptor in the field of higher education research. Thus I will utilise this term, with the additional identifying information outlined above, but will do so with the aim of contributing to the field of research on non traditional students in a more rounded and compassionate way.

Subject areas

When we consider subject areas information from HESA is particularly useful as they divide university subjects into an outline of nineteen subject areas. The subject areas do not overlap, and cover the entire range of JACS Principal Subjects¹⁸. Table 1 outlines the subject areas according to HESA

¹⁸ Apart from the need to separate the 'Mathematical science' and 'Computer science' elements of Principal Subject G0 and G9, they are expressed entirely in terms of JACS Principal Subjects, and correspond closely to JACS Subject Groups. Since Initial teacher training data is presented on a count of instance basis rather than an apportioned basis, the figures are not directly comparable with the apportioned figures in the 'Education' subject area, and are tabulated separately to reduce the risk of misinterpretation.

Table 1: HESA Subject Areas

Subject areas		
Medicine & dentistry	Computer science	Languages
Subjects allied to medicine	Engineering and technology	Historical & philosophical studies
Biological sciences	Architecture, building & planning	Creative arts & design
Veterinary science	Social studies	Education
Agriculture & related subjects	Law	Combined
Physical sciences	Business and administrative studies	
Mathematical sciences	Mass communications & documentation	

Source: HESA 2011

The importance of subject areas will become more apparent in the following chapters; however it is worth stressing at this time that I included an emphasis on outcomes relating to specific subjects for two specific reasons. Firstly, as will be discussed further in Chapter Two, entry in to postgraduate study, graduate level employment can be influenced by subject studied, as can the possibility of being unemployed. I have also concentrated on subject studied due to the emphasis by Bourdieu on the “*social hierarchy of the faculties*” e.g. the arts, law, medicine and science (1988:38). Bourdieu’s research finds that the students entering these fields are far more likely to be the offspring of privileged parents (Webb, Schirato and Danaher, 2002). Linked with Bourdieu’s discussion of subjects in terms of a hierarchy I will also draw upon notions of a subject capital that is gained from studying a specific subject.

Destinations

HESA describe destinations as being the circumstances of students who have completed their HE experience, six months after graduation. (HESA, 2011). The utility of this data is that these statistics can give an overall picture of what graduates can expect post graduation. Whilst HESA destinations data is utilised for many studies on graduate outcomes, there are criticisms of this data source which are discussed in Chapter Two and Five. Whilst appreciating its utility as a descriptor of graduate outcomes, there is an element of finality about the term that is summarised in its dictionary definition: e.g. the “*end of a journey or voyage*”. Whilst HESA destinations data is often the starting point for most studies this study has developed from the understanding that there is a need to describe more about the journey, beyond graduation.

Alongside the interest in graduate destinations, there is also an interest for policy makers, to understand if these are graduate or non graduate destinations. Prior to WP policies the difference between a graduate and non-graduate level employment was pronounced. Those leaving university with a degree tended to enter traditional graduate professions such as law and medicine, or be accepted onto graduate management training schemes with large, prestigious companies. However today's graduate labour market is much more complex: occupations that were not originally graduate level are now often require a degree. Further to this is the observation that when the distinction between a graduate or non graduate destination is made, the general emphasis is on employment. As already discussed, this study is concerned with all types of graduate outcomes: employment (full and part time, voluntary); further study (combining with or without employment) and inactivity (unemployment and not being available for employment e.g. caring responsibilities). In light of these observations, Chapter Seven includes a typology of graduate trajectories that takes into account these issues.

Trajectories

A desire to extend the discussion of graduate outcomes beyond six months after graduation led to this study focusing on the ways to describe longer term outcomes. Two words seemed to be synonymous with my desired approach: career and trajectory. Whilst both terms describe the individual entry path into the labour market, as well as the continuing journey, Valenduc et al, (2009) make the point that career mainly focuses on individual paths within or between organisations, whilst trajectory is related to mobility and transitions. Where I disagree with Valenduc et al (2009) is that they state that *career and trajectory only concern work* (p14). I would suggest that whilst career is synonymous with employment, trajectory - path or progression - is a more flexible term that can be applied to more outcomes than just employment.

This is evidenced in work by Corbin and Strauss (1991) who utilised this term to refer to the course of a chronic disease in its different stages and phases. Anselm Strauss made significant contributions to many areas in sociology, including significant contributions to research on occupations and professions (cited in Conrad and Bury, 1997). The concept of 'trajectory' is therefore far broader than the more limited term 'course of illness'. Trajectories are dynamic and often unpredictable, not least

because they involve people and the availability of resources (Hannigan and Allen, 2011). Chapters Three and Six discuss trajectories in further detail.

Success

When the first higher education institutions were established in medieval Europe in the late 11th and the 12th centuries (David et al, 2008) their purpose included the training of professionals, scientific investigation and improving society (Bockstaele, 2004). In his classic work *'The Idea of a University'* (1852), John Henry Newman expanded on these aims and stated that the: "*University is a place of teaching universal knowledge* (1852: ix). Defining success in the context of this thesis is difficult as it may mean different things for the variety of stakeholders involved in HE (Jones, 2008). Harlan Cleveland the US educator highlighted the conflicting views of higher education: "*The outsiders want the students trained for their first job out of university, and the academics inside the system want the student educated for 50 years of self-fulfilment. The trouble is that the students want both*". This contrasting emphasis between 'training' and 'education' and honing the mind or nourishing the soul, alongside an emphasis post graduation on the individual gaining a graduate role means that there are a variety of frequently cited indicators of success. These include:

- *Educational Attainment*: the completion of the qualification e.g. degree
- *Academic Achievement*: degree classification e.g 1st; 2.1; 2.2; third; pass or fail)
- *Personal Development*: improving self-awareness and self-knowledge and building or renewing identity/self-esteem (Cuseo, Fecas, and Thompson, 2007)

Post graduation achievement is normally discussed in terms of entering employment, or going on to further study. Whilst I will utilise the above indicators in order to discuss success, as I highlight in later chapters, I prefer to distance myself from the fickle process of defining who the successful students in this study are and who are not. Instead I prefer to discuss graduates outcomes without the emphasis on success.

Outline of the thesis

The chapters of this thesis have been organised according to the following structure. *Chapter Two* examines relevant research and debates on key themes in HE and beyond graduation. *Chapter Three* revisits the themes discussed in the destinations

section of *Chapter Two*, but enlarges the context by considering graduate trajectories. The second section discusses access to postgraduate opportunities. *Chapter Four* explains the rationale for the research design of this study and documents the procedures that were adopted. *Chapter Five* is the first original findings chapter and focuses on how the respondents from North Wales access and experience university, and utilises HESA data to discuss First Destinations. *Chapter Six* is the second findings chapter and discusses trajectories and how graduates access to opportunities. *Chapter Seven* continues with the discussion of graduate trajectories by using existing typologies of graduates. The second half of the chapter presents a new graduate typology that is useful for understanding trajectories. The concluding chapter reflects on the extent to which the aims and objectives of the study have been met. It also seeks to discuss the implications of the study from the perspectives of the various stakeholders – graduates, the institutions, graduate support services and the wider HE sector. Directions for further research are identified.

CHAPTER TWO. ACCESS AND SUCCESS: THE JOURNEY TO FIRST DESTINATIONS.

Introduction

The previous chapter outlined the parameters and objectives of this study. This chapter will examine relevant research and debates on key themes in higher education and beyond graduation. The first part of the chapter discusses access and attainment in higher education, whilst the latter half of this chapter focuses on some of the complexities involved when discussing first destinations of graduates. This chapter will also include a discussion of how Bourdieusian concepts have been used by sociology of education researchers to explain disparities in access, attainment and first destinations. The chapter will then conclude with a discussion of what we know about access and first destinations. This first section discusses access to HE and focuses on two key concepts, aspirations and choice.

Access to higher education

Despite increased enrolments from previously excluded student groups, participation in HE stubbornly remains *heavily patterned by 'pre-adult' social, geographic and historical factors* (Gorard et al. 2006: 7). When gender is considered there are immediate differences. Despite population estimates that show there are more young men than young women in the UK (ONS, 2012), UCAS statistics (2012) reveal that women are a third more likely to start a degree than their male counterparts. Male students are outnumbered by their female counterparts in almost all UK universities (Smith, 2008) as the UK undergraduate population comprises of 45 percent of males to 55 percent of females (HESA, 2013a). Whilst first degree students are most likely to be female, at postgraduate level this falls to around 47 percent. A synthesis of research on mature students by Smith (2008) suggests there are slightly more male mature students than female mature students. Further gender differences e.g. choice of HE subject and institution will be discussed in a later section.

A 2005 study by Pollard et al found that the decision to enter HE appears to still vary according to socio-economic background and age. For instance 20 percent of the most disadvantaged students were up to six times less likely to enter HE compared to the 20 percent most advantaged pupils (cited in Gorard et al. 2006). A statistical analysis by Gilchrist, Philips and Ross, (2003) noted that whilst entrants from professional or

intermediate classes generally take up higher education by the time they are twenty, those from non –skilled or manual backgrounds tend to enrol at a later age. Age is a particularly important factor to consider as although HESA statistics over the last twenty years demonstrate increases in the numbers of mature students entering HE (Smith, 2008), younger students still form the vast majority of undergraduates. For instance, those aged 24 and under formed over three quarters of First Degree students in 2013, with those aged 25-29 accounting for 8 percent of students, and the remainder consisting of those aged 30 and over (HESA, 2013a).

The use of the term non traditional student

Before moving onto a discussion of aspiration and the decision to enter HE, I want to pause to return to a discussion of a term that has already been frequently used: non traditional student. As previously discussed the definition of non traditional students often includes those who are actually not under represented. For instance the inclusion of ethnic minorities as a non traditional student is problematic as according to Connor et al (2004) those from a minority ethnic background are actually *more* likely to undertake HE qualifications than are those who are defined as White British. In their study for the Institute of Employment Studies, Connor et al (2004) found that minority ethnic groups also represent a *“higher proportion of the graduate output compared to their share of the working population”* (pxiii)¹⁹. There are further definitional problems. The use of the term is often used without due consideration that it is an inappropriate descriptor for a disparate range of students e.g. ranging from aged 21 (or 23, 25, depending on who is providing the definition), to an often uncited ‘upper’ age. When one looks at the inclusion of those who are the first in their family to attend university, it is not often clear if this refers to immediate family or anyone in the family? ²⁰.

A further observation is that despite there being examples of obvious diversity amongst non traditional cohorts, such differences are frequently ignored (see McGivney, 2004 for a more detailed discussion). The heterogeneity of mature students is captured most persuasively in Osborne et al’s (2004) typology of mature students. Their typology

¹⁹ What should be stressed when one discusses ethnic minorities as being an example of a non traditional student is that ethnic minority groups do not participate in HE in a uniform way, and their representation varies between universities, subjects, geographic regions, and courses (ibid) See Connor et al, 2004 for a detailed discussion of ethnic minority participation in HE

²⁰ Please refer to the introduction for a reminder of what I meant by the term non traditional student

proposed six 'types': delayed students in their 20s who are similar to younger traditional age entrants; late starters undergoing a life changing or transformative event e.g. redundancy; single parents; careerists who are seeking promotion; escapees who are employed and who want to gain qualifications as a way out of dead end jobs and personal growers who represent a small number who are pursuing education for its own sake. What is interesting about this typology is that it displays the cultural and social homogeneity of mature students: for example, 'single parents' may also be 'escapees' as their social circumstances change; women returners may be 'late starters' but also 'personal growers'. Despite the differences, there are common issues between mature students e.g. the influence of dependents; employment circumstances; and family support that can affect the decision to attend university. Gorad (2006) also suggests that the tendency to use terms such as 'non-traditional' conflates the experiences of such students, making it appear if one size fits all²¹. Such an approach will invariably affect institutional decisions regarding support services.

Reading the literature for this study also highlighted another issue relating to non traditional students: one that has influenced my interest in reappropriating the term. When the literature is taken as a whole, the non traditional student doesn't fare very well. Leathwood and O'Connell (2003) comment that such students are viewed as being: "*deficient: in ability, in not having a 'proper' educational background, or in lacking the appropriate aspirations and attitudes.*" (p.599). Bowl (2001) notes that many non-traditional students are not adequately informed, advised or prepared for HE by their schools, and as such are a "*frustrated participant in an unresponsive institutional context*" (p141). Given and Smailes (undated) refers to the text of a speech by Baroness Warnock, speaking in the House of Lords, as representative of a plethora of literature on those who have entered HE following WP policies: *I believe that, one way or another, we should stop filling our universities with students whose talents are more practical than theoretical, and who will not change...They have no very clear idea of the point of what they are going to learn or what they will do with it. For many of them, their years at university will, if they stick them out, be expensive and a waste of time* (House of Lords Hansard, 2002, column 795, cited in Given and Smailes, undated). If they are not discussed as having poor or rusty study skills (Kimbrough and Weaver, 1999) then they are cited as having complex support needs. For instance Newson,

²¹ <http://www.enyplan.com/abstract.cgi?id=a38361>

McDowall and Saunders (2011) research on Understanding the support needs of mature students. They suggest that there is: *strong agreement on the need for greater attention to the skills needs of mature students from the outset of their studies – with greater clarity about skills requirements for specific courses, an early needs analysis for individual students and a process for addressing skills gaps through appropriate training (p3)*²². Whilst relatively benign, there is still the assumption that mature students as a group will need such ‘support’. Overall the NTS is someone (or a group) that universities need to pay greater attention to in terms of the skills needed to enter university; to stay in their studies and to gain their degree: all in all it is a struggle.

However when one focuses on specific authors and studies, there is a more sympathetic and measured understanding of this cohort. Baxter and Hatt (1999), for instance suggest that despite a longer period time out of formal education, compared to younger students, older mature students (who they defined as being 25 and over) were less likely to experience difficulties during their studies, and were more likely to have uninterrupted progression through from the first year into the second year. A study by Morgan-Klein and Field (2010) *Access and Retention: Experiences of Non-traditional Learners in Higher Education (RANLHE)*, interviewed students (and staff) at three HEI’s in Scotland. They found that those students who had been nervous or daunted at the beginning of their studies generally reported that their confidence had increased and they had increased belief in their capabilities. A study by Wilson (1997), utilised a mixed methods approach to look at the ‘lived experience’ of being a mature student in a Scottish university. Amongst her findings was the observation that the NTS she interviewed appeared to be more inclined to take their university work seriously. Whilst the aforementioned study by McGivney (2004) noted that mature students, in particular, are usually more motivated to study and have a greater sense of what they expect to gain from a university education than younger students. Further to this, Roderick et al, (1981) found that non traditional cohorts were more likely to ask lecturers more questions; talk more in seminars and remain more clearly in the memories of lecturers, thus negating the argument that they have no interest in learning and developing. Despite these positive views of diverse ‘groups’ in HE, Reay (2001) notes that relationships towards education for such cohorts have often been “*deeply problematic and emotionally charged, inscribing academic failure rather than*

²² I should note that the aforementioned study does helpfully suggest that universities provide mature students their timetables as early as possible so that they can fit their studies around their possible caring responsibilities

success” (p). As such I believe there is a need for further positive studies relating to these cohorts. The next two sections consider aspiration – a prominent concept in HE policy debates - and then follows with a discussion of the decision to enter university.

Aspiration

Aspiration is often conceived as being something that advantaged students have and disadvantaged groups lack (Bradley, et al. 2008, cited in Bok, 2010). This view was evidenced in comments by Prime Minister, David Cameron who stated that young people from working class families do not get ahead in life partly because they have low “*aspirations*”. He suggested that people from poorer households and ethnic minorities need help to “*get them to think that they can get all the way to the top,*” (The Telegraph, 13 Nov 2013). These comments explain why schools and universities are often encouraged to bid for funding to promote social inclusion and individual opportunity (Bradley et al, 2008). However lack of aspiration may not be a suitable explanation for disparities in access. Studies such as Hutchings, 2003 and Thomas, 2009 propose that mature students do not lack aspiration, but instead have confidence issues relating to previously (bad) experiences in educational institutions. Reay, Crozier and Clayton (2009) study of working class students from four UK HEI’s supports this view. They also cited evidence from Leathwood & Read, 2008 that noted that a lack of confidence was gendered as it was females as opposed to males who exhibited these characteristics. Barrow, 2011, in her study of mature students in a post 1992 institution also identified a lack confidence among her, mainly female students, but suggested that this was because they were self conscious about being a non traditional student, as opposed to their lack of academic ability. The latter study is particularly interesting as it highlights that the use of labels to describe particular student groups can have an impact on their subsequent student experiences.

There are further explanations for disparities in access. Archer and Merrill (2001) who interviewed over a hundred ‘working-class’ young men and women who decided against a university education, found that their interviewees constructed HE as a risky, demanding and costly option. Risky, because university was a process that needed time, money and effort and the outcome was not be guaranteed; demanding because, unlike students from families who had attended university, they did not have a true idea of how much work would be involved; and costly, because even if they gain their

degree, they might end up working in the same service or administrative roles they did prior to university (Archer and Merrill, 2001). Appadurai's (2004) notion of the 'capacity to aspire', reframes the concept as being cultural rather than a trait found in specific individuals. (Bradley, et al. 2008, cited in Bok, 2010). According to Appadurai (2004) aspirations are related to individual "*wants, preferences, choices, and calculations*" (Appadurai, 2004: 67). These factors are normally seen in purely economic terms, however he suggests that an anthropological view points to them being derived from cultural norms (Appadurai, 2004). As such, Appadurai (2004), maintains, aspirations are not exclusive to affluent families - having plans and dreams for the future is not exclusive to more affluent groups. However Appadurai (2004) does note that the capacity to aspire is shaped by social, cultural and economic experiences, and the availability of navigational information (Appadurai, 2004, cited in Bok, 2010).

Reay, Crozier and Clayton's (2009) paper on working class students attending elite institutions is an excellent example of how experiences are shaped by social, cultural and economic factors. They interviewed working class students and found that they suggested that they displayed little evidence of "*middle-class cultural practices*" (p1106) that are often a precursor to university attendance, e.g. attending a grammar school or being involved in out-of school activities such as dance, art and music lessons or private tuition (Lareau, 2003; Reay, 1998 cited in *ibid*). Whilst students from economically advantaged backgrounds are encouraged to attend university by their immediate family, only two of the working class respondents they spoke to suggested that the decision to attend university was expected by their parents (Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2009). However a 2008 study by Baker and Brown, who constructed autobiographical narratives of participants from disadvantaged backgrounds in rural Wales who were successful at university, found that their respondents, who were from similar backgrounds to those in the above study, conceived they had a right to be at university. The reason for this, Baker and Brown (2008) suggest is that the participants they spoke to appeared to be influenced by mothers who attached considerable significance to educational achievement.

Valid, reliable and accessible advice and guidance, or 'Navigational information' (Bok, 2010) is more likely, suggests, to be available to those from advantaged backgrounds (Appadurai, 2004, cited in Bok, 2010: 3). A study by Hutchings, (2003) who conducted

focus groups with over 100 working class students in order to understand their view of HE, supports this. He found that not only did schools and colleges supply less information to students from disadvantaged backgrounds but that these respondents knew fewer people who had experienced university. As such the information these students required before making the decision to attend university was more complex. Citing from a study by Roberts and Allan (1997), Hutchings (2003) noted that in private schools (institutions that are more likely to be attended by individuals from advantaged backgrounds) subsequent university attendance would be presumed, thus information and advice regarding this process would be disseminated to all students. In comparison, advice and guidance in comprehensive schools would be more generalised, focusing on employment and further study options. Consequently, information regarding university would be targeted to specific students who were expected to gain good grades. This approach means that Information, advice and guidance (IAG) is filtered by teachers. Whilst teachers are well placed to spot students who have suitable study behaviours for HE there is the observation that students that may appear bright, but difficult, will be excluded.

A person's habitus, the concept briefly discussed in the previous chapter, which will be discussed in more detail in a later section, is likely to indicate the types of people that individuals are most likely to associate with. As individuals tend to socialise with people with similar values and interests, there is little wonder that working class students may be less likely to be aware of people who have attended university. Having family and or friends who have experienced HE or who are currently in university is a social network that many people from economically disadvantaged households lack (Hutchings, 2003). This can also affect the types of support that working class student receive. Ball (2003) notes that in middleclass families, students receive explicit support, (for instance, help with homework) and implicit support, (for instance encouragement and good will). However as working class parents often have less experience in relation to HE, their support tends to be of the latter variety (Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2009). Research by Stuart (2006) extends on this theme and highlights how having close links with peers at university can assist potential first generation HE students to navigate the HE system, and ensure their chances of success within the institution.

Studies such as those by Howieson and Semple, 1996; Hutching and Archer, 2001 and Thomas 2001 note that the knowledge and understanding of how to apply for grants, or other bursaries can also prove to be difficult for some students, particularly in relation to financial issues. Whilst middle class entrants tend to find financial arrangements more straight forward (as they are often more likely to be paying fees without financial support), mature students and economically disadvantaged cohorts tend to require more complex financial support e.g childcare grants and hardship loans. Navigating the application process for financial support can be time consuming, act as a deterrent for some, and is an extra factor that some students have to consider before they even enter HE (Hutchings, 2003). However according to Smith (2008), the findings on the influence of financial issues as a barrier to participation for students are mixed. Whilst a Universities UK (2012) asserted that at least one in four economically disadvantaged students doubted that they would go to university because of fear of debt, a combination of bursaries from local universities and part time employment has encouraged many such students to undertake HE.

The decision to enter HE

Using a sample of those who did go to university Fazez and Fazez (2001) examined the way that parents viewed education and how they communicated this to their children. They concluded that “*protection from socio-economic disadvantage*” was the primary advantage of emphasised most heavily to their children (p351). Fleming (2010) in an excellent study of mature students in Ireland also found that motivations for gaining a university degree were often framed in terms of economic motivations, eg educational qualifications can enable many graduates to move away from routine or manual employment. The study by Fleming (2010) also found, as does research by Davies, Osbourne and Williams (2002), that personal development and improvement were also important factors. Halpern (1999) and Putnam (2000) take this further and identify educational achievement as being a key motivator. However a 2012 publication by the National Union of Students suggested that it was a myth that mature students only go to university to pursue personal interests. The motivations of mature students’, like their younger counterparts, for entering higher education are diverse. Although their study did note that the decision to enter HE involves a conscious weighing up of the potential benefits and risks, far more so than for the younger student who has always expected to go to university. A study by Pollard et al (2008) which

explored the attitudes towards HE amongst over 1,000 working individuals with no university level (level 4) qualification noted three main for considering university: general employability/career reasons, (e.g. developing one's career, changing the type of work undertaken and earning more money); the intellectual challenge, and reasons related to their current job (e.g. gaining new skills or improving work satisfaction).

For some students the decision to attend university was a taken for granted assumption (Allatt, 1993). Reay, David and Ball (2005) support this, talking about how their respondents engaged with university choice with a sense of certainty and entitlement. Michie, Glachan and Bray (2001) offers a further explanation for this point suggesting that the transition from being at school (or at work or unemployed in the case of those who are older) to being a university student requires a person to recreate their self-identify to include an 'academic self-concept'. The individual needs to feel that he or she is the undergraduate 'type'. As the aforementioned study by Barrow (2008) highlighted, the mature students she spoke to did not feel like the typical student. Michie, Glachan and Bray (2001) found that academic self concept occurred most easily and frequently amongst younger students, because university was just another educational transition, whilst the 'failure' to develop an academic self-concept was more prevalent amongst older students.

When the subject studied is considered a systematic review by Tripney et al (2010), is useful for understanding why young people chose STEM subjects (see Cleaves, 2005; Mendick, 2006; Vidal Rodeiro, 2007 for detailed information). Tripney et al (2010) found that a degree in a STEM subjects was perceived to be useful, specifically in terms of future career prospects and entry requirements for postgraduate education. Bennett (2004), who surveyed almost three hundred first-year undergraduate business students from a post-1992 university, found that the strongest motivator was also the perception that they would gain better job prospects, but there was also an emphasis on financial rewards. These findings are interesting but should be compared against other 'types' of institutions. A study by Sturridge and Walton (2007) who surveyed all (250) undergraduate students enrolled on the Applied Social studies and Nursing degree routes at a traditional university. The study had two key strengths: the sample consisted of undergraduates undertaking a focussed vocational degree (Nursing), and a more diverse, academic route (Applied Social studies) and the sample was evenly

shared between the two subjects. Whilst three quarters of respondents from these two subjects suggested that career motivation was an important factor for undertaking their degree, enjoyment of learning was cited by a greater number of Applied Social studies students.

When university choice is considered, Reay, David and Ball (2005) found that the reputation of an institution is the main consideration for those from advantaged social backgrounds. In contrast, research by Pollard et al (2008) found that geography matters for some students. They asked respondents about where they would most like to study and two-thirds of their respondents said that they would like to study at a university or college close to their home, whilst a further one-fifth said that they would like to study at a university/college within commuting distance of their home. Very few (just two per cent of respondents) said that they would like to study somewhere that would require them to move/spend time away from home. Whilst this is an interesting finding it should be remembered that the cohort for this study were those who were not already in university and would perhaps be those who were most unlikely to go to university, or be classed as non traditional if they did enter HE

As discussed in the introduction to this thesis one way of conceptualising choice in HE is to draw upon the theoretical concepts developed by Pierre Bourdieu: e.g. 'field', 'habitus' and 'capital'. Bourdieu's key concepts have been utilised and developed by sociology of education researchers in order to explain choice and the decision making process. For instance, institutional habitus, a concept most associated with McDonough (1996), Reay (1998) and Reay et al (2001) is a useful tool with which to understand how the 'feel' of an institution can influence student 'choice'. Reay et al. (2001) argue that, in relation to HE choice, 'a school effect' interacts with class, gender and race to impact on secondary school pupils' and further education college students' lives and HE choices. Reay, David and Ball (2001) developed the concept of institutional habitus during an ESRC research study on choice of HE institution. The study focused on six educational institutions: a secondary school with a large minority ethnic, working class intake; a 'sixth form' in a comprehensive school that served a socially diverse community; a tertiary college with a very large A-level population; an FE College which runs HE Access courses, and two prestigious private schools, one single-sex boys and one single-sex girls. Questionnaire, interview and participant

observation data was gathered from students, parents as well as careers teachers and sixth form tutors in order to evaluate how various components of institutional habitus; educational status, organisational practices and expressive order influence choices of higher education. Institutional habituses, no less than individual habituses, have a history and have been established over time. They are therefore capable of change but due to their collective nature they are less fluid than individual habitus. Reay, David and Ball (2001) found that whilst pupils from the private schools both expected and were prepared for entry into elite universities, the poverty and deprivation of the catchment area of the 11-18 Comprehensive meant, that entering HE was an achievement in itself. For students from the FE college advice and support appeared to be shaped by a recognition of the necessity, due to familial responsibilities, to think local, i.e choose institutions that are within easy geographical reach.

Research by Elliot and Brna (2009), which focused on university choice amongst those attending a FE college delivering HE – students who are typically from disadvantaged areas or mature, in age, on entry - suggested there were three main reasons for attending their institution: closest institution (geographically); course content and reputation of institution, but geography was the critical factor influencing potential learners' decisions on where to study. They found that students with children or those from lower socio-economic backgrounds were more likely to choose the nearest institution to them geographically, whereas individuals from higher managerial backgrounds were most likely to consider the reputation of the institution they attended e.g students following the *learning's of their habitus* (Bourdieu, 1984: p223, cited in *ibid*). In practical terms this may mean that a student from the dominant social classes, who, in Bourdieu's words *encounters a social world of which it is a product* (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:127), is, to paraphrase Reay, David and Ball (2001) *a fish in water* in traditional institutions. In comparison, a student from a non-traditional background who may not have encountered traditional institutions before, may feel like 'a fish out of water', and as such may choose to enter institutions with a similar habitus – where there are students 'like them' (*ibid*). Thus many non traditional students may choose post 1992 universities or distance learning institutions and those from more advantaged backgrounds may be more drawn to elite or traditional universities. Bourdieu (1984) also discussed how individuals gain a sense of one's place, this process will often lead to a person excluding themselves from places from which they

are feel they are likely to be excluded (p471). This is further explained by Reay et al (2001) who quotes a white working class interviewee who rejected the chance to study at an elite institution with the telling comment: *What's a person like me going to do at a place like that (p864)*. This process of self exclusion is often due to the need to feel comfortable in the institution that they do attend – to feel like a fish in, as opposed to out of water (ibid). The aforementioned studies have implications for my own research as I would expect to find the same process at play in terms of the decision making of the types of institutions attended by graduates from each 'type' of institution.

A further study that develops the Bourdieusian concept, and helps understand choice of institution, is that by Baker (2005) who deployed the notion of habitus to explain how people from disadvantaged backgrounds successfully entered and navigated their way through HE due to their *aspirational habitus*'. Respondents from rural, socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds in Wales described how there was a sense in their families that education was valuable and the culmination of this was to go to university. In line with how Bourdieu perceived the concept, their habitus was not restricted or unchanging, or one that clashed with the ethos of HE. Some seemed to have been prepared for HE before arriving, despite growing up in considerable socio-economic and regional disadvantage and having no family tradition of participating in HE. Baker attempts to elucidate the characteristics or experiences shown by individuals from Wales possessing such an aspirational habitus, that may have enabled them to enter HE. Seven recurring themes arose from the data. These were: the presence of socially ambitious mothers²³; the influence of religious nonconformity; the concept of going to university 'by proxy'; lack of other opportunities in economically deprived communities; influential schoolteachers or schools; peer pressure, and exposure to 'cultural capital', even though living in an-economically deprived community. It would be beneficial to the study of non traditional students to identify further examples of an aspirational habitus in both HE (entering a high status institution) and post graduation (entering, or at least attempting to enter a high status employment or further study).

²³ Also evidenced in earlier surveys and community studies found that mothers were more involved in education and contact with schools than fathers.

The influence of social class on educational choice, in terms of the level of education, has been investigated by both sociologists and economists. Bratti (2005) suggests that this analysis can also be extended to subject choice. An early study by Kelsall et al. (1972) suggested that those from disadvantaged social backgrounds may be more inclined to choose subjects that offer better labour market prospects. This may explain the high incidences of vocational subjects chosen by non traditional cohorts as future labour market outcomes depend more on subject studied for low social class than for high social class students. The latter are likely to enjoy good labour market outcomes once they get a university degree irrespective of their field of graduation, thanks to 'family networks'. There is also the observation that some fields might be more closely linked to professions for which the presence of 'social networks' (to which high social class students are typically better connected) is more important to ensure labour market success and a higher economic return. Bratti (2005) found that as disadvantaged groups or individuals might have higher costs of enrolling in HE, standard economic theory predicts that these individuals will require a higher return from their investment in university education.

I also highlighted in the introduction how subjects such as law, the arts, medicine and theology have a privileged relationship within universities as *these disciplines act as agents of reproduction for social authorities* (Webb, Schirato and Danaher, 2002: 132). For instance law graduates gain gravitas as they represent and preserve the legal system; graduates in medicine have a position of authority as they are encouraged to preach messages about health to the general population; those who gain a degree in theology are often represented as having a deeper understanding of issues relating to morality (ibid), whilst graduates from the arts enter a field with the power to assign value to artists and works of art (Bourdieu, 1987). Expanding on observations by Webb, Schirato and Danaher (2002) there appears to be capital, or positive associations to be gained from graduating with a degree in particular subjects. There is an image that is associated with certain subjects, an image that bestows, what I would describe as 'subject capital'. What is interesting about this view is that Bourdieu's own research found that the students entering these fields were far more likely to come from privileged backgrounds (1988: 41).

Success

Personal development

Before turning to statistical data that profiles those gaining degrees, one should be mindful that attainment or success in HE may mean different things according to the agent concerned (NUS 2012). The primary motivation varies according to the particular agent. As discussed in the introduction to this study the primary reason for encouraging more individuals to enter HE is an economic one, or similarly to have a suitably trained workforce. However as outlined in an earlier section, entrants to HE may have economic reasons but these are often combined with personal factors such as the desire to study a particular subject²⁴. This outcome consists of multiple dimensions, which may be defined or described as follows:

- *Intellectual development*: developing skills for acquiring and communicating knowledge, learning how to learn, and how to think deeply.
- *Social development*: enhancing the quality and depth of interpersonal relationships, leadership skills, and civic engagement.
- *Ethical development*: formulating a clear value system that guides life choices and demonstrates personal character.

Purcell and Pitcher (1996), a precursor to the Future Track studies, conducted a survey with 5,000 third year undergraduates in 21 UK HEIs, finding that most believed they had gained 'personal development skills', especially self-reliance and independence.

The aforementioned study on mature students from three Irish Higher Education institutions by Fleming (2010) refers to personal development as being a large part of 'success' in higher education for non traditional cohorts. The vast majority, with only few exceptions, had positive experiences of their years of study. The students deeply value the college experience, the learning, the qualification and, more often than not, the HE institutions in which they studied. Fleming (2010) suggests that this is linked to overcoming previous educational exclusion earlier in their lives. For many graduates one of the most important aspects of their experience of tertiary education is that it strengthened their sense of confidence and agency. This included the sense that they were better placed to engage in the world around them and in their communities. The

²⁴ Despite these differing reasons one should note that university has been 'sold' to the masses as a guarantee of a graduate job.

effort and sacrifices made by students were considerable and personal determination and focus were the primary characteristics of the stories told by graduates. This is an important addition to the research on graduates as it has been observed throughout this literature review that the majority of commentary concentrates on monetary gain. My own research is an opportunity to add to this literature on personal development skills.

Academic achievement.

The importance of the category of academic achievement is not to be underestimated as statistical data is often used in order for post 1992 institutions to gain further funding to encourage entry from diverse cohorts. HESA statistical data shows that in 2011/12, 390,985 HE qualifications were obtained at first degree level from UK HEI's, compared to 369,010 in 2010/11 - an increase of 6 percent. 57 percent were by females - both genders saw an increase of six percent from the previous year (HESA 2013b). Statistical breakdowns regarding age and social class are not normally freely available, but researchers may contact HESA for bespoke data requests.

Degree classification²⁵ is also relevant here as it gives some indication of a graduate's ability. It is also, according to Naylor, Smith and McNight, (2007) an indicator of future earning: the higher the degree classification the higher the earnings. When considering academic performance HESA data for 2011/12 found no gender differences in terms of those who gained a First Class Honours degree (17 percent of males and females); slightly more females received a second class honours degree (51 percent compared with 46 percent of males); whilst slightly more males were awarded either a Lower Second (29 percent compared with 26 percent of females) or a Third/Pass (8 percent males, 6 percent females). (HESA 2013b). Smith and Naylor (2001), who evaluated leavers details e.g. personal information and academic history, of just under 100,000 graduates from 1993 considered how age influences degree performance. Placing students into specific bands (24-27; 28-33 and 34+) their analysis noted that whilst males overall were more likely to gain more Firsts, this tended to be for those students in the first two age bands, whilst females reported higher levels of Firsts the older in the 34+ age range. Social class was an additional factor of influence as those from advantaged backgrounds were more likely to gain

²⁵ The levels of students who received a First, Upper, Second, Third etc.

'good' degrees, with graduates from skilled manual worker backgrounds apparently having the lowest levels of Firsts and 2.1's. The statistical analysis also showed that those graduates, male and female, who had gained A Levels in STEM subjects, were more likely to gain at least an Upper second – gaining an A Level in English apparently had no noticeable effect. This information is particularly important for understanding future destinations of graduates as university attainment can be an indicator of what graduates do when they leave university, or first destinations²⁶. HE attainment is helpful in gaining a graduate level role as employers are likely to ask for graduates with at least a 2.1.

Smith and Naylor (2001) analysed the full 1993 student record to ascertain who were most likely to gain a 'good degree' (this is defined as being at least an upper second class degree). When considering the profiles of awards in selected subject areas, Engineering graduates were most likely to gain a First whilst those from Historical & Philosophical studies had the highest levels of 2.1's. Graduates from the aforementioned subjects were least likely to obtain a Third/Pass, whilst Computer science had the highest proportion of graduates (15 percent) with this classification. A QAA Briefing Paper by Yorke (2009) compared how the levels of good degrees by subject were influenced by institution attended. Data from academic years 1994-2002 and 2002-07 is utilised, but with a focus on England, Wales and Northern Ireland because of the different approach to the award of honours in Scotland. There is a disclaimer at the start of the article that suggests trend analyses are problematic as the introduction of JACS in 2002 modified the way in which subjects were coded, and a number of institutional and sub institutional mergers took place during the period. Many colleges of higher education gained university status. Yorke calculated the percentage of 'good honours degrees' as follows: low propensity - up to 50 per cent; medium propensity - in the range 51 to 60 per cent; high propensity - in the range 61 to 70 per cent. Using this method the levels of Sociology or Business graduates gaining a good degree had a high propensity to be influenced by institution attended as awards appeared to be dominated by new universities. In comparison Mechanical Engineering and Electrical and Electronic Engineering graduates had a lower probability as numbers changed over time, awards being evenly spread across university types. This

²⁶ Definition of this key term to be discussed in chapter 5

study is particularly helpful when understanding post graduation destinations as it confirms that gaining a good degree from an elite or Russell Group institution in a 'desirable' subject (this could change according to the type of employer) would further support a graduate hoping to attain access to postgraduate funding or graduate level employment.

The previous two sections have focused on access and attainment in university. It has been noted that despite the success of WP policies, traditional students still tend to form the majority. New, e.g. non traditional, 'types' of students are more likely to be concentrated in post 1992 universities as their choice of institution is most likely to be influenced by geography as opposed to reputation and they often chose to study a limited range of subjects. The main aim of this research is to understand the HE and post graduation experiences of graduates. Do these previously disadvantaged students go onto gain graduate level employment and access to postgraduate study, or as Mosca and Wright (2011) suggest, has the higher education sector generated "too many" graduates for the economy to absorb and as such do pre-entry disadvantages now affect outcomes? An early indicator that these disparities may be maintained was evidenced in the previous section as whilst degree performance was high for mature students overall, graduates from post 1992 institutions were less likely to gain a First or an Upper Second. The next section will outline statistical data and related research that focuses on First Destinations.

First Destinations

Destinations as a concept for analysing post graduation experiences

HESA describes destinations as being the circumstances of students who have completed their HE experience, six months after graduation. (HESA, 2011). The utility of this data is that these statistics can give an overall picture of what graduates can expect post graduation. A common criticism of HESA destinations data is that six months after graduation may be too early in which to evaluate a person's situation post graduation. Graduates may take time to find their feet after completing a long and intensive university course and as such the first six months may be considered a transition period. The graduate may have other plans, for example travelling, starting a family, whilst those with a graduate career path in mind, may prefer to work on a voluntary or part time basis for the first few months in order to gain necessary work

experience, e.g. teaching assistant. As graduates may also only take a particular job in order to start paying off any debts incurred during their time at university, these jobs may prove to be no indication of their subsequent career path. However I return to my earlier assertion that the utility of HESA data paints the picture of graduate's first experiences, and it is in this light that the data will be discussed.

Employment

In 2010/11 there were 224,045 full-time first degree graduates whose destinations were known. Employment was the dominant first destination, accounting for 60 percent of graduates in 2010/11. Significantly for graduates in Wales, the public sector was only one of two sectors²⁷ to increase their graduate intake during 2008 (GMT, 2009). In their report for the Wales Institute of Social & Economic Research, Data & Methods (WISERD), Bristow, Davies and Drinkwater (2011) note the importance of the public sector in Wales, which they estimate accounts for a quarter of total employment in each local authority. The report, which utilises data by HESA and the Labour Force Survey (LFS) to outline the post graduation location of 'young' graduates, noted how public sector cuts during the recession have a particularly damaging impact on employment in a sector which is vital in poorer areas such as Anglesey, and on female graduates. Employment patterns in Wales differ from those in England in other ways. For instance, sectors such as health, education and public administration account for almost one third (30 percent), of employment, followed by retail, wholesale, hotels & restaurants (23 percent). Whilst just under 99 percent of businesses in Wales are Small to Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs), employing less than 250 people – the majority of which are micro organisations e.g. businesses with less than 10 employees (Go Wales, 2010).

When trying to understand the types of roles that graduate's occupy in the first six months, the picture painted by statistical data, and then repeated by academic and policy research, can be decidedly muddy. According to HESA, almost one third, 31 percent, of full-time first degree graduates in 2010/11 first were in '*Associate professional & technical occupations*', 24 percent were in roles classified as *Professional occupations*; and the remaining graduates were shared evenly between

²⁷ The other was the Army

Sales & customer service occupations or *Administrative & secretarial occupations*²⁸. However, the use of occupational codes to describe graduate roles offers little understanding of the specifics of the graduate market on a regional or even national level.

Prospects, a graduate careers information website which is widely promoted within university careers services, is a useful resource for gaining an understanding of the types of role that graduates expect to occupy post graduation. According to the Prospects website *business* graduates often follow their degree with either a career in finance or management. Specific roles include: chartered accountant or corporate investment banker (Prospects, 2012a). Those with an *engineering* degree most often gain technical careers in engineering related industries, or utilise their skill sets in more generalist areas such as management. Careers may include: civil engineers or product/process development scientist, to name but a few (Prospects, 2012b). *Social studies* graduates often choose to enter people-focused fields, for instance careers in the public sector. Typical roles include: social researcher and further education lecturer (Prospects, 2012c). Whilst these are roles that graduates from these disciplines may acquire, there is little emphasis on the additional training that would certainly be required in order to be suitable for these roles. Further study is mentioned on the website, but it is discussed as an optional extra, as opposed to a necessity to attain these careers. Data collection that focused on specifics such as job titles of graduates throughout their career would be more illuminating of the graduate experience.

Temporary employment

An Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development publication (2002) outlined how temporary employment had grown considerably in the previous twenty years, citing it as the solution to an increase in demand from both employers and employees for flexible working patterns. Findings from a large follow-up study of graduates at the University of Sussex by Connor and Pollard, (1996), illustrates the variety of career paths which graduates follow up to three years after degree study.

²⁸ The full SOC 2000 is as follows: 1. Managers and senior officials; 2. Professional occupations; 3. Associate professional and technical occupations; 4. Administrative and secretarial occupations; 5. Skilled trades occupations; 6. Personal service occupations; 7. Sales and customer service occupations; 8. Process, plant and machine operatives; Elementary occupations. Available from <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/classifications/archived-standard-classifications/standard-occupational-classification-2000/about-soc-2000/index.html>

When asked about their situation six months after obtaining their first degrees, nearly 60 per cent of the graduates were in employment. However, almost one in three were in temporary jobs (lasting less than three months). The majority took temporary work for financial reasons, but some did so to gain work experience. Whilst for others it was often utilised as a route into permanent employment, especially for graduates with lower class degrees. The type of temporary work undertaken varied but was generally non graduate roles. A study by Gebbell (2010), which compared British and German graduates by utilising British Household Panel Study (BHPS) and the German Socio-Economic Panel (GSOEP) data from the period 1991 to 2007, concentrated on understanding the types of organisations or sectors that were more likely to utilise graduates for temporary employment. He found that the size of the firm influenced the types of temporary employment, observing that the highest levels were to be found in the German public service, for instance universities, research institutes and hospitals. Anecdotal information offers examples of this being replicated across the UK, particularly since the economic recession.

Under-employment

McGuinness (2006), in his literature review of 'over education' suggested that there are concerns that the higher education sector has produced too many graduates, as such many are now employed in non graduate roles - those that do not require the skills they obtained through their study to perform the required work, for instance a retail assistant or a taxi driver (Mosca and Wright, 2011). Whilst the above is a commonly understood definition of over-education, Blenkinsopp and Scurry's (2007) systematic literature review is an excellent addition to the literature because it extends our knowledge of underemployment. It also suggests that there is an objective perspective to the term: objective in relation to the level of utilisation of individuals' human capital, in comparison to an accepted standard for their referent group, e.g. other graduates (ibid). This is illuminating as it highlights that graduates have *failed* if they do not gain the accepted standard – graduate level employment - for their reference group. In Mosca and Wright's (2011a) study, under employment, or non graduate jobs were defined according to a classification devised by Elias and Purcell (2004)²⁹ as occupations for which a graduate level education is inappropriate (e.g.

²⁹ This classification by Elias and Purcell (2004), which will be referred to in the next chapter examined each of the 353 unit groups of the 2000 Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) and classified each unit into the type of skills needed to do the required

school secretaries and bar staff). With respect to graduates with first degrees the graduate-job rate of Scottish graduates is 68 percent. This is higher than the rate for UK graduates of 65 percent, but overall this suggests that around one-in-three are in non-graduate jobs six months after graduation.

Explanations of the high incidence of graduates in non graduate roles have a starting point in what Savage (2005) describes as the knowledge-focus of the third wave of human socio-economic development³⁰. In the Knowledge Age, wealth is based upon the ownership of knowledge and the ability to use that knowledge to create or improve goods and services. The highly influential *Affluent Worker* studies (1968–9) by John H. Goldthorpe et al, that Savage (2005) describes as *probably the most widely discussed text in modern British sociology* (p719), discussed these changing work patterns. As Goldthorpe et al notes working class employment changed in the late 1950's and early 1960's in so much that young men, rather continuing in the types of manual work that their fathers had done before them, were now more likely to be found in middle class positions such as administration roles: roles that gave rise to opportunities for promotion to senior managerial posts and intergenerational economic mobility³¹ (Li and Devine, 2011).

The rise of the knowledge economy led to calls for increasing numbers of skilled workers and graduates. Tony Blair's emphasis on a desire for 50 percent of the young i.e. 18-30 population to gain a graduate qualification is a good example of this. Some suggest that the increase of graduates has been an intrinsic social good, for instance Bowers- Brown and Harvey (2004) who point out that a demographic view of the increase of graduates shows that there is no such thing as a graduate job. Besides this, graduates 'grow' jobs. Whereas an elitist perspective, as they term it, would suggest that there are too many graduates and not enough graduate jobs. Although unwilling to be defined as having an elitist perspective, I would agree with the latter

work. They arrived at a five-fold classification: (1) *Traditional graduate*: the established professions, for which, historically, the normal route has been via an undergraduate degree programme (e.g. solicitors and doctors); (2) *Modern graduate*: the newer professions, particularly in management, IT and creative vocational areas, which graduates have been entering since educational expansion in the 1960s (e.g. computer programmers and journalists); (3) *New graduate*: areas of employment, many in new or expanding occupations, where the route into the professional area has recently changed such that it is now via an undergraduate degree programme (e.g. physiotherapists and sales managers); (4) *Niche graduate*: occupations where the majority of incumbents are not graduates, but within which there are stable or growing specialist *niches* which require higher education skills and knowledge (e.g. nurses and hotel managers); and (5) *Non graduate*: occupations for which a graduate level education is inappropriate (e.g. school secretaries and bar staff).

³⁰ The first wave was the Agricultural Age with wealth defined as ownership of land. In the second wave, the Industrial Age, wealth was based on ownership of Capital, i.e. factories.

³¹ Goldthorpe and Jackson, (2007) emphasised that intergenerational *income* mobility is not the same as *class* mobility which takes account of a class structure (Li and Devine, 2011).

point of view as explaining the numbers of graduates in non graduate roles. However further research into their experiences might illuminate these issues more.

Post graduate qualifications

Just over one quarter of first degree qualifiers from the UK in 2010/11 were engaged in some form of further study - 8 percent were combining employment with further study whilst 18 percent were in further study only (HESA, 2013b). However, as the UK economy has become increasingly knowledge-intensive, a post graduate qualification is fast becoming the new point of difference that suggests highly-developed and specific expertise (Higher Education Commission, 2012). A theme I noted in the literature was the case for postgraduate study being the new WP issue (Wakeling and Kyriacou, 2010) As Prof. Nigel Thrift, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Warwick in the *Thrift Review of Research Careers (2008)* states, very little is known about the socioeconomic and demographic makeup of those UK students who go into postgraduate study. When compared with the extensive knowledge there is regarding undergraduates and their experiences, many questions concerning postgraduate study remain unanswered (p20).

A research synthesis by Wakeling and Kyriacou (2010) found that PG students were drawn disproportionately from certain backgrounds or groups as students were more likely to be male and from higher social classes. Statistical analysis by the Higher Education Policy Institute, carried out in 2010, focused on trends in postgraduate student numbers between 2002-3 and 2007-8. It showed that most doctoral students have remained concentrated in Russell Group and 1994 Group universities, however post-1992 institutions have attracted a good proportion of the growing number of masters students. Of significance here is the observation that whilst the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), has 21 Doctoral Training Centres (DTCs) in 45 institutions), the majority of those recognised as DTCs are Russell Group universities (Holmwood 2011, cited in Thatcher, 2012) and no former polytechnics were granted DTC status (Thatcher, 2013). Overall Wakeling and Kyriacou (2010) found that attaining first-class honours, graduating in physical science subjects and attending a pre-1992 university are all closely associated with progression to a research degree. Access to finance may also influence entry to PG courses. However whilst there is some evidence that women and students from lower socio-economic classes are less

likely to receive research council studentships, there is the need for more evidence on the sources of tuition and maintenance funding for postgraduate students according to their background characteristics. Research is also needed on the impact of finance on decision-making at this level.

Unemployment.

As discussed in the introduction to this study my research has been undertaken during what is now considered to be the worst economic recession since the Great Depression. In 2010/11 there were 224,045 full-time first degree graduates whose destinations were known, 8 percent of whom were unemployed. However a report by the Higher Education Policy Institute thinktank shows that the economic downturn caused an increase in graduate unemployment of 25 per cent - from 11 percent at the end of 2008 to 14 percent by 2009. These statistics also show that unemployment has a gendered element and when the figures are disaggregated, a stark picture emerges: 17 percent of young male graduates are unable to find jobs compared to 11 percent of women (Guardian, 2010). In addition to this, HESA first destinations data the following year suggest that averaged across all subjects, a lower proportion of female graduates are unemployed (7 percent) when compared with male graduates (11 percent) (cited in The Council of Professors and Heads of Computing, 2012). A subject, institution and socio-economic analysis of data collected from a regional cohort of graduates may illuminate the picture of graduate employment more widely.

The need for graduates to have employability skills is often cited as being important in order to avoid unemployment. This concept has received greater attention since the supposed end of 'careers' and lifetime job security – discussed by Tomlinson (2007) in the next chapter. While there are variations in the classification of employability, Yorke (2009) is particularly helpful in understanding the myriad ways of talking about this concept. She notes that there are three interlinked ways that employability is demonstrated: by the graduate actually obtaining a job; by the student being developed by their experience of higher education; and, possession of relevant *achievements*. These factors will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter. However, at this point it is useful to note that within the employability literature the emphasis is on what the graduate lacks, as opposed to what they have. In addition the perceived need for

employability skills places the blame firmly on the student for their own predicament, and does not consider the effects of the worldwide economic recession.

A briefing paper from the Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research, Data and Methods by Bristow et al (2001) examined the effects of the recession on the Welsh labour market. Comparing employment and unemployment rates for the UK and Wales across different sectors, the authors maintain that the Welsh labour market has been affected slightly more by the recession than the rest of the UK, experiencing relatively large falls in its employment rate during the first third quarter of 2008 and second and third quarters of 2009. Whilst graduates are least likely, compared to those without qualifications, to be affected by the recession, a 2010 report by HESCU noted that planned public spending cuts, which are to be repeated in 2013, are likely to affect graduates in North Wales, particularly negatively as many cuts will be in the public sector (Prospects, 2010). As the public sector is an important employer in the region this may have implications for my own research.

Inactivity

HESA statistical data for 2011 also refers to a small number (4 percent) of graduates who were 'inactive', or were not available for employment. This is a further research area that is often neglected, mainly because levels of inactivity remain around the same level and the reasons for this post graduation choice tend to be concentrated around caring responsibilities. The annual ONS report "*Graduates in the Labour Market*", which looks at graduate and non graduate employment, suggested that in 2012, like previous years, graduates have a lower rate of inactivity than non – graduates. This is more than likely linked with the idea that individuals tend to go to university with a purpose in mind – either to enter higher level employment, or to continue onto postgraduate study. However this ignores the fact that some graduates entered university with this same purpose, and then were delayed due to family or caring responsibilities or health issues.

Subject and institutional effects

In attempting to understand subject differences Brennan, Williams and Blasko (2003) analysed the 2000/2001 findings of the First Destinations Survey (FDS). Their analysis specifically concentrated on graduates with a first degree in subjects that included

Sociology and Business Studies. Business graduates had the highest levels of employment six months after graduation, whilst Social studies was a subject that had high levels of engagement with postgraduate study. A 2002 pilot project by COHE which evaluated employers' perceptions about the skills developed through studying subjects that included Engineering. Their study highlighted how Engineering graduates were perceived to have good prospects for employment as they were likely to have mathematical skills and skills in analysis, problem solving and team work (cited in Lowden et al, 2011).

Webb, Schirato and Danaher (2002), who provide an excellent outline of Bourdieusian concepts, note further subject effects as they suggest that disciplines such as business gain gravitas through being associated with a discipline that is influenced, and associated with the financial sector. Social studies claims validation in other ways, for instance as a subject that produces graduates that are flexible, who have critical thinking skills. Whereas engineering is a degree subject that is often noted for its utility. These subject effects appear to influence the destinations of graduates from these subjects as a review of university websites³² suggests that the destination for Business and administrative studies graduates is often promoted as being employment or to start their own business, in contrast, opportunities for further study are frequently discussed in terms of Social studies graduates. The majority of institutions I consulted emphasised the scope that Engineering graduates have. I would expect that further research would support these findings, beyond the regional context. I would, however expect to see a notable gender difference in outcomes when comparing Engineering or Social studies graduates, but less so amongst those with a Business degree.

Institutional effects are discussed in a study by Power et al (2003) who collected biographies of 350 young men and women who might have been considered 'destined for success' at the start of their secondary schooling. The research mapped their educational pathways and analysed their subsequent achievements and entry into employment finding that those graduates who were 'doing well' in the first six months after graduation had gone to elite and 'old' universities. Chevalier and Conlon (2003) show that the financial returns associated with degree level qualifications vary

³² A number of UK university websites were evaluated in order to gain an understanding of the ways that these subjects were conceptualised in terms of destinations and career opportunities

substantially, according to the type of HEI attended. They find that even after controlling for academic achievement, subject of degree and family background, graduating from a Russell Group institution (compared with a Modern university) leads to an earnings premium ranging from 0 to 6 per cent for men and 2.5 per cent for women in the younger cohorts that they examined. It is important to note, however, that these researchers do not take into consideration regional or sectoral differences in the jobs undertaken by graduates - which are likely to account for large differences in their earnings (Brown and Smetheron, 2006). Chevalier and Conlon 2003 also suggest the more prestigious university attract students of higher academic ability and with different backgrounds than students registering at modern institutions. I would disagree with their statement and refer to research by various studies by Reay (2001, 2003 and 2005), as well as the Paired Peers project (Research that was carried out from October 2010 to July 2013), which demonstrated that pre-entry factors influence whether one attends an elite or traditional institution. I would also point the reader to the commentary made by David (2007) who argued that those from disadvantaged social groups are effectively channelled into lower-status institutions, so as to preserve higher-status opportunities for advantaged groups (Brint and Karabel 1989, cited in *ibid*). However outcomes of graduates from specific institutions in a region may provide a useful comparison, highlighting clear differences, or perhaps similarities.

Whilst existing research such as that outlined above suggests that institutional effects on destinations are considerable, it is worth mentioning that despite these studies that discuss destinations, and offer hints about the expected destinations for students from specific institutions, I did not discover any studies that explicitly predicted how the institution attended or institutional habitus would affect actual destinations. Drawing upon my review of prospectuses and websites of different types of HE institutions there appeared to be differences in how career opportunities were discussed. For students studying at traditional institutions there was an emphasis on post graduation experiences consisting of graduate level employment or opportunities for further study. There was a similar emphasis at post 1992 institutions but there was more focus on employment. Some, but not all post 1992 institutions would suggest that graduate level employment would be forthcoming post graduation, but others just focused on employment and did not specify the type. FE colleges that delivered HE courses also emphasised employment but there was little mention of the 'type' of employment it

would be. In general these colleges suggested that after gaining one of their qualifications graduates may be promoted within their current organisation – assumptions here being made that their typical student was employed – or develop a broader range of skills suitable. There was little emphasis on further study for these potential graduates. Distance learning institutions, the largest one being OU, tended to focus on personal development.

Research by Smetherton (2004) found that degree classification is also a further factor to consider as those who gained a degree at ‘older’ universities have an earnings premium of at least 10 percent over those from other HE institutions, whilst first class graduates from low status institutions are significantly less likely than their similarly qualified counter-parts to be in jobs that had degrees as an entry requirement. She also notes that 82 percent of first class graduates from traditional institutions entered jobs that require degrees for entry while only 44 percent from low status universities entered qualifications of this level. The study also found that in each of the graduation years men were slightly more likely than their female contemporaries to be in permanent employment (however this tells us little about the type of job in which respondents are employed). The age of the graduate appeared less important as there were no apparent differences. The study by Smetherton (2004) also utilises Elias and Purcell’s (2004) classification of graduate employment . She found that females with firsts, and women with lower seconds are more likely than their male counterparts to be in modern professional (or newly professionalized and often lower status) occupations. When the ‘traditional professional occupations’ category was considered, men with firsts fare better than any other group, whereas men with 2:2s are more likely to be in traditional professional occupations even than women with firsts. Women with 2:2s fare worst of all as fewer than 10 percent were employed in traditional professional occupations such as doctors, engineers or lawyers.

The effect of socio-economic characteristics

The previous section gave some indication that socio-economic characteristics can affect outcomes. HESA data from 2011/12 suggests that among employed graduates, men were more likely to be earning higher salaries than women with 32 per cent earning more than £25,000 a year - compared with just 18 per cent of women. The HESA data also showed that, as with previous years, male graduates are more likely

to be unemployed six months after leaving university than women. Nine percent of males were unemployed six months after gaining their degree compared with just six percent of women. Burke (2004) suggests an explanation for the female differential is that more females study in lower-status universities and observes that the university continues to be a space where gender and class privilege is maintained. A comparison with regional data would be interesting here to see if this is a UK wide issue. When one considers male graduate unemployment a report published by the Higher Education Policy Institute think-tank suggested that complacency and general hopelessness have been blamed for the unemployment of male graduates. This description appears to be a continuation of the discourse used to describe non traditional cohorts. Those male graduates who do not gain employment are treated as the 'other'. No remedies are proposed for this apparent malaise, nor are there any suggestions of a deeper analysis of the issue. As such I would suggest that additional research on unemployment in a regional and a gendered context would be useful, but it should not repeat the previous mistakes of concentrating specifically on females.

Subject choice could be a factor in explaining these gender differences. Thompson and Bekhranadia, 2009, evaluated past trends in higher education participation in the UK. They noted that women have higher participation rates, than men, for all subjects apart from Technologies; Physical Sciences; Architecture; Mathematical and Computer Science and Engineering. This is significant as the ranking of degree subjects according to the earnings premia remains relatively stable as Law, Business, Economics, Computing and Mathematics are almost always ranked as the top five subjects (Brown and Smetherton, 2006). As the literature review did not yield any studies that focussed on gender differences in a regional context, I intend to investigate this issue further. The age of a graduate is an additional factor that can influence postgraduate opportunities. A graduate employability study by Smith, McKnight and Naylor (2000) evaluated destinations data for the 1999 full UK cohort of graduates from traditional universities. They found that the probability of unemployment or other forms of inactivity six months after graduation was influenced strongly by the person's *social class* background – those from disadvantaged groups being more likely to be unemployed. Background characteristics also negatively influenced the likelihood of undertaking a postgraduate qualification or being in graduate employment.

A study by Egerton (2001) which utilised General Household Survey (1983-92) data - although it focuses solely on employment - provides a further layer to the factors that influence first destinations. Egerton (2001) examined pay differentials between men who graduate at the conventional age and men who graduated after mature study. This sample yielded 3,733 early graduates and 841 mature graduates who were in employment and had good pay data. Having controlled for the expected shorter lengths of work experience that graduates who were mature students would have, the study highlighted that lower mature graduate pay was influenced by a combination of: social origin (fewer mature graduates coming from middle-class origins); institution of education (more mature graduates attend new universities); and working in the public sector (public sector employers are less likely to discriminate against mature graduates than private sector employers, and mature graduates are mainly employed in the public sector. Whilst previous sections have evidenced the oft held view that mature graduates do not fare as well in the labour market when compared to younger graduates, there has been a lack of research that provides data based on the specific controls outlined above e.g. age, social origin and sector of employment. A longitudinal approach may illuminate the importance of these factors over time. There is also the presumption that mature students, who become graduates, do not have graduate work experience.

Whilst academic achievement is important, the aforementioned study by Fleming (2010) on mature students is an interesting addition to the literature that generally concentrates on economic rewards. Whilst the respondents noted that monetary benefits were more modest than expected, overall their experiences six months after graduation were positive as their educational qualifications enabled many graduates to move away from routine work to roles with higher levels of autonomy, status and pay. Fleming concluded that for some students HE is a highly valued transitional space that affords a greater level of career choice and opportunities to renegotiate aspects of personal identities. This finding appears to support existing evidence that the intrinsic value of HE for differed for mature graduates - a factor that would be interesting to evaluate longitudinally, in relation to a cohort of graduates in a regional context.

Conclusion

The literature on destinations suggests that the same issues that influenced access to HE, namely pre-entry factors as well as institution attended and subject studied, were still evident at the point of *exit* from higher education. There were also examples of the same patronising discourse that has been a feature of research into access issues. Overall, students who struggle post graduation are blamed for their predicament and told to develop employability skills. This is not to underestimate the value of the employability discourse – there are obvious merits of students and graduates developing certain skills sets - however I have not been convinced that it is the role of the university to do this. Overall I would be concerned if the focus on employability were to eclipse an understanding that today's graduates are entering a labour market vastly different to the one that was present ten and even twenty years ago.

There is an additional factor to consider with regard to post graduation experiences - the proliferation of studies that focus on first destinations. At the start of this section I outlined some concerns I had regarding utilising this data source as a method to understand what graduates do in their first six months. For many graduates the first six months may be a transition period. Some individuals, with a graduate career path in mind, may prefer to work on a voluntary or part time basis for the first few months in order to gain necessary work experience, e.g. teaching assistant; research assistant, whilst others may only take a job to begin paying off debts incurred during their time at university. There is also the observation that HESA statistics may show little more than the graduate's circumstances on the specific day that they completed the survey. I return to the static dimension of the term destinations, e.g. "*end of a journey or voyage*" (ibid). The destination, in this context is obviously not "the end"? In light of these observations I would suggest that additional sources of research material should be used to explore post graduation issues.

Research gaps

The literature review highlighted three main areas that would benefit from further investigation. The first is that at present access, success and outcomes are at present discussed in separate parts. I would suggest that these issues would benefit from the longitudinal approach used by studies I will discuss in the next chapter. A second area of interest is to investigate graduates from a specific area in the UK in order to see if the outcomes for a regional cohort of graduates can be said to reflect regional

circumstances, when compared with UK statistics. The third area is whether institutional, subject and socio-economic characteristics have any influence in the regional context

CHAPTER THREE. GRADUATE TRAJECTORIES

Introduction

In the previous chapter I outlined research concerning access and attainment in HE as well as first destinations post graduation, noting that pre entry factors appear to not only influence access to HE but also an individual's subsequent post graduation experience. I also noted that the practice of describing post graduation experiences according to their circumstances six months after graduation is inadequate as it implies that graduates should have their future pathway neatly laid out before them within this short time frame. This chapter revisits the themes discussed in the destinations section, but enlarges the context by considering the unfolding process involved in movement from one position to the next, not simply the bare characteristics of the initial position.

Alternative methods of understanding graduate experiences

Typologies have played a meaningful role since the beginning of empirical social sciences. 'Types' can help us understand and explain complex social realities and systems (Kluge, 2000). Existing graduate typologies are helpful in understanding more about outcomes beyond graduation. The first two typologies by Brown and Scase (1994) and Tomlinson (2007) focus on how students conceptualise their post graduation experiences. The second two typologies, both developed by Purcell and Elias (2004 and 2013), during longitudinal Future Track research, offers an employment classification relating to the types of roles that graduates can expect to obtain.

The typology by Brown and Scase (1994) was developed out of a comparison study of three different types of universities – an Oxbridge institution; a traditional institution and a post 1992, inner city university. The combined sample of 250 students reflected the general demographic make up of students from the respective institutions e.g. young, middle class students from both Oxbridge and traditional universities and larger numbers of females and ethnic minorities in the post 1992 university. The researchers firstly identified a cluster of attitudes which they labelled as 'Conformist' and 'Non – Conformist'. The former were those who were committed to developing careers as part of their personal development, whilst the latter rejected this notion. Within the

conformist perspective Brown and Scase (1994) identified three 'types: *Traditional Bureaucratic* type: those who perceive that a career can be obtained from a single large organisation. The *Flexible type* who would still want to be employed, but have an understanding of how organisations are restructuring and *Entrepreneurial* graduates who are more likely to consider self employment. Amongst the nonconformists were the rather unfortunately named '*Drop-outs*' appeared to have a marginal attachment to employment. *Ritualists* recognise the need for employment but conceptualise this in terms of income. Whilst the *Socially Committed* place concerns for various ideals above their occupational careers, thus looking for employment in the voluntary sector (Brown and Scase, 1994: 89). A problem with using this typology is that it is based on the changeable concept of orientations: for instance one may start off with a socially committed orientation, but due to financial concerns may move more towards a variation of the conformist point of view.

The majority of students in the Brown and Scase study harboured what can be described as conventional views, perceiving that they would soon progress to middle management careers in single organisations where they would remain for a long duration of their working lives. A qualitative study by Tomlinson (2007) attempted to see if post WP student's had changed their orientation. This study, which captured the views of 53 final year undergraduates in a pre-1992 university, drew upon the above typology, as well as Merton's theory of social adaptation (Merton, 1968) to explore how students' understand and manage their employability. Students in the *Careerist* and *Ritualist* category had goals that centred around entering the labour market and as such their approach was similar. *Careerists* developed a strong orientation towards their future, so were more active in attempts to manage their employability. The *Retreatists* abandoned labour market goals, and formed a minority of the sample. *Rebels* also abandoned labour market goals but would be expected to be more active in their approach to this goal. However, no students fell into the latter category. Overall Tomlinson observed that his respondents, when compared with those in Brown and Scase's study anticipated a much more difficult process of career progression. For the most part, students appeared to interpret the labour market as being increasingly flexible and higher risk. As a result, students appeared to be concerned with the need to adopt a more flexible and adaptive approach to careers, involving the active management of their own employability. One of the purposes of

my study is to see if graduates from North Wales conform to the categories of this typology.

The most widely used typology relating to graduates is that by Elias and Purcell (2004) who, as part of a programme of research on graduate career paths for the Futuretrack programme of longitudinal research, developed a typology, *SOC (HE): A classification of occupations in the graduate labour market*. This typology related both to the type of work typically performed in a job and the extent to which such work makes use of the skills and knowledge gained in HE (Elias and Purcell, 2004). Elias and Purcell's classification used data from nine quarterly Labour Force Surveys (Spring 2001 to Spring 2003) as well as a special file prepared by the Office for National Statistics from the Winter 1996/7 quarter of the Labour Force Survey. This file contained text descriptions of job titles, job descriptions and qualifications required for the job for more than 65,000 employed people. From this they devised five different jobs categories:

1. 'Traditional' graduate occupations such as solicitors; medical practitioners; HE and secondary education teachers
2. 'Modern' graduate occupations - software professionals; primary school and nursery teachers as well as journalists
3. 'New' graduate occupations include roles such as management accountants; housing and probation officers
4. 'Niche' graduate occupations such as hotel and other leisure facilities managers, nurses and midwives
5. 'Non' graduate occupations comprise of roles that tend to be minimum wage or slightly above, i.e bar working, retail

Mosca and Wright (2012) note that it is clear that categories (1), (2) and (3) are "graduate-jobs" as the skills obtained through higher education will be needed for both entry into the profession and to carry out the required job specification. It is also clear that (5) is "non-graduate jobs". However they go on to point out that there is an uncertainty with respect to (4) *Niche' graduate occupations*. They suggest, and I would concur, that these are roles that could be undertaken by both individuals with or without higher education. Elias and Purcell (2004) then evaluated the job titles of a cohort of graduates from 1995. They found that graduates were represented in each 'type' of graduate occupation: one fifth were in traditional graduate jobs, modern graduate jobs,

new graduate jobs or in niche graduate occupations, whilst the remainder were in non-graduate positions. There are two major difficulties with using this classification in relation to this research study, the classification focuses on employment as opposed to other outcomes, for instance self employment, further study, inactivity and travelling. There is also a concentration on first destinations, as opposed to trajectories. Both typologies are useful to consider whilst carrying out research on graduates however, a further typology should perhaps be developed that considers all these themes.

A further classification emerged from the Futuretrack findings due to dissatisfaction with the way that the classification was operationalised. The classification was revisited and instead jobs titles were evaluated in terms of: their use of knowledge and high level skills acquired through HE and the use of communication and strategic skills and knowledge. Elias and Purcel (2013) that the resulting classification has enabled them to identify, more succinctly, the distinction between graduate and non-graduate jobs.³³ Their classification suggested that graduates roles could be described as follows:

- **Experts:** knowledge-intensive occupations. Examples include: civil engineers, physiotherapists and chartered surveyors.³⁴
- **Strategists** require knowledge and high level skills to evaluate information, make decisions and co-ordinate. Examples: managers and directors and strategists in the armed services, police force and public sector.
- **Communicators** require high-level technological knowledge and understanding of how to communicate effectively. Examples include journalists, conference and exhibition Organisers, web design and marketing associates (p6).

This typology is more descriptive and enables graduate roles to be more easily placed into categories, but again the emphasis is on employment. There is also the observation that it would be exceedingly difficult for graduates to gain some of these roles e.g. a director or civil engineer so early in their career. This typology gives little information on how graduates accessed these roles.

Trajectory as a concept for analysing post graduation experiences.

³³ Definition of non graduate roles is as in previous section

³⁴ These job categories are not exhaustive

Despite the proliferation of research on first destinations and discussion of typologies graduates may not move so easily from the world of a student into the role of an employee or post graduate student. Graduates may experience difficulties in the labour market, feel it is too soon for further study, and indeed decide to become a parent or carer. This informs the second aim of my study, to be discussed in the next chapter, which is to consider graduate experiences from a longer term perspective. The concept of trajectory has a number of associations but it is also, conveniently associated with careers or labour market research. As discussed in the introduction trajectory is pertinent as a descriptor for graduate experiences, as it focuses on mobility and transformation - it is a more neutral term, than success or attainment. A trajectory can describe changing orientations, discontinuous steps, or no progression (Valenduc et al, 2009).

A further reason for the utilisation of the term trajectories is due to an observation I made early on in this study that post graduation experiences could be disorderly³⁵. In the introduction I referred to a study by Corbin and Strauss (1991) who described trajectories of illness. Hannigan and Allen (2011) who utilise trajectories, in both the health and employment contexts, note that whilst trajectories are dynamic they are also unpredictable. The concept of trajectories enables us to see post graduation experiences as a longer, more eventful journey that can consist of highs and lows. An example of a 'low' can be found in the increased use of flexible working policies, which have contributed to a greater proportion of precarious or insecure employment (Morissette, Maranda and Lessard, 2006). As will be discussed in greater detail in a later section of this chapter these jobs, which are often short-term or of indefinite length, do not provide workers with any social benefits or job security and are more likely to be experienced by vulnerable groups (ibid). Whilst graduates may not immediately be conceived as being vulnerable group, some graduates are more disadvantaged than others.

A further way of understanding graduates beyond first destinations is the *HESA Longitudinal survey*. The first stage of HESA data collection is carried out approximately six months after graduation – data from this source was discussed in the previous chapter. The second stage is a follow-up survey which considers the

³⁵The current economic climate has meant that there are now often frequent warnings in the press and media that graduates may not get a graduate level job as quickly as they once thought.

destinations of leavers up to 3.5 years after they qualified. Data from the Longitudinal Survey is based on a sample of the students who responded to the six months survey. A total of 49,065 leavers responded to the 2006/07 Longitudinal survey^{36 37}. Analysis shows that 80 percent of graduates were in employment whilst 12 percent were in forms of further study – 5 percent of whom were combining this with employment. A further 4 percent of respondents were unemployed, with the same level being unavailable for employment.

Alongside HESA Longitudinal data there have been a series of reports that were a precursor to the Futuretrack study. The first in the series *Great Expectations?* (1996) focused on student expectations in their final year. The second report *Working Out?* (1999) evaluated their experiences 18 months after graduation, whilst *Moving On* (1999) looked at their circumstances three and a half years after graduation. Findings from the latter two reports support the use of longitudinal data as they found that whilst unemployment was fairly high immediately upon completion of studies, it fell over the first summer after the cohort left HE and then remained at a low and fairly constant level throughout the rest of the three and a half year period covered by the study.

The Class of '99, a report by Purcell et al (2005) which explored the unemployment and career profiles of a cohort of graduates from 1995 and 1999 is a useful starting point for understanding longer term graduate trajectories. According to their findings three years after graduation 91 per cent of the 1995 cohort and 90 per cent among the 1999 cohort were employed. Participation in further study as the main activity gradually declined as the length of time since graduation increased and unemployment declined rapidly after graduation among both cohorts - among the 1999 graduates. Unemployment among the 1999 graduates during the two years after graduation was slightly lower than that observed for the 1995 graduates. However, as Purcell et al (2005), note this is explained by the general fall in levels of unemployment in the observed period between 1995 and 1999.

³⁶ This survey focused on the activities leavers were undertaking on 29 November 2010.

³⁷ Further information about the sample design and survey methodology are provided in the following web page http://www.hesa.ac.uk/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2251&Itemid=286

The Futuretrack³⁸ series of reports is a longitudinal study of people who applied in 2005/06 for a full-time place in a UK higher education institution, to commence study in October 2006 (refs). This seminal study involved the collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data over a five and a half year period. Online surveys were conducted with respondents at four stages: when they were applicants to university, as students, as early graduates, and when the majority of respondents had completed three or four year undergraduate courses 18 or 30 months previously. Compared with the experiences of graduates from *The Class of '99*, some ten years earlier, the economic recession meant that Futuretrack graduates faced a tough labour market. The researchers found that the greater number of graduates seeking employment, coupled with harsh economic conditions, meant higher levels of graduate unemployment, a higher proportion of graduates in non-graduate employment and a lower rate of career progression for graduates than was the situation ten years earlier.

Themes in research on trajectories

Temporary and under employment patterns decline - but do not disappear

Research has regularly shown that there are graduates who are engaged in temporary employment, or who are under employed. For instance the study by Connor and Pollard (1996) discussed in the previous chapter, noted that whilst fewer graduates were unemployed later on in their trajectory (10 per cent at the 18 month stage compared with 15 per cent 6 months after graduation), almost one in three of the employed graduates were in temporary employment six months after obtaining their degrees. However, Connor and Pollard (1996) also showed that overall temporary employment tended to be of relatively short duration and to happen in the early stages of their careers as at the 18 month and three year stage there were more graduates who were in permanent jobs (55 per cent at 18 months, and 72 per cent after three years). A UK-German comparison study by Gebell (2010) supports this as he found that temporary employment did not seem to be a persistent phenomenon among

³⁸ Whilst the studies are similar there are two main differences between the Class of '99 reports and the Futuretrack cohorts of graduates. First, the Futuretrack sample covered graduates from virtually all higher education institutions (HEIs) in the UK, whereas the Class of '99 was restricted to graduates from 38 randomly selected HEIs. Second, the Class of '99 graduates were contacted approximately four years after graduation, and consisted of a mix of those who had completed three, four or five year courses for their first degree. Futuretrack graduates were also a mix of those who had completed three, four or five year courses, but the date of the Stage 4 survey and the different sampling methodology meant that their potential labour market experience varied from a few months (for the five year course completers) to two and a half years (for the three year course completers) (Elias and Purcell, 2013).

entrants. Temporary employment, in Germany, which was at 37 percent at six months, decreased to 27 percent one year after labour market entry and to 15 percent after five years. The decrease is even more pronounced in the UK: from 22 percent to 40 percent after five years.

Whilst in previous years temporary employment may have been utilised for non graduate positions, figures from Sharman (2013), a temporary agency which manages the supply of temporary, permanent and consultant labour in large organisations across the public, private and not for profit sectors, provides some evidence that temporary labour usage by local authorities has increased. These increases have been found particularly in IT, legal and professional job roles. Whilst not strictly the cohort of interest for this thesis, a longitudinal study by Quarmby, Willett and Wood (1999) concerning the 1994/5 cohort of students on a MSc Information Management programme provides additional data of interest. They found that whilst the proportion of contract work was very high amongst their graduates (58 percent of all posts are permanent appointments, the remainder being contract posts for between one and 60 months), graduates were able to leave temporary positions to move into permanent posts. The researchers suggested that it is noteworthy that almost one-half of the moves from contract to contract employment were internal transfers or promotions, indicating that a permanent post is not necessary for career progression – and financial security. The latter point is particularly pertinent for this study that is being undertaken during a worldwide economic recession and worthy of further investigation with a different cohort of students.

However, the growth of agency work, outsourcing and privatisation, coupled with growing job losses, has also added to a feeling that there are few permanent jobs left. It is in this climate that Standing, author of the *Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* (2011) defined these individuals as members of: *a distinctive socio-economic group, so that by definition a person is in it or not in it... [T]he precariat could be described as a neologism that combines an adjective precarious, and a related noun proletariat* (p18). He goes on to suggest that as mainly western societies have moved towards a flexible open labour market, a more fragmented global class structure has emerged. Results from the Great British Class Survey (2013), a collaboration between the BBC and researchers from several UK universities, support this. Their research

proposed a new model of class structure consisting of seven classes: ranging from the Elite at the top, to the Precariat at the bottom, with the Precariat's being the most deprived British class due to its low levels of capital (Savage et al, 2013).

An emerging issue during my research study has been the sharp increase in the use of so-called 'zero-hours' contracts. The term 'zero hours' is not defined in legislation, but is generally understood to be an employment contract between employer and a worker, which effectively means that the employer is not obliged to provide the worker with any minimum working hours, and the worker is not obliged to accept any of the hours offered. Zero-hours contracts may suit some people who want occasional earnings and are able to be entirely flexible about when they work. However, the unpredictable nature of such contracts means that individuals are likely to find it difficult to plan their other commitments effectively. Increasingly, many companies and specific industries are taking on staff on 'zero-hours' contracts (Brinkley, 2013), including educational institutional and local Authorities. For instance research by a Lecturers Union (2013) notes that universities and colleges are twice as likely to use zero-hour contracts as the workplace in general. These issues have given rise to the suggestion that there has been a rise in *permatemps* – an employee whose status is somewhere between a temporary and a permanent employee (ibid). It would be beneficial to see if the regional labour market has been affected by any of the issues outlined above.

The rise of non graduate employment

A significant finding in the 2013 Futuretrack report was the strong evidence that graduates were undertaking non graduate roles, in which they did not consider their graduate skills and knowledge to be useful (p14). Evidence of this finding had been signalled in previous papers by the Futuretrack team, in particular the graduate typology developed by Purcell and Elias (2004) which was discussed at the start of this chapter. Underemployment - a person being employed in a job for which they are over-qualified - was alluded to in the previous chapter as something that affected up to one third of graduates. The suggestion was that this may be a phenomenon that decreases the longer the graduate is in the labour market. A study by the Citizen's Advice Scotland (CAS) in 2012 who surveyed almost 1,000 graduates via the internet found that whilst 58 percent of respondents were employed, 43 percent of those were in a

lower skilled job³⁹. One quarter of respondents stated that at some point in their graduate career they had been in lower-skilled employment. It may be no surprise that the researcher detected notable levels of frustration amongst these graduates. Mostly this frustration was focused around respondents being unable to find a job matching their qualifications and aspirations. However the study discussed the wider consequences of the situation: job and skills displacement. This, and temporary employment, are issues of growing relevance for graduates, and one that I feel needs to be addressed further in terms of research and policy initiatives.

Rises in self employment may be masking inequality and poor conditions

A study by Tackey and Perryman (1999) for the Institute for Employment Studies evaluated self employment amongst graduates. The graduates in their sample were divided into three distinct groups: those who had any experience of self-employment since graduating; those who had considered self-employment as a career option either on entering higher education, or at the time of graduating; and those who had no interest in self-employment. Nearly one-third (31%) of the graduates were self-employed, or had been at some time since graduating with their first degree. Over a quarter (26%) had thought about entering self-employment, whilst the majority, over two-fifths (43%), expressed no interest in self-employment. The findings also indicated that women were more likely than men to have some experience of self-employment. The research did not offer reasons for this difference. Self-employment also appeared to be influenced by the degree course as the majority of those in self-employment graduated in the creative arts and design. A family background in self-employment was a significant factor influencing a labour market status in self-employment.

A TUC report in 2013 suggests there may be a further group – those who are working freelance rather than claiming benefits. The TUC report showed that since the start of the recession in 2008 the small rise in employment levels had been driven by a 9 percent rise in the number of self-employed workers (up 330,000). There have been significant increases in all areas of self employment, with the largest being in administrative and secretarial work (52 per cent rise); sales and customer service roles (32 per cent rise) and personal service occupations, such as hairdressing, cleaning and care work (31 per cent rise). Whilst this is good for understanding the factors that

³⁹ Respondents self defined their career

can influence those who become self employed, this sharp rise in self-employment could be masking the true extent of unemployment. The TUC report highlights concerns that individuals may not actually be self employed, but instead could be working for employment agencies where they are doing the same work as contracted employees but on poorer terms and conditions. Whilst generally seen an American phenomenon, there appears to a growing use of what have been described as *permatemps*. There are two types of permatemp employment relationships. In the first form, a public or private employer hires workers as "temporary" or "seasonal" employees, but retains them, often full-time for year after year, without any benefits. The second type is an employee in the traditional sense, but the 'employee' is paid by the Employment Agency, rather than by the primary employer, as a self employed person. Such evidence suggests there are appreciable numbers of individuals working as 'permatemps, however further research is needed to see if this is an issue that affects graduates.

Inactivity presented only as a negative activity

Shah, Pell and Brooke (2004) who conducted a longitudinal research study which looked at the circumstances 18 months after graduation, found that within this time 99 percent of respondents made a successful transition from HE to the workplace, with 56 percent in a job related to their first-degree subject. However career pathways were diverse, with many graduates experiencing several different periods of employment/unemployment before obtaining a professional position. What is notable about the issue of graduate inactivity is that it appears too dominated by research from the standpoint that unemployment is always a negative outcome (see Smith, McKnight and Naylor's, 2000 for an example of this discussion). Research abounds on how unemployed workers are twice as likely as their employed counterparts to experience psychological problems such as depression and poor self-esteem (Belle and Bullock, 2011). However this view of graduate 'inactivity' does not take into account that the increasingly flexible labour market has meant that a typical career pattern may be characterized by fluctuations (Otto, Hoffmann-Biencourt, and Mohr 2011), including temporary employment. Periods of inactivity may also prove to be an opportunity for graduates to gain further skills, or consider other options.

Pre-entry factors, overall, continue to affect trajectories

Chapter Two highlighted how factors such as age, social class and gender, as well as family engagement with HE, were all likely to have an influence on university attendance. Following the influx of WP policies there have been greater levels of students from a non traditional background⁴⁰. Despite this, these new participants in HE appear not to have benefited from HE as much as students from more advantaged households. *Working Out?* The report by Purcell, Pitcher and Sim (1999), mentioned earlier in this chapter, found that pre-entry factors continue to affect trajectories. For instance at 18 months after graduation, men were significantly more likely than women to be in full-time employment which they considered related to their longer-term career plans, for which a degree was a prerequisite and which they believed appropriate for someone with their skills and qualifications. There was also a higher proportion of male graduates compared with female graduates in professional and associate professional occupations, with higher proportions of women in clerical and secretarial occupations - many of which were not graduate level jobs. Their explanation for this was choice of degree subject, an explanation offered in the previous chapter because having a degree in engineering and technology or business studies was associated with positive career outcomes and satisfaction with career to date. In comparison, graduates with social sciences and Inter-disciplinary degrees were more likely to have experienced difficulty in finding appropriate employment or to have opted for postgraduate study.

A further explanation for gender disparities is offered by Elias and Purcell (2004), who as part of their programme of research on graduate career paths, utilised data from nine quarterly Labour Force Surveys (Spring 2001 to Spring 2003) and data from the Office for National Statistics (1996/7). They found that female graduates were more likely to take on lesser paid, part-time work. If one considers wages by sector, the only area where female pay is equal to males is in the not-for-profit sector; in the public and private sectors, in graduate workplaces and also in graduate and non-graduate job roles, males earn more. However, they also supported findings from the previous chapter that noted that male graduates were more likely to be unemployed when compared to females. As discussed in the previous chapter explanations for male graduate unemployment can be quite patronising e.g. they blame the graduate rather than any other factors. Therefore I would like to extend the exploration of graduate

⁴⁰ Refer to Chapters One and Two for a detailed discussion of these 'groups'

unemployment to also cover long term or repeated unemployment in a gendered and regional context.

Research on age presents a mixed picture. Brennan and Shah (2003) found that age appears to be a factor to consider when looking at long term trajectories as they found that it is young, or traditional aged graduates who are more likely to gain a graduate role and have a smoother labour market transition compared to older graduates. However Bratti et al (2004) dispute this as their findings showed that older graduates actually have a higher probability of gaining graduate employment. A major international study of graduate employment by Little and Tang (2008) perhaps provides a deeper understanding of mature graduates as they concentrate on specific age ranges, as opposed to just those aged over 25. They found that for both European and UK graduates it is the older graduates (aged 30 or over) who were most likely to be unemployed for longer than six months. Almost half of the European graduates who had experienced this level of unemployment were mature (48 percent compared to 35 percent overall) as were 40 percent of UK graduates (compared to 23 percent overall). By comparison, for both European graduates overall and UK graduates, those aged 25-29 on graduation were less likely to have experienced periods of unemployment longer than six months. This might suggest that mature graduates were less likely to appeal to employers than those belonging to the other groups (especially in the 25-29 age group) and therefore it might take them longer to find employment.

Purcell, Pitcher and Sim (1999) also provide more detailed data and report similar findings. Whilst mature graduates appeared to take longer to be assimilated into the labour market most were *en route* by the time of the survey – 18 months after graduation. Graduates aged under 30 were more likely to be in career-related employment than older graduates. Those aged 40-49 were least likely to believe that their career development expectations had been met and to have experienced difficulty in finding appropriate employment - though few regretted returning to study. They were less likely to have achieved jobs for which a degree was a prerequisite than younger respondents and more likely to express disappointment with their current job and career development so far. Purcell and Elias (2004) offer an explanation for this. They note that initial disadvantage may be eroded over a longer period as although mature

graduates were more likely to have attended a new university, they generally have the attributes that graduate employers seek: work experience and a clear evidence of their ability to manage time well. These issues will be investigated in further detail in my own research as overall the evidence relating to mature graduates beyond first destinations is mixed.

Socio-economic status is also a factor to consider according to a study by Macmillan, Tyler and Vignoles (2013). Using data from the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) 'early' and 'longitudinal' surveys carried out in 2006/2007, they found that nearly two thirds of graduates who come from higher SES family backgrounds (NS-SEC Group I or II) entered higher status occupations (NS-SEC group I), compared to just over one third of students from lower SES backgrounds (NS-SEC groups II-VII). Equally around 83 percent of graduates who attended a private school secured a higher status occupation, compared to just 17 percent of students from state school backgrounds. Much of this socio-economic gradient is attributable to the fact that more socio-economically advantaged graduates also have higher levels of human capital.

Further socio-economic differences are to be found in research by Furlong and Cartmel (2004) who found that disadvantaged young people may be forced to apply for all possible jobs while those who have other sources of support may be able to hold out for more desirable forms of employment. Indeed, a few respondents suggested that engagement with part-time employment stood in the way of job-search activities focused on the graduate labour market. Byrom and Lightfoot's (2013) study on the trajectories of working-class students is useful for understanding the ways in which working-class graduates may re-construct their career aspirations as a result of post graduation difficulties. An online questionnaire was provided for students to complete (57 students completed it, representing a 19 percent response rate) and interviews were conducted with 10 students. The students repeatedly suggested that they had come to university to secure a job that was higher in status than that of other family members. The process of 'othering' parents was apparent which illustrated the distance between the students' own emerging social status and that of their family based habitus. Those students who did not do as well as they would have wished, in terms of assignments of examinations described how they felt they had not fully

prepared for university assignments – citing time management as a major factor in their failure. Whilst this study relates to students it would be useful to see if their comments are applicable to the experiences of graduates e.g. do those graduates who have not achieved their ambitions ‘blame’ themselves or offer structural explanations?

The interview data in Byrom and Lightfoot’s (2013) study also provided some in-depth accounts of how students responded to any difficulties they had with their academic studies. Two thirds of those that replied to the questionnaire had questioned whether they should be at university, particularly in relation to whether it would lead to a specific type of employment and also one that would represent social mobility. The question of whether university was the right choice was further exacerbated for those students who had friends in highly paid jobs who had not invested in HE. Whilst there was a sense of resilience among the students, some went on to re-consider their career aspirations. This reflects Bourdieu and Passeron’s (1977) work on reproduction, where structures and institutions eliminate those who are not ‘shaped to enter the field’ (Bourdieu 1993: 72). Despite those who were reconsidering their career options one third remained fixed on the initial career aspiration. In an interview with one student, his determination to succeed appeared to be fuelled by a desire not to lose face with his peer group at home, none of whom had gone to university: Byrom and Lightfoot (2013) suggest that it is evident that this respondent was feeling the sense of separation from his former existence that comes with habitus transformation. In a Bourdieusian sense, the distance already travelled (Bourdieu 1998: 6) – by being in university left him in a transitory social space where returning to a previous existence, with the concomitant career choices, was not an option. A problem that a number of respondents highlighted was familial expectations. In the words of one interviewee ‘they expect me to be earning a lot of money, living in a nice place and driving a nice car’. Whilst HE is continually promoted as a way of achieving these aspirations, many will continue to feel a sense of failure if they do not reach these supposed targets.

A 2010 Universities UK report, (UUK, 2010) which drew upon HESA longitudinal statistical data, evaluated the *subjects studied* that were most likely to have graduates in employment, or assumed to be unemployed approximately three and a half years after graduation. The study ranked subjects in relation to first, second and third most likely to be employed, or unemployed. They found that engineering and technology

graduates were the second most likely to be in employment, after medicine and dentistry, whilst business graduates were the third most likely. Social studies were not mentioned in any categories. The study by Purcell, Pitcher and Sims (1999) also found there were different types of graduate career trajectories, depending on a number of factors including degree subject. Graduates with vocational and numerate degrees were more likely to be in work which they considered appropriate for their skills and qualifications, for which a degree was required. In addition they found that having a degree in engineering and technology, business studies or maths and computing was associated with positive career outcomes, whereas arts and humanities, social sciences and inter-disciplinary graduates were more likely to have experienced difficulty in finding appropriate employment and were also most likely to have opted for postgraduate study. This may provide evidence that some subjects have a subject capital e.g. gaining a degree in that subject is an indicator of their later trajectories. This is an idea that will be explored throughout this study

Power et al's (2010) follow up study of a cohort of graduates noted some *institutional differences*. One quarter of those who went to an 'Old' university were in Class one occupations, compared only 9 percent of those who went to 'new' universities – one third of those from new universities were outside Classes I & II. They also found a strong relationship between earning levels and status of university attended for those who went to elite universities, but there was little difference between old and new universities (only 8 percent and 5 percent respectively). Attending a prestigious university is clearly an advantage in a labour market with a large supply of graduates. For example, Brown and Hesketh (1994) found that among 14000 applicants to one leading employer, Oxford University graduates were 29 times more likely to be appointed than candidates applying from 'new' universities. However like much of research in this area there appears to be a greater emphasis on the benefits gained from an elite education rather than comparisons between old and new universities.

The much cited study by Purcell, Pitcher and Sim (1999) is useful when considering differences between the traditional and post 1992 institutions. They found that those from new universities were less likely to be in jobs for which a degree was required, which they believed to be appropriate and which used their graduate skills and knowledge and be less likely to be satisfied with their career progress to date. They

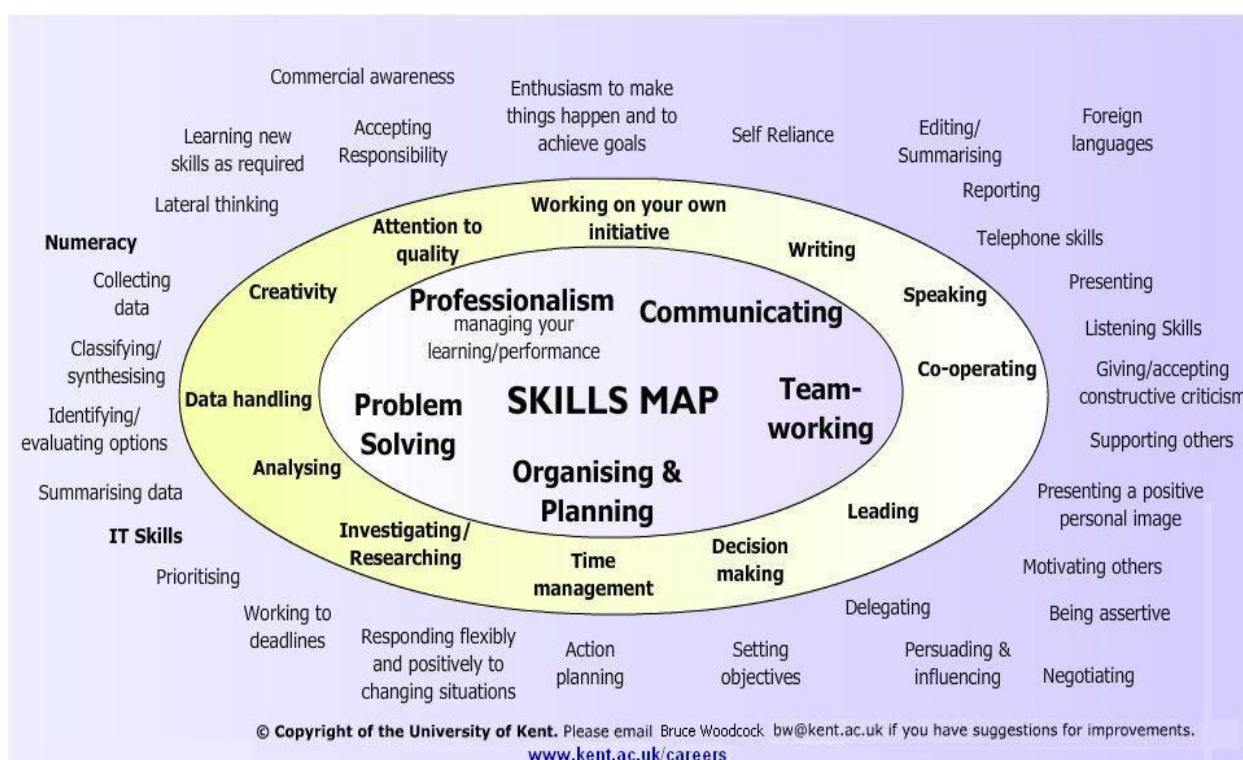
also suggested that graduates from new institutions were more likely to have experienced difficulties in obtaining appropriate employment. However their findings noted that mature graduates – those most likely to attend new universities – were normally more settled in the graduate labour market 18 months after graduation. Wakeling and Kyriacou's (2010) literature review of postgraduate study found that attending an old university was more closely associated with progression to a research degree when compared to graduates from a post 1992 university. A further review in 2013 by Wakeling and Hampden-Thompson found that those progressing to research degrees were concentrated in particular institutions: one in five of those progressing to a research degree graduated from one of the 'big five' research universities. Graduates from more selective institutions generally had greater rates of progression to higher degrees than those from less selective institutions. However, the picture was not uniform: some less selective institutions sent more graduates to taught higher degrees than some selective institutions. The existence of institutional differences in graduate trajectories is not clear when one is specific about the type of institution e.g. old v's new universities. As such a focus on the details of individual institutions in a regional comparison may be useful.

The emphasis on employability

Yorke (2006), discussing the importance of employability skills for *all* graduates, suggests that employers generally see a graduate's achievements related to the subject discipline as necessary but not sufficient, and in some employment contexts the actual subject discipline may be relatively unimportant. As one human resources manager comments: "*Academic qualifications are the first tick in the box and then we move on. Today we simply take them for granted*" (Brown, Hesketh, and Williams, 2003: 19, cited in Yorke, 2004). The term employability with its various interpretations and relevance to HE has been widely used in numerous contexts (see Brown, Hesketh, and Williams, 2003; Teichler, 2004 for further discussions). There are a number of definitions of employability, but the one that I will utilise is that which is used by the Higher Education Academy: "*A set of skills, knowledge and personal attributes that make an individual more likely to secure and be successful in their chosen occupation(s) to the benefit of themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy.*" (cited in Yorke, 2004). Whilst clear, this definition appears to hint at a set of personal attributes.

According to findings from the Working Out report the skills *most used* by graduates in employment were spoken communication, interpersonal skills, ability to prioritise tasks and time management (Purcell, Pitcher and Sims, 1999). However the debates surrounding employability mean that graduates are often required to develop more skills than this. A recent ‘employability skills’ map (see Figure One) produced by the University of Kent Careers Service attempted to provide clarification of the ways that graduates could improve their overall employability.

Figure 1 Employability map



The above diagram shows that there are so many employability skills that it can get confusing for stakeholder to be clear about which particular skills are the most important. Further to this there appears to be little emphasis on the types of skills that will be useful for specific careers. Research by Clark and Connolly (2012), which focused on engineering graduates highlighted the deficiencies of employability that focus on ‘generic’ or ‘transferable’ skills, as opposed to subject specific knowledge. Additionally there is also the observation by Nicholls (2004) that employability is based on a negative premise as there is too much emphasis on what Nicholls (2004) defines as ‘throughput’ (the skills acquired by students in HE) and ‘output’ (the utilisation of

these skills in employment), but less on 'input' (the skills students bring with them into HE and then on to employment). In many cases, institutions have responded to these economically-driven pressures from the government by developing a model in which the careers service becomes part of a service designed to help academic departments incorporate employability skills and career management skills into course provision. The paradox is that the scope for linking employability to the curriculum in traditional universities tends to be more limited, whilst at post 1992 universities, where the boundaries around the careers service may be much more permeable, resources to enact these initiatives tend to be fewer (Bowman, Hodgkinson and Colley, 2005).

Often running alongside the employability debate is the suggestion that graduates, especially those from non traditional backgrounds need to be flexible. An information sheet from Sheffield Careers Service suggested that there were various ways that graduates could be flexible, for instance: have changed (or thought about changing) where they live for a job or a postgraduate opportunity; worked for or looked at different types of employers, postgraduate institutions or even types of careers; entered further study whilst waiting for the employment situation to improve; taken lower paid employment in order to be employed or to gain skills, and; gained work experience of a workplace, client group or skills. It could be argued that this particular information sheet is patronising, but other examples of the genre show that this is often the advice that is given. What is apparent here is that this advice is structured towards the traditional graduate, one who has few limitations to his or her flexibility.

Harvey (2003) notes that specifically targeting non-traditional students for support with employability skills is an issue that is far from resolved. He notes that whilst minority ethnic students generally, if not always, overcame their concerns about receiving 'special treatment' in terms of the advice given, disabled students were often less enthusiastic about employability schemes. He also goes on to say that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds remain very difficult to target. If careers advice is to be targeted, then greater collaboration with other departments within the institution, most notably widening participation and outreach officers, is necessary. Whilst it is important to have a joined up regional approach I would suggest of far more importance is ensuring that NTS, like traditional graduates, understand their strengths e.g. they are likely to already have some employability skills.

Few studies that have actually evaluated how employability skills benefit graduates. However, there is some evidence from a survey of graduate careers by Wilton (2011). From data drawn from the Class of '99 questionnaire survey conducted in 2003 (which surveyed one in two graduates in all subject disciplines who completed their undergraduate education in 1999 at 38 UK HEIs), Wilton first evaluated whether business graduates reported that they had developed employability skills. It was apparent that these graduates reported that their programmes of study had “contributed to the development of a broad range of employability skills that are likely to be of value in a wide range of jobs and labour market contexts” (p89). There were variations according to age, gender and institution, which suggested that those who may be considered to be NTS were more likely to have developed the broader skills range: e.g. *older mature graduates reported higher average development..., when compared to young and young mature graduates; new-university graduates reported higher average skills development...* (p90) when compared to those from higher status institutions, and *women reported greater development in all areas* (ibid) when compared to male graduates. The study found that for this cohort of recent business and management graduates, the relationship between employability and employment was uncertain. Wilton summarised the study by suggesting that not only did traditional labour market disadvantage still appear to be an impediment to achievement but that this was the case regardless of the extent to which graduates developed employability skills. So, despite NTS developing a broad range of employability skills it made no appreciable difference in terms of their ability to gain graduate employment.

Compared with the focus on getting graduates into employment or internships/work experience that may lead to employment, less emphasis is placed on accessing post graduate opportunities. This is changing as recent research by Stuart et al (2006) and Wakeling and Kyriacou (2010) has acknowledged that information on funding is a common issue affecting post graduate participation. Funding that is available tends to be less accessible (i.e targeting specific groups), or be highly competitive (in the form of scholarships or bursaries). Students from post 1992 universities are less likely to apply for post graduate funding (Wakeling and Kyriacou, 2010). Furthermore, knowledge of post graduate funding opportunities can often be greatly influenced by the social networks the individual has access to (ibid). Throughout this study I have noted that there has been an increase in interest in helping disadvantaged groups

access funding to postgraduate study. As such many institutions now offer postgraduate bursaries that are advertised on university websites⁴¹. Further research at a later time could evaluate the take up of these bursaries, and forms of financial support, as well as the socio-economic characteristics of recipients.

This section has outlined two approaches to looking at graduate outcomes beyond first destinations: graduate typologies and trajectories. The section showed that whilst there are still notable examples showing how pre-entry factors continue to influence long term trajectories there are also other instances where these appear to have declined. This, I would suggest is further example of the need to investigate graduate outcomes from a longer term perspective. The final section of this literature review will concentrate on how graduates access opportunities, considering both employment and postgraduate study.

Access to opportunities

Try (2005) observed that the questions about how individuals access employment vacancies is one of the most under-researched topics within labour-market analyses. Additionally, as research into postgraduate study has often been neglected in favour of analysis of labour market outcomes, it is no surprise that there is little that focuses specifically on the methods and processes that are used to access opportunities in this area. The following section presents one typology of graduate job seekers. This is followed by a discussion of the *sources* used to look for post-graduation employment. The last section will focus on a discussion of the factors that influence how graduates access opportunities, leading finally to a discussion of the research gaps.

A typology of graduate job seekers

The study by Purcell, Pitcher and Sims (1999) previously found there were three kinds of graduate job-seeker:

- *Career planners* were those who enrolled on their courses with a clear view of where they wanted to get to – and who were most likely to be in an appropriate job and satisfied with their career development;

⁴¹ Throughout the study I would search for bursaries available for postgraduate study. I noted that the availability of financial support available to graduates, from many institutions, including Bangor University and Glyndwr University, increased in 2013. My suggestion is that this is because research on postgraduate study has increased since the start of this study and as Wakeling and Kyriacou (2010) have noted, postgraduate study has become the new widening participation issue (p10).

- *Adapters* were those who had not thought ahead when choosing their course, or who had changed their minds about what they wanted to do in the course of their studies– but who had considered their realistic options and had set about making the most of the opportunities available; and
- *Drifters* did not have clear ideas at the outset of their studies. Some students were drifting due to a postponement of career development, but most were unsatisfied and looking for appropriate opportunities (p15).

This typology is useful as apart from Brown and Scase 1994 (discussed earlier in this chapter) there is nothing similar to this. However the categories do appear to resort to easy stereotypes with drifters are described in similar ways to NTS. Whilst I have not discovered an studies that have explicitly utilised this typology the description of these ‘types’ are also often utilised as a ways of encouraging non traditional students – and graduates – to behave in a similar fashion to traditional cohorts e.g plan their career, be proactive, develop employability skills.

The types of methods graduates utilise to find post graduation opportunities

As organisations may need to recruit often, and for many positions, it can be economically prudent to use *formal* recruitment methods. A study by Try (2005) which evaluated data captured from the Norwegian Graduate Surveys, found that the formal approach was the most common job search strategy for 72 percent of the graduates they evaluated. Jobs in the formal job market are those that appear in the public domain, i.e. advertisements published in newspapers, trade magazines and, more recently, the Internet. Local and national newspapers are a useful source for graduates as the former can provide graduates with information about local vacancies and companies which are moving into the area, whilst the latter can give subject specific vacancies within a wider geographical area. However, this is a method that appears to be declining, parallel with the readership of the printed press, being replaced by internet job searches. Trade magazines contain industry-specific job notices, although their wide readership may mean that these vacancies, alongside those on the internet, are over-subscribed. Some may target employer’s websites as current vacancies are increasingly advertised there, but this could turn out to be a lengthy process if an

applicant has more than one 'ideal' employer. HEI careers departments⁴² provide a diversity of services for graduates - from careers workshops and advice, to individual coaching sessions to access to work experience and training opportunities, although Morey et al (2003) notes that these tend to be utilised by students who have a clear idea of their plans, as opposed to those who needed direction. Utilising recruitment agencies is an additional method as some specialise in specific sectors, while others recruit across a range of industries. However, as these agencies are working for the employer rather than the applicant they may forward information for positions which are not suitable.

An oft quoted statistic is that up to 80 percent of all vacancies are filled without ever being advertised (Van Ours and Ridder, 1993). Informal methods, i.e personal contacts such as friends, family and former employers, may be a valuable resource. Through these networks, information about upcoming or actual vacancies may be exchanged, or an applicant may be referred to employers where job offers may ensue (Try, 2005). Some studies suggest that females are more likely than males to use informal job search strategies (e.g. Huffman and Torres, 2001 and Straits, 1998). On the other hand, Atfield and Purcell, (2010) as part of the Futuretrack study found that men were more likely than women to have used family and friends as a job seeking resource. This reflects an overall pattern of male students using more job seeking resources than women, but may also reflect gendered subject clustering. Women were slightly more likely than men to have used the Job Centre and independent employment agencies, which suggests that women are seeking work at a more local level than men, but a more targeted job seeking approach is also evident amongst female students. Ball and Vincent (1998) describe this distinction between formal and informal methods as being hot and cold knowledge. Hot knowledge refers to that acquired through the 'grapevine' (in this case from family, friends, existing students known to them and school-based networks), whereas cold knowledge is that acquired from official sources or formal knowledge (in this case from sources such as prospectus and comparison websites). As will be discussed in a later section, they suggest that these knowledge sources are unequally distributed.

⁴² Universities and colleges across Wales are supported by The GO Wales programme which is funded by the EU Convergence Fund and the Welsh Government.

Due to the focus on graduate employment prospects, it is no surprise that there is even less research that focuses on how graduates find out information on postgraduate study. A qualitative study by Bowman, Hodkinson and Colley (2005), who interviewed 24 students across six Masters courses in two universities (a post-1992 university and a traditional institution) from the North of England, suggested there were various sources of guidance. Their respondents either utilised the internet (general websites such as Prospects); personal contacts (family friends or university lecturers) and (or) formal guidance provision, e.g Careers services. The study also noted that websites of relevant Research Councils can be helpful in not only finding out about postgraduate opportunities, but also the funding that might be available. The next section will discuss available research on the main methods utilised by graduates that have been discussed in more detail in research studies

University Careers Services.

The much cited *Working Out?* report by Purcell, Pitcher and Sims (1999) surveyed one in three final year undergraduates at 21 UK universities regarding current aspirations and amongst other topics, their experiences of *university careers services*. They found that graduates used multiple methods: national newspapers; family and friends, local newspapers, trade press, graduate vacancy publications and careers guidance staff were the most commonly-used sources of information. University career services were commonly used as graduates received support with job applications, their CV's, interview preparation. Graduates who had used their university careers advisory service were very satisfied with the quality of information and guidance they had received. However, in the *Working Out* study, this was one of the least utilised methods. Despite this, the importance of careers services should not be underestimated as a longitudinal study by Stiwne and Jungert (2010), which collected data via questionnaires and interviews, showed that many graduate engineers gained their first employment through their university project work, set up by their university Careers Service.

However Greenbank and Hepworth (2005), who surveyed 165 full-time students who had gained either a vocational or traditional degree, found that those from working class backgrounds were less likely to use university careers services. The researchers found that the reluctance of the students to approach the careers service for advice

arose because they often chose to talk to people they were more familiar with e.g. lecturers as well as friends and family. There were also some students⁴³ who reported that they were intimidated by careers advisers, fearing that their lack of knowledge about careers issues could result in embarrassment or even humiliation. Greenbank and Hepworth (2005) note that these students did not seem to be aware that careers services could also help them with the recruitment and selection process. The researchers also reported that many students they spoke to did not approach careers advisers because they were concentrating on their studies. This 'serial approach' to study and careers where students prioritised assignments and other activities and completed them one at a time, meant that career planning activities were inevitably suspended as the students completed more pressing tasks such as assignments. Career planning was more likely to occur close to completion of their degree course. Whilst I concur with many of the findings from their study, I did question the patronising way of talking about NTS e.g. did any 'traditional' students have similar feelings relating to a lack of confidence? This was not elaborated on in the findings. A common theme in research on students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and their use of the careers service, see Ball and Vincent (1998); Reay (2001), is that working class students felt alienated from this service due to their previously bad experiences whilst at school (p6). Due to these concerns Shoemith (2011) suggests that for careers services to be effective, advisors need to ensure that services do not have a one size fits all approach, that they are aware of differences.

The Jobcentre

Findings from the study by Citizen's Advice Scotland (2012) discussed in a previous section relating to underemployment, suggest that Jobcentres still have some way to go before they are able to be helpful for graduates. The majority of the sample were employed but a substantial number, 16 percent were unemployed. 56 percent of participants reported that they had been unemployed at some stage since graduating and, of these, 67 percent were unemployed for longer than 4 months, and 20 percent had been unemployed for longer than a year. Almost one third (62 percent) of those who were unemployed at any stage sought benefits, 98 percent of whom claimed Jobseekers Allowance. The study featured a range of questions on issues that affect

⁴³ A smaller number of students had already decided on a career path, therefore they did not feel the need for careers advice.

graduates including the support they have received in finding employment. A number of survey respondents reported the difficulty they faced as graduates with the Jobcentre, revealing a lack of confidence in the Jobcentre in finding graduate level jobs, and in some cases, being told to apply for jobs that did not meet their expectations as a graduate. In all, three quarters of respondents (79 percent) found the Jobcentre unhelpful in finding them a graduate level job, with only 1.8 percent saying the service had been helpful.

Further to this, the study found that in some cases the Jobcentre advisers had told the client to play down their degree to make them more employable. The graduates also reported that there was a strong emphasis on applying for jobs they were overqualified for rather than ones that matched their skills and experience. This was blamed on a lack of graduate level jobs being notified to the Jobcentre system. Further evidence that the Jobcentre is not designed to meet the expectations or support needs of graduates was found by Charlton et al (2006) in research funded by the European Social Fund. Data collection for this study was in two phases. In the first phase people were asked to complete a questionnaire booklet or Internet questionnaire. The second phase involved completing a job-seeking diary for up to six months after their graduation. A total of 157 people graduating from 13 English and Welsh universities agreed to participate in both phases. Amongst other findings relating to ethnicity and job seeking methods, the study found that greater use of Jobcentres was found to be associated with a lower likelihood of obtaining a graduate-level job. This is an interesting finding as Atfield and Purcell (2010) noted that women were slightly more likely than men to have used the Jobcentre. Seeing as employment levels have grown during the recession, it is observed there needs to be an understanding of whether and how a regional cohort of graduates utilises a local resource.

Work experience and internships

Unpaid work is undertaken for a variety of reasons, some of which may be in anticipation of the type of paid employment that the graduate wishes to enter and with the intention of influencing entry into an occupation. There has been very little systematic investigation of the growth of unpaid work experience and internships, as university students and graduates increasingly find themselves encouraged to do any kind of work experience, even if it is unpaid (Purcell et al, 2012). This type of experience is becoming increasingly important in determining entry to a growing range

of professions, including the arts, media and publishing (ibid). Results from the FutureTrack survey found that more than three quarters of respondents suggested they would undertake an internship, but 38 per cent said that they could not due to financial reasons. Female students were slightly more likely than male students to say that they would like to do an unpaid job or internship, but were unable to afford to, with 40 per cent giving this response compared to 35 per cent of male students. Forty-one per cent of students from a professional or higher managerial background said they had applied or planned to apply for an unpaid job or internship, and 37 per cent said they would like to but could not afford to, while 42 per cent of students from an intermediate occupational background and 38 per cent of students from a routine or manual occupational background said they had or would apply and 39 and 40 per cent respectively said they would like to but could not afford too (ibid).

The Futuretrack study also looked at subject areas and internships. They found that the subject with the lowest incidence of unpaid work is mathematical and computer Sciences; social studies and law subjects. In comparison, medicine and related, and education subjects have the highest proportions of respondents who did unpaid work during their degrees. An explanation for this could be that Futuretrack respondents included structured work placements they did during their course as a type of unpaid work experience. Graduates from creative arts and design subjects had the highest proportion of respondents who did unpaid work after graduation only. Graduates from STEM subjects were more likely to have done no unpaid work at all, and less likely to have done unpaid work during the degree than those which did not include a STEM subject. The study found few differences across institutional sectors, except that those who attended elite universities were most likely to do unpaid work during their course, and least likely to do so after graduation. The emphasis on employability could be an explanation why there were no noticeable differences between students or graduates from traditional or post 1992 institutions (ibid). As Graham (2013) noted in her analysis of university websites, examples of the importance of employability skills were noted on the websites of all types of institutions – from the elite to the universities that typically service NTS.

Bathmaker, Ingram and Waller's (2013) study on the mobilisation of capitals is also helpful in understanding the importance of internships and work experience, but also

extracurricular activities. Their research, based on data collected from the Paired Peers study discussed earlier, considers the processes of capital acquisition and mobilisation by middle class and working class students while at university. They suggested that to 'play the game' successfully, students should be encouraged to enhance their 'employability' through additional activities including work experience and internships, and to exploit the skills gained through extra-curricular activities (ECA) (Tomlinson 2007). The researchers dealt with internships/work experience separately because they found that students in their study – both working and middle class students – understood that internships and work experience were important for generating capital useful in the transition to the labour market. However they noted that orientations towards extracurricular activities were more varied, with the middle class students who understood their value in the labour market and beyond. For instance, for two middle class students in their study extracurricular activities were a means of standing out from their peers. One in particular is interesting as they became a student peer tutor and applied to be a student ambassador as a means of finding 'the right circle of people'.

Interestingly, they found similar processes amongst some working-class families, but these were described as being aspirational working-class. The working class students in their study were most likely to experience barriers in engaging in extracurricular activities due to either financial or time constraints, or because they wanted to prioritise their studies. Working class students were also more likely to socialise with likeminded friends. Whilst these various activities arguably involve the generation of capitals, but they do not easily translate into something for a CV. It appeared that working class students socialised with people like themselves, as opposed to the 'right' people e.g. those who would be able to develop their social capital.

Factors that influence how graduates access opportunities.

Access to information

Access to opportunities is a further area in HE where it is generally accepted that there are disparities in the provision of information – particularly for those from disadvantaged groups. As alluded to in previous sections of this chapter, having family members who have experienced HE is a form of capital which many individuals from poorer backgrounds may not possess. For those who do go on to HE disadvantages

may continue as although they have gained educational qualifications, they still may not have gained the same cultural capital that individuals from middle class backgrounds have inherited. This factor can go on to affect them in the labour market if they do not have the necessary contacts who can identify employment opportunities, and they will have even fewer contacts who have gained postgraduate qualifications.

With regards to the observation that schools and colleges supply less information on accessing HE to people from disadvantaged backgrounds (see Roberts and Allen, 1997) I have not found existing research to suggest that this continues post graduation. However, despite a lack of evidence in the form of specific studies, there may be a case to suggest that due to a lack of perceived capital (apart from their educational qualifications) careers advisors may not supply the same information on specific graduate vacancies that they would to more traditional graduates. The information required by non traditional graduates may also need to be more complex due to lack of engagement with specific graduate careers. This is somewhat evidenced in research by Hutchings (2001) who investigated the means that working class students use to access information to enter HE. Hutchings collected data via a series of focus groups with over 100 working class people aged 18-30 who were attending FE college. Amongst his findings were the observations that working class people lack information and they rely differently on hot or cold information. Hutchings commented that his cohort lacked access to information as 1. they knew fewer people going to HE; 2. schools and colleges supply less information to people from their background and 3. the information needed by these cohorts is more complex, by virtue of their lack of engagement. It should be noted that whilst these issues are primarily associated with access to higher education, as will be discussed, they are also relatable to access to post graduate opportunities. The literature review overall highlighted an absence of gender differences in the job-seeking methods used by the graduates. The study by Charlton et al (2006), which investigated this issue, suggested that across all gender - and ethnic - groups there was a large amount of Internet usage during job-seeking. The literature review did not identify research that discussed differences according to age, but this could be due to the searching strategy that was employed. As a later section will discuss the nature of information needed to access to HE, it is worth noting three points Hutchings (2001) made about this. First he notes that there is often no

moment of decision about entering HE; second IAG is not neutral and third, the decision making process utilised are often based on hunches or feelings.

Regional factors

Throughout the literature review process it has been observed that whilst research on graduate employment is extensive, it is often Anglo-centric and does not account for region-specific factors. The introduction to this thesis, as well as the previous chapter noted some variations in the overall UK labour market and that of North Wales: the main difference being the dominance of the public sector and smaller employers in Wales. However, there are additional factors. For instance, whilst Wales shares a close political and social history with the rest of Great Britain, it has always retained a distinct cultural identity. Wales is officially bilingual, thus the Welsh language is part of a specific and unique ethno-linguistic heritage in the region. By the mid 1990's knowledge of the Welsh language became a considerable asset in gaining employment in Wales (Bernstein, 2004) due to the significant increases in the number of bi-lingual employment opportunities, particularly within the public sector and the service industries. Two in ten of the Welsh population (aged three or more) speak Welsh – increasing to more than half the population in Gwynedd and the Isle of Anglesey (ONS, 2004). A survey of the bi-lingual skills needs of employers in the private sector found there is a demand for bi-lingual skills in Wales (Lifelong Learning UK, 2010).. The study also found there was a shortage of people with bi-lingual skills in graduate occupations such as Police, Careers Advice, Nursing – especially Mental Health and Speech/Language Therapists. Welsh Language skills have also been identified as one of the skills which is set to grow in demand over the next few years.

Furlong and Cartmel (2000) investigated the importance of *local networks*, interviewing a cohort of unemployed young people in four areas of rural Scotland. They found that an important factor influencing access to employment was 'who they knew' in the local area. These informal networks provide information about forthcoming employment opportunities and even personal recommendations for jobs. Employers, especially those in rural areas, often recruit new staff by '*letting it be known*' that they were seeking additional workers. Informal recruitment methods may be popular with employers as a method of 'guaranteeing' the reliability of recruits. 'Local recruitment', that which utilises local knowledge (re-) enhances 'embeddedness' within the

community. SME's are more likely to be socially embedded than larger firms (Lowe and Talbot, 2000, cited in Marsden, Franklin and Kitchen, 2005). While these informal networks can smooth young people's transitions to employment in rural areas, poor family reputations can be a barrier to employment. Individuals or families perceived as 'trouble-makers', single parents and incomers were found to have difficulties in gaining access to informal networks. A system where embedded local knowledge becomes a key asset can lead to a closed labour market to all but those who are on the 'inside' of the system.

Greenbank and Hepworth (2008) note that alongside family and friends, careers advice can be sought from familiar people such as university or college lecturers. These can be a rich resource, particularly of opportunities in an individual subject area, however they may not have as much information regarding vacancies within other sectors. Granovetter (1973) agreed that an individuals' network consists of close relatives or friends – what he terms 'strong ties', but he also noted that people have 'weak ties', i.e wider relatives, previous employers/colleagues or friends of friends (cited in *ibid*). In essence social capital depends not only on a person's own resources and their connections, but also those resources available to these connections.

A major disadvantage for some lies in the quality of their networks. For example some who live in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, their social networks may not be conducive for facilitating access to graduate level employment. Research such as that by Blasko, (2002); Furlong and Cartmel (2005) and Thomas and Jones (2007) suggest that the social capital possessed by graduates from economically disadvantaged families may be unsuited to the graduate labour market. This was highlighted in Bathmaker, Ingram and Waller's (2013) study discussed in a previous section of this chapter. The middle class students in their study not only had an awareness of the capital they possessed, but they were predisposed to use it e.g. 'pull strings' and capitalise on 'favours' owed by family members. In comparison, whilst the working class students they interviewed invested energy in cultivating friendships and the social aspects of their lives, it appeared these were not the 'right' relationships e.g. they socialised with individuals they enjoyed spending time with as opposed to those who could help them most in the labour market. This is not to imply that the middle class students socialised with people they did not like, but it was apparent that the working class students tended to stick

with like minded people. The importance of social networks is also supported in research by Macmillan, Tyler and Vignoles (2013) who found that a graduate who used personal networks to find their job was 0.5 percentage points (baseline 6.1 percent) more likely than a graduate who found their job by other means to work in a higher managerial occupation.

Non traditional graduates did however appear to utilise other forms of capital described in research by Granovetter (1963). Speaking to individuals who had recently moved from one job to another, Granovetter attempted to learn about the job searching methods they used. His study found that many individuals acquired information leading to their current jobs through personal contacts (strong ties). However he also found evidence that these individuals also utilised acquaintances, friends of friends, past employers (weak ties) as a job search method (Easley and Kleinberg, 2010). Despite these positive findings there are also indicators that employers may look less favourably on applicants from neighbourhoods with poor reputations. A study by Tunstall et al(2012), who considered the challenges for disadvantaged young people seeking work found that perceptions of 'postcode discrimination' were widespread among the public and some labour market intermediaries. The researchers devised three matched applications from fictional candidates (two from neighbourhoods with poor reputations and one from a neighbourhood with a bland reputation) and sent them as applications for a variety of vacancies. No apparent statistically significant difference in employer preferences for candidates from neighbourhoods with different reputations were found. However the researchers suggested that postcode discrimination could possibly be an issue for well-qualified candidates at interview or subsequent stages. Although candidates who apply for national or regional posts were more likely to encounter less discrimination as staff are unlikely to be aware of local neighbourhood reputations.

An Anglo/urban specific approach to graduate outcomes can often ignore micro issues of importance in a region such as *access to transport*. Whilst in cities many use public transport to go to work due to it being difficult to use a car in a city, in smaller towns, a car is a valuable resource or example of capital. Studies (Furlong and Cartmel 2000 and Marsden and Kitchen, 2006) have shown that lack of access to transport (not having access to a car or relying on public transport) can be a significant barrier to

accessing work, particularly in rural areas. Whilst Furlong and Cartmel 2000 found that two out of five jobseekers felt that lack of transport is a barrier towards getting a job and young people with driving licences are twice as likely to get jobs as those without. Difficulties when relying on public transport include access and availability: poor network coverage, infrequency, and unreliability of public transport, have always been an issue for those who rely on public transport. Research by Furlong and Cartmel (2000) suggests that access and availability may be more of an issue in rural locations as employers appeared to be reluctant to risk recruiting those who had to undertake long or complex journeys fearing that extensive travel, especially in the winter, would result in poor time-keeping. A further issue that is applicable not only in Wales, but to regions outside of London is that most graduate roles are either located in London or in head offices of organisations situated around the country. The ideal graduate is one that is mobile (Bathwater, Ingram and Waller, 2013). This again means that some individuals are going to be disadvantaged either due to the lack of economic capital or through their attachment to family. A lack of economic capital means that some graduates will not be able to afford to work in different geographical locations.

Conclusion

Research gaps

After the observations in the previous chapter regarding first destinations, this chapter outlined alternative ways of conceptualising graduate experiences – graduate typologies and the use of longitudinal data. The graduate typologies were helpful in understanding the types of roles that graduates undertake as well as their labour market orientations. The longitudinal data, particularly the Future Track survey, is wide ranging and offers a cohesive view of the graduate experience. It confirms the need to concentrate on graduates from a wider viewpoint than just first destinations. Evidence that pre-entry factors continue to influence longer term trajectories is noticeable. Accordingly, one of the aims of the study will be to see if these pre-entry factors affect the long term trajectories of a regional cohort of graduates.

The final section provided a comprehensive overview of how graduates access opportunities. These methods will be analysed in further detail in the findings chapter, but what is immediately apparent is that whilst there are numerous studies of how graduates access employment opportunities, the same cannot be said for

understanding how they access information about postgraduate study. As Wakeling and Kyriacou (2010) observes, postgraduate study is a relatively new interest in widening participation discussions and this may explain the dearth of studies. Or a simple, but unexplored explanation may be that typical postgraduates (those from economically advantaged backgrounds) are less likely to require information relating to advanced study. These and other issues will form a major part of Chapter Six.

CHAPTER FOUR. METHODS.

Introduction

The previous chapters outlined four key themes relating to HE: access and success; first destinations; trajectories and access to opportunities. The impact of the institution attended, subject studied and socio-economic characteristics were discussed with reference to the theoretical concepts of Pierre Bourdieu, leading to the conclusion that there is a need to understand how these factors interact in a regional setting. This chapter explains the rationale for the research design of this study and documents the procedures adopted.

Objectives

Chapter one highlighted that the aim of this research was to contribute to the study of students and graduates in a regional context. Following on from the literature review which highlighted a number of research gaps relating to access; success; beyond graduation and access to opportunities, I decided to focus on the following objectives:

- a) to use existing data to establish the relevance of students access to and experience of HE for post graduation destinations
- b) to collect and analyse primary data on the destinations of graduates from a specific region
- c) to develop a typology of post graduation trajectories beyond first destinations
- d) to critique the literature on how graduates access post graduation opportunities, using primary data from my study.

Location and scope of the study

The region

Consistent with Miles and Huberman (1994) in *Qualitative Data Analysis*, who encourage the researcher to consider feasibility in terms of practical issues I chose North Wales as the foci for this study due to accessibility. Figure 1 shows how North Wales relates to the rest of Wales and the North West of England. Three million people - approx 1 in 20 of the UK population - live in Wales and one-third of that number (687,937) lived in North Wales (ONS, 2012). The Wales Spatial Plan - *People, Places, Futures* - originally adopted by the National Assembly for Wales in November 2004, identifies six sub-regions in Wales, two of which are in North Wales (Welsh Assembly Government, 2010).

Figure 1: Map of North Wales



Source: www.gires.org.uk

North East Wales comprises of three local authorities: Denbighshire; Flintshire; and Wrexham which are characterised by some of the highest employment rates in Wales, the lowest economic inactivity rates, and comparatively high levels of manufacturing employment. North East Wales is a mixture of urban and industrial areas at the English border, the coastal belt in the North of the area, and rural areas to the South and West. A population of over 490,000 people the sub region has the second lowest percentage of population aged 16 to 64 with degree level or above qualifications but also the lowest percentage with no qualifications (ibid). In comparison, **North West Wales** is a predominantly rural area, interspersed with coastal settlements and a cluster of larger towns located either side of the Menai Strait. As of 2009, the area had a population of almost 300,000 people, 22 percent of whom were aged 65 and over. The area is made up of three local authorities: Isle of Anglesey; Gwynedd; and Conwy and is characterised by the highest proportions of all employees in businesses related to the accommodation and food sectors and the private sector health and education sectors (ibid).. Use of the Welsh language across Wales is at its highest in North West Wales, with over half of the population in Gwynedd and Isle of Anglesey speaking Welsh, and one quarter in Conwy (ibid).

The Institutions

Research by Purcell, Elias and Atfield (2009) and others suggests there is an institutional effect as they found that graduates from elite institutions or universities that

are part of mission groups⁴⁴ e.g. Russell Group, Million + and 1994 Group, are proportionally more likely to have the more 'successful' outcomes. It would have been interesting to test this proposition in a regional context, but North Wales does not currently have an elite or a Russell Group institution. The decision was then taken to concentrate on graduates from a traditional university^{45 4647}. Thus as Bangor University, (BU) is the only traditional higher education institution in the region, the first institution to be chosen to be included in the study was Bangor University, (BU). I also wanted to include BU as it the host institution for this research project.

Resulting from recommendations of the Aberdare Report of 1881 for the foundation of university colleges in North and South Wales, the University College of North Wales was opened in 1884. According to the authoritative account by Roberts (2009) *Bangor University 1884 – 2009*, the case for Bangor being chosen as the site for the institution over other areas such as Rhyl, Denbigh and Conwy was strengthened by the idealism demonstrated by local tradesmen who donated money towards the creation of a university. Originally founded as a constituent college of the federal University of Wales, the University College of North Wales opened in 1884 with 58 students and 10 members of academic staff. In 2007, the University received its own taught and research degree-awarding powers and 'university title' (as 'Bangor University') following a 2007 QAA review (QAA, 2012). By 2013 Bangor University had over 11,000 students and 2,000 members of staff - two thirds of whom are working full time (Bangor University, 2013). The organisational structure of the institution – it currently has 23 Academic Schools which are grouped into five Colleges – points to BU being a *traditional university*. The demographics of the student cohort suggests this status as full time study forms the majority, and one in five students are from outside the UK.

⁴⁴ An association of universities with, roughly speaking, the same origins, ethos and ambitions.

⁴⁵ Statistical data for each institution is in the appendix. This data is incomplete as detailed data regarding institutions and staff was not available online. For data protection reasons this data was not available from the institution. A bespoke data request, from HESA, provided details of students, qualifiers and graduates from three of the specific institutions (BU, GU AND OU) and subjects (Business, Engineering and Social studies), but this will form part of the findings and will be discussed in Chapter five.

⁴⁶ The following descriptions of the institutions are based on a number of sources: their website; online and paper prospectuses; various university and course review websites e.g. The Good University Guide, and finally the QAA. These sources were chosen as I wanted to discuss the various institutions from the point of view of the student e.g. consulting sources that students would have access too. Near the end of the writing up stage I came across a journal article by Graham (2013) Discourses of widening participation in the prospectus documents and websites of six English higher education institutions. This was particularly helpful in terms of validating my choice to concentrate on university prospectuses and websites as the article suggested that they were the first point of contact for students and necessary in trying to understand the nature of the messages being communicated to prospective students by the different HEIs in the context of the changing policy landscape

⁴⁷ This research evaluated websites and prospectuses available in 2007 and 2011 so as to understand if any changes were visible in how WP policies were being communicated. This is something I would have done if I had not been so close to the end of the writing up stage.

There is also a small percentage recruited from private schools (Complete University Guide, 2012a).

In line with other traditional institutions, BU's online presence and its prospectus not only promote the institution but have a level of transparency that is notably absent from the other three institutions e.g. contact details and research profiles of individual members of staff, as well as specific policies and programmes. Further indicators of the status of BU as a traditional institution include a 2012 review by the UK Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) which resulted in the highest possible endorsement of the University's academic standards (Bangor University, 2013). The report concluded: *Confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards* (QAA, 2012). In addition to this, a 2008 Research Assessment Exercise, conducted every five years, confirmed Bangor as having conducted world-leading research in all of its 19 assessed subject areas, with nearly 50 percent given the top grading of 3* and 4*; 'areas of particular excellence' including accounting & finance which was rated as the best for research in the UK, and electronic engineering which was rated second in the UK (Bangor, 2013).

When deciding on a suitable FE college delivering HE courses, there were eight institutions to choose from. After reviewing each institution I decided to concentrate on one of the larger colleges – as opposed to a subsidiary college – in order to represent a large part of North Wales. Coleg Llandrillo Cymru⁴⁸ was decided upon as its catchment area lies between BU and GU. Once a small catering college with a single campus, Llandrillo Technical College was opened in 1965. The word technical was later removed from the name in response to the college's shift towards teaching HE as well as vocational subjects. CL formally merged with Coleg Meirion-Dwyfor in 2010 to become Grŵp Llandrillo Menai. The merger created Wales' largest further education institution and one of the largest FE college groups in the UK (The Independent, 2013). This FE college delivering HE, has over 20,000 students, 1,000 of whom are enrolled on a HE programme (Ibid). This includes the option to study for an Honours Degree, Foundation Degree or Higher National qualification, either full-time or part-time. The

⁴⁸ Coleg Menai was the other large college that could have been chosen, however as this institution is mainly based in Bangor I felt that this would lead to too much emphasis on graduates from North West Wales. Since the fieldwork was carried out the two colleges have merged into the Grŵp Llandrillo Menai.

University level qualifications are awarded by Bangor University or Glyndŵr University. CL, like other FE Colleges that deliver HE, is weighted towards part-time students. Campbell (2000) also suggests that the profile of students tends to be those who are local, employed, studying vocational as opposed to academic programmes, career focused and sensitive to the cost of study.

Since the aforementioned merger I noted greater detail posted online relating to specific institutional policies. For instance its Annual report and Welsh language scheme, as well as information on specific staff. However this and the aforementioned information is not as detailed as that provided by BU. The organisation of CL, like other FE colleges that deliver HE, is different to that which is observed at BU as the divisional structure and titles of senior staff indicate a different style of governance with less emphasis on academic autonomy. CL also promotes its links with local employers, its capacity to build confidence and provide vital employability skills (Coleg Llandrillo Cymru, 2010). Promotional material also notes that the institution is only one of only three UK Centres to hold Centre of Excellence status for autotronics (The Independent, 2013) and it has been praised for its exemplary practice in supporting access to further education and employment for disengaged adults (Coleg Llandrillo Cymru, 2010).

I also wanted to include graduates from a post 1992 institution, so I included Glyndŵr University (GU) in the study. This, along with Bangor University, represented both 'parts' of North Wales – the North West (BU) and North East (GU) respectively. Wrexham School of Science and Arts was formed in 1887. In 1975, three local colleges merged to form the North-East Wales Institute of Higher Education (NEWI). NEWI was then granted taught-degree awarding powers in July 2008. Glyndŵr today hosts almost 10,000 students and just over 700 employees, with there being close to a 50/50 split between those studying and working full and part time. GU is generally regarded as being a post 1992 institution. Like many other former polytechnics and institutes of higher education, they gained their university status after 1992. The student cohort of GU is similar to that of CL in terms of the proportion of local students who are undertaking vocational courses, but there also appears to be some similarity with BU as there is an even gender split and there are larger numbers of international students (The Complete University Guide, 2012b).

There are, like CL, 'course areas' as opposed to specific departments or schools - 15 offering undergraduate study and 11 course areas in postgraduate study. GU's institutional self-image as presented via the website and prospectus is broadly similar to BU's except that GU differs from both BU and CL in placing heavy emphasis on employability programmes: for instance, a new Employability Work Placement Scheme which allows graduates to earn more than £2,000 while they study. Whilst CL does discuss employability there is more detailed information available to GU students. When compared to BU there is some reference to the research profile of the institution and its support for local, regional economic and social development, but a relative lack of focus on individual members of staff (Glyndwr University, 2010b).

Finally, the distance learning Open University (OU) in Wales was included as OU support staff confirmed that its students/graduates were situated across the breadth of North Wales. The Open University (OU) was established by charter on 23 April 1969, with its first students enrolling in 1971 (OU, 2010). Since then, it has become the UK's largest university, and the only UK university dedicated to distance learning. The Open University in Wales is part of the wider UK Open University and is now, since the 'demise' of the federal university of Wales, the only 'all Wales' higher education institution. The OU in Wales has a student population of 8,000, all studying on a part-time basis and 86 percent are mature students (ibid). Over a third of its undergraduate students in Wales join without standard university entry level qualifications, whilst almost a third of students are on low income or are unemployed. The OU offers over 500 courses, emphasising student choice, flexibility, and educational opportunity while suggesting that its range of courses are 'building blocks' in order to develop the student, whether in terms of confidence building or for further study (ibid). The OU, an institution which due to its course flexibility and bursaries stands as the forerunner of widening participation, has long been seen as an institution where non traditional students may be at home. However there are increasing concerns that the student cohort does not reflect the demography of the UK, and that advantaged cohorts are more likely to undertake such study.

The OU emphasises not only employment and career outcomes but also the achievement of 'life goals' through higher education. Thus perhaps it is a university that is most likely to have students who are studying for the love of learning, as distinct from

just career based reasons. The institution promotes its teaching standards, for instance of the 24 subjects assessed by the Quality Assurance Agency, 17 were placed in the top 'Excellent' category. The OU has also been highly ranked for overall satisfaction in all three of the National Student Surveys to date and is one of only two universities in England to have been awarded the leadership of four Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (Complete University Guide, 2012c).

The subject areas

The previous chapter provided evidence within existing literature of the importance of the subject studied for graduate destinations. HESA statistical data from 2009/10 demonstrates that some subjects have very different destinations^{49 50}. Whilst I would have welcomed the opportunity to conduct a study that attempted to understand the outcomes of graduates from all subject areas, there was an early acknowledgment that this would render the study unmanageable - especially as the institutional context is also part of the research. I decided to consider the outcomes of graduates from a smaller selection of subjects. In contrast to Brennan, Williams and Blaskó (2003) who concentrated on the outcomes of graduates with similar career paths, I decided to evaluate graduates from subjects that might be associated with very different trajectories. Table 2 outlines HESA statistical data relating to enrolments in 2011/12 of the three subjects areas that will be the focus of this study. All subject areas are of sufficient size for statistical comparisons to be meaningful.

Table 2: Higher Education enrolments at Welsh HEIs by subject, level and mode of study 2011/12

	BUSINESS	ENGINEERING	SOCIAL STUDIES
Total Undergraduate	12,495	8,095	7,850
Full-time students	10,130	5,560	6,040
Part-time students	2,365	2,535	1,810

Source: Stats Wales (2013).

The first subject chosen was business and administrative studies. This was because it is a vocational degree that is often described as being highly transferable. HESA statistics discussed in the previous chapter showed that business graduates had the same levels of employment and unemployment as those of engineering and

⁴⁹ Detailed HESA subject codes are available from <http://www.hesa.ac.uk/content/view/102/143/1/2/>

⁵⁰ Table 1 in the introduction to this thesis (Chapter One) provides a summary of the subject categories adopted by HESA.

technology, but at 93 percent, had the highest combined levels of graduates from all three subjects who were in forms of employment, or further study (HESA, 2013). Amongst the three subjects this had the highest number of students enrolled in Wales in 2011/12. Appendix A outlines the degree courses that come under this subject classification for each institution.

Analysis of the prospectus and websites for each institution is useful in attempting to understand how the institution wishes to be seen. I observed differences and similarities in the discourse used by each institution when discussing a business degree. Bangor Business School stressed their academic credentials (it had been rated no.1 in the 2008 RAE for the quality of research conducted by staff in the field of Accounting and Finance) (Bangor University, 2011a) and their national and European focus - they are a '*Centre of Specialised Excellence*'. In contrast, the emphasis at Glyndwr University was their links with local and national businesses with their promotional material noting that they '*recognised the requirements of organisations in the modern business environment*' (Glyndwr University, 2011a). Academic credentials were stressed, but to a lesser degree when compared with BU. Coleg Llandrillo had a decidedly local only approach, promoting their courses as being designed to meet the needs of students (obtaining employment) and organisations (gaining suitably trained staff) (Coleg Llandrillo, 2011a). Finally, the focus at OU was firmly on accessibility and flexibility (OU, 2011a). However, like Bangor University, they also pointed to employability credentials of their degree programmes, noting that three quarters of FTSE 100 companies sponsor, or have sponsored OU students. The *practicality* of a business degree was emphasised by all.

The economic recession, which served as a backdrop to this study, not only influenced the graduate labour market, but also HE funding regimes. Successive British Governments have been keen to increase the number of STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) students at British universities. Recent reforms to higher education made this more apparent as public funding for STEM subjects was protected. Interest in focusing on engineering and technology was piqued as First Destination statistics suggested that engineering and technology graduates were in the top half of subjects who had higher than average levels of return from their degree as 88 percent were in employment or further study six months after graduation (HESA,

2011). Appendix B outlines the degree courses relating to engineering from each institution.

Utility was a theme that I observed over and over again in the promotional material, but I noted the term was used in a different way for each institution. Coleg Llandrillo had a similar approach to how they promoted business studies as they emphasized their excellent training facilities and their links with Sector Skills Councils, industry and local employers (Coleg Llandrillo, 2011b), whereas Bangor University focused on promoting the usefulness of their academic credentials e.g. highlighting that electronic engineering at Bangor was placed second in the 2008 RAE (Bangor University, 2011b). Similarly, Glyndwr University also stress the utility of their degree in engineering as contributing to calls (from industry or government – it is not made clear) for highly qualified and skilled electronic and electrical engineers (Glyndwr University, 2011b). There is less stress on academic excellence, but more of an update of the approach taken by Coleg Llandrillo. OU had a similar approach to GU in so far as that the qualifications were described as enabling graduates to explore how to design, engineer and manage for a vast variety of national and international employers (OU, 2011b).

I chose to concentrate on social studies due to my own BA experience and familiarity with this subject, which I also felt might facilitate my access to research respondents. The literature review highlighted further reasons for the choice as HESA data from 2011/12 showed this subject had slightly lower levels, when compared to engineering, of graduates in either employment or further study six months after graduation. I also observed that social studies may provide a useful comparison against subjects such as engineering. Degrees in the latter, and other similar disciplines, lead to professional accreditation, whilst the occupational pathways for social studies graduates are less clear. Appendix C outlines the social studies degree courses available for students from each of the four North Wales institutions⁵¹

The discursive emphasis in the promotional material of the target institutions is that social studies is a research led, evidence based discipline. The usefulness of the discipline is emphasized, but in a broader, more flexible way when compared with

⁵¹ The list is not exhaustive, however there is a link provided for each institution that gives an outline of the full range of courses available in this subject area.

engineering and technology. For instance the utility of a social studies degree is discussed in relation to its ability to provide answers to the social concerns of the day e.g. crime and deviance, social class, globalization, health and illness, and welfare systems in a practical real life setting. Flexibility of the subject is an additional focus in the literature of all institutions. Whilst GU and CL emphasize the flexibility of the degree subject in terms of gaining employment with large regional employers (Coleg Llandrillo, 2011cb and Glyndwr University, 2011c), BU has a twin emphasis on further study and employment (Bangor University, 2011c), with OU stressing the ability to learn for learning's sake, or to achieve possible promotions with existing employers (OU, 2011c).

Research Design

Research questions

In light of the discussion relating to the regional, institutional and subject context the following research questions were developed. These research questions should also be understood in terms of the central themes highlighted in the previous chapter and referred to in the introduction to this chapter. The objective to understand how students access and experience higher education led to the following research question:

How do engineering and technology; social studies and business and administration students from individual institutions in North Wales access and experience higher education?

The objective to understand the destinations of graduates led to the following:

- *What are the destinations of engineering and technology; social studies and business and administration graduates in North Wales, six months after graduation?*
- *What influence do socio-economic characteristics have on these destinations?*
- *How do these destinations compare with the destinations of graduates from England and Wales?*

As will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6, the objective to extend the study of graduates beyond first destinations, led to the following research questions:

- *What are the trajectories of engineering and technology; social studies and business and administration graduates from institutions in North Wales?*

- *What influence do socio-economic characteristics have on these trajectories?*

Finally, following on from the aim to understand how graduates access post graduation opportunities, the following question was formulated:

- *Which methods do graduates from North Wales use to access post graduation opportunities?*

Philosophical assumptions

This thesis, like much contemporary scholarship in the field of HE and employment, is informed by a broadly realist position. As highlighted in the introduction I also draw upon feminist perspectives, in particular, feminist standpoint theories. There is no one feminist perspective, and hence no one feminist methodology. 'What one means by feminist methodology depends in part on which authors one takes as examples' (Ramazanoglu, 1992: 208). Thus it is important to recognise that there are divisions *within* and *between* feminism approaches to research methods, as well as the differences between feminist and non-feminist researchers. The distinction between feminist and non feminist perspectives to research is relatively clear cut as feminist researchers have overall criticised non feminist, mainly overly quantitative positivistic methods for ignoring the experiences of females (see Oakely, 1974) and for generalising findings from research on men, to the experiences of women (see Stanley and Wise (1993) and Westmarland (2001). Ironically, criticisms of 'male stream' theories that excluded women sometimes led to feminist perspectives that could also marginalize women, albeit inadvertently e.g. the presumption that all feminists were from a specific social and economic background (Doucet and Mauthner, 2006). Despite differences amongst feminist research perspectives, there are some elements that are common to all. This largely pertains to a belief that feminist research should seek to fully consider, and where possible, empower the women involved (De Vault and Gross, 2011). Feminist research has emerged as a legitimate, relevant and popular research perspective as its research methods have produced a significant output, specifically in relation to marginalised groups (Roberts, 1981, cited in Sarantakos, 2005).

In the introduction I alluded to my interest in standpoint theory. According to Wood (2009), individuals hold a standpoint if they can identify the arbitrary and unfair nature of power relations that structure social life; and, are critical of the uneven

consequences of those power relations for members of different groups. As discussed in the introduction I have an interest in challenging the dominant view of NTS. The central thesis of feminist standpoint theory - an extension of standpoint theory - is that: 'those who are subject to structures of domination that marginalize and oppress them may, in fact, have epistemic advantage on a number of crucial dimensions. They may know different things, or know some things better than those who are comparatively privileged (socially), by virtue of what they typically experience and the resources they have for understanding their experience' (Wylie, 2003: 27). Standpoint theory questions the whole notion of objectivity (Harding, 1993). Using the example of contemporary journalism, journalists seek balanced viewpoints, however as they often rely on dualisms to construct their stories, this can lead to oppositional categories e.g. good and evil; right and wrong; male and female (Creedon, 1989). Furthermore this 'objectivity' is often a theoretical ideal, as in practice it is generally based on the 'perspective of those who are mainly white and male' (Creedon, 1989: 15). Applying these factors to a mass system of HE, students are often presented as being either traditional (the Norm) or non traditional (the Other), with the latter appearing to be second best. As the perspective of the traditional student dominates in much of contemporary research on students in HE, the experience of the Other is not considered, except perhaps as a deficit position. As such my intention is to draw upon my epistemic advantage e.g. having been a non traditional, in order to gather, analyse and present data on non traditional students.

Conceptual framework

The introduction noted how three central concepts developed by Pierre Bourdieu (field, habitus and capital) have particular value when attempting to understand how students access and navigate HE and post graduation opportunities. When considering access and attainment, Bourdieu uses the concept of field to describe a social arena, in this case the university, in which people manoeuvre and struggle in pursuit of desirable resources (a degree qualification) (Jenkins, 2002: 84). As noted previously, a degree qualification is often more desirable depending on the institution in which it is gained e.g. a degree from an Oxbridge has more gravitas compared with the same qualification obtained from a small institution that is unknown outside its locality. There is also a hierarchy among subjects such that a graduate with a medical degree is highly

unlikely to experience unemployment. An individual's habitus and store of capital helps to explain who is most likely to go on to access and gain these more desirable degrees.

When one considers destinations and trajectories the field in question could be one of many - the labour market; the university (due to postgraduate study); the home (if one is inactive in some form). Whilst the qualification should in practice be enough to give the graduate access to desirable outcomes in the field that they wish to enter, as outlined in the previous chapter, Bourdieu provides evidence that desirable gains from a degree qualification (generally being seen as access to graduate level employment or post graduate study) will more likely to be available to traditional, graduates from established institutions (Bangor University) and from specific subjects (engineering).

As discussed in Chapter Two, access to desirable post graduation opportunities are normally negotiated through '*informal*' methods, e.g. personal contacts such as friends and family. Through these networks, information about upcoming or actual vacancies may be exchanged (Try, 2005). The previous chapter highlighted how traditional graduates are those who are most likely to have the types of social networks that will generate these opportunities, whilst graduates from post 1992 institutions (such as Glyndwr University and Coleg Llandrillo Cymru) more often utilise *formal* methods, e.g. advertisements published in newspapers and, more recently, the Internet. These methods are useful but they do not provide access to privileged information.

Mixed methods

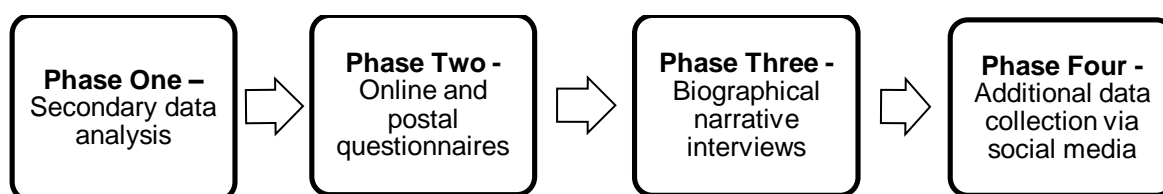
Morse and Niehaus (2009) note when a study has questions that cannot be answered by using a single method, mixed methods should be employed. As individual and aggregate data - both numerical and descriptive - was collected, mixed methods were employed. These are studies that involve 'a series of complete related qualitative and/or quantitative research projects' (Morse and Niehaus, 2009: 13). Mixed methods research is being used increasingly in sociology as it provides more choices, options, and approaches to consider. For this reason, it has emerged as the 'third methodological movement' (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007: 13). Alongside the growth in popularity of this method there has also been much critical analysis of a mixed methods approach (See Greene, 2008 or Plano Clark, and Garrett, 2008 for a detailed discussion). Whilst the above researchers take issue with regards to how to define a

mixed methods study, and procedures for conducting a study, my own concern with utilising this perspective was of a more practical nature. This is succulently summarised in Cresswell (2011): “*Is mixed methods seen as the answer to everything?*” (p269). Whilst my desire in this thesis is to discuss the experiences of graduates from North Wales it is inevitable that there will be some areas that I am unable to collect sufficient data on, i.e. the socio-economic status of graduates from North Wales⁵². So whilst I suggest here that the use of mixed methods will not be able to address everything in relation to post graduation experiences, how much this research approach enables me to collect and analyse suitable data will be a focus of discussion in Chapter Eight, the conclusion.

Overview of the research process

This study utilised a mixed methods approach to gathering both numerical and non-numerical data, see Figure 2. Analysing numerical data in tandem with collecting data via questionnaires, followed by in-depth, semi-structured interviews, allowed the identification of broad trends whilst drawing out details of the lived experience of the graduates.

Figure 2 The research process



Phase one – secondary data analysis

The first phase of the research concentrated on gathering numeric data on a national and institutional level. There are a variety of data sources on graduates – from the Labour Force Survey (LFS), the Annual Population Survey (APS) to the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education Survey and small, institutional studies. This particular research study concentrates on data from Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). The Destinations Survey, officially known as the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education Survey, is an annual survey, produced by the in

⁵² At an early stage of writing this thesis I was informed by HESA that data relating to socio-economic status was unlikely to be available at an institutional level due to my concentration on specific subjects

collaboration with statisticians from the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, the Welsh Government, the Scottish Government and the Department for Employment and Learning Northern Ireland, that all higher education institutions in the UK are required to conduct. All UK and other EU graduates are contacted approximately 6 months after they have graduated to find out what they are doing in terms of work and study. A questionnaire is sent to graduates at their home address, and/or a link to an on-line version emailed, in April or November depending on when they completed their course. Graduates who do not return the postal questionnaire or complete the survey on-line are telephoned for a response (HESA, 2013).

Collection of statistical data

In January 2012 I contacted the HESA Information Provision Service with a bespoke data request relating to the 2004/05 student cohort; the 2007/08 student qualifiers (those who had gained qualifications) and the 2007/08 first destinations. I chose these specific years as these graduates represent those who would be graduating in the midst of the economic recession. I asked for the above data relating to students/graduates from the specific institutions⁵³ and subject areas outlined earlier in this chapter, as well as replica data from England and Wales. Data was also requested on the socio-economic characteristics of students, qualifiers and graduates. The aim with Coleg Llandrillo Cymru was to gain statistical data from the institution. Whilst the response from the institution was encouraging they were unable to provide the required data within the specified time frame (July 2012). Alongside contacting Coleg Llandrillo Cymru for the data, I also contacted the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW). Statistical data was provided in July 2012. However the data provided regarding Coleg Llandrillo Cymru was not as detailed as the HESA data on the other three institutions, for instance there is no subject or demographic breakdown.

Ethical considerations.

HESA ensure that published and released tabulations are designed to prevent the disclosure of personal information about any individual. This strategy involves rounding all numbers to the nearest multiple of 5⁵⁴. In terms of my own ethical procedures, all

⁵³ Except for Coleg Llandrillo Cymru – the reasons for this are discussed in this paragraph

⁵⁴ Further, detailed information about HESA's compliance with the Code of Practice for Official (and National) Statistics, together with copies of statistical policies and reports providing more detail on quality and reliability of HESA statistics can be found at www.hesa.ac.uk/official_statistics

statistical data was kept on a password protected external hard drive, with access only being available to myself.

Data analysis

The HESA and HEFCW data was received in the format of Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. Frequencies were then calculated for descriptive statistical analysis. For each question or variable in the survey, e.g. the number of students from each institution, the numbers of those gaining qualifications etc. The overall percentages, averages, modes and ranges (where applicable) were then compiled in table and/or chart form. These tables and charts form the basis for the discussion in Chapter Five of students, qualifiers and destinations from the specific subject areas and the individual institutions

Phase two - online and postal questionnaires

Questionnaire design

The questionnaire was designed using online software⁵⁵. In designing the questionnaire the key objective was to ensure that the question fields related directly to the aims of the study. The semi structured, self completion questionnaire was piloted in January 2012 with ten graduates (five males and five females) who were selected partly for convenience (the graduates were previously known to the researcher). Whilst all but two graduates were known to myself, they were honest and helpful with their feedback on the questionnaire design. The piloting process identified a number of inconsistencies in the questionnaire that were corrected: for instance, questions relating to students' educational backgrounds (and those of their families) were also found to be imprecise. Re-writing these questions resulted in a clearer, more effective questionnaire⁵⁶

Validity and reliability

Validity in a questionnaire refers to the extent to which the questions provide a true measure of what they are designed to capture. There are many different types of validity in such studies but it was key that questions should be clear and likely to

⁵⁵ I used google docs to both design and host the online questionnaire.

⁵⁶ A copy of the online questionnaire is available online at:

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheet/viewform?usp=drive_web&formkey=dHdyNklFb2Rzb3FGaWw0OWhGai02WVE6MQ#gid=0. This questionnaire is still available online until I officially 'close' the study. I am unable to provide a copy of the 'paper' questionnaire as this was stored on my external hardrive and USB drive which was subsequently damaged beyond repair. Thankfully this did not occur until near the end of this study.

produce accurate, unbiased information. For this study the questionnaire was designed over a six month period, during the literature review process. Similar questionnaires were consulted in order to ensure that the questions I asked were not written in a way that could prejudice the responses. In addition I ensure that any introductory text in the questionnaire was kept as neutral as possible. Throughout this process the questionnaire was tested as I went along. I completed the questionnaire myself – answering as a graduate – I referred the questionnaire to my supervisor, and finally in the pilot stages I asked for feedback.

Ethical considerations.

Following the writing up of the secondary data used throughout the study, ethical approval for primary data collection was applied for in January 2012. After careful examination of the University's Research Ethics Framework, I provided the following outline of my ethical approach (See Appendix D for full version). Copies of the information sheet and consent form are provided in Appendix E and F. Ethical approval was granted in February 2012.

Figure 3 Extract from Ethics application to Bangor College Ethics Committee

- **Participation is voluntary:** respondents are able to **withdraw at any time**. If a respondent does withdraw, **any data** they gave **will** then be **deleted**.
- Any **data** collected will be **stored** on a **password protected laptop** and **external hard drive**. Only my supervisors and I will have access to any data.
- The **data collection instruments** and **consent forms** for the study **will be provided** to respondents in **both Welsh and English**. Respondents will also be offered the choice of being **interviewed in either Welsh or English**.
- Individuals who express a wish to take part in the study will be given a covering letter and an information sheet that explains the purpose of the study and outlines the types of questions they are likely to be asked during the interview/focus group. The information sheet assures the respondent of issues relating to confidentiality, data storage and identification and provides my contact details, as well as those of my two supervisors

Sampling

The sample frame of graduates in North Wales should be understood in terms of the approach taken for each institution. Possible **Bangor University** research participants were selected from data provided by the university Alumni Office. The office was contacted in February 2012 to discuss the possibility of accessing contact details of graduates, who resided in the UK at the time of their study, from the aforementioned subjects (2007/08 cohort). As I am based at Bangor University there was no obstacle to accessing to this data, subject to certain conditions. An Excel sheet was provided that contained name and contact details of the full sample of graduates (249) from the

2007/08 cohort in the target subjects. After the cleaning process e.g. removing any overseas graduates that had accidentally been included in the sample as well as those who did not provide contact details) this target sample size reduced to 206. As Table 4 shows, the majority of graduates, before and after the cleaning process were from Business subject areas. This subject also had the largest percentage removed during the cleaning process, mainly because these students were from outside of the UK, and therefore not part of my sample.

Table 3 Number of Bangor University graduates in each subject area

	BUS	ENG	SOC
Full sample	153	28	68
After cleaning	113	27	66
Difference (%)	26	4	3

There were more male graduates from BU both prior to and after the data cleaning process. The majority of males from BU were from business and administrative Studies, whilst there were similar levels of female BU graduates from social studies and business and administrative Studies. As expected the males from BU accounted for all but two of the Engineering graduates. After receiving the data on possible respondents from Bangor University I then drew up a target for the number of respondents I hoped to gain from each institution (see Table 5). The target sample was based on the size of each institution and numbers of students generally enrolled on each course.

Table 4 Target and actual sample

	BAN			CLC			GLY			OU		
	B	E	S	B	E	S	B	E	S	B	E	S
Target respondents	20	5	15	1	1	3	10	5	15	5	3	8
Actual respondents	12	5	17	0	0	2	9	4	10	3	0	6
Difference %	-40	0	13	-100	-100	-33	-10	-20	-33	40	100	-25

As the above table shows I had an overall target of 40 respondents from Bangor University. My achieved sample was 34 respondents. Whilst I did not achieve the target sample for business graduates from Bangor University, I achieved the required sample from engineering and slightly exceeded the sample target for social studies. The sampling methods for the other institutions required a purposive approach. Coleg Llandrillo Cymru was firstly contacted via telephone in September 2011 in order to identify the correct people to contact. The individual concerned was then contacted via email, which was then followed up by a telephone call to explain the study in further

detail. A follow up email and telephone call was then made in January 2012. In February 2012, after detailed discussions, a Coleg Llandrillo Cymru ethics form was completed and returned to the institution via email. Unfortunately, as the institution was at the same time going through a merger the ethics form had to be re-sent, which I did in June 2012. At the end of June the institution replied to say that data protection policies meant that the institution would be unable to give details of past graduates. I then asked if the institution would mind sending details of my research, on my behalf, to past graduates. This was agreed in July 2012.

Due to the above difficulties in gaining access to graduates via the complete alumni lists from institutions except for Bangor University, I sought to make use of social media tools⁵⁷ such as Facebook, Twitter and Linked In as a method of 'advertising' the study to potential research respondents⁵⁸. As Table 5 shows I managed to gain the views of 2 respondents from CL. Although I did not achieve my target sample of 5 graduates, and was not able to gather respondents from two out of the three subject areas, I was happy that the institution was represented in terms of social studies. Whilst I had no feedback from respondents on where they heard about my study⁵⁹, due to the increased number of followers I had on Twitter I suspect that this was instrumental in gaining research respondents.

The Glyndwr University Alumni office was contacted via telephone in September 2011. The institution provided an email address for further contact. Unfortunately despite a number of telephone calls and emails, there was no response by June 2012. Following consultation with my supervisor a formal letter was sent to the Pro Vice Chancellor in July 2012. Unfortunately, despite this there was no reply. After further consultation with my supervisor I contacted a Bangor University PhD colleague who was also teaching at Glyndwr University to ask if he would mind forwarding details of my study to his contact list. He⁶⁰ agreed and I emailed him details of my study which he then forwarded on to the relevant individuals. Social media was again utilised to ensure that all possible steps had been taken to contact participants from this institution. Table 5 shows that the views of 34 respondents were gathered. I did not manage to gain the

⁵⁷ A later section will discuss the use of social media as a research tool.

⁵⁸ The study was promoted to graduates from Bangor University as well as to graduates from the other institutions

⁵⁹ On reflection I should have included a question on this at the end of my questionnaire. This question has been included on past studies I have conducted that use a variety of methods to find respondents. I would also ensure that I include it in any future studies

⁶⁰ Thanks are extended to Dr Wulf Livingston for his help and kind support

full target sample in each subject. However, apart from social studies the response rate was satisfactory. As before I am unable to say which method has been the most successful way of gaining research respondents, but again I would suspect social media has been the most useful method.

With regard to the approach for Open University in Wales, their alumni office was contacted via email in January 2012. I then followed up this email with a formal letter to the Pro Vice Chancellor in February 2012. Unfortunately I did not receive a reply, thus in September 2012, I decided to contact the institution via telephone. The Alumni Office showed interest in the study, but I was told very quickly that due to data protection issues, the institution would not be able to give me details of their graduates. As with Glyndwr University, I asked the Alumni office if they, on behalf of the institution, would be able to forward details of the study to possible research respondents. This was agreed and said details of the study were promoted to the relevant graduates. As previously discussed I also utilised social media. Following a combination of all the methods I managed to get 9 OU graduates to complete my survey. I was a little disappointed not to gather the views of engineering graduates from OU, but on the whole I was happy with the numbers I gathered as due to it being a distance learning institution I had anticipated that I would have problems gaining access to many respondents.

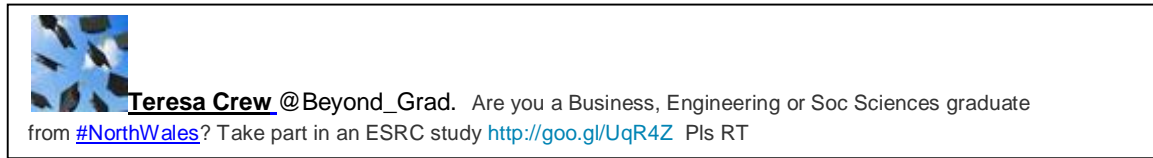
Administering the questionnaire

The amended version of the questionnaire was then administered between June and August 2012. Questionnaires were sent out in two batches. The first concentrated on graduates from Bangor University who had provided an email address (35). A link to the questionnaire and details of the study – all of which were stored in the Google Docs format – was included with the email⁶¹. Any emails that were returned were then included in the next batch of invitations sent out. Following on from this the second batch was sent out by ordinary mail to all those who had included a postal address (173). In this batch a letter, an information sheet about the study as well as the questionnaire were included, as well as a link to the online questionnaire and explanatory material. In August 2012 a second set of emails and letter was sent out to those from Bangor University who had not responded. In addition to this, social

⁶¹ Included in Appendix

media was utilised on a weekly basis to promote details of the study to any potential respondents from the North Wales institutions. Examples of this are presented in Figure 4.

Figure 4 Example of a 'tweet' as a call for respondents, sent from my Twitter account⁶²



Response

A total of sixty eight respondents completed the online or postal questionnaire^{63, 64}. Table 5 discusses the demographics of these respondents in more detail.

Table 5 Details of respondents

(n)	Survey respondents	Interviewees	Social media
<i>Institutional mix</i>			
Bangor University	34	8	5
Coleg Llandrillo	2	5	0
Glyndwr University	23	2	0
Open University Wales	9	0	0
Total	68	15	6 ⁶⁵
<i>Subject mix</i>			
Business	24	7	3
Engineering	9	2	1
Social studies	35	6	2
<i>Gender</i>			
Female	40	6	4
Male	28	9	2
<i>Age</i>			
24 and under	17	3	
25-29	29	6	
30-39	17	6	
40 +	5	0	
<i>Socio-economic class</i>			
I-III	13	4	
IV-VIII	55	11	
			Data on age and socio-economic characteristics of social media graduates was unknown

Half (34) of the survey sample were from Bangor University, the second largest group of responses was from Glyndwr University (23) and the remaining respondents were

⁶² Pls RT (included on the 'tweet') refers to a common way on Twitter of asking individuals to please retweet e.g. please forward this message on to your followers.

⁶³ Seventy nine respondents completed the questionnaire - 10 respondents completed the paper questionnaire and returned it via the self addressed envelope, whilst 69 completed the online survey. Following data cleaning to remove those graduates who had originally been living outside of the six counties of North Wales or whom were from outside the UK, I was left with 68 respondents.

⁶⁴ Four respondents, gathered through social media, gave an address that indicated they were from outside of the UK.

⁶⁵ I also interviewed an engineering respondent via Twitter. This respondent was from outside the UK, and did not attend any of the target institutions. I have included her data as her views offer useful parallels with existing research

from either Open University Wales (9) or Coleg Llandrillo (2). The sample comprised mainly of social studies graduates (35); followed by 24 from business and administration subjects and 9 with an engineering degree. The majority of respondents were female and there were larger numbers of graduates who were aged 25 and over. This varies considerably from HESA statistics on graduates as those aged under 24 tend to form the majority, whilst females are the majority in certain subjects. In terms of institution there was a close to even gender split at OU (5 females and 4 males) and similar gender mixes at Bangor University (15 males and 19 females) and Glyndwr University (9 males and 14 females). There were no male graduates who responded from Coleg Llandrillo. With regards to subject mix there was generally a good gender mix. However I was unable to obtain the views of any engineering graduates at these institutions⁶⁶, nor were there any male social studies graduates at Glyndwr University.

Graduates from Bangor University had a greater age range whilst those from the other institutions showed particular patterns consistent with graduates from these institutions. The two Coleg Llandrillo respondents were in the 21-24 and 25-29 age groups, Glyndwr graduates were generally in the 25-29 or 30-39 age groups, and those from OU were all 40+. Social class showed the most divergence from the typical graduate characteristics as only one quarter were in Groups I-III. Respondents from social classes I-III were mainly from Bangor University or OU and within engineering or business subjects. When asked about their circumstances prior to starting university, one in five were combining work with study⁶⁷, a small number were stay at home parents and one was unemployed. A further respondent gave a variety of answers that included employment and caring responsibilities. The majority of respondents, however, had worked on a full time basis before starting university, either employed in service occupations or were already in graduate level employment.

Data analysis

The online questionnaires were completed through Google docs - this meant that all responses could be downloaded into an Microsoft Excel table. Those returned by post were inputted into the existing Microsoft Excel sheet. As before, for each question or

⁶⁶ Through Social media I made contact with 4 female engineering graduates, however they were all from outside the UK. Three of these graduates completed the survey, whilst one of these three answered further questions. This data will be discuss with caution in a very general way when talking about engineering graduates. However on the whole the experiences of the male only UK respondents will be discussed.

⁶⁷ As discussed on page 1, some respondents were studying for their A-levels prior to university, whilst others were on an Access course.

variable in the survey, e.g. institution, subject, socio-economic data etc, the overall percentages, averages, modes and ranges (where applicable) were compiled in table and/or chart form.

Phase three - biographical narrative interviews

The life story or 'biographical' approach to interviewing is viewed by many oral historians as an effective way of contextualising specific experiences (Perks 1995). This study is focusing on a specific period of time (up to four years after graduation) in the respondent's life, and within a specific context (their experiences in HE and beyond graduation). Commonly, interviewers start by asking a single eliciting question that is designed to encourage the interviewee to tell the story of his or her life or that particular period in time. The purpose of the interviews for this study was to gain a deeper understanding of an individual graduate's habitus, alongside their trajectory since leaving university. Thus the interview usually started with a question relating to the questionnaire they filled in. For instance: *You mentioned that you were born in....would you mind telling me a little about your childhood*"; as well as: *"You have mentioned your parents a few times in relation to your education, would you mind telling me a little more about their attitude towards education"*. Such an approach leads to a chronological interview and helps to ensure that major life phases are not overlooked i.e childhood, getting to university, experiences whilst there, post university, and so on). The interview matrix is included in the Appendix H ⁶⁸.

Pilot interviews

Three pilot interviews were carried out – with two females (one of whom who just fitted the mature student category) and one male. Two were with graduates from Bangor university and one was with a graduate from Glyndwr university. The subjects were business and social sciences. The first pilot interview was conducted with a fellow graduate who I met whilst in university. At the request of the respondent the interview was not recorded, but detailed notes were taken. This first pilot interview was useful to ensure that the process of interviewing went smoothly and that all questions were answered. I then posted details of my study and a call for research respondents on LinkedIn – an online professional networking site – as I wanted to pilot the interview with individuals who were not previously known to me. Two individuals contacted me

⁶⁸ Following the pilot interviews and administering the questionnaires a final interview matrix was compiled. See Appendix H

– one male, one female. The interviews were taped and then transcribed. The pilot interviews were useful as they tested the previously refined interview questions and technique. All three of the above pilot interviews were successful e.g. respondents asked all questions and gave detailed information. They were utilised in the data analysis and should be understood as counting towards the total number of graduates who were interviewed.

Post pilot interviews

Further interviewees were selected from graduates who completed the questionnaire and who selected the box saying they would participate in further parts of the study. They were then contacted and invited to take part in interviews. In total 15 graduates were interviewed. The demographics of this sample differed in one respect from above, as I was able to interview slightly more males. In all but one case interviews were conducted in cafes⁶⁹. This was a purposeful tactic as I had done this in previous research studies to good effect. I have found that interviewing people where they can have something to eat or drink at the same time makes the conversation flow more easily and there are less awkward pauses. When I first met the interviewee, as I have done in previous studies, I would leave them with the details of the study and go and purchase some refreshments. This would give the respondent time to read through the study without them feeling they had to rush to read the information. Invariably, perhaps due to the time they were given to read the specific interview material,⁷⁰ when I asked respondents if they had questions they had very few questions about their role in the research and more of an apparent interest in the study itself. When answering that specific question I would always explain to the interviewees that I was a former Bangor University graduate and that since graduation I had experienced some ups and down in my career – issues that I did not see reported in journal articles or the general media. As a result of these observations I decided to conduct my own research to see if I could further the study of post graduation experiences. If I was interviewing a respondent from OU, Glyndwr University or Coleg Llandrillo I would mention my links with that institution⁷¹ as it was an easy way to build rapport and provide a link to any specific questions on why they decided to attend their institution.

⁶⁹ One interview at the pilot stage was conducted in her place of work – a hotel. However this setting was similar to a café as we went into the tea room.

⁷⁰ See Appendix E for the information sheet given to respondents

⁷¹ I had previously studied at two of the above institutions – Coleg Llandrillo Cymru and OU – I had also considered studying at Glyndwr University prior to entering Bangor University.

Data analysis

Interviews were transcribed into a Microsoft Word document when I returned from the interview. Each document had a number ascribed to it e.g. 001, 002 etc, and the name of the institution. The name of the institution was added so I could keep track with how many had been carried out at each university. My data analysis focused on looking out for information on specific areas in each of the key themes, for instance when one respondent mentioned that his gender had played a part in him gaining a role in the area where he worked as there were fewer men in that occupational area, I recorded his direct quotes, my own observations about what he said under the heading Destinations/Gender. I would continue to do this for each respondent. At the start of the project SPSS and NVivo were used, However, due to the size of the sample, and the volume of data collected, 'manual analysis' e.g inputting data and then searching for specific terms or themes by reading the data on a regular basis was found to be more effective.

Phase Four - Additional data collection through social media and email.

Social media is an important technological trend that has big implications for how researchers (and people in general) communicate and collaborate. This study has utilised social tools for communication and collaboration purposes. For instance Google Docs, an example of a social document, was utilised in the first instance in order to design a questionnaire that respondents would be able to access online. Additionally, details of the study were stored in this format. A link to the questionnaire, as well as details of the study were then available to email to respondents or to promote online. Prior to the study I had used Social networking tools such as LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter and Academia on a personal basis, these were redesigned in order to promote the study; to gain additional research respondents; to provide contact details as well as regular updates of the study. After utilising social networking tools for a few weeks, and following a presentation from the Thesis Whisperer, an academic who works primarily in social media, I observed that many of the individuals who appeared to successfully promote their study, or work had set up a blog. After careful consideration I set up a blog entitled *Beyond Graduation* as a way of disseminating information of my ongoing study. I also promoted my study via articles on online 'blogs' of other organisations such as Go Wales

The final data collection phase was via social media and was in response to the need to collect additional data on two specific themes:

- *How flexible are you [graduates] when looking for post graduation opportunities*⁷²
- *The one word that best describes your post graduation experiences*⁷³

First I contacted graduates whose email address I had access to, and who had responded to the survey. I also posted the above questions on the Bangor University Alumni group as well as the alumni groups for Glyndwr University and OU. Responses from Bangor University were more forthcoming on the LinkedIn groups. Following this I also posted the above questions on additional social media websites such as Facebook' and Twitter. The purpose of using Twitter was to identify if there were any differences between North Wales and other UK graduates. I also used Twitter to promote my study to a wide audience, and also gain research respondents. As a result of these methods I was able to gather the views of 6 additional people via social media⁷⁴. I also gained additional 'followers' on my Twitter account (@Beyond_Grad) I had gained 348 followers (rising from 54 to 402 as of August 2013).

There are both advantages and disadvantages of using social media. The social media for researchers toolkit produced by the International Centre for Guidance Studies (2011) suggests that 'researchers have a huge amount to gain from engaging with social media in various aspects of their work'. Whilst the use of peer-reviewed journals, bibliographic databases and information portals as well as attending academic conferences remain central to academic research, these can lead to a feeling of information overload. The utility of social media is that it can help the researcher both to discover more and to filter more effectively. For instance Twitter makes it possible to follow people who are 'like-minded', thus the content received is more tailored to the needs of the research. Social media is also useful for quick collaboration and dissemination purposes. Whilst releasing findings into the public domain before they are ready may put the ability to publish at risk and potentially provide people with a

⁷² The following blog post was promoted via social media <http://graduatedestinations.wordpress.com/2013/02/14/graduating-in-a-recession-north-wales-graduates-how-flexible-are-you/>

⁷³ The following blog post was promoted via social media <http://graduatedestinations.wordpress.com/2012/12/03/the-one-word-that-describes-your-journey-postgraduation/>

⁷⁴ Interviews with social media respondents ranged from a few comments regarding a question I had posed, to a full conversation, comparable to an interview.

target for criticism, there can be real benefits for researchers who feel able to share ideas and to draw on others for advice. The benefits can include: opportunities to forge new collaborations and benefit from the experience of others; drawing in expertise to help with research processes (use of techniques, methods and analysis); receiving continuous feedback rather than waiting to submit to journals and presenting conference papers; raising the profile of work more rapidly than conventional academic publishing allows (ibid).

However not everyone is positive about social media and it is important to consider some of the main criticisms. Privacy and confidentiality is an issue, particularly for studies that seek to analyse people's behaviour on social media websites, because it is unclear from an ethical point of view whether Facebook, Twitter or other types of postings count as public or private behaviour, and therefore require their authors' consent to be used in research (Philips, 2011). As Christofides (2011) notes 'Technically, the information that you post on Facebook [and associated social media sites] is publicly available. But many people think of these posts as private⁷⁵, and institutional review boards tend to back them up' (cited in ibid). To avoid this problem, many researchers obtain explicit permission from social media members they wish to use in their studies. In light of these observations regarding privacy I would ask social media respondents for permission to use comments they made⁷⁶.

Keen (2007) and Carr (2010) have provided detailed critiques of social media and the ubiquitous use of the Internet. Broadly speaking, their concerns suggest that social media leads to a loss of an authoritative perspective. Whilst traditional publishing provides a filter for quality, social media in contrast allows everyone to publish anything that they have to say. This inevitably means that it is more difficult to identify which contributions are valuable or authoritative (ibid). With this in mind I have attempted to ensure that the online material I have used is valuable in so much that I would not have gained it through 'traditional' measures, and is authoritative due to the specific context or known characteristics of the actor.

Validity and reliability

⁷⁵ Different social networking sites and groups may also have different rules about soliciting research participants. Thus it is best to read the rules for each type of social media.

⁷⁶ This was done by asking the respondent very informally if they minded if I used this data as part of my PhD. I had always explained about my PhD study before hand so that they knew what they were contributing too.

Validity is the criteria for how effective the design is in employing methods of measurement that will capture the data to address the research questions. There are two types of validity: internal, and external. Internal validity is a confirmation of the robustness of the study design. Internal validity can be assured in both qualitative and quantitative studies with pilot testing of the proposed survey instrumentation to assure that the instrument is clear and unambiguous. Pilot testing of instruments is a procedure to enable the researcher to make modifications to an instrument based on results (Golafshani, 2003). As discussed the questionnaire and interviews were piloted. This process identified a number of small inconsistencies relating to the ordering and flow of the questions which were then rectified. I also ensured that the interpretations of the questionnaire and interview data were consistent with what the interviewee said and meant. With regards to the interview I asked follow up questions to ensure what I understood was what the interviewee actually meant e.g. *So you have just talked about your use of the Jobcentre whilst a graduate; am I right in thinking that you do not believe that their current services are useful to a graduate?* These follow up questions were designed to get the respondent to either affirm what they had just said, to correct me, and to give them the chance to explain their response in more detail. External validity is the extent to which the results of the study can reflect similar outcomes elsewhere, and can be generalized to other populations or situations. I believe this study is also highly valid and reliable to the extent that it relates to the types of institutions which are not just unique to North Wales. It is also replicable in principle: my claims can be tested in relation to another region, with the same types of institution, or different institutions or subjects.

Dissemination

If the major purpose of research is to provide empirically based knowledge and to corroborate or disconfirm theories, then the dissemination of research findings is an integral component of the research process. Due to my prior employment of managing or contributing to research studies and community engagement projects a central tenet of my own research process was to, where possible, feedback early findings to those who had contributed to the study and to share them with a wider audience. One method of achieving these aims draws inspiration from a 2012 London School of Economics blog post by Dunleavy and Gilson who they suggest that in research terms *blogging is quite simply, one of the most important things that an academic*

should be doing right now. They support the use of academic blogging because: *It is quick to do in real time; it communicates bottom-line results...yet with due regard to methods issues and quality of evidence. [I]t helps create multi-disciplinary understanding and joining-up of previously siloed knowledge... Academic blogging gets your work and research out to a potentially massive audience at very, very low cost and relative amount of effort* (Dunleavy and Gilson, 2012).

As you cannot predict whether a blog will be read by 1 or 100 people, social tools such as Twitter can become a gateway between your blog and the people you wish to reach (Webber, 2012). Throughout this study I have used Twitter and a Word Press blog (which I promote on my Twitter account). They have been vital for disseminating ongoing findings and will be continued to be utilised as a valuable source. During the writing up stage of this thesis my Twitter and Blog account, was included in [The 101 Twitter accounts every PHD should follow](#). Twitter is especially useful due to its 140 character limit which means that key messages need to be conveyed quickly and concisely. I have also created a number of blog posts that have updated my Twitter followers with where I am with my research. An example of one post is one where I discuss [The methods graduates use to access employment opportunities](#). As of August 2013 this particular blog post has been retweeted on 103 separate occasions since it was written in March 2013. A further post on [The PhD experience and its potential for disadvantage](#) has also been retweeted on 39 occasions^{77 78}. As such my early findings have been seen by a more diverse and wider audience than if I had just relied on the traditional academic conference route.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have explained that the objectives of this study were to understand the experiences of students and graduates in a regional context, evaluate institutional or subject effects and to gain an understanding of how graduates access post graduation opportunities. Details of the regional, subject and institutional context were outlined followed by the research questions that relate to each of the four specific themes of the study⁷⁹. I outlined the methods utilised – secondary data analysis, survey, interviews and social media for additional data collection – and provided a discussion

⁷⁷ <http://graduatedestinations.wordpress.com/2013/06/10/update-of-beyond-graduation-study-the-phd-experience-and-its-potential-for-disadvantage/>

⁷⁸ As of August 2013

⁷⁹ Access and success; First Destinations; Trajectories; and Access to opportunities

of the implications for validity and reliability. Chapter Five will now outline the first set of findings from this study which relates to access and 'success' of graduates in North Wales.

CHAPTER FIVE. FINDINGS: ACCESSING HIGHER EDUCATION AND FIRST DESTINATIONS OF NORTH WALES GRADUATES.

Introduction

The previous chapter outlined the objectives of this study, the central research questions as well as how the study was designed and implemented. The next three chapters will focus on the findings and will present data on student and graduates from North Wales. This chapter focuses on how students access and experience university as well as their early outcomes, post graduation. The chapter is divided into two sections. This first section uses HESA statistical data relating to business, engineering and social studies students from England, Wales and the individual institutions, as well as survey and interview data collected from 68 North Wales respondents in order to discuss their experiences as students. As will be discussed on page 2 of this chapter my sample differs from the typical/student graduate outlined in the HESA statistics.

The second section in this chapter focuses on student success, and utilises a mixture of HESA statistics and the aforementioned primary data collected via the survey and interviews. The final section concentrates on first destinations e.g. the circumstances of graduates 6 months after leaving university. Whilst I collected primary data on North Wales graduates I do not draw upon this data – in the context of graduates - until Chapter 6. Instead I use HESA statistical data: mainly because this is generally the primary data source for discussions on graduates. The section that follows focuses on the first research question:

'How do Engineering and technology; Social studies and Business and administration students from individual institutions in North Wales access and experience higher education?'

Access⁸⁰

According to a bespoke data request from HESA there was a total of 127717 business and administration; engineering and technology; and social studies first degree

⁸⁰ This chapter should be read in consideration of the following information. I made a bespoke data request regarding the 2004/05 cohort of students from the aforementioned subjects, institutions and countries. This cohort was chosen as a typical undergraduate programme lasts for three years. As such the student cohort of 2004/05 was *likely* to go on to be the graduate cohort of 2007/08. I say likely because some students may take longer than three years to gain their degree and a small number will complete in a shorter time. Any discussions on students and graduates using HESA statistical data should keep this in mind.

students in the UK in 2004/05. 83 percent of whom were from England and 6 percent from Wales. Within Wales, 711 students from the aforementioned students, from the individual institutions, enrolled on one of the three courses. In England and Wales the majority were business and administration students (37 percent in England and 42 percent in Wales). On an institutional level, when all three subjects were compared, 52 percent of Bangor University students were studying business and administration, 52 percent of Glyndwr University students were studying engineering and technology and 67 percent of OU students were studying social studies. Table 6 shows the distribution of students from these subjects in further detail.

Table 6 Student cohort 2004/05 from England and Wales and individual institutions

(%)	ENG			WAL			BU			CL	Glyndwr			OU		
	B	E	S	B	E	S	B	E	S		B	E	S	B	E	S
All	47827	22109	36181	2524	1727	1737	122	22	90	⁸¹	68	144	62	44	23	136
Gender																
F	23056	3401	21659	1188	144	994	53	1	66		45	13	47	30	1	100
M	24770	18708	14522	1336	1583	773	69	20	24		23	131	15	14	22	36
Age⁸²																
Up to 24	42070	19318	27095	2203	1461	1408	119	19	72		53	123	27	13	5	36
25-29	2892	1303	2467	135	112	81	5	1	5		5	11	5	27	7	27
30-39	3879	1114	2011	114	112	146	3	0	3		19	5	19	47	8	47
40-49	680	313	2184	55	35	74	4	1	4		10	2	10	22	3	22
50-59	132	50	468	15	6	25	6	0	6		2	2	2	3	0	3
Socio-economic class																
I-III	17170	8739	15859	788	494	754	HESA advised that the data was too small on an institutional level									
IV-VIII	7522			341												
Unknown	23124			1395												

When students from all three subjects were considered in England and Wales there were more male students (55 percent), compared to females (45 percent). At Bangor University 51 percent of students from all three subjects were female; 62 percent of students at Glyndwr University were male and almost two thirds (65 percent) of OU students were female. In terms of subject there were larger numbers of male students from England and Wales in business and engineering⁸³, but more females in social

⁸¹ Late on in this study I was given data relating to the above institution. However despite repeated attempts to have data that reflected the numbers of students who attended this institution on a HE basis the data given was not reliable. As such I have not included this statistical data

⁸² This will not add up to the number above as I have excluded those aged 60-69. I had originally intended to only concentrate on students and graduates aged up to 39, however the ages of students completing my survey went up to 55 so I decided to include statistical data on those aged up to 59.

⁸³ Engineering – 15 percent from England were females, 85 percent males. 8 percent in Wales were females, 92 percent were males. Business – 48 percent in England were females, 52 percent were males. 47 percent in Wales were female, 53 percent were male.

studies⁸⁴. On a subject/institutional level when one considers gender Bangor University had the same pattern as England and Wales (outlined in previous sentence)⁸⁵, but in comparison, there were fewer females in engineering and more in social studies. The subject/institutional mixture at Glyndwr University and OU^{86 87} in terms of gender differed slightly as there were greater numbers of female students in social studies, as well as business. There was less differential in terms of the age of students as in almost all institutions in England and Wales, those aged under 24 accounted for the largest group of students^{88 89}. At OU 35 percent of students in all three subjects were aged 30-39. Comparable with existing HESA statistics on students, Social studies was the subject with the most students aged 25 and over, with Glyndwr University and OU having highest levels (58 and 74 percent respectively). Data on socio-economic class is available only for England and Wales, and as will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter, is unreliable as most were 'unclassified' or 'unknown'. There was little difference in this data except that as, Smith (2008) found, there were more social studies students from social groups IV-VIII.

In terms of my own sample of North Wales graduates, discussed in greater detail in the previous chapter, there were differences. The majority of my sample were from Bangor University (50 percent) or were social studies graduates (50 percent). There were also higher numbers of what would be described as being non traditional graduates e.g. mature graduates (75 percent) and those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds (80 percent)⁹⁰. The composition of my cohort means that I am able to offer a lucid discussion of the experiences of non traditional students, but also to compare their experiences against those students who might be described as being 'traditional' graduates. The following section uses survey and interview data to retrospectively construct the experiences of graduates from North Wales, concentrating on the concept of aspiration and their decision to attend university.

⁸⁴ Social studies – in England 60 percent were females, 40 percent were male. In Wales 57 percent were females, 43 percent were male.

⁸⁵ Engineering – in Bangor University 5 percent females, 95 percent males; Business – 43 percent females, 57 percent males; Social studies – 73 percent female, 27 percent male.

⁸⁶ Engineering - in Glyndwr University 9 percent were female, 91 percent were male; Business - 66 percent were female and 34 percent were male; Social studies – 76 percent were female and 24 percent were male.

⁸⁷ Engineering – at OU 4 percent of students were female, 96 percent were male; Business – 68 percent were female, 32 percent were male; Social studies – 74 percent were female, 26 percent were male.

⁸⁸ 83 percent in England and 85 percent in Wales.

⁸⁹ 90 percent in Bangor University and 74 percent at Glyndwr University.

⁹⁰ As noted throughout this thesis the definition of the term is contested.

Aspiration

Respondents were asked about their early childhood experiences, with a specific focus on the value of education and the varied understanding of aspirations to higher education. The focus on the latter was deemed worthy of further investigation as aspiration is often conceived as being exclusive to affluent households (Bradley, et al. 2008, cited in Bok, 2010). After preliminary warm up questions, the interviews began with the question:

Interviewer: I wonder if you would mind talking to me about your early family life.

I would then prompt to find out how their parents viewed education. In these discussions all but one respondent talked about how their parents stressed the value and importance of education, with the most frequently used example of being required to do their homework before they were allowed to go out and play with friends. In contrast to Reay, Crozier and Clayton (2009) I found that the graduates I interviewed also displayed some evidence of additional educational and cultural practices⁹¹ e.g. out of school activities or private tuition, that are often a precursor to university attendance. The majority of respondents appeared to be involved in an abundance of out-of school activities such as art, dance, music lessons as well as attending the Brownie Girl Scouts. Females were more likely to have suggested that they had been involved in such activities, however two male respondents mentioned that they had attended the Boy Scouts as children. There was a further difference noted in so much that those from advantaged backgrounds tended to continue with these after school activities and clubs into their teenage years. The comment of one interviewee was that her parents did not have the financial resources to pay for all the lessons and clubs that she wanted to attend. The latter is consistent with findings from a report by Hirsch (2007) who summarised the messages from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation Education and Poverty programme and found that children from advantaged backgrounds are more likely, compared to children from disadvantaged households, to experience structured and supervised out-of-school activities on a longer term basis. In further contrast to findings from Reay, Crozier and Clayton, (2009) the vast majority of respondents suggested they received support from their families - either informal (through family members) or on a formal (private tuition) basis⁹². Almost all

⁹¹ Private tuition will be discussed in a later section.

⁹² Their study found that these networks were more likely to be experienced by those from middle class households

interviewees stressed that their family members would help them with their homework, purchase books that matched or sparked their interests and generally encouraging them to learn and not just play out as one respondent suggested. A theme I noted when interviewing students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds was that parents would also ask their friends to help their children. For instance one male respondent, an engineering graduate from Glyndwr University, suggested that whilst his father – a mechanic - provided him with informal knowledge regarding cars, there were also what might be described as informal apprenticeships with his father's work colleagues e.g. he was often required to pick out particular tools, run errands. Whilst these were menial tasks the respondent suggested that he managed to pick up quite a lot of information. It indicates how males can pass on subject specific cultural capital in an informal way. Other parents would also utilise the capital of their friends by suggesting that if they had a question about something that the parent could not answer then they were encouraged to go and ask a particular relative (normally a grandparent), or a neighbour.

Examples of formal support were few, and were mainly found amongst economically advantaged respondents. However there were two instances of respondents from disadvantaged backgrounds who had received outside tuition. One respondent was an only child - perhaps offering some explanation for the availability of financial resources. However there were similarities with the findings from Baker and Brown's 2008 study, which examined aspiration in the rural context. Whilst the respondent in my own study was not from a rural location, both of her parents had grown up in similar circumstances to those described by Baker and Brown (2008) e.g a rural working class family from North Wales. On questioning the respondent further she suggested that for her father in particular, considerable significance was attached to a university education. The family of the other respondent appeared to want to promote their child's cultural capital as they were aware, perhaps through their own store of capital, that excellence in specific subjects were valued commodities.

Respondent 011: "I was given extra tutorial in specific core subjects so I could work towards A grades.

Interviewer: which subjects?

Respondent 011: Maths and Science".

All respondents suggested that their parents emphasised the advantages of gaining an education, but during the interviews I observed parental differences in the way that the need for education was conceptualised. Fathers appeared to view education in the same way that Fazey and Fazey (2002), perceived it, as “*protection from socio-economic disadvantage*” . As one respondent suggested:

Respondent 011: *“My dad seemed to take a different, more tougher view...He wanted me to do a job that required me to use my brain, or noggin as he used to say [laughs]”*.

To “use one’s” brain appeared to be a common thread amongst fathers from skilled trades or manual occupations. As many respondents suggested, their fathers did not want their children to be working in the same types of jobs that they had done themselves.

In comparison, when asked about their mother’s views, most respondents mentioned that their mothers in particular had a genuine love for education. The mothers of respondents appeared to be particularly culturally active in as much that they were always reading, following the news or learning a new hobby. One male respondent suggested that he may have been encouraged [to go to university] by his mother so strongly because she herself had not had the chance to go to university. Halpern (1999) and Putnam (2000) also identify educational achievement as being important, or key to the creation of social capital, and it is examples of this that appeared most when respondents discuss their mother’s influence:

Respondent 011: *“My mother’s view of education was that it was a great equalizer... a way of being anything you wanted to be. My mum always used to stress that, education meant that no matter where you were born or how much money you had if you were educated you had a chance to do whatever you wanted to do”*.

Another respondent explained that from an early age that her mother would read to her and then encourage critical thinking about books by her favourite fiction authors e.g. asking her who were her favourite characters and why, and if and how she thought the book could be improved. Further examples of formal support were found as ten percent of graduates entered university via access programmes. However despite the engagement with access programmes none of these graduates mentioned attending university outreach programmes within their community;

Deterrents to HE participation

Archer and Merrill (2001), who interviewed over a hundred 'working-class' young men and women who had decided not to enter university found that these cohorts often constructed HE as a risky, demanding and costly option. As my focus was on graduates rather than individuals who had decided not to go to university, it was unlikely that I would find a large evidence base regarding concerns about entry into higher education. However, as I interviewed respondents about their family background I hoped that these themes might emerge. I found one respondent whose comments closely matched Archer and Merrill's (2001) findings. On a personal level the respondent suggested that, like many others from a disadvantaged background, she hadn't considered university before.

Respondent 011: Well I did rubbish at school. I was very rebellious; I had problems at home so university was never going to be an option. I was not expected to go to university.

In the interview the respondent went on to say that her parents did not talk about going to university, nor did she consider that it was an option she could consider, as such her decision to go to university was a gradual process. Like many mature students she saw employment, as opposed to education, as the means to advancement.

I worked full time in a number of roles, ending up working in an insurance agents office. After a while I became the manager. I turned a previously 'bad' branch [underperforming branch] into a 'good branch' [well performing branch]. But I felt there was more to life than this [working in this role]. I had children and after a while I started on an access course at Coleg Menai. [interviewers interpretation].

This short extract suggests that whilst the respondent displays the same type of determination, motivation and hard work found amongst working class respondents in Reay, Crozier and Clayton's (2009) study of working class students, the outlet for advancement for this respondent was initially through to be through employment as opposed to gaining higher level qualifications.

When asked why she didn't consider going to university at an earlier age, when she clearly had the capacity to learn, she mentioned the money that it would cost for her to go to university; the income that she would lose by giving up her stable employment, as well as the personal cost to her family. The respondent suggested that support from

her family was not available as her parents were cautious about university; her partner did not want her to go into HE, and her friends' educational experiences did not go further than training courses in a FE college. The respondent was, however, able to draw upon the experiences of a friend as a source of inspiration and I also observed that she, like many non traditional students, displayed what Vermunt (1998) terms as *a strong self-regulation in learning* (cited in Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2009:1108).

Studies such as that by Thomas (2009) suggest that mature students may delay entry to university due to previous (bad) experiences in education or confidence issues. I did not get a sense from the mature students I spoke to that they had experienced a difficult time at school, they just appeared to prefer to enter the labour market. A lack of confidence was mentioned by a small number of female graduates, but this was in relation to how they felt whilst they were in university e.g. taking on assignments, reading academic material, rather than as a potential deterrent to entering university. Research such as that by Hutchings (2003), suggests that some students who are older on entry might envisage that HE as being *not for the likes of us*. I did not find concrete support for this finding either but this is potentially due to the nature of the interviewees e.g. they were graduates as opposed to prospective students. No interviewees mentioned that they felt university was not for them, but like similar WP research, I did note that some mature graduates did not appear to have even considered going onto higher education when they were younger.

The default view regarding non traditional cohorts is that the information needed to enter university is often inaccessible or more complex than that needed by middle class students. Hutchings (2003) for example suggests that they are often less likely to be aware of how to purchase academic books and other materials. As I expected I did not find examples of this amongst my respondents. Indeed, Hutchings (2003) finding is patronising: non traditional students, like other students, are given information by the university regarding specific reading material that is required for the course, the institution's library widely promote their services and lecturers and support staff are more than likely to be on hand to help new students in this manner.

The major deterrent to university that I detected amongst older graduates, supported by evidence from Howieson and Semple (1996), Hutching and Archer (2001), Thomas

(2001) and Pollard et al (2006), was financial concerns, or specifically not knowing how to apply for grants, or other bursaries. Data captured in the survey and interviews shows that students were not always aware of how to access information on the financial support available as this information was easier to access whilst in university as opposed to being outside the institution. For example, a new student explained that whilst this had been the situation when he had considered becoming an undergraduate ten years ago, information on the financial aspects of university were more readily available. Irrespective of their economic background younger students did not mention financial concerns. However comments from a small number of mature graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds, as outlined below, suggested that their parents would not have liked to have relied on forms of student support when going to university

My father would not ask anyone for support, so applying for financial support for a university course when there were jobs out there, would be an unlikely consideration. [Respondent 004]

This comment is consistent with findings from a study by Callender and Kemp (2000) who surveyed students, including those from poorer backgrounds, regarding their income and expenditure. They found that disadvantaged students were least likely to take out loans as they were found to be more debt averse. This also fits with the aforementioned study by Archer and Merrill (2001), who noted that the 'working-class' often perceive HE to be a risky option.

The decision to attend university

As my respondents were graduates I also asked them *Why did you decide to attend university?* Fleming (2010) comments that the decision to attend university is often framed in terms of economic motivations, e.g. educational qualifications can enable one to gain higher level employment or to move away from routine or manual roles. Davies et al (2001) also point to personal development and improvement as important factors for individuals considering university. As individuals have different decision making processes I gave respondents the option to tick more than one answer. Most respondents were influenced by a combination of career and personal development reasons: existing qualifications were inadequate to meet career ambitions, or they wanted to do something different with their life.

Pollard et al's (2008) study noted that the decision to enter HE appeared to vary according to age. Like Pollard et al I found differences among my own respondents. Graduates aged 21-24 gave the most reasons, but they were most likely, compared to other age groups, to suggest that university *seemed like a natural progression*. Those aged 25-29 gave an even split of career based and personal reasons, whilst the 30-39 year olds were either *disillusioned with current career*, or referred to a desire *to be a role model for their children*. As with Pollard et al (2006) I noted little difference when class is considered except that those from higher managerial backgrounds were the most likely to state that university was a *natural progression*. Whilst Pollard et al did not note gender differences I found that female graduates were most likely to suggest they *wanted to be a role model for their children*. Graduates who entered university following an Access course were most likely to cite a combination of three reasons: *existing qualifications were inadequate to meet career ambitions*, *wanting to do something different with life* and *wanting to be a role model for children*. The interviews revealed that younger graduates seemed to have a more natural progression towards attending university, whilst older graduates seemed to have a more hesitant attitude.

As with the study by Reay, David and Ball (2005) a number of graduates in this study, mainly younger or from more advantaged social backgrounds, appeared to engage with university choice with a sense of entitlement - evidenced by those who suggested that university *seemed like a natural progression*. Michie et al (2001) offers a further explanation for this point suggesting that the transition from being at school (or at work or unemployed in the case of those who are older) to being a university student requires a person to recreate their self-identity to include an 'academic self-concept'. The individual needs to feel that he or she is the undergraduate 'type'. This view occurred most frequently amongst younger students, because university was just another educational transition, whilst the 'failure' to develop an academic self-concept was more prevalent amongst older students (see Michie et al, 2001). However, whilst I refer the reader back to the earlier sections where I discuss the financial reasons why some students did not go on to attend university at a younger, more traditional age as opposed to not feeling like they were suitable for academia, I also posit this with the acknowledgment that as my respondents have graduated, the problems or difficulties they may have faced whilst in university may have lessened with the passage of time.

The literature review noted the different reasons individuals may give for choosing HE according to the subject studied. For instance a systematic review by Tripney et al (2010) which evaluated why young people chose STEM subjects suggested this was due to enjoyment of the subject. In comparison, Bennet's (2004) study of business graduates from a post 1992 institution found that they mainly sought financial benefits and research by Surridge and Walton (2007) noted that career motivation was a key factor for social studies students, with personal development being an influential aspect. Amongst my own respondents I found that business graduates were more likely to cite economic reasons, whilst social studies and engineering graduates cited a mixture of both personal and career motivators. When I asked respondents why they chose their particular course 'general interest in course or subject' was the most cited reason for all respondents, followed by 'to help me change job/careers'. In terms of specific subjects, social studies and engineering respondents were more likely to refer to general interest in the subject while the business graduates were also likely to stress that it was to change jobs or careers.

Overall, respondents gave three main reasons for attending their institution: closest institution (geographically); course content and reputation of institution, but geography was the critical factor influencing potential learners' decisions on where to study. This supports the findings from Pollard et al (2008) as well as Reay, David and Ball (2006). When individual institutions were considered, respondents from Bangor University and OU were most likely to say that the reputation of the institution was the main reason why they went there; at Glyndwr University 'course subject' or 'closest institution' was cited, whilst the graduates from Coleg Llandrillo said it was because it was the 'closest institution'. I also found support for findings in research by Reay, David and Ball (2005), as students from occupational classes I-II were most likely, when compared to those from more disadvantaged groups, to show examples of familial habitus in university choice. For example respondents 005, 018 and 020 all provided examples of how their families, who had attended university, were involved in the university choice process. All three respondents explained that they, along with their parents, visited university campuses before choosing which institution to attend. Respondent 005 also mentioned how they and their parents *conducted research into specific institutions* before choosing to attend BU. What is notable is that only graduates from BU referred to the existence of these familial practices.

Attainment

It is accepted that attainment in HE may mean different things according to the agent concerned, but in the UK and most other countries with a renowned HE system it has been understood in terms of whether the student goes on to achieve a degree level qualification. As the aim of this study was not to solely concentrate on employment trajectories it was decided to utilise three separate indicators of student success in higher education:

- *Educational Attainment*: the completion of a degree qualification
- *Academic Achievement*: the degree classification e.g. 1st; 2.1 etc)
- *Personal Development*: development of personal and social skills (adapted from Cuseo, 2005),

This section will draw upon HESA statistical data to outline the numbers of graduates who have gained a degree level qualification as well as the degree classification. However, the section on personal development will utilise comments from the cohort of graduates discussed in the previous section.

Educational Attainment:

Table 7 outlines the numbers of first degree qualifiers⁹³, including those achieving Foundation degrees, in 2007/08 from England and Wales as well as the individual institutions, according to each subject. Data on CLC refers to those gaining Foundation degrees. As the table shows, business graduates formed the majority in England and Wales and at Bangor University; engineering had the highest levels of graduates at Glyndwr University and at OU, the largest group of graduates was from social studies.

Table 7 Student qualifiers 2007/08 according to subject

(n)	England*			Wales*			BU*			CLC**	GU*			OU*		
	B	E	S	B	E	S	B	E	S	S	B	E	S	B	E	S
Quals	37332	16298	27985	2343	1172	1439	157	18	86	53	73	148	55	5	14	38

*HESA bespoke data request 2011 and **HEFCE bespoke data request

When we consider socio-demographic factors^{94 95} such as gender HESA data from the bespoke data request shows that females overall were more likely to gain a social

⁹³ First degree includes first degrees with or without eligibility to register to practice with a health or social care or veterinary statutory regulatory body, first degrees with qualified teacher status (QTS)/registration with the General Teaching Council (GTC), enhanced first degrees, first degrees obtained concurrently with a diploma and intercalated first degrees.

⁹⁴ Institutional data only is discussed here due to the need to keep this section to a manageable length. Bangor University data is similar to English and Welsh data.

⁹⁵ Statistical data was not available relating to qualifiers and socio-economic class.

studies or business degree, whilst males were more likely to gain an engineering degree. However, there were some institutional differences. Whilst up to 90 percent of social studies graduates at Glyndwr University⁹⁶ and Bangor University⁹⁷ were female, the split was more even at OU⁹⁸, where 60 percent of social studies graduates were female⁹⁹. When business studies is considered there is still a gender difference: at Bangor University and Glyndwr University up to 60 percent of graduates were female¹⁰⁰, whilst at OU 80 percent of Business graduates were female¹⁰¹. At OU the number is just 5 graduates.

When age is considered, at Bangor University younger graduates (aged up to 24) were more likely to gain a degree; whilst at Glyndwr University it was those aged 25-29 and at OU those aged 40-49 were most likely to achieve their degree. Combining institution and subject there are further differences. For instance, among those gaining an engineering degree at Bangor University the vast majority were aged 21-24¹⁰²; whilst at Glyndwr University although the majority were aged 21-24 the proportion was lower than at Bangor. At OU the age differences were more pronounced, as there was a greater range of older graduates¹⁰³, with the majority being aged 40-49. There was a smaller age range amongst business studies graduates from OU as 4 were aged 40-49 and one was aged 21-24. At Glyndwr University there was greater age diversity amongst business graduates but those aged under 24 (55) formed the majority¹⁰⁴, whilst at Bangor University almost all business graduates were aged under 24¹⁰⁵. Amongst social studies graduates the youngest age cohort – 24 and under – made up 60 percent of the graduates from Bangor University; 10 percent from Glyndwr University and 3 percent from OU. At OU, almost half of graduates were aged 40-49¹⁰⁶ and at Glyndwr University there were similar numbers across all three age groups

⁹⁶ Glyndwr University Social studies graduate gender split (50 female; n4 male.

⁹⁷ Bangor University social studies graduate gender split n70 female; n16 male.

⁹⁸ OU social studies graduate gender split n23 female n15 male.

⁹⁹ Although it is worthwhile remembering that we are discussing very small numbers at OU.

¹⁰⁰ Bangor University business graduate gender split n46 female; n27 male. Glyndwr University business graduate gender split n83 female; n74 male.

¹⁰¹ Glyndwr University business graduate gender split n4 female; n1 male.

¹⁰² n17 aged 21-24 and n1 aged 40-49.

¹⁰³ 30-39 (4); 40-49 (8) and 50-59 (2).

¹⁰⁴ 25-29 (11); 30-39 (4) and 40-49 (3).

¹⁰⁵ The remaining graduates were aged 25-29 (5) and 30-39 (1).

¹⁰⁶ 16 graduates were aged 40-49, whilst 1 were aged 21-24; 4 were aged 25-29 and 9 were 30-39.

*Academic success*¹⁰⁷

As Table 8 demonstrates, individual institutions compared well against English and Welsh statistics relating to qualifications, in particular BU. On an institutional level BU overall had the highest numbers of graduates with first class honours or upper seconds. For instance, business graduates (mainly) gained upper or lower class honours as did engineering graduates, except from Bangor University where the majority were slightly more likely to have a first class honours degree. In social studies, graduates were most likely to gain a lower class second, except for those from Bangor University.

Table 8 Degree classification of 2007/08 qualifiers from England, Wales and individual institutions

(n)	England*			Wales*			BU*			GU*			OU*		
	B	E	S	B	E	S	B	E	S	B	E	S	B	E	S
First	3378	3375	3007	188	200	127	17	7	12	2	21	2	0	0	7
Upper Second	15464	6356	14372	883	450	680	62	4	45	23	71	23	1	8	12
Lower Second	13698	4354	8623	933	318	532	54	4	27	24	42	24	3	7	14
Third	4073	1390	1793	277	102	98	25	3	3	14	5	14	1	0	5
Unclassified	720	822	191	63	104	2	0	0	0	10	9	0	0	0	0

Source: Bespoke HESA data request

When this data is considered in terms of age and gender there are again similarities in terms of English and Welsh data, particularly when BU is compared. On an institutional level, overall, male graduates in all three subjects and institutions were more likely to gain first class honours degrees but males also had higher levels of unclassified or third class honours. Females were more likely to gain an upper second and males more likely to gain a lower second. Compared with graduates from all three subjects and institutions the HESA data showed that male engineering graduates at Bangor University were most likely to gain a first class honours degree. Graduates from all other subjects were most likely to gain an upper or lower second. The only noted gender difference was that male business graduates from Bangor University were more likely to gain a lower second whilst females were more likely to gain an upper second. Age differences were not noticeable in the HESA data as for all ages, institutions and subjects an upper second or lower second was the most common degree.

¹⁰⁷ Statistical data relating to the degree classification of Coleg Llandrillo Cymru graduates is unavailable.

Personal Development

A study by Fleming (2010), who interviewed mature graduates from three institutions from Northern Ireland, suggested university attendance was linked to a change in the students' sense of themselves and that the increase in their esteem and confidence was striking. Interviews with my respondents supported this as most commented that going to university had been good for their personal development in a number of ways. Almost all suggested that it had raised their confidence. For instance respondent 061 from OU noted how university had given the opportunity *to start afresh and improve my self-worth. Importantly I think I've also made my parents very proud.* Respondent 051 saw their time in HE as an *enabling device* in which they could try and attempt other goals: *I've managed to get my degree, I can do anything!* For other respondents their time at university was the impetus to consider training to be a teacher, for others higher education was the reason why they felt they were capable of trying for a new job, or enrolling on another education course. Other respondents saw their degree qualification as leading to smaller, but just as valuable changes. For example, one respondent discussed how their course had given them the confidence to watch television programmes they might not have considered before, as well as to read books that they had previously felt was too *high brow* [Respondent 037]. This respondent suggested that after university finished she took the time to read *all the classic novels*. A few other respondents who defined themselves as being from a 'working class' background noted that prior to starting university they had never read a broadsheet newspaper, feeling that they would not understand the language used.

Whilst the majority of graduates mentioned that their parent or other family members were proud of their achievement in gaining a degree at university, I observed that five respondents talked of how going to university had been somewhat negative in terms of their personal and working life. For instance these respondents found that family, friends or work colleagues were sometimes dismissive of their achievement at university. Respondent 061 who I mentioned earlier, noted that whilst her parents were very proud she did get the sense from friends, and in particular from her work colleagues that they thought her OU course had been made much easier because she had *studied from home*. *A small number of people in work would mention that my time studying was very cushy because I was sat in the house. It wasn't...I'd have to motivate myself in order to study – perhaps sometimes more often than those who attend a*

bricks and mortar uni. Also I did not just study in the house – we would meet our tutors for tutorials once a month, I would meet fellow students once a fortnight. At first I thought that this was due to the common misconception about OU courses being in some ways ‘easier’ (See footnote¹⁰⁸ for a brief discussion of this uninformed point of view). However, when I looked through responses in the survey alongside interviews I found that the five respondents who suggested that their friends, or those they worked with somewhat downplayed their achievement in gaining a degree, were all from different institutions. I felt that the negative experiences of these graduates may be explained in some part when we consider that the popular perception of the typical student is that they have a party lifestyle. There is also the common perception of universities, highlighted by Chris Woodhead ex- head of the Office for Standards in Education, who pointed to a *"pack 'em in and pile 'em high"* approach in HE (cited in the Guardian, 2003).

Interviews with two respondents also highlighted what may be an issue of particular concern for those from non traditional backgrounds. Most interviewees mentioned that their education had led to them feeling *‘different’*. A study by Field and Morgan-Klein (2013) noted how for NTS, family relations can also be affected by university study, with many students feeling that there is cultural and social distance from their family from their current environment. Other students, particularly females, suggested there had been relationship problems following their time at university (p11). Whilst I am aware of friends in HE who have had relationship problems following their time at university, I did not find evidence of relationship breakdown within my own sample, but then could be due to the research methods used, and the choice of location for interviews¹⁰⁹, as opposed to there being no evidence to support this.

I also found evidence of distance from family members, but it was normally discussed in relatively benign ways, e.g. how since they had gone to university they understood specific terms but friends and family *did not have a clue what they were talking about* [Respondent 011]. Graduates who had parents who had attended university seemed to have little problem with these differences as they noted that their parents, or other family members also *knew things that I don't now* [Respondent 026]. However I noted

¹⁰⁸ This common misconception about OU being an easier degree to gain is often reflected in online message boards for people looking into gaining a degree See discussion here for an example <http://www.wikijob.co.uk/forum/mbas/open-university-mba>

¹⁰⁹ I interviewed graduates in busy café's. Thus they may not have felt comfortable sharing this information in public.

graduates from economically disadvantaged backgrounds appeared to have difficulties with these changes as they appeared to impact on their family life, including social situations. This is also consistent with research by Jetten et al (2009), who conducted a cross-sectional study with secondary-school students (A-level students) from across the UK attending an open day at a relatively high-status university in Britain. They investigated the economic considerations and identity factors affecting students' predicted adjustment to university. Their study found that working-class students at elite universities faced difficulties in their ability to maintain connections to their social background, including family, friends and the wider community. Similarly Respondent 036 told me how she felt 'awkward' when talking to her friends about issues relating to health, social care and housing because she felt that they tended to believe *whatever was in the newspapers*. Throughout our interview she mentioned that she felt frustrated because the only time she heard different opinions about these issues was when she was in university. Whilst not explicitly stating that she felt isolated from her social background after university, she outlined how it was often easier to think about her *new opinions, rather than say them out loud*. Sadly this appears to go against the idea of the university, proposed by Newman (1852: ix) e.g. "to think and to reason and to compare and to discriminate and to analyse". I would concur with Newman's view of HE and also with the aforementioned Jetten et al (2009) who concluded that, in the context of entering university in Britain, individual mobility is more costly for those who have most to gain from such opportunities.

Non traditional students in HE

My data collection with the North Wales sample of graduates did not focus on their experiences in HE, beyond the degree acquisition and classification but I was able to gather some views about their time in HE, in particular the experiences of non traditional students. Existing literature suggests that mature NTS often differ from their younger counterparts, for instance, reporting difficulties in integrating into student life and other campus activities (Graham and Donaldson 1999; Bowl, 2003). An earlier study by Bowl (2001) points to the difficulties experienced by students during the construction of academic assignments, whilst Bamber and Tett (2001), also critical of academic expectations for non traditional students, notes that these cohorts often retain *a distrust of academic language and struggle to master it*. They propose that *texts which are inaccessible to all but the most academically able could set back, rather*

than enhance, intellectual development (cited in Sheeran, Brown and Baker, 2007). An alternative view, proposed by Reay, Crozier and Clayton (2009), who interviewed students at an elite university, suggested that the 'working class' respondents they interviewed were successfully able to *move across two very different fields* (the elite institution and their disadvantaged social field) as they had often felt like a *'fish out of water' among their working-class peer group*. On the positive side, non traditional students report a strong sense of commitment to the goal of obtaining a university degree (Bradley and Cleveland-Innes, 1992).

Data from my sample of North Wales graduates revealed a very different experience to that discussed by Bowl (2003) and Bamber and Tett (2001) and others in the literature review. In my various interviews with non traditional students, from all subjects, and almost all institutions,¹¹⁰ graduates did not speak about their time at university in a negative manner. All indicated that they had relished their studies and had enjoyed writing about a variety of subjects. My research also supported studies by Wilson (1997) and McGivney (2004) who found that NTS are more inclined to take their university work seriously. The graduates I spoke to retrospectively referred to being part of informal study groups, of planning assignments in advance and of consulting lecturers for help where possible. I did not ask my interviewees about their participation in seminars but my own experience of teaching in HE and conversations with lecturers suggests that Roderick et al (1981) assertion that NTS are more likely to ask lecturers questions and contribute in seminars is correct.

In trying to get a complete picture of NTS I asked all interviewees to consider: *Would you still go into university given what you know now about your later experiences?* All were emphatic that they would still go to university irrespective of their eventual outcomes. I questioned graduates further about their experiences whilst in university – mindful of the view that four years after graduation, any negative feelings may have disappeared. All interviewees acknowledged that university was a difficult experience that they had struggled with at times, but respondents suggested that as they worked hard they were able to gain their degree. When I asked respondents their experiences of writing assignments, reading journal articles and books, understanding lectures and contributing in seminars, Respondent 032 pointed out that he got a first so *I must not*

¹¹⁰ I was unable to interview a graduate from Coleg Llandrillo Cymru

have struggled with the academic language that much. Another male graduate stated that he managed to *pass university with a good degree because I crammed hard, worked till I dropped when essays and exams were on* [Respondent 001]. A female mature graduate noted how she was very organised with regards to the reading required for the seminars, and any subsequent assignments: *I would set aside time each day to read for each subject. So for example if I had two lectures that day I would read the set material for both these subjects when I got home* [Respondent 014]. The positive nature of the data collected from my interviewees may suggest that studies which stress how much non traditional students struggle might be focusing on data that is captured from first year undergraduates. I state this because all graduates I spoke too suggested that the difficulties they encountered generally occurred in the first and early part of the second year of their studies. As Respondent 014 also noted: *Yes there were tough times, but I spoke to the lecturers, I asked friends and I read everything I could get my hands on until slowly the information started to seep through.*

My findings are consistent with research by Graham and Donaldson (1999) as young, more traditional graduates talked of greater engagement with the typical student experience e.g. joining clubs and societies. Respondents 001 and 005 saw this an integral part of being in university. It was the first time that they had been away from their family home so they appreciated the chance to 'join in' with student life, suggested Respondent 005. Whilst the mature graduates and interviewees who were first in their family to attend university reported that they did not attend university functions and group meetings, they did socialise a great deal with their fellow students – normally with individuals with similar characteristics. Social activities generally revolved around going to university cafe's and pubs together; meeting up at each other's houses (if they lived close to each other); or sharing a car to get to university. These networks amongst mature graduates, whilst they were students, were a great source of both emotional and study support. Respondent 037 view is typical: *The courses were hard, rigorous, but I met friends here. There was a definite sense of community that kinda held us together. That's what got us through it [university] the camaraderie . . . we all helped each other. One of us would be good at understanding a certain perspective, or a subject better, so they would help, in return, I suppose, for help with another subject.* This example of mutual exchange was generally found amongst mature students, or students who were the first in their family to go to university. I also found

some symmetry with the experience proposed by Reay, Crozier and Clayton (2009) as two graduates (one male, one female, both mature), spoke about how in the third year of their studies they began to understand what was expected of them academically.

I also noted examples of the *life experience* that graduates had. Those interviewed (as well as those who gave detailed survey data) stressed that they came into university with accumulated life experiences. They often referred to having practical but not academic knowledge prior to attending university – or to apply a Bourdieusian analysis, not having the ‘right’ type of capital. To explain further I will use the example of completing assignments. If a NTS is asked to complete an assignment relating to poverty, they may have some practical experience or first hand knowledge to draw on. However, due to their lack of academic capital – that which is expected to be developed through their university experience – and their working class habitus, they might have greater difficulty in applying their academic knowledge. In conversations with a small group of NTS¹¹¹, and from my experiences teaching sociological subjects to students I have noted that those students who tend to achieve high grades in their assignments¹¹² are those who are able to combine both practical and academic knowledge.

A further theme I noted fits in with the above comments, and also draws upon a recent emphasis on the need for additional skills alongside the degree qualification. As discussed in Chapter Three, alongside the changing demographics in HE there has also been a noticeable emphasis on employability e.g. *A set of skills, knowledge and personal attributes that make an individual more likely to secure and be successful in their chosen occupation(s) to the benefit of themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy.* (Yorke, 2009). There have been various criticisms of employability: the amount of employability skills needed is so wide ranging that it can get confusing for a variety of stakeholders; little emphasis on the types of skills that will be useful for specific careers and employability being based on a negative premise (See McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005 for a further discussion).

My own criticism of the literature on employability is based on the observation that the emphasis on the need for employability skills coincided with the onset of new, non

¹¹¹ After completing my data collection I have continued to have conversations with three graduates who took part in my study (one is a friend of mine, the other two are interested in having updates on my research)

¹¹² All three of the individuals I refer to gained a first.

traditional cohorts entering HE. A scan of the literature on this subject area suggests that this is perhaps not accidental, as the graduates who are more likely to be cited as needing 'support' with employability are those who were previously less likely to enter HE. The problem with this approach is that it stigmatises non traditional cohorts as being unemployable, even with a degree. In addition to this, there appears to be an overlap between the employability discourse, and the way in which the long term unemployed are discussed. Evaluating the way that these disparate groups are discussed shows that the emphasis is on the individual and the range of personal attributes impacting on employability e.g. a lack of suitable skills and/or the lack of institutional infrastructure such as suitable childcare in their area, as opposed to external factors e.g. the supply and quality of training and education and the supply of appropriate jobs in the local economy. In addition to this, as discussed in the previous section employability skills appear to be a further example of NTS not having the 'right capital'. Adults, including NTS come to courses with experiences and knowledge in many diverse areas. This is something that needs to be recognised when requiring students and graduates to demonstrate employability skills. The following section will now concentrate on discussing findings relating to first destinations e.g. six months after graduation.

First destinations

The previous section discussed how respondents made the decision to enter higher education and outlined their experiences. In this section I utilise 2007/08 HESA first destinations (FD) data¹¹³ and concentrate on the following research questions:

What are the destinations of engineering and technology; social studies and business and administration graduates in North Wales, six months after graduation?

What influence do socio-economic characteristics have on these destinations?

¹¹³ As discussed in the previous chapter the 2007/08 First Destination Survey (FDS) of full-time undergraduate leavers from UK universities, administered by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) is utilised as is information from a bespoke data request from HESA relating to individual institutions, specific subjects and socio-economic characteristics.. Further to this I also requested similar destinations data from Higher Education Funding Council Wales (HEFCW) in relation to Coleg Llandrillo

How do these destinations compare with the destinations of graduates from England and Wales?

Returning to the HESA data discussed on page 133, that referred to the numbers of students from England and Wales, and individual students in North Wales institutions (from the specific subjects), this section now outlines statistical data regarding graduates. A total of 98585 UK graduates gained a first degree in either engineering, social studies and business and administrative studies subjects during 2007/08: 83 percent (81616) were from England and 5 percent were from Wales (4955)¹¹⁴. The majority of English and Welsh graduates¹¹⁵ were business graduates, followed by social studies and then engineering. On an institutional level a total of 646 graduates gained a first degree in the aforementioned subjects. A slight majority were from Glyndwr University (276), followed by Bangor University (253), whilst almost one in ten (53) gained their degree from OU or from Grŵp Llandrillo Menai¹¹⁶ (53). There were subject differences as at Glyndwr University, graduates with an engineering degree formed the majority¹¹⁷; compared with business graduates at Bangor University¹¹⁸, whereas at OU and Coleg Llandrillo Menai the largest number of graduates¹¹⁹ were from social studies subjects¹²⁰.

Table 9 Destinations of first degree graduates in Business, Engineering and Social studies, from England and Wales and individual institutions, 2007/08

(%)	ENG			WAL			BU			CL	Glyndwr			OU		
	B	E	S	B	E	S	B	E	S	SS	B	E	S	B	E	S
FT	54	59	52	52	58	51	54	71	54	40	40	47	46	67	63	40
PT	8	5	9	8	3	11	6	0	9	0	4	1.5	19	33	0	15
VOL	0.8	0.8	1.8	0.4	0.2	1.5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.9	0	0	5
WFS	10	7	9	14	10	8	20	9	10	19	19	15	20	0	21	25
FS	10	13	15	11	16	17	7	19	13	13	28	28	3	0	5	5
UNP	10	10	8	8	7	7	6	0	11	¹²¹	6	6	11	0	5	0
NA	5	4	5	5	5	4	7	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	5	10

¹¹⁴ Of these, 58581 UK graduates, *responded* to the HESA Destinations survey: 82 percent (47764) were from English institutions and 5 percent (2990) were from Wales.

¹¹⁵ And respondents.

¹¹⁶ I contacted HEFCW for statistics on Grŵp Llandrillo Menai after the institution was not able to send the data that I requested. The dataset from HEFCW comprised of statistics of those who have either gained a degree 21; a non degree 17 and a postgraduate qualification 10. Whilst HEFCW split the data relating to those who had gained a qualification, they did not when outlining destinations of these graduates. As such I took the decision to discuss graduates with all three types of qualifications.

¹¹⁷ And respondents.

¹¹⁸ The largest share of respondents was within social studies.

¹¹⁹ And respondents.

¹²⁰ Glyndwr University had the highest response rates (60 percent), comparable with response rates in England and Wales, however this was likely to be because engineering and technology graduates from Glyndwr University had a response rate of 89 percent. Business graduates from Bangor University were least likely to respond to the HESA Survey.

¹²¹ Any number less than 5 has been suppressed due to data protection.

Key: ENG: England; WAL – Wales; BU – Bangor University; CL – Coleg Llandrillo; GU – Glyndwr University and OU – Open University. B - Business and administrative studies E - Engineering and technology; S - Social studies. FT – Full Time Employment; PT – Part time employment; Voluntary – Voluntary employment; WFS – Work and Further Study; FS – Further Study; UNP – Unemployed and NA Not available for employment¹²². Source: Bespoke data request from HESA 2011

Table 9 above provides an outline of their first destinations. English and Welsh graduates appeared to have similar destinations as just under half were employed and overall, two in ten were in postgraduate study. One difference is that Welsh graduates were slightly more likely to be in postgraduate study when compared to English graduates. This is consistent with English and Welsh statistics overall e.g. non subject specific relating to postgraduate study (HESA, 2009). When analysing the data on an institutional/subject level there were differences and similarities. There were additional variations when destinations were analysed in terms of a combination of institution attended/subject studied. For instance, whilst all OU engineering graduates were employed, as were almost three quarters of graduates from Bangor University, under half of those were from Glyndwr University as they went onto further study. Business graduates from Bangor had varied destinations – represented in all destination categories graduates from Glyndwr University having lower levels of employment, but higher percentages in further study whilst all from OU were all in employment. Social studies graduates from all four institutions had the lowest percentages of graduates in full time employment, the highest in part time and the largest percentages of unemployment. There were some differences when postgraduate study is compared. The majority of social studies graduates from Glyndwr University and OU combined further study with employment, whilst those from Bangor University were slightly more likely to choose further study only. Over half of Coleg Llandrillo graduates were either in full time employment or combining this with further study.

Destinations match the institutional habitus and demonstrate subject capital

Chapter Two noted how university websites and prospectuses stress that subject studied influences graduate outcomes. For instance the destination for business graduates is often promoted as being employment or to start their own business. Opportunities for further study are frequently discussed in terms of social studies graduates, whilst HEI's emphasise the scope that an engineering degree brings. It is perhaps obvious to say that no institutions stress that a likely destination will be

¹²² These are HESA categories. Other is an additional category but it has not been included as the data ranges from 0-2 percent and there are no discernible patterns.

unemployment. However I did observe that social studies departments, as opposed to other subject areas of interest in this study, were more likely to stress the usefulness of voluntary employment. Voluntary employment as a strategy to help to go on to gain full time employment is often promoted by university careers services, and according to one respondent in this study, most recently by job centres.

Overall the subject capital matched as social studies graduates had the highest levels of engagement with employment/further study, voluntary employment and unemployment. These tend to have a higher than average representation in further study/training due to the need for additional vocational qualifications to enter some social professions (e.g. Social Work; Probation and Teaching) (HECSU, 2009). The higher levels of voluntary employment - when compared to other subjects in this study – may also be linked to the need to gain work experience, alongside further qualifications to enter the aforementioned professions. Levels of ‘inactivity’ may be higher for social studies graduates six months after graduation due to the higher numbers of females undertaking this subject. Engineering graduates destinations matched their subject habitus as they had the highest levels of full time employment and good levels of engagement with further study. Chapter Six will evaluate if this is due to the professional career pathway that is available to students of engineering. Business graduates matched their subject habitus in terms of levels of employment, but as the statistical data on self employment was not available¹²³ I was unable to evaluate how many went on to start their own business, however I discuss this in Chapter Six in relation to my sample of graduates. The otherwise varied destinations of business graduates may be because of the vocational nature of their qualification e.g. it is a degree subject that is transferable to a larger number of professions.

However an additional reason for the varied nature of outcomes for business graduates is that this subject, as perhaps social studies, has no obvious career pathway. Such findings, combined with findings from the longitudinal studies discussed in Chapter 3. For instance, Brennan and Shah, 2003, and the Futuretrack studies *Great Expectations?* (1996), *Working Out?* (1999), and *Moving On*, 1999) suggest that the subject studied can indicate not only the first destinations, but also the longer term

¹²³Through an error on my part I did not ask for HESA data on self employment until late on in this study. By this time I was unable to receive it in time to add to this chapter.

trajectory. As will be investigated in the next chapter, data from this chapter, combined with previous studies suggests that engineering graduates typically have a smooth trajectory e.g. graduate employment, opportunities for career advancement and engagement with further study. The studies outlined above suggest that the trajectory of business graduates may continue to be focused on full time employment or self employment – the former being a mixture of graduate and non graduate roles, depending on the opportunities available. There may also be fewer graduates who engage with further study. In comparison social studies graduates are expected to have the highest levels of engagement with further study as their trajectory continues, or as the aforementioned studies suggest, graduate level employment. However, both business and social studies graduates are more likely to have uneven trajectories which indicate non graduate employment; unemployment; combining postgraduate study with non graduate employment roles, and uneven employment that might lead to the decision to become self employed. On a long term basis I would expect that the outcomes for engineering graduates would continue to be concentrated in full time employment, or perhaps further study if one wanted to go further in their career. Social studies graduates, according to various longitudinal studies suggest that there is a mixture of graduates being in either graduate employment, or in roles they could do without a formal degree qualification. I would also expect high levels of postgraduate study as part of a career enhancement strategy. In terms of business graduates I would again expect their outcomes to mainly comprise of employment or self employment.

The literature review discussed the expected destinations according to the institution attended and subject studied. Overall the initial destinations of graduates matched their institutional habitus. According to the HESA data, OU and Coleg Llandrillo graduates were more likely, than graduates from other institutions to either be in employment or further study. As expected there was a small number of graduates from this institution who were now concentrating on their family or caring responsibilities after gaining their degree. However the data shows that there were appreciable levels of unemployment. As numbers are too small to check if this is statistically significant Chapter Six will attempt to illuminate if this is an issue for OU graduates. The levels of full time employment, and in some cases further study, at Coleg Llandrillo can also be understood in relation to the institutional emphasis on employment and training outcomes. The next chapter will attempt to illuminate any similarities or differences

with this statistical data as well as providing an overview of the long term trajectories of graduates from this institution

Overall the evidence of the influence of an institutional habitus of graduates from Bangor University and Glyndwr University was as expected, as in both cases over half of graduates were in full time employment, there were notable levels of postgraduate study and example of other variations of graduate destinations e.g. unemployment. However, missing from this analysis due to the limitations of HESA data is the opportunity to analyse the types of vacancies that these graduates entered: namely, 'are these graduate roles?', and 'are these the employment opportunities that they expected when they entered university?' One point of difference from the expected institutional habitus was the higher levels of graduates from Glyndwr University who went on to post graduate study. Consistent with the emphasis in existing studies regarding the probability in gaining a degree from a traditional – and elite – institution, it would be expected that in the long term that graduates from such universities e.g. Bangor University and OU, would be expected to have a smoother trajectory than those graduates from the post 1992 institution (Glyndwr University), or FE delivering HE (Coleg Llandrillo Cymru). This will be investigated in Chapter Six.

The influence of socio-economic characteristics on destinations¹²⁴

The literature review highlighted that socio-economic factors not only influence institutional choice and subject studied, but it can also have an effect on the post graduation destinations of students. As Figure 5 shows, when HESA (2007/08) statistics on English and Welsh graduates are considered in terms of age¹²⁵, there are close similarities in levels of employment, postgraduate study and inactivity, across most age groups. There is one main difference between the destinations of English and Welsh graduates from all subjects: there were lower levels of employment amongst those aged 21-24, compared to older graduates (those aged 25-29 and 30-39). Younger graduates were more likely to enter postgraduate study because postgraduate qualifications have become a necessary step in a growing number of careers.

¹²⁴ Due to a lack of available data from Gwrp Llandrillo Cymru, socio-economic differences will only be discussed according to graduates from Bangor, Glyndwr and OU.

¹²⁵ In this section I will consider the destinations of graduates aged 21-24; 25-29 and 30-39.

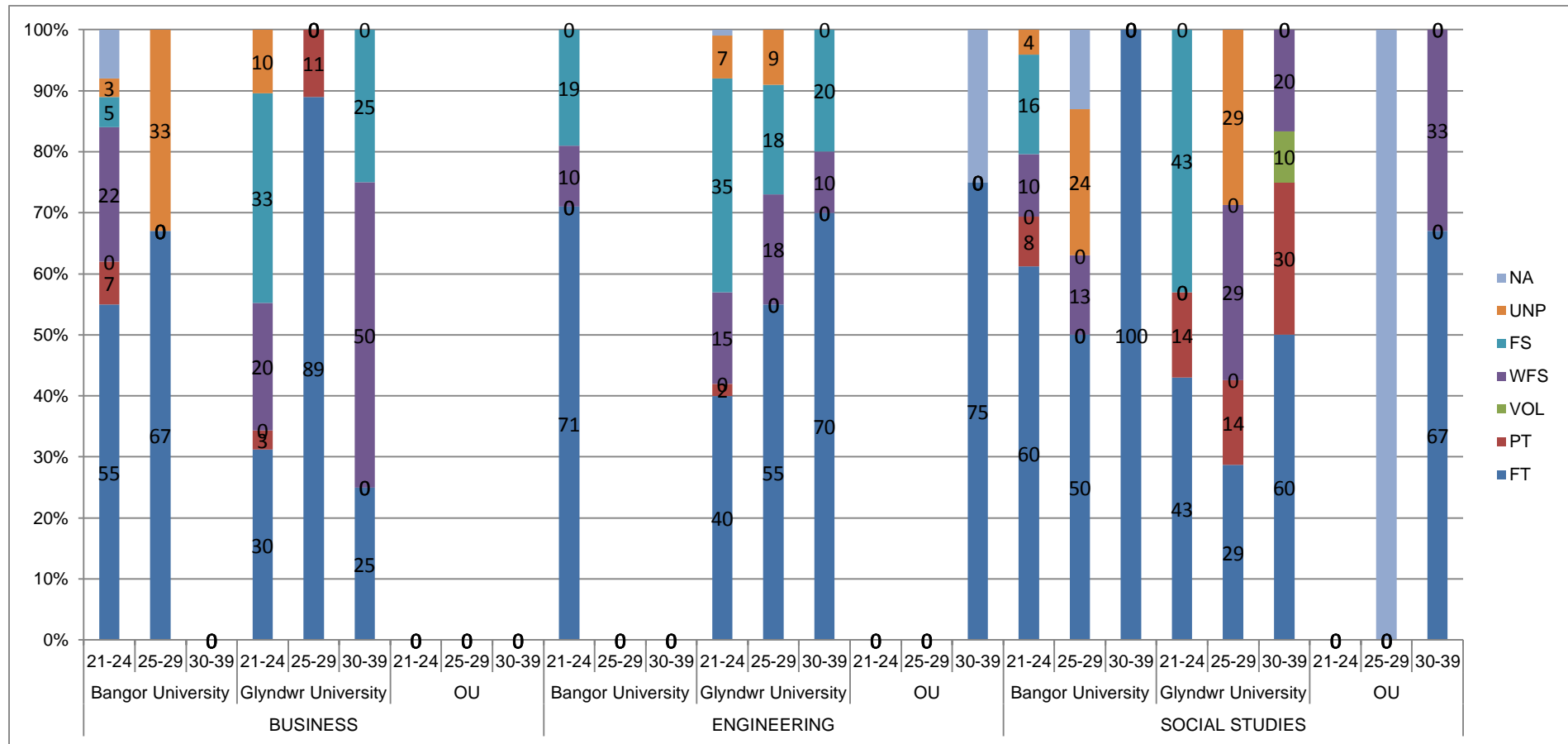
Figure 5 also shows there are more apparent institutional differences¹²⁶. For instance, whilst business graduates aged 21-24 from Bangor University and Glyndwr University¹²⁷ had similar levels of graduates combining work with further study (22 and 20 percent respectively), one third of graduates from Glyndwr were also in further study (compared with only 5 percent from Bangor). OU and Glyndwr University engineering graduates aged 30-39 had similar, high levels of employment (75 and 70 percent respectively), though the remainder of those from OU were unemployed whilst those from Glyndwr were in postgraduate study. At Bangor University half of social studies graduates aged 25-29 were in full time employment, but one third were inactive. At Glyndwr University there was no majority destination whilst at OU, all graduates were not available for employment. The HESA data in Figure 5 support Brennan and Shah (2003) findings that mature graduates were most likely to experience difficulties in the employment market as there are greater levels of unemployment amongst social studies and business graduates aged 25-29. However, in a departure from the aforementioned study, there were also similar levels of unemployment found at the traditional institution (Bangor University). Whilst these are small numbers, Chapter 6, will evaluate if this is an ongoing pattern

Despite a major expansion in student numbers over the last decade, students from disadvantaged backgrounds remain highly under-represented in higher education (HESA, 2009) and more likely to be unemployed, post graduation (Stevenson and Lang, 2010). Figure 6 provides English and Welsh data relating to destinations and social class. In support of findings from Blasko et al (2002) I also found overall there were slightly higher levels of employment and postgraduate study amongst graduates from advantaged social classes, particularly in England. When I evaluated the data from an English/Welsh perspective I found that graduates from Wales were more likely to go into further study if they were from higher managerial backgrounds whilst those from a lower supervisory background were more likely, when compared to other graduates, to be working part time. These differences were small, but could be related to gender and subject choice. As such they would benefit from further investigation.

¹²⁶ As numbers were low, and not all age ranges were represented in each subject and institution it is difficult to say how statistically representative this is.

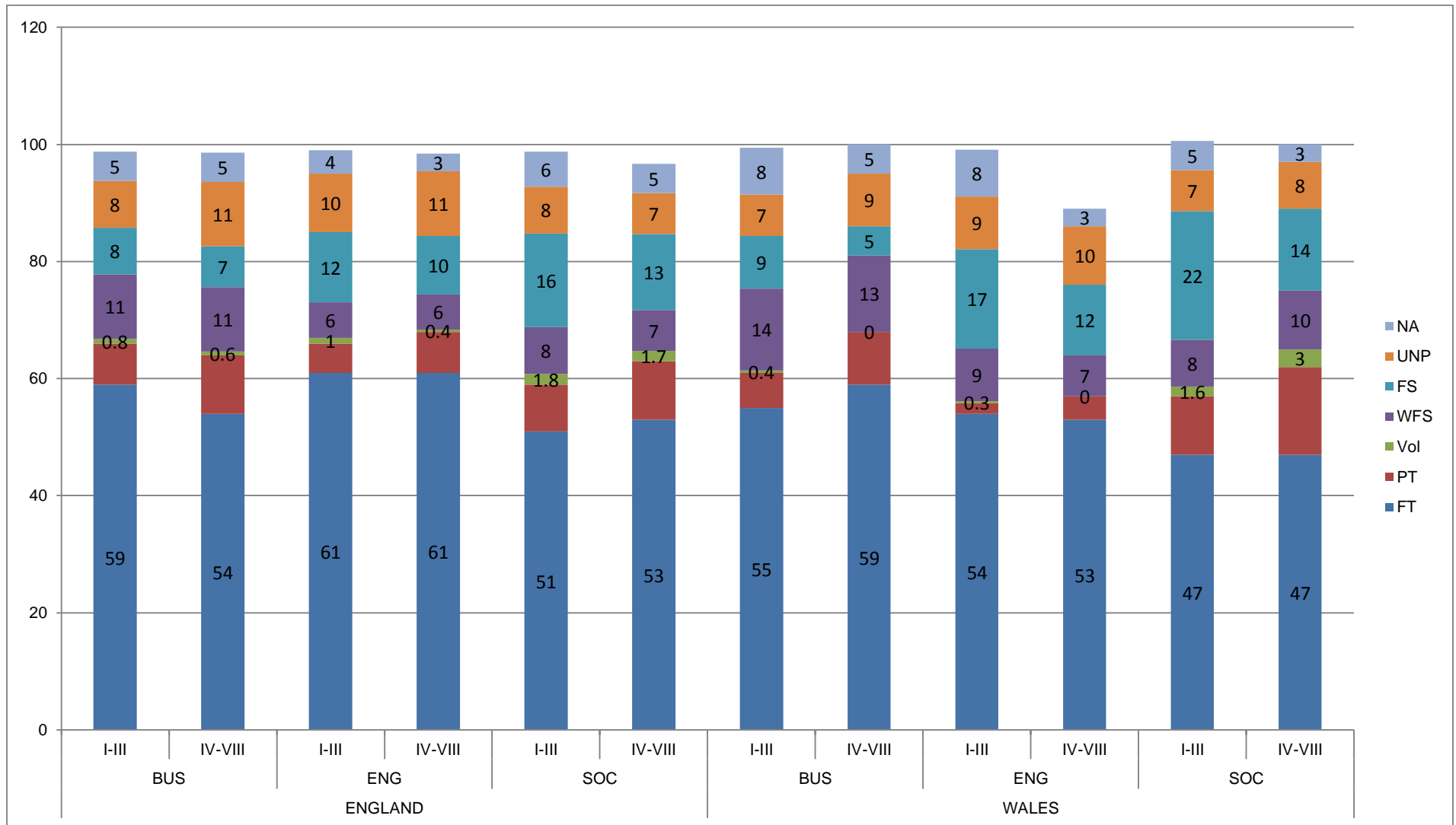
¹²⁷ There were no Business graduates at OU within the following age ranges 21-24; 25-29 and 30-39.

Figure 5 Destinations of first degree graduates in Business, Engineering and Social studies, according to age, 2007/08



Key: FT – Full time employment; PT – Part time employment; Vol – Voluntary/unpaid employment; WFS – Work and Further Study; FS – Further Study; UNP – Unemployment and NA – Not available for employment. Source: Bespoke data request from HESA 2011

Figure 6 Destinations of English and Welsh Business, Engineering and Social studies graduates by soci-economic class, 2007/08



Source: Bespoke data request from HESA 2011

There is often a large proportion of students for whom data on socio-economic 'status', is either missing or unclassifiable (NAO, 2008 cited in *ibid*). Over half of the HESA respondents included in this survey were defined as 'unknown' or 'not classified'. Consistent with Harrison and Hatt (2009), younger students from disadvantaged neighbourhoods and mature students are more likely to have missing social class data. As a result I attempted to collect additional data on background characteristics¹²⁸. The data from my questionnaire will be discussed in the next chapter.

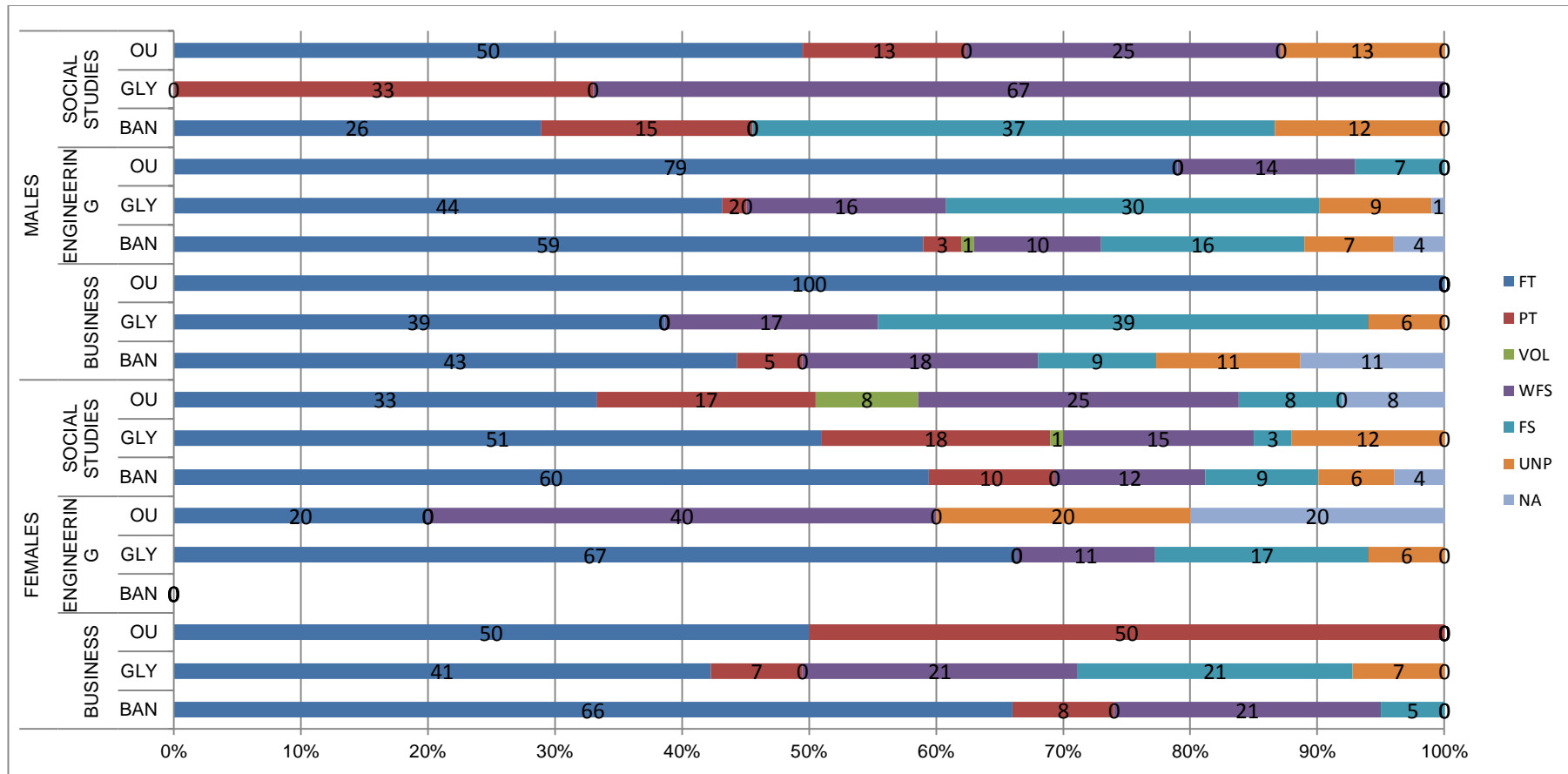
Pronounced gender differences

Whilst there were variations in terms of age and socio-economic class, these were not as pronounced as gender differences. Chapter two highlighted the importance of gender when considering HE outcomes as HESA data has consistently shown that male graduates are more likely to be unemployed six months after leaving university than women (HESA, 2009). I found some evidence of this when analysing the data on English and Welsh graduates: females in all three subjects had higher levels of full time employment whilst males were more likely to go into further study. Females also engaged with postgraduate study, but perhaps due to family responsibilities, they were more likely to do this in combination with employment. There were also an apparent subject difference as there were slightly more male Welsh engineering graduates were in full time employment (59 percent), compared to their female counterparts (49 percent).

In relation to subject and institutional specifics I found that male engineering graduates from Bangor University had the highest proportions of all graduates who went on to full time employment and half of all female business graduates from OU were in part time employment (although this was generally also surprisingly a male outcome as there were higher levels overall found amongst male social studies graduates from BU and GU). Consistent with HESA statistics discussed in the previous section, unemployment was found amongst male graduates from most subjects. However female engineering graduates from OU had the highest levels of all with this being the outcome for one in five, but overall graduates from OU, male and female, were less likely to be unemployed. A report by Oxford Research and Policy (2012) offers some explanation

¹²⁸ This is best highlighted by questions such as *Have you or anyone in your family attended university?*

Figure 7 Destinations of first degree graduates in Business, Engineering and Social studies, according to gender, 2007/08



Key: FT – Full time employment; PT – Part time employment; Vol – Voluntary/unpaid employment; WFS – Work and Further Study; FS – Further Study; UNP – Unemployment and NA – Not available for employment. Source: Bespoke data request from HESA 2011

for gender differences in engineering as it suggests that females are less likely than males to enter engineering careers on graduation, despite many graduating with a first or 2.1. On questioning engineering graduates whether they had the technical skills employers looked for, fewer females than males suggested that they did.

On an institutional level, particularly at BU and GU, females were more likely to combine further study with employment, whilst males were more likely to engage with further study without employment. These differences could be for financial reasons as a research synthesis on postgraduate study by Wakeling and Kyriacou (2010) found that at doctoral level, 45 per cent of full-time male students were research council funded, against 31 per cent of women. However as there is little data published on the distribution of awards between men and women in non-science subjects¹²⁹, this is an area that needs additional statistical data.

The HESA statistics also show that voluntary employment is a route that was pursued by female graduates only. Voluntary employment is not only gender specific, it is only undertaken by female social studies graduates from OU. The gender differences match research by the volunteering website do-it.org.uk who suggested that three quarters of their volunteers are women (Wiggins, 2009). The concentration of volunteering in social studies would need to be investigated further as existing research does not suggest that graduates from this subject are any more likely than other graduates to volunteer. However when one compares the typical student in each subject, social studies is a subject that is more likely to have females, both students and graduates, as opposed to business or engineering. A further reason why this subject may have more volunteers is due to the varied career path that is associated with social studies. On a regional level graduates with this type of degree may be likely to work for local councils and the Welsh Assembly – possibly these are roles that require some prior experience in the field. This will be discussed in the next chapter.

Existing research explains gender differences, post graduation as being linked to a combination of choice of institution, subject and type of employment. For instance,

¹²⁹ I checked the ESRC website to see if this had been updated and came across annual reports that do discuss research funding (See http://www.esrc.ac.uk/_images/ESRC_2012_13_Vital_Statistics_tcm8-29040.pdf). Whilst they do discuss funding in terms of specific research areas, regions and institution, there is no data on socio-economic characteristics. If I had come across this finding early on in the project I would have contacted ESRC to ask if such data was available. Incidentally Wales has the highest success rate of 67 percent in terms of gaining funding, but as a region they had only 'asked' for funding for 9 projects and received it for 6, compared with England's 'ask' rate of 121, on success of 59.

Thompson and Bekhradnia (2009) note that female graduates have low participation rates in STEM subjects as well as Mathematical and Computer Science – all subjects that can yield high salaries. This finding is consistent when we consider that females from all North Wales institutions had low participation rates in Engineering. There is some support in this study for Burke's (2004) comment that females are also more likely to gain their degree from lower-status universities. As discussed earlier in this chapter, up to 90 percent of social studies graduates at Glyndwr University were female, however overall, when all three subjects were considered, there were more male graduates (53/47 percent male/female). Purcell and Elias (2004) suggest that a further explanation maybe that females are more likely to undertake lesser paid, part-time work. There is some support for this assertion amongst the HESA statistical data on the individual institutions. However on a subject level I found greater numbers of males, when compared to female graduates, who worked part time. The above commentary highlights that a deeper understanding of the existence, if any, of gender differences in terms of outcomes is needed.

Conclusion

Observations on using HESA Destinations data to understand graduate destinations

At the start of this chapter I noted that a common criticism made of the use of HESA destinations data is that six months after graduation, the period in which graduates are asked about their circumstances, may be too early in which to evaluate a person's situation post graduation. I concur with this observation as whilst HESA data provides a useful discussion of first experiences after graduation, the main criticism I have regarding this data is that it only provides details of one destination that a graduate may have. Although respondents are able to indicate if they are combining employment with further study, they are not able to provide additional details – for example is this employment part time, full time or even on a voluntary basis? This data may provide valuable information relating to how individual fund their postgraduate studies or if graduates are in employment relating to their postgraduate degree. As well as this HESA data does not allow for concurrent or retrospective destinations. Informal conversations with one graduate in particular during the course of this study highlighted that some graduates may not just have one destination during the first six months. If

the graduate in question had filled in the HESA survey on a particular day they would have been classed as working full time, however, they also had been unemployed prior to that and had worked on a voluntary basis. I also observed that there may be graduates who had multiple destinations concurrently e.g. working full time as their main source of income, but also working on a voluntary basis in order to gain graduate level experience. These observations formed the basis of my decision to design a survey that allowed graduates to record multiple destinations.

A further problem, discussed in Chapter Two, is that existing policy and institutional literature on graduate appears to highlight the ideal destination. Smith, McKnight and Naylor's (2000) paper on graduate employability is a good example of this. Employment, and postgraduate study are cited as 'positive' destinations, whilst unemployment and 'not available for employment' are deemed to be 'negative'. This narrow understanding of postgraduate opportunities not only presumes that unemployment, or even being unavailable for employment is only a negative experience, but presumes that all forms of employment or further study may be a happy or enlightening experience. Often lost amongst the rhetoric on graduate employability is the opinion that destinations data alone can sometimes be insufficient for understanding what happens next for graduates. For instance, how can you evaluate a graduate's destination unless you are aware of the reasons why they went to university? If a graduate enters university for the purpose of higher learning, he/she may be satisfied in a non graduate role as they have achieved their aim of acquiring higher knowledge. However those who have entered HE for purely economic purposes may not see the value of a university education if it does not 'lead to something'. This also presumes that all individuals go to university for one purpose. As discussed in this chapter, students go to university for a variety of reasons. In addition to employment and the quest for higher learning, some individuals go to university to act as a role model for their children or family. Graduate destinations, in my view, are best understood without a pre-determined idea of the 'ideal' destination. In light of these concerns, and the discussion in Chapter Two relating to the concept of destinations, the next chapter will concentrate on providing a discussion of the trajectories or progression of a cohort of graduates from North Wales.

Summary

This chapter has focused on findings relating to access and attainment in university and first destinations beyond graduation. Data on the decision to enter HE shows that whilst there are examples of 'middle class educational practices', graduates from economically disadvantaged backgrounds are still less likely to enter HE when compared to those from more socially mobile households. Also, non traditional students in the main, tended to make subject and university choice according to convenience e.g. select the closest institution to them. The majority of those gaining a degree tend to reflect the age demographic of their institution e.g. younger graduates at Bangor University, mature students being predominant at the other institutions. Overall there are more female graduates, particularly in social studies, and more male graduates from engineering subjects, while business graduates had an even gender split. Males in all three subjects are most likely to gain either a First or, on the opposite scale, an unclassified degree, whilst females were more likely to consistently gain a 'good' degree.

As the main aim of this study is to assess how pre-entry disadvantages now affect outcomes the chapter also outlined findings from HESA statistical data and related research that focuses on first destinations. Overall it was found that even when accounting for subject studied, English and Welsh graduates appeared to have similar destinations. On an institutional/subject level, despite some differences, the statistical data showed heterogeneity, with the expected subject and institutional outcomes (discussed in Chapter 4). However differences were identified when socio-economic characteristics were considered, particularly gender and especially when engagement with postgraduate study and voluntary employment was considered. The need for a deeper analysis of the data on outcomes was identified. The next chapter will address outcomes and longer term destinations in the context of data collected from graduates via the questionnaire and interviews.

CHAPTER SIX. FINDINGS: TRAJECTORIES OF GRADUATES IN NORTH WALES.

Introduction

The previous chapter presented the first destinations of business, engineering and social studies students from North Wales. The institutional and subject habitus matched and there were clear socio-economic differences were found, in particular relating to gender. However, as I discussed, HESA statistics provide only a very narrow picture of graduate outcomes. This chapter is divided into three sections which draw upon primary data captured via a survey, interviews and social media, and comparison HESA statistics¹³⁰. The first two sections focus on the following research questions:

- *What are the trajectories of engineering and technology; social studies and business and administration graduates from institutions in North Wales, up to four years after graduation*
- *What influence does subject studied; institution attended, and socio-economic characteristics have on these trajectories?*

Post graduation trajectories of graduates from North Wales

This chapter is based on the views of 68 respondents captured via the survey method, as well as 15 of these who went on to be interviewed. There was also additional data captured from 6 individuals who I interviewed via social media. The majority¹³¹ of the sample were from Bangor University, with the second largest group of responses being from Glyndwr University. The majority of survey respondents were from a social studies background, followed by business and engineering. Most respondents were female, and there were larger numbers of graduates who were aged 25 and over. As discussed in Chapter Four, this varies considerably from HESA statistics on graduates as those aged under 24 tend to form the majority, whilst female are the

¹³⁰ Survey respondents will be discussed using their Respondent number e.g. 001; 002; etc... Social media respondents will be identified as SM001; SM002; etc...

¹³¹ For a discussion of specific numbers of respondents from each institution, subject etc, please refer to Chapter Four: Methods

majority in certain subjects. Table 10 outlines the circumstances of the sample of graduates from North Wales, up to four years¹³² after graduation.

Table 10 Outcomes of all North Wales respondents.

Destination (n)	Twelve months	Two years	Three years	Four years
Full time employment	32	34	34	36
Part time employment	3	2	2	1
Voluntary employment	0	0	0	0
Self employment	4	6	6	5
Work & further study	10	10	11	11
Further study	4	4	4	4
Unemployment	4	1	1	1
Not available for employment	0	3	3	4
Multiple Outcomes	12	9	9	7
Total	68	68	68	68

NB: The categories in the above table in the main relate to HESA publication definitions¹³³ However HESA publication categories combine data on self employment along with statistics on full time employment, whereas I have separated this data.

As the table shows full time employment remained the dominant outcome each year. However, when the individual trajectories of North Wales graduates were analysed, only one quarter of respondents were employed on a full time basis throughout the study period of four years, whereas a further one quarter of respondents did not enter employment at all throughout the study period. There were low, but consistent levels of part time employment amongst graduates but there were no graduates who said they were in voluntary employment only. Self employment was low overall, but increased over the study period. Comparisons with HESA statistics are difficult to make as data on self employment is normally included in statistics on full time employment. When individual trajectories were considered the majority of those who were self employed were so throughout their post graduation trajectory.

Postgraduate study was the option for one quarter of respondents, with combined work and further study being the most common option. Further study were undertaken by one third of respondents overall. Unemployment dropped after year one, and remained at a consistent low level. Graduates who were 'not available for employment' were low, as expected, but these numbers increased over the study period and were centred around a small number of individual graduates. As outlined

¹³² As the data was collected over a six month period it is noted that some graduates outlined their circumstances four years after graduation, whilst others were outlining their situation close to four and a half years after graduation. For consistency I will record this data as being the circumstances of graduates four years after graduation.

¹³³ HESA Publication Categories are available from:
http://www.hesa.ac.uk/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=573&Itemid=233.

there were also graduates who had multiple outcomes i.e. more than one outcome throughout the study period, counting at each twelve month period. As the table shows multiple outcomes were the second highest outcome for graduates and then decreased each year. Initial data analysis highlighted four specific themes.

Mixed outcomes when compared with HESA datasets

As discussed, direct comparison with HESA data is difficult as the HESA First Destinations Survey concentrates on data collected on what graduates are doing six months after graduation, whilst I chose to ask my graduate cohort about their circumstances, twelve months after graduation (I chose the latter date as it was easier for graduates to recall their post graduation trajectory when I asked them to consider this in twelve months cycles). Despite these issues, I feel it is still useful to compare my own data against HESA statistics (first destinations and the longitudinal survey) as the latter are particularly useful as a benchmark. Table 11 outlines this data.

Table 11 Comparison of circumstances of North Wales graduates with HESA First Destinations data, 2007/08

Destination (%)	Circumstances of North Wales respondents at 12 months	HESA First Destinations data (six months after graduation).
Full time employment	47	49
Part time employment	4	6
Voluntary employment	0	0.3
Self employment	6	0 ¹³⁴
Work & further study	15	16
Further study	6	18
Unemployment	6	7
Not available for employment	0	2
Multiple Outcomes	18	0 ¹³⁵

The comparison showed similar levels of employment, unemployment, and other forms of inactivity as well as postgraduate study. However there were three times as many graduates who went on to further study in the HESA statistics.

Direct comparison with the HESA longitudinal Survey (LS) is also not easy as it focuses on what graduates were doing three and a half years after graduation, whilst

¹³⁴ This data is included by HESA in the statistics on full time employment.

¹³⁵ Multiple outcomes is a descriptor I use, it is not a HESA term. Thus this data was not available in the HESA data.

my data concentrates on the circumstances of graduates four years after graduation. Further to this HESA purposefully over-sampled some graduates relative to others e.g. foundation degree graduates, those completing a Masters degree and non-white graduates. As a consequence, this over-sampling means that the statistics generated from the Longitudinal Survey dataset are not representative of all graduates (HESA, 2012). Despite these difficulties, comparison is, as discussed, useful in order to observe differences and similarities. Table 12 outlines this data.

Table 12 Comparison of circumstances of North Wales graduates with HESA Longitudinal Survey, 2008/09

Destination (%)	Circumstances of North Wales respondents at Four years	HESA Longitudinal survey 2008/09
Full time employment	53	72
Part time employment	13	10
Voluntary employment	0	0 ¹³⁶
Self employment	7	0 ¹³⁷
Work & further study	16	0
Further study	6	5
Unemployment	1.4	7
Not available for employment	6	3
Multiple Outcomes	10	3
		0 ¹³⁸

Compared against the HESA Longitudinal Survey (2008/09) the North Wales graduates had lower levels of employment and higher numbers of graduates in employment. There are, however similar levels of further study and unemployment. These differences could be explained by subject variations as a longitudinal study by the Campaign for Social Studies found clear subject differences in their comparison of longitudinal data on graduates from Social science, STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) subjects and arts-humanities graduates e.g. a higher proportion of social scientists were in employment when compared to graduates from STEM subjects or arts-humanities graduates: 84 percent of social science graduates, compared with 78 percent of STEM graduates and 79 percent of arts-humanities graduates, are in employment at this period.

High incidence of graduates with multiple outcomes

In the previous chapter I noted that graduates may have more than one 'outcome' within a given time frame, so within my own data collection I gave respondents the option to tick more than one answer when asked about their circumstances in each

¹³⁶ In the HESA Longitudinal data, statistics on part time employment includes those who are working on a voluntary basis.

¹³⁷ As with HESA first destinations data statistics on full time employment include those who are self employed.

¹³⁸ HESA does not include the category multiple outcomes.

time period. Analysis of the data showed that one third of respondents had what I define as ‘multiple outcomes’ across the study period. These multiple outcomes were both consecutive, and concurrent¹³⁹. Table 13 outlines the trajectories of these respondents – including their other outcomes e.g. I also record if the person is in full time employment before or after their period of having a multiple outcome.

Table 13 Types of multiple outcomes undertaken by North Wales graduates

Respondent Number	1 yr	2 yrs	3 yrs	4 yrs
001		PT/FT		
008	NA/VOL	NA/FS	NA/VOL	
011		UNP/FT(T)	UNP/FT(T)	
012	UNP/FT(T)			
015	NA/VOL			NA/VOL
017	NA/FT			
023	UNP/FT(T)			
027			UNP/FT(T)	
031		UNP/FT		
032				
038			SE/PT	SE/PT
042			UNP/FT(T)	
043	FT/PT (T)	UNP/FT(T)		
044				
045	FT/PT (T)	FT/PT (T)	UNP/VOL	UNP/PT/VOL
047			UNP/FT(T)	FT/PT (T)
048		FT/NA		
049	UNP/FT	UNP/FT		
051	UNP/FT(T)			
052	UNP/FT			
058	UNP/FS			
060	NA/FS	NA/FS	NA/FS	NA/FS
062				NA/FS
063				FT (T)/UNP

Key:

FT	PT	VOL	SE	WFS	FS	UNP	NA	MO
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¹³⁹ I was able to deduce that some outcomes were concurrent and some were consecutive, however I was unable to confirm with confidence.

Multiple outcomes accounted for the circumstances of 17 percent of graduates in year one, but by year two and year three, this figure had dropped slightly to 13 percent. In year four this was the outcome for one in ten graduates¹⁴⁰. The decision to include data relating to multiple outcomes offered the chance to gain a more detailed understanding of graduate trajectories. For instance, whilst female graduates were most likely to undertake caring responsibilities after leaving university, the option to tick more than one outcome for each year revealed hidden levels of voluntary employment amongst this cohort. All three of these graduates indicated that they were also working on an unpaid basis with a local charity or for their local school.

Whilst levels of part time employment were low amongst graduates, further analysis found that in the first year after graduation there were additional instances of part time employment. Whilst these instances of part time employment were still few, what was notable was that in the main this form of employment was followed by full time employment at a later date¹⁴¹ and that the full time employment in question was graduate level employment. An example of this is best explained when considering the following trajectory.

Respondent 001, a male aged 21-24 worked full time prior to and during this time at university. Inspired by his father's background in management, the respondent went on to gain a BSc (Hons) Business/Environmental Science degree at Bangor University. After graduation he was employed on a part time basis in *various hospitality and retail roles*. The main aim with these roles was to *finally earn some money!* By year three, and year four he was working for a local authority as an Information Officer.

This graduates trajectory also supports my observation in the previous chapter that graduates may take on non-graduate employment immediately after leaving university (or even stay with their employer they were with during university) and then enter graduate employment 12 months or so after graduation.

Table 13 also shows that amongst those who had multiple outcomes a number were working on a temporary basis. These graduates reported working for local authorities

¹⁴⁰ By this time, work and further study had replaced multiple outcomes as the second most popular option for graduates.

¹⁴¹ Although there was one respondent who suggested they worked part time in order to support their desire to eventually go into self employment.

and the voluntary sector in a mixture of graduate and non graduate roles¹⁴². An Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development publication (2002) on temporary employment promoted it as being the solution to an increase in demand from employees [and employers], for flexible working patterns. However, I found very little evidence of this. An analysis of the types of roles undertaken by graduates, alongside qualitative data from the survey and interviews suggests that the career trajectories of some respondents were apparently hostage to the funding regimes of various organisations. The following respondent is typical of this.

Respondent 043, a female from a disadvantaged socio-economic background, was aged 25-29 when she entered university after completing an Access to HE course. She gained a first class honours degree in Youth and Community work at Glyndwr University. Whilst at university she worked as an Administration Assistant, and then carried on working in same role on a full time basis up until six months after graduation. She then acquired employment as a project worker in a local regeneration area. The project worker role carried in to year two of her trajectory until her funding ran out. She was then unemployed for three months. Whilst the funding for the project returned in year three, *Once the funding returned there was only space for a two project admins (sic) and a project manager*. She was unsuccessful when applying for the project manager role but instead was offered the administration role. She reported that she enjoyed working on the project but was unhappy as in her new job, he was *still doing much of the work I had done before as project worker*.

Respondent 043 also reported being concerned both about both the gaps in her CV (whilst she was unemployed and waiting to start her next funded role), and the change in her job titles (from project worker to project administration. Whilst a change in job titles, and small periods of unemployment may not seem like a major concern, this could make a difference for a graduate trying to compete against other graduates in an insecure labour market. She was particularly worried about the latter as she suggested that this may affect her ability to gain project officer roles in the future. This regional cohort of graduates, who in the most part were mature students and from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, appeared to understand that a graduate rich labour market may mean that a typical career pattern will experience fluctuations (Otto, Hoffmann-Biencourt, and Mohr, 2011).

¹⁴² To be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

When analysing how respondents viewed these episodes of temporary employment, I was struck by similarities with the work of the British economist, Guy Standing (2011) on the precariat. As discussed in the literature review Standing locates the origins of precarious employment in the globalization era which transformed industrial organization and delocalized production between 1975 and 2008. Standing, who also acknowledged the financial crisis of 2008 as leading to a further increase in both unemployment and temporary employment, suggests that *the worker...afraid that the job is coming to an end ...feels dejected, as regards his or her professional skill and the efforts made in training* (p23). I noted similar feelings amongst my own respondents, particularly those who were mainly employed within their local area¹⁴³. In the words of Respondent 014 *“I’m frustrated with a labour market¹⁴⁴ that offers a choice between being employed for a short time; working insecure zero hour contracts, or having to take lower paid employment”*. These choices left the respondent feeling *extremely disposable*.

Despite these similarities with Standing’s research on the precariat, the immediate question that sprang to mind was: could a graduate, with all their advantages, belong to the precariat? Standing offers some answer to this question as he notes the increasing numbers of those with higher level skills who have been displaced by economic change. As he observes *falling into the precariat could happen to most of us if accidents occurred or a shock wiped out the trappings of security many have come to rely on* (ibid). However he also points out that the precariat would be likely to be deprived in other ways apart from job insecurity. For instance they were likely to lack work-based identity, career prospects, self-esteem and social worth, and to be insufficiently integrated in society and community (Standing 2011:9-12). This is something that one might not immediately associate with graduates but I was able to find example of this in the responses. My data is silent on whether a graduate was integrated into the community, but a number of respondents mentioned during interviews that they did not feel like that they were part of the organisation that they worked in because their employment was temporary. Two respondents suggested birthdays were examples of when they did not feel like they were part of the team

¹⁴³ I use local to refer to North Wales e.g. Anglesey; Conwy; Denbighshire; Flintshire; Gwynedd and Wrexham.

¹⁴⁴ I understood that she was talking about the local labour market.

because they had not been there long enough to receive a card from their colleagues, or were not asked to take part in collections for the full time, permanent staff. There were other instances such as not being included in work related activities, unless it was a job that a permanent member of staff did not want to do.

I have already highlighted one respondent who in the previous case study noted their concerns about future career prospects. Half of the respondents who had worked on a temporary basis suggested that, although there was an implicit understanding in the local area that such roles were temporary, they were often questioned about the nature of previous employment when they were interviewed for other positions. Respondent 043 said it was *catch 22*. *If I was unemployed this would not sit well with employers. But there then I would be questioned intensely about why a particular project had not turned into something more permanent – I'm sure that they thought I was flighty.* It appeared that the same local employers who advertised temporary roles were also likely to *look down on those who did the jobs* [Respondent 014]. Issues relating to self-esteem and social worth are always more difficult to evidence as these are not static or one dimensional concepts; individual self esteem is likely to be affected by a number of factors. However, as discussed earlier on in this section, I did detect discernible levels of frustration from graduates who worked on a temporary basis. All the graduates from North Wales I spoke to, who were employed in this manner, would have much preferred to forgo the 'flexibility' of a temporary contract, and instead be employed on a permanent basis.

That said, Standing (2011) points out that the precariat does not just consist of victims. Despite the concerns outlined above the graduates all noted that the project work they were employed in gave them the chance to learn a lot of useful skills that would help them in the graduate labour market. Most graduates reported being involved in complex tasks, being required to give presentations, write reports and become *fairly self sufficient very quickly* [Respondent 014]. Two male respondents I interviewed explained that this experience of being required to work at a higher level so soon after graduation meant that they were able to confidently apply for permanent employment at this level and above. I will address this point in a later section that concentrates on gender and temporary employment.

Unemployment as a positive experience

Overall unemployment was low amongst the North Wales respondents. It accounted for only 6 percent of graduates in the first year after graduation and then was the primary outcome for only 1 graduate. However, as Table 13 shows, there were further incidences of unemployment amongst those who had multiple outcomes. In the main they were more likely to occur in the first twelve months. However, as will be discussed in an upcoming section, there were instances of graduates being unemployed later on in their trajectory.

As discussed in Chapter Two, numerous studies highlight the non-economic effects of being unemployed. For instance Belle and Bullock (2011) in research for the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues, found evidence that unemployed workers were twice as likely as their employed counterparts to experience psychological problems such as depression and poor self-esteem and they were less likely to want to socialise (cited in Brisson, Roll, & East, 2009). As with graduates who had been employed on temporary contracts, I found individuals who acknowledged that they were frustrated with being unemployed. However, whilst not wanting to downplay the effect that unemployment can have on individuals and their families, I did not get the impression from my own sample that there were any respondents who were experiencing depression or poor self esteem. Further analysis of my field notes revealed that the graduates I interviewed who had been or were currently unemployed appeared to have the sense that they were more likely to gain employment as distinct from those without such qualifications. Rather than being concerned about being long term unemployed, their worries centred on rewriting their CV's to suit specific roles, or being required to 'down-grade', or leave off their qualifications from their CV so as to gain non graduate positions¹⁴⁵.

Within the first few interviews I began to get the sense that, for my respondents at least, unemployment was not quite the negative experience that is often discussed in academic and policy literature (see Smith, McKnight and Naylor's, 2000 for an example of this). I therefore began to take particular note of this theme during

¹⁴⁵ The difference between the types of roles gained by graduates will be discussed in the next chapter.

subsequent interviews. Whilst I reiterate that respondents in my own study were at times uncomfortable about being unemployed, for instance due to a lack of money or boredom, I noted that almost all respondents dealt with this frustration in proactive ways. For instance I found that most respondents either used this time to develop new skills, and a few, such as Respondent 045, volunteered in a field of interest. Others utilised the time to study a subject that they had an interest in, subjects such as mediation; Welsh language skills and history. Two respondents asked relatives and close friends for driving lessons (both mentioned that this was something they wanted to do for work purposes, but that they had put off whilst studying). There were also others, such as respondent 049 below, who indicated that they used their period of unemployment to learn all about becoming self employed.

Respondent 049, a male aged 25-29 worked full time before entering Glyndwr University. He went to university as he wanted to understand more about the marketing side of a business. For the first two years after graduating he was intermittently unemployed and working as a sales assistant, the latter being *a means to an end*. When he was unemployed he said he used the time to *research about how to set up my own business...I undertook lots of courses e.g. tax returns, market research, and went to open evening where business support agencies would tell me about local funding*. Whilst he acknowledged that being unemployed was frustrating at times, he pointed out that the above courses he attended were available to him for free because he was unemployed.

Overall, the respondents appeared to see periods of unemployment as being a transition phase, and one that could be used for positive purposes. If these findings were replicated in other studies, this point would certainly enhance the somewhat static nature of the literature on unemployment.

Pre-entry factors affecting entry in to postgraduate study

There is no single definition of 'postgraduate study' although it is often used to describe further study undertaken by those who already have a first degree. It is frequently used to refer to master or doctoral studies, but it also includes certificates and diplomas which are taught to a more academically demanding standard than undergraduate certificates and diplomas (British Library, 2010). As discussed earlier in this section, postgraduate study was undertaken by one third of respondents

throughout their trajectory. Table 14 summarises the distribution of postgraduate study across respondents.¹⁴⁶

Table 14 Outline of North Wales graduates undertaking postgraduate study at some point in their trajectory

	Business					Engineering				Social studies											
	BU		OU	BU		GU	BU			CL	GU			OU							
Respondent No	4	20	21	22	62	26	28	55	12	13	16	32	33	34	44	48	58	61	63	65	68
Yr1	FT	FT	SE	FT	SE	FS	FT	UNP	MO	SE	SE	SE	FS	FT	SE	SE	MO	SE	FS	SE	SE
Yr2	FT	FS	FS	FT	SE	FS	FT	FS	FT	SE	SE	FT	FS	NA	SE	MO	SE	SE	FS	SE	NA
Yr3	SE	FT	FS	FT	SE	FS	FT	FS	FT	SE	SE	MO	FS	FS	FT	SE	SE	SE	FS	FS	FS
Yr4	SE	FT	SE	SE	UNP	SE	FS	FS	SE	FT	SE	SE	FS	FS	SE	SE	SE	FT	MO	SE	NA

Key:

FT	PT	VOL	SE	WFS	FS	UNP	NA	MO
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A distinction is sometimes made between courses which are *postgraduate in level* – e.g. those that are more advanced than undergraduate courses, and *postgraduate in time* e.g. courses which are postgraduate only in the sense that they are studied by people who already hold degrees. Eighty percent of the sample of North Wales graduates, who went on to further study, were in courses that were postgraduate in level, with most being Masters courses. In line with research by Wakleing and Kyriacou (2010) that found that there was a positive relationship between undergraduate and postgraduate subject area, all but one graduate (Respondent 012) transitioning from a first degree stayed in the same subject area.

As my concern throughout this study was to look at the spectrum of post graduation opportunities, I had an obvious incentive to include issues relating to postgraduate study. As postgraduate study is emerging as *the new frontier in WP* (Moore et al, 2013), one area of immediate interest was to understand some of the reasons why some graduates do not go onto further study. Various studies (Stuart et al, 2008; Wakeling, 2010; Stevenson et al., 2010; Wakeling and Hampden-Thompson, 2013) have stressed how a combination of reasons: finance, lack of information and socio-

¹⁴⁶ As later sections will discuss postgraduate study in more detail I will only briefly discuss institutional and subject differences with issues relating to socio-economic characteristics being discussed in a later section.

economic factors can all impact on the decision to make the transition from undergraduate to postgraduate. I decided to probe interviewees, who did not go into further study, the reasons for this decision. Normally part way through the interview, after I had gathered data on what their overall trajectory had been, I would say:

Interviewer: When you talk about your trajectory you don't mention anything about postgraduate study. Have you ever considered postgraduate study?

The literature review on postgraduate study by Wakeling (2010) found that financial reasons were often cited as a reason why many potential postgraduates did not carry on with further study. He highlighted how funding arrangements differ quite markedly between undergraduate and postgraduate study. Whilst undergraduates are often entitled to certain levels of support¹⁴⁷, postgraduates have no entitlement to funding support for tuition fees or maintenance from the state¹⁴⁸. I would point out that funding support does seem to be changing as I have noted that during the course of this study that the North Wales institutions, like many other universities, now offer postgraduate bursaries. However despite these changes, fees for masters degrees can range from around £3,000 per annum for a full-time student, to upwards of £20,000 for some business or computing qualifications (Atwood, 2009 cited in *ibid*). Whilst this is often less than most undergraduate courses, it is still a large expense to consider, especially after paying for their first degree.

Financial reasons were cited as being a barrier by some respondents, one stated: *I have always wanted to continue into further study, though simply cannot afford to do so. It is still something I may attempt to do in the future.* [Male, Respondent 022]. Respondents also mentioned the price of the academic books they would be required to buy for their course. One interviewee who was considering enrolling on a course that I had undertaken, asked in what was a half joking, half serious way, if I would like to forgo buying them a coffee for the purpose of the interview, but instead purchase one of the books of their required reading list if they went onto further study¹⁴⁹. Other respondents said that it would be difficult for them to undertake further study as it would mean they would either lose money due to having to 'drop' specific shifts in

¹⁴⁷ Dependent on their financial circumstances and with the level of fee prescribed by the government, undergraduate students may be eligible for a means-tested maintenance grant

¹⁴⁸ With the exception of teacher training courses or postgraduate nursing.

¹⁴⁹ I respectfully declined this tempting offer.

their current, non graduate employment, or 'lose' the job as they were no longer as flexible as they had been. What struck me when speaking with this particular graduate (Respondent 056) was the dilemma that he faced. It was clear that he would almost certainly benefit from gaining a Masters degree in applying for a graduate position, but unfortunately he was not able to enrol on such a course as it might mean losing his current employment.

Wakeling and Kyriacou (2010) identified a further aspect, linked with finance that was seen as a disincentive for potential postgraduates - the complicated funding process. As they noted, the principal source of funding for postgraduate research students, at the time of their study, was research council studentships¹⁵⁰ These awards cover tuition fees and maintenance payments for three to four years of full-time study at doctoral level, or in some circumstances for one year full-time research training masters degrees. These studentships were allocated to individual university departments: some were available on a competitive basis; some awarded in collaboration with other public, private and voluntary sector bodies; whilst others were made direct to institutions, which were then free to select a student themselves¹⁵¹. Other sources of funding include institutional studentships and funding from industry, charities or government body funding¹⁵².

The difficulties in funding a postgraduate course are highlighted in the following extract from Respondent 022 who indicated that he would like to go on to further study but was unable to do so, at that time, due to financial reasons. Approximately a year after our interview he enrolled in postgraduate study - I was privy to this information because, although I had no further face to face contact with the respondent, he was a member of the Bangor University Alumni group¹⁵³. He posted the following message on the message board for this group, which I replicate in full¹⁵⁴.

¹⁵⁰ Except in Northern Ireland, where there are some RCUK awards, but DELNI provides most of the equivalent funding.

¹⁵¹ This system had been replaced by Doctoral Training Centres recognised by the research councils.

¹⁵² I was not able to ascertain with any degree of certainty how respondents were funding their courses. I probed this with interviewees, but the answers were vague.

¹⁵³ A group that I follow on Linked In, a social media site where I have collected additional data.

¹⁵⁴ With his full permission.

"Hi all, I recently started a MA and am now looking at opportunities for funding. There are hundreds of websites out there stating that funding is out there, but no actual information beyond the typical Research Councils as where to go for it...It is quite mind boggling...I just wondered if the educational veterans here had any additional advice?"

- I am awaiting a decision on a bursary that will help in part,*
- I have a loan so am not considering that an option,*
- Have approached my employer (council said no to finance though have offered time which was nice of them),*
- Have approached both the relevant research arm and also the semi-relevant one (answer pending and "no" respectively)*
- Have approached bodies that fund other bits but not necessarily students ("no")*
- Have approached National Schemes for which it is likely I may get some small sums which will help a lot, though answers are pending.*

What seems apparent is that the respondent had tried the many sources that graduates are advised to try and that whilst he had some success in terms of funding, this had required multiple funding applications, not all of which were successful. Whilst charities, and other funding institutions have processes in place to help people overcome financial difficulty, includes supporting students with postgraduate funding, having conducted my own research in this area I was aware, like the above respondent, that applicants may need to meet some specific criteria, i.e. awards will either be targeted by nationality, region, profession, subject area or theme (The Alternative Guide to Postgraduate Funding, 2012-13).¹⁵⁵ I will revisit the theme of funding for postgraduate study in the last section of this chapter.

Tobbell et al's (2012) study on the transition into postgraduate study revealed that *the demands of real life* was a further issue that impacted on the decision to undertake further study. This included trying to combine family life with studies as well as attempting to negotiate paid employment to support the study. Graduates observed that social activities would have to be sacrificed, alongside noticeable levels of 'denial' when engaging with further study: for example, giving up time (with family and friends) and money (if not able to work an extra shift), in parallel with the tensions of

¹⁵⁵ For instance, The Vegetarian Charity will only grant postgraduate funding to students with a history of vegetarianism or veganism, whilst The Leverhulme Trades Charities Trust finance students who are related to grocers, chemists, or commercial travellers (The Alternative Guide to Postgraduate Funding, 2012-13).

family demands and self-denial. I found examples of these occurring amongst my own sample of graduates who were engaging in postgraduate study as all mentioned that there were elements of sacrifice involved with carrying on with their studies. No respondent suggested they had given up 'family time', however, perhaps in an attempt to not miss out on this, the sacrifices made seemed to be personal. For instance Respondent 062, who undertook a PhD within her graduate trajectory said she was not able to do *anything else but my PhD*. She felt that her decision to complete as early as possible i.e. within a three year period, because she was self-financing, meant that she did not have time to socialise, to relax or to have conversations outside of her studies. The latter comment certainly highlights how difficult it is for some to continue with their studies, particularly if they are the only individuals in their social circle who are undertaking further study.

The all encompassing nature of further study was cited by a small number of interviewees, all females, as a reason why they stayed in employment. As Respondent 043 noted: *I gave up an awful lot when I undertook my undergraduate degree. I can't put my family through that again, especially when the MA, or any other qualification would be for the purpose of learning, as opposed to earning*. Whilst these respondents stressed that they enjoyed their undergraduate experience, they were unsure if they would be able to combine postgraduate study with their family life. For instance, when I asked respondent 008 if she had considered going on to her PhD, she said it may be a step too far, naming a number of concerns that included family responsibilities (as well as how to finance it). Further research would be ideal to see if this is reason for not undertaking further study is, as I suspect, gender based, or if males defer postgraduate study due to family based reasons.

Further to this, the utility of undertaking further study was questioned by all respondents who went on to employment, as opposed to further study route. Rautopuro and Vaisanen (2001), who conducted a four-year longitudinal study with 'young' and 'mature' students, found that whilst younger students were more occupationally orientated and older students were more academically orientated, overall, mature students were less likely to go on to further study. Stuart et al (2008), who investigated attitudes towards postgraduate study among final-year undergraduates, may have some explanation for this. They surveyed over 1,000

students from two post-1992 universities in southern England and found that a substantial group of respondents had a preference for work experience and immediate entry to the labour market. Whilst I did not find qualitative evidence for Stuart et al's (2008) findings, I did note evidence to suggest that many respondents, particularly mature graduates, saw university as a stepping stone to employment: in some cases it was the next stage to gain a: *well paid job that is respected* [Male, Respondent 021]. Whilst for others it was useful to enable them to change careers: *Previously I worked as a PA , now I am the manager so it has changed my career path.* [Female, Respondent 040]. These respondents did not seem to see going to university as the start of an academic career. Postgraduate study was often only considered by those considering an academic career, or by those who felt that they needed a MA to stand out in the labour market. The emphasis in policy and university literature on the economic reasons for HE appear to have resonated with the majority of graduates in this sample – particularly those who were traditional students.

The influence of subject studied on trajectories

A Universities UK (2013) report which drew upon HESA longitudinal statistical data, evaluated the subjects that were most likely to have graduates in employment, or assumed to be unemployed approximately three and a half years after graduation. It found that engineering and technology and business and administration subjects were the second and third¹⁵⁶ subjects in which graduates were most likely to be in full time employment, engineering graduates were amongst the subjects whose graduates were least likely to be unemployed. Social studies tended to be mid range, when compared to other subjects, in terms of all types of outcomes. However, a 2013 report by the Campaign for Social science – based on 2004/05 HESA longitudinal data - showed that a higher proportion of Social studies graduates were in employment, three years after graduation, than STEM or arts/humanities graduates. Table 15 summarises the trajectories of respondents from North Wales, according to subject studied.

¹⁵⁶ Medicine & Dentistry was the first.

Table 15 Trajectories of North Wales graduates, according to subject studied

Outcome (n)	Business				Engineering				Social Science			
	Yr1	Yr2	Yr3	Yr4	Yr1	Yr2	Yr3	Yr4	Yr1	Yr2	Yr3	Yr4
Full Time employment	12	12	14	14	6	7	6	6	13	15	14	15
Part Time employment	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	1	1
Voluntary employment	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Self Employment	4	5	6	5	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0
Work and further study	1	1	2	3	0	1	1	2	6	5	6	7
Further study	1	2	1	0	1	1	1	1	3	3	3	2
Unemployed	1	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Not available for employment	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	3
Multiple Outcomes	4	2	1	2	0	0	1	0	8	7	7	5

Findings from the previous chapter alongside a consideration of the existing literature on long term outcomes led to me to anticipate that in the long term the outcomes for engineering graduates would continue to be concentrated in full time employment, or perhaps further study if one wished to go further in their career. Social studies graduates, according to various longitudinal studies, are likely to be in either graduate employment, or in roles they could do without a formal degree qualification. High levels of postgraduate study would also be expected. In terms of business graduates I would again expect their outcomes to mainly comprise of employment or self employment. As is shown in Table 15, business graduates had varied outcomes, but overall they were either working full time, self employed or had multiple outcomes. As their trajectories went on, work and further study overtook multiple outcomes. The trajectories of engineering graduates were less varied as two thirds were in full time employment, followed by further study or unemployment. Graduates from this subject were least likely to have multiple outcomes, or, as supported by HESA statistics, be unemployed. Social studies graduates had a wide range of trajectories. Whilst full time study is the most cited 'destination' at each time period, one third of graduates had multiple outcomes. Work and further study, as opposed to further study only, was undertaken by more social studies graduates. Further themes from my analysis of graduate trajectories according to subject are discussed in the following section.

Table 16 Detailed trajectories of North Wales graduates according to subject

SUBJ	BUSINESS AND ADMINISTRATION																							
Respondent No	1	2	3	4	5	6	20	21	22	23	24	25	36	37	38	39	49	50	51	52	53	59	62	64
Twelve months	FT	FT	FT	FT	FT	UNP	FT	FS	FT	MO	FT	PT	FT	FT	SE	FT	MO	SE	MO	MO	FT	SE	WFS	FT
Two years	MO	FT	FT	FT	FT	PT	FT	FS	FT	FT	FT	FT	FT	FT	SE	UNP	MO	SE	FT	SE	SE	SE	WFS	FT
Three years	FT	FT	FT	WFS	FT	FT	FT	FT	FT	FT	FT	FT	FT	FT	MO	SE	SE	SE	FT	SE	SE	SE	WFS	FT
Four years	FT	FT	FT	WFS	FT	FT	FT	FT	WFS	WFS	FT	FT	FT	FT	MO	FT	SE	SE	FT	SE	SE	SE	MO	FT

SUBJ	ENGINEERING AND TECHNOLOGY								
Respondent No	26	27	28	29	30	54	55	56	57
Twelve months	FS	MO	FT	FT	FT	FT	UNP	FT	UNP
Two years	WFS	FT	FT	FT	FT	FT	FS	FT	FT
Three years	WFS	FT	FT	FT	FT	FT	FS	FT	FT
Four years	WFS	FT	FS	FT	FT	FT	WFS	FT	FT

SUBJ	SOCIAL STUDIES																																		
Respondent No	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	31	32	33	34	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	58	60	61	63	65	66	67	68	
Twelve months	FT	MO	FT	FT	FT	MO	WFS	FT	MO	WFS	MO	FT	PT	FT	FS	FS	FT	FT	FT	FT	MO	SE	MO	FT	UNP	WFS	MO	MO	WFS	FS	WFS	FT	PT	WFS	
Two years	FT	MO	FT	FS	MO	FT	WFS	FT	FT	WFS	FT	FT	PT	FT	FT	UNP	UNP	FT	FT	FT	MO	SE	MO	FT	FT	MO	WFS	MO	WFS	FS	WFS	FT	FT	UNP	
Three years	FT	MO	FT	FT	MO	FT	WFS	FT	FT	WFS	FT	UNP	PT	FT	MO	FS	FT	FT	FT	FT	MO	FT	MO	FT	MO	WFS	WFS	MO	WFS	FS	WFS	FT	FT	UNP	
Four years	FT	UNP	FT	FT	UNP	WFS	FT	FT	MO	WFS	FT	UNP	PT	FT	WFS	FS	FT	FT	FT	FT	FT	WFS	MO	FT	MO	WFS	WFS	MO	WFS	FT	UNP	WFS	FT	FT	UNP

Key:

FT	PT	VOL	SE	WFS	FS	UNP	NA	MO
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The variety of trajectories found amongst social studies graduates

When all three subjects are compared, social studies graduates have the most varied trajectories. For instance, whilst graduates from all three subjects have multiple outcomes or temporary employment, this is the outcome for over half of social studies graduates (compared with one engineering graduate, and one quarter of business graduates). There is further variety in the types of employment social studies graduates are represented in: either associate professional and technical occupations (graduate occupations) or administrative and secretarial occupations (non graduate roles). In contrast, business graduates are mainly working as managers, directors and senior officials, whilst engineering graduates mainly worked in professional occupations. This differs slightly from the findings of the aforementioned Campaign for Social Science (2013) study which found that social studies graduates were most likely to be in professional occupations (there was no similar data on STEM graduates, but we should note that this research, as suggested in the title of the study, is a campaign with the aim of raising the profile of social studies – thus there is likely to be little information regarding non graduate employment. However the variety of outcomes noted in the trajectories of Social studies suggests that this degree has particular transferability.

Explanations for the varied trajectories amongst social studies graduates can also be found in Bourdieu's famous analysis of academic sociology: *Homo Academicus* (1988). Whilst not directly applicable (the book concentrates on the field of French higher education) it is Bourdieu's suggestion that different disciplines have varying degrees of institutional influence which is perhaps useful for this study. Bourdieu (1988) highlighted how subjects with the greatest prestige in France were, and still are the faculties of medicine and law. These disciplines, and subsequent graduates, act as agents of reproduction for the State (Webb, Schirato and Danaher, 2002: 132). The function of social studies and its relationship with fields of authority is more complicated. Being the study of human social relationships and institutions, the subject matter is diverse, ranging from individuals, to the family, to institutions. Unifying the subject is its purpose of understanding how agents both shape and are shaped by cultural and social structures (Berger, 1973). The difficulty with placing social studies is that at times the subject has an uneasy relationship with the institutions of power. Whilst some sociologists have

focused on reinforcing the views of the state (Taylor, 1973), others have looked beyond these taken-for-granted views and critiqued these institutions of power (Berger, 1973). These contradictions make social studies a discipline that is not only hard to place within the hierarchy of subjects, but also one that is difficult to envisage a 'typical' career trajectory. Whilst we understand that business graduates have a degree that can enable them to enter a wide variety of organisations, or to start their own business, and engineering graduates become part of a professional body, it is harder to perceive the typical career path for social studies graduates. Prior to the influx of non traditional cohorts, many social studies graduates would continue with their studies onto their PhD, and into academia¹⁵⁷. However positions in academia are few, and graduates in this field have increased, thus for many graduates their post graduation pathway is into employment with the same institutions of power that they have spent three years critiquing.

Analysis of the socio-economic data collected on the North Wales cohort of social studies graduates found that economically advantaged or younger students tended to enter postgraduate study, whilst older graduates and those from socially disadvantaged backgrounds have gone on to employment. These latter graduates then face a labour market with employers *who may not see the immediate value of such a degree, perhaps not understanding how graduates from this subject can fit with their organisation [Respondent 044]*. Despite this observation from the above respondent, the range of employers who tend to employ social studies graduates suggest that this subject has somewhat the same generalist nature of a business degree.

Self employment – an alternative trajectory for business graduates

Data from the DLHE survey in 2007/08 showed that 3 percent of graduates were self employed and that in 2010/11 this had risen to 5 percent. Self-employed graduates were most likely to come from Art or Design subjects. Table 17 lists the respondents from North Wales who were self employed. There were 4 respondents self employed in year one, 5 in year two, 6 in year 3, and then 5 in year 4 (9 percent of all respondents).

¹⁵⁷ This is not to imply that this was the main destination for Social studies graduates prior to WP policies. The point here is that there are greater demands on a postgraduate funding process that has not kept the same stride with the undergraduate funding process

Table 17 North Wales respondents who were self employed

Respondent no	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Current /Recent
038	Self Employed Avon	Self Employed Avon	Full time employment Self Employed - Avon	FT Self Employed - Avon
039	Full time employment	Unemployed	Self Employed - one employer	Full time employment
044	Self Employed - one employer (Temp)	Self Employed - one employer (Temp)	Full time employment	Work and Further Study
049	Unemployed Full time Employment	Unemployed Full time Employment	Self Employed Ebay	Self Employed Ebay
050	Self Employed Photography business	Self Employed Photography business	Self Employed Photography business	Self Employed Photography business
052	Unemployed Part time Employment	Self Employed Garage owner	Self Employed Garage owner	Self Employed Garage owner
053	Full time Employment	Self Employed Accountant	Self Employed Accountant	Self Employed Accountant
059 ¹⁵⁸	Self Employed	Self Employed	Self Employed	Self Employed

The data also showed that they were mainly male business graduates. Two respondents had a less traditional form of self employment as they reported that they were working as direct sellers for companies such as Ebay and Avon. The relatively small numbers of respondents (6 at its highest) is consistent with a report by Tackey and Perryman (1999) for the Institute for Employment Studies which found that after two years, the number of graduates in self employment rose to approximately 15 percent percent.

There are interesting issues in the literature to consider when looking at self employment amongst graduates. An evidence report by the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (2011), highlighted that an interpretation of statistics on self-employment needs to differentiate between those genuinely seeking to develop their own business, and those who are forced into self-employment due to a lack of suitable available employment. Whilst I was unfortunately unable to interview any graduate who was self employed¹⁵⁹, after analysing their responses I noted that half of the above respondents had parents or close family and friends who had started their own business. This finding supports evidence from a study by Hjarnø (2006) who evaluated the experiences of immigrants in Western Europe. His analysis indicates that the habitus that the migrants bring with them plays an important role in determining whether or not they will consider self-employment or look for waged work. Whilst I am working with graduates, as opposed to immigrants, respondents who had parents who were self employed would have spent a considerable amount of time being around their family business. The respondents may have been used to seeing self employment being worked around family life, had noted the late nights

¹⁵⁸ No details provided about nature of business.

¹⁵⁹ One respondent had agreed to be interviewed but then due to staffing constraints had to cancel their appointment. Unfortunately despite numerous attempts to rearrange, this was not possible.

and long hours that their parents worked and even seen some of the practical elements of running a business first hand, e.g. filling in tax returns or chasing outstanding accounts.

In addition to this, there is the recent phenomenon of individuals who self define for tax purposes as being self employed, but who only work for one employer (Burchell, 1999). The distinction between an employed and self employed person has always been clear: an employed person receives a wage or salary and is subject to some kind of direct supervision, whilst the self-employed person run their own business in order to make a profit. However there are workers in a grey area, who lie somewhere between the two ends of this spectrum. This practice, defined as false self employment by UCATT (Union of Construction, Allied Trades and Technicians), has been long associated with the construction industry, but in later years has become also used across many more sectors. Concerns about this practice have grown as it a recent report for the UCATT notes how whilst workers have all the attributes of an employee they have none of the rights e.g. holiday pay, sick pay, pension and security (Harvey and Behling, 2008). Analysis of the data on North Wales graduates found that this type of self employment was undertaken by two respondents, who explained they were self employed, but worked for only one organisation, either a local council or within the voluntary sector¹⁶⁰

Engineering and family influence

The typical engineering student and subsequent graduate, according to HESA statistics and supported by my own research, is male, under the age of 25, and generally from a middle class background. I also observed that the majority had a family background in that specific field. This supports findings by Reay, Crozier and Clayton (2010) in their study on working class students making the transition into higher education, where they note that a person's habitus can influence their decision making, or their general disposition to behave in a certain way. They mention how people are likely to move towards fields in which they feel familiar. When attempting to understand the relativity positive employment performance of Engineering graduates when compared to those from other subjects¹⁶¹, these early family experiences are exceedingly helpful. A person's habitus, a system of dispositions (lasting, acquired schemes of perception, thought and

¹⁶⁰ This was ascertained by evaluating their job title – I have previous experience in these types of roles and of being self employed/employed.

¹⁶¹ We are reminded that this is a subjective phrase as how do you judge what is a 'positive performance'?

action), develops in response to the objective conditions it encounters. A person's habitus helps them to develop a 'feel for the game'.

The data showed that entry into HE and understanding of the engineering field was greatly aided by having a father who had and who worked in this employment sector. For instance, when I asked one engineering respondent, discussed in the previous chapter, why he decided to undertake a degree in this subject he suggested that initially he wasn't sure what he wanted to do in university, but he chose engineering due to a familiarity with that specific area. The same respondent, who studied at Glyndwr University, also discussed how he gained a great deal of informal knowledge regarding mechanics when he was growing up as he would be around his father and his father's work colleagues whilst they were working. After analysing the responses of engineering graduates I feel that this imparting of knowledge continued post graduation and may have aided them in the subsequent labour market. Respondent 055's trajectory best illustrates my point

Respondent 055 was aged 21-24 when he decided to go to Glyndwr University to study for a HNC in Electrical and Electronic Technology. His father and brother were engineers. After completing his course he was unemployed. However what is interesting is that he explicitly states that although he was out of work he used the time to work with his father to "develop key engineering skills". Whilst the skills they developed were not outlined in any detail, it is notable that after this time the graduate reported in year two that he went onto undertake a MS in Electrical Studies for a two year period and when asked about his current or recent circumstances, the respondent replied that he was working as a Quality Manager, whilst combining further study¹⁶².

Another respondent also with a father in the engineering field, was unemployed in year one, but then by year two, and until the end of his recorded trajectory was working as a maintenance engineer. Whilst I was unable to collect comparable data with female engineering graduates from the target institutions I was able to gain some data from female engineering graduates from outside the UK¹⁶³. They supported the idea that their fathers had been an influencing factor in both their subject choice and informal knowledge. Whilst the overall cohort of engineering respondents for this study was small, these are findings regarding habitus and family support, are still consistent.

¹⁶² The respondent did not specify if this was the MA qualification, or another type of study.

¹⁶³ I had several informal conversations via Twitter conversations with two Engineering graduates from outside of the UK.

Only one engineering respondent appeared to have some difficulty during his trajectory - he recorded having multiple outcomes in year one (unemployed followed by temporary employment) – however by year two the role had become permanent. A further explanation for the good performance of engineering graduates can perhaps be found in the current status of this subject. The importance of STEM skills to the future prosperity of the UK is well established. Lord Sainsbury's (2007) review, *The Race to the Top*, stated that: *In a world in which the UK's competitive advantage will depend increasingly on innovation... it is essential that we raise the level of our STEM skills...and supply of creative young scientists and engineers.* Further this, a recent study commissioned by DIUS, The Council for Industry and Higher Education and the Engineering and Technology Board concluded that companies and organisations that are most dependent on high quality STEM personnel will find it increasingly difficult to find the skills that they will require to operate and compete successfully (Russell Group, 2009). A report by Social Market Foundation (2013), a cross political party think tank predicted that jobs requiring degrees in STEM subjects would rise - the majority of them in engineering. Similarly, the Association of Graduate Recruiters found that engineering vacancies were likely to increase by 8.3 percent in 2009, despite significant decreases in other sectors (Russell Group, 2009). Despite a small cohort of engineering graduates it is significant that almost all respondents appeared to have smooth trajectories.

Subject studied impacted on the reasons for entering postgraduate study

Progression rates to postgraduate study also appear to depend on the subject studied at undergraduate level. Stuart et al (2008a) describe undergraduate study subject as a 'highly significant predictor' of intentions to take up postgraduate study. They found those students who studied more applied undergraduate courses, such as engineering and health occupations, had lower intentions to take up postgraduate study and were more likely to move directly into work. Data from my sample of graduates suggested that there were also subject differences as whilst four in ten Social studies graduates went onto postgraduate study as did, one third of engineering graduates, this was the trajectory for two out of ten business graduates. Qualitative data analysis found that the only explanation given by North Wales respondents with a social studies degree who went on to further study was that it was due to a love of the subject itself. This matches findings from a number of case studies in a report by the Campaign for Social sciences (2013),

were one graduate included in the study urged that: *If you haven't considered studying sociology, do! It's such an interesting subject that we can all relate to in some way as it's all about understanding the world in which we live in* (p19). These views were mirrored in my own sample as all social studies graduates who made the transition in to postgraduate study explained that this had been influenced by a yearning to understand more about the subject matter. The experiences of Respondent 016 are an example of this.

Respondent 016, a female Social studies graduate from Bangor University was the first in her family to go to university. A factor that she suggested influenced the *sense of wonder* she felt when studying Social sciences. *I'd not heard such different points of view before, I hadn't come across all these ways of thinking...I knew some basics, but On Behalf of the Insane Poor; The Sociological Imagination; Stigma? They were mind blowing to read...It [studying] didn't feel like work, I wanted to learn, and learn and learn.* In her first year after graduation she went on to do her MA. Despite the emphasis on financial barriers, this respondent said that *I wasn't in a great financial position, but as soon as possible I enrolled on the MA [in Women's Studies]....I knew it would be a big step up, but I wanted to carry on learning.*

I have included this extract from the interview with this respondent as it displays an obvious joy in studying and it contrasts with the image of a struggling non traditional student that appears so often in the literature. This finding also emphasises the need to encourage other non traditional students to not only consider access postgraduate education as well as undergraduate study.

The effect of institution attended

One of the most reported aspects of research into graduate opportunities is that the notable disparities according to the institution attended. As noted earlier, studies such as those by Brown and Scase (1994) and Purcell and Hogarth (1999) show that employers have a strong preference towards graduates from more established institutions. When rates of postgraduate study are compared the 'institutional dimension' of transition to postgraduate study is often neglected (Wakeling and Hampden-Thompson, 2013: 46). As Wakeling (2010) found, graduates from traditional institutions are more likely to enter further study compared with students from other institutions as institutional practices influence rates of progression into higher degrees. In addition to this, Brown and Scase (1994) also noted that unemployment is higher amongst graduates from post 1992

institutions. Table 18 summarises the trajectories of graduates from the individual institutions in North Wales.

Table 18 Trajectories of North Wales graduates according to individual institutions

Outcome (n)	Bangor University				Coleg Llandrillo				Glyndwr University				OU			
	Yr1	Yr2	Yr3	Yr4	Yr1	Yr2	Yr3	Yr4	Yr1	Yr2	Yr3	Yr4	Yr1	Yr2	Yr3	Yr4
Full Time employment	19	19	21	19	1	0	0	1	10	11	11	11	2	3	3	4
Part Time employment	2	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Voluntary employment	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Self Employment	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	5	5	4	1	1	1	1
Work and further study	3	4	4	6	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	4	3	3	3	1
Further study	4	3	2	2	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	0
Unemployed	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Not available for employment	0	1	1	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Multiple Outcomes	5	4	4	1	0	0	0	0	5	4	4	3	1	1	1	3

The outcomes of my sample support the aforementioned research by Brown and Scase (1994) and Purcell and Hogarth (1999) regarding employment. Graduates from Bangor University had high levels of engagement with full time employment throughout their trajectory, as did the two graduates from Coleg Llandrillo. The positive performance of the latter may be explained due to the vocational nature of their foundation Degrees¹⁶⁴. Concerning postgraduate study I found similarities with Wakeling and Kyriacou (2010) conclusion as graduates from OU were most likely to undertake work and further study. Graduates from Bangor University were most likely to undertake further study only, whilst those from Glyndwr University had the lowest engagement with both forms. Although numbers were low overall, graduates from Glyndwr University (the post 1992 institution) were most likely to be unemployed. There were two main themes found with regard to the effect of institutions

Trajectories matched, but also differed from the institutional habitus

The previous chapter noted that all universities and colleges, have an identifiable institutional habitus. This can influence the learning experiences of students likely to attend the institutions, but also their experiences post graduation. The previous chapter outlined the HESA evidence that outcomes matched the institution habitus e.g. Bangor University graduates had healthy, comparable levels of engagement with full time employment and further study, whilst as expected, OU graduates were more likely to be combining work with further study and Coleg Llandrillo graduates were mainly in full time

¹⁶⁴ The next chapter will discuss the types of employment undertaken by these graduates.

employment. The main deviation from the anticipated effect of institutional habitus was amongst graduates from Glyndwr University who had higher levels of postgraduate study than expected.

When evaluating the trajectories of graduates from individual institutions in North Wales I found both differences and similarities in relation to the expected institutional habitus. Graduates from Bangor University, a traditional institution, might be expected, as their trajectory progresses, to have settled into employment, or to return to further study. Across the study period the trajectories of three quarters of the Bangor University respondents included full time employment, with this being the main circumstance for just over half of respondents. Engagement with postgraduate study accounted for the trajectory of two in ten of graduates from this institution, with work and further study being the favoured option. As there were low incidences of unemployment found in all graduate trajectories, as may be expected there were only two graduates from Bangor University who were unemployed.

Due to the nature of the cohort of individuals who attend this institution, the long term trajectories of *Coleg Llandrillo* were more likely to be concentrated in forms of employment (full and part time) or, due to caring responsibilities, 'not available for employment'. But there are also examples of postgraduate study. Explanations for this departure from the expected pattern should be cautiously given as it is based on data from two graduates, however my findings are consistent with a HESCU study by Higgins, Artess and Johnstone (2010). They found that the learning experience gained on an Access course often inspires individuals to continue with their studies. Research by Archer and Leathwood (2003), in their study of non-participants in university, offers a further explanation. They found that the whilst the working-class participants recognised the value of a degree as a means to 'move on' from manual employment, they understood that the institution attended would play a large role in influencing how far they were able to move on. One respondent from Coleg Llandrillo appeared to explicitly understand the 'status' of their institution. For instance Respondent 034 said in her survey responses that she was *happy going to Coleg Llandrillo as she understood it as a stepping stone into a proper degree.*

As in the previous chapter the trajectories of OU respondents showed a strong to their suggested institutional habitus: concentration on full time employment or combining this with postgraduate study. However, there was more variation in long term trajectories as there were some respondents who were self employed, working part time or had multiple outcomes. The variation found amongst the trajectories of graduates from Glyndwr University is a closer match with their institutional habitus when compared with the previous chapter. Full time employment formed the main aspect of the trajectories, with 66 percent of respondents having some periods of full time employment, and 43 percent having this as their main trajectory. In addition, 30 percent of respondents were self employed at some point and 17 percent had periods of postgraduate study (work and further study being most frequent).

Despite these examples of where the trajectories matched the institutional habitus, there was a point of difference in terms of when multiple outcomes. Coleg Llandrillo graduates had no examples of these whilst there was only one such OU graduate. Bangor University and Glyndwr University respondents had markedly higher levels. For instance, one third of Bangor University respondents and almost half (43 percent) of Glyndwr University respondents reported instances of multiple outcomes. Additional analysis of the data found further differences. Whilst only two respondents at Bangor University had multiple outcomes on more than one occasion through their trajectory, in comparison, at Glyndwr University, this was the case for two in ten respondents. Respondents from Bangor University and Glyndwr University were also more likely, when compared to those from OU or Coleg Llandrillo, to be working in temporary employment, to have periods of unemployment, and, as will be discussed in the next chapter to have the greatest difficulty in finding and settling into graduate roles. The experience of Bangor University graduates may at first seem to be a surprise. However my findings are consistent with a much cited study by Chevalier and Conlon (2003). They found that institutional differences tend to be more pronounced when elite universities are compared against other types of institutions, as opposed to traditional v post 1992 institutions. I found there is more evidence of a subject effect than institutional effect. Further data analysis suggests that explanations for these disparities may also be understood as being influenced by regional labour market factors, as well as socio-economic characteristics

Table 19 Detailed trajectories of graduates from individual institutions in North Wales

BANGOR																																		
No	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	68
GEN	M	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	F	
AGE	21	21	30	21	18	21	30	30	40	40	25	25	21	25	25	25	19	50	50	30	21	25	25	21	18	21	25	25	25	21	30	21	25	25
SEC	99	4	7	3	2	6	6	4	5	99	3	6	6	5	4	3	3	2	5	3	8	6	5	3	3	2	5	5	3	4	99	3	3	3
SUBJ	B	B	B	B	B	B	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	B	B	B	B	B	B	E	E	E	E	E	S	S	S	S
Yr1																																		
Yr2																																		
Yr3																																		
Yr4																																		

LLANDRIL LO		GLYNDWR																		OU															
No	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	
GEN	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	F	F	F	F	F	F	M	M	M	M	
AGE	25	21	25	25	30	30	30	25	25	25	25	25	25	25	21	25	25	25	30	30	21	21	30	25	40	30	30	25	25	30	25	30	30	30	
SEC	6	99	5	5	4	4	99	5	99	7	6	5	8	6	6	3	4	4	3	3	2	3	5	3	3	5	3	6	5	5	2	3	7	7	
SUB	S	S	B	B	B	B	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	B	B	B	B	B	E	E	E	E	S	B	S	S	B	S	B	S	S		
Yr1																																			
Yr2																																			
Yr3																																			
Yr4																																			

Key:

Full Time employment	Part Time employment	Voluntary employment	Self Employment	Work and Further Study	Further Study	Unemployed	Not available for employment	Multiple outcomes
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OU respondents and their inclination towards further study

The institutional analysis showed, as expected, a high level of engagement with postgraduate study amongst OU graduates. The distance learning institution that provides *supported learning* is known to be particularly suitable for those who are combining study with employment or returning to learning. However, the flexibility of OU courses was one reason cited by all the respondents, who went on to study beyond their first degree.

Respondent 063, a mature female graduate from a “working class background” who went on to do her PhD with OU explained that she chose to stay with OU as *Its non-traditional approach to education affords learning opportunities to those who would otherwise not have them. I would never had been able to stick with a degree in a traditional university as I needed to work throughout my BA. There was little difference in carrying on with this method [working and studying] whilst I did my Phd. In fact I was much richer for this experience.*

A male social studies graduate, again a mature student, who went on to do a MA in Statistics part time and over a three year period – alongside working as a support worker suggested that *Combining research and a job was often difficult, but as with my first degree, I found that the Open University understands the demands on part time students well. My MA benefited from the different perspectives from my employment.*

Although the OU cohort of graduates only accounted for just over ten percent of the sample of North Wales graduates, over half of this small number of graduates went on to postgraduate study. As will be discussed in the conclusion the above comments, as well as the earlier discussion on finance, point to lessons that other institutions can learn from OU.

The influence of socio-economic characteristics

Social justice was one policy principle that led to the introduction of the WP policies most associated with the new Labour government during the late 1990's. The argument was that if an individual gained graduate level qualifications, they would have equal access, regardless of gender, age and class, to higher level opportunities. The previous section highlighted that this is unlikely to be the case as the institution an individual attends as well as the subject they study are likely to affect their post graduation trajectory. The literature review provided compelling evidence that what individuals do post graduation remains to a

large extent, associated with their background characteristics. The following sections will discuss gender, age and social class.

Gender differences – temporary employment and unemployment

Table 20 Outcomes of North Wales graduates relating to gender

Outcome (n)	Female				Male			
	Yr1	Yr2	Yr3	Yr4	Yr1	Yr2	Yr3	Yr4
Full Time employment	18	18	18	20	14	16	17	17
Part Time employment	1	2	1	1	2	0	0	0
Voluntary employment	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Self Employment	3	3	2	1	1	3	4	4
Work and further study	7	6	3	6	1	2	2	6
Further study	1	2	2	1	4	4	3	1
Unemployed	2	1	0	1	2	0	0	0
Not available for employment	0	2	2	3	0	0	0	0
Multiple Outcomes	3	6	7	7	4	3	2	0

Full time employment increased across the study period for both male and female graduates, although there were gender differences. Up to two thirds of males were employed full time, compared with just under half of females. Postgraduate study was similar, except females were more likely to combine this with further study. As previously discussed, multiple outcomes were observed in the trajectories of one third of respondents¹⁶⁵. Within this data there are a number of key gender differences. Female respondents were more likely to have multiple outcomes that included temporary employment (Respondent 043, discussed on page 5 is an example of this). This finding is consistent with McCrombie’s (2011) observation that temporary employment has traditionally been a feminine sector, in part due to the perceived flexibility it offers mothers and those returning from maternity leave - women being more likely to take career breaks than men. However she also draws upon the aforementioned concept of the precariat, developed by Guy Standing, that has emerged in recent years to describe both male and female employees who work on a flexible basis. Rosenberg and Lapidus (1999) also show that temporary workers are more at risk of workplace exploitation because employers see them as ‘disposable workers’.

¹⁶⁵ To recap multiple outcomes is a term I use to describe when graduates suggested they had, two or more outcomes concurrently or consecutively, in a specific time frame.

Whilst temping has traditionally been a sector associated with receptionist or secretarial temping roles (McCrombie, 2011), the sample of North Wales graduates includes roles that were more senior than I expected. The majority worked on a temporary basis in graduate level positions such as: data analyst; community development officer; manufacturing engineer; project worker; gallery assistant and research officer. It has been observed previously (see Cloudt et al, 2011 for further details) that temporary employment may provide stepping stones to permanent jobs for male graduates. The few male graduates, from North Wales, who undertook this form of employment quickly gained full time employment, either with the organisation they were temping for, or with another organisation. Sandberg - Facebook CEO (2013) suggests that the reason why females are less likely to make some of the gains that males do, such as asking for a raise, a promotion, or for the role to become permanent, is because they do not “*lean In*”, or take charge of their trajectory. There may be some support for this as the two male graduates I have just mentioned suggested that the reason why they moved away from temporary employment so quickly was that they rewrote their CV to reflect a higher, managerial level of employment experienced even whilst working on a temporary basis. I did not find examples of females who discussed temporary employment in such a way. Whilst they referred to the graduate nature of the tasks that they did, there was no mention of how this would help them in any subsequent job searches. However, Faludi (2013) suggests that the emphasis on women taking charge in this way downplays the damaging effects of systemic gender bias felt collectively by women in the workplace. An interview with a female engineering graduate highlights this bias as she recalled how academics and others outside academia e.g. policy makers would assume that she was *the helper or secretary* as opposed to the *Dr of engineering that they had come to see* [Respondent SM006]¹⁶⁶

Whilst females with experiences of multiple outcomes were most likely to be in temporary employment, for males it was more likely to include a period of unemployment. An explanation for this is offered by Carl Gilleard, the chief executive of the Association of Graduate Recruiters who noted that: *When I talk to graduate recruiters about how impressive candidates applying for jobs are, I do pick up a sense that female graduates are a little more mature and focused, that they put together good applications* (Guardian, 2010).

¹⁶⁶ This respondent was from outside the UK and EU. I include her comments as despite searching for a female engineering graduate from within the UK I was unable to interview one who could substantiate these comments or findings from an Engineering UK (2013) study.

Gilleard went on to argue that male students may perceive that a university education is enough to guarantee them the dream career. Interviews with my sample support this as I also gained a sense that female respondents appeared to be more articulate, and more focused about what they wanted from a degree education. Further to this there was evidence that they were willing to try other, non graduate, jobs. This is in contrast to comments from Norman Rose of the Recruitment Society, one of the professional bodies for recruitment agencies who suggested that most graduates were 'job snobs'. As he told BBC Radio 1's Newsbeat. *People think because they have a degree or a qualification they should not go for anything other than their line of expertise.* (The Independent, 2013). As will be discussed in the next section, female graduates were also willing to try multiple methods to identify employment opportunities.

When further study is considered, research by the Department for Business Innovation and Skills (2009) found that males from STEM subjects were less likely to be self-financing and more likely to receive research council support than were females (Wakeling and Kyriacou, 2010). I did not observe notable gender differences between the levels of graduates in postgraduate study, but I did note that males were most likely to go into further study only, whilst females combined their studies with employment. Prior to the interviews I had felt that this might be due to more males gaining access to university or research council funding (e.g. the difference in funding opportunities for different subjects), but as statistical data on gender and research council funding according to subject is at present not publically available, I could not reach a definite conclusion for this disparity.

Age and social class combine to increase advantage

Various studies identified age and socio-economic class as a factor that may influence post graduation experiences (see Purcell, Pitcher and Sim, 1999; Brennan and Shah, 2003 for further details). When I evaluated the experiences of North Wales graduates I was not able to immediately identify specific patterns and differences according to either demographic. However, after further reflection I noted that, despite lower levels of respondents from these particular categories, younger respondents who were in social classes I-III were the least likely to have multiple outcomes, or to be employed on a temporary basis, or even to have trajectories that were interrupted by unemployment (see Table 20). If they did have multiple outcomes, or work on a temporary basis this was something that did not tend to last for

more than a twelve month period. These findings partially support¹⁶⁷ those from a study by Macmillan, Tyler and Vignoles (2013). They found that socio-economic status affects the likelihood of a recent graduate accessing a top job e.g. those from higher SES family backgrounds are more likely to enter higher status occupations when compared to graduates from lower SES backgrounds.

Bourdieu's concepts of capital (social, cultural and economic) offer a lucid explanation for these disparities. In terms of graduate employment, economic capital is useful as it allows individuals the freedom to move to where the current employment or internship opportunities are. Whilst North Wales has graduate opportunities, when compared to other areas in the UK there are disparities. For instance the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings – the official survey of wages across the United Kingdom – shows that whilst the median salary in London, £27,560, was almost 50 percent higher than Wales £19,472 (Guardian, 2013b). When individual areas in North Wales are considered the median salary is highest in Wrexham, at £20,213, and lowest in Vale of Clywd at £16,287 (ibid). Data from Futuretrack found that one quarter of their respondents they surveyed between 18 and 32 months after they had completed their courses had undertaken unpaid work in order to gain career-related experience (Purcell and Elias, 2013: 109).

Internships – opportunities to gain work experience that often require an individual to work unpaid - are becoming increasingly important for graduates. The importance of internships for employment is stressed by university careers services and is an important feature of the aforementioned Futuretrack study. Focusing on those who were aged 20 or younger when they gained their degree they found that women were more likely than men to have worked unpaid. There was a strong correlation between socio-economic background and participation in unpaid work: for example, those from professional and managerial backgrounds were most likely to have done so, while those from routine and unskilled backgrounds were least likely. In addition to this, those with graduate parents and those who had been privately educated and those at prestigious universities were also most likely to have been able to take advantage of unpaid work experience opportunities during their courses and least likely to have worked unpaid after graduation (ibid).

¹⁶⁷ I say partially support because this study concentrated on graduates who were aged 18-25 – respondents who do not neatly fit in to the traditional or non traditional age category.

There were only two respondents from my sample who said they undertaken a graduate internship¹⁶⁸. Both graduates were from Bangor University and had been on Go Wales placements. They are not internships in the traditional sense as they are paid placements for 10 weeks. The first respondent who had undertaken a Go Wales placement reported that she had already been on one placement, and was currently working on a second one, in a marketing role. The respondent liked both placements, suggesting that the service provided was *very good* and that it had given her the chance to access graduate level employment. A further female respondent, was also complimentary about the experience she gained, but she did have reservations that they might not be suitable for those from lower socio-economic backgrounds: *there appears to be little understanding of how people can support their family on constant temporary work* [Female, Respondent 039]. Other respondents who did not consider internships explained that this was because they had found employment, or they were not in a financial position to take unpaid work. The obvious problem here is that those that have the required economic capital in order to work unpaid or on a temporary basis will have an advantage in the labour market.

Cultural capital refers to the non-financial social assets that promote social mobility beyond economic means. The capacity to ‘fit in’ with decision makers (James, 2001) creates resources that enable many graduates to gain access to opportunities. Reay (2005) discusses how non traditional students are least likely to feel that opportunities such as HE are suitable for someone from their background. Whilst Chapter 5 showed examples of this the non traditional students in my study were, by definition, able to ‘get over this’ and enter HE. However, despite gaining a degree these feelings of not fitting in seem to carry on post graduation. When I interviewed one graduate about carrying on with her PhD I was struck by her comment: *In an ideal world yes I think I would like to carry on with my studies, however I have to think about my situation long term. Further study would be interesting but it would delay my career*¹⁶⁹. I asked the respondent what she meant by this and she was not clear in her prose and her comments were rather disjointed. However after reading through her interview as a whole I got the distinct impression that she did not feel it was ‘worth’ going on to do PhD as *I’m not considering an academic career*. Further questioning about this revealed that she perceived an academic career as involving difficulties such as

¹⁶⁸ However I should note that the graduates I focused on in this study were those who were living in North Wales, not those who had moved outside North Wales.

¹⁶⁹ I asked the respondent what she would do in an ideal world. I ask this question as it is a useful way of gauging how a person feels about a specific issue if there were no barriers to their decision.

having to move around the country to different jobs. She couldn't see how she could expect her husband and children to move around the country and suggested that her *mum would have a heart attack if she said she was moving out of Wales*. Whilst I first perceived these statements as being relating to wishing to live in Wales with her family, on reflection I felt that this was a local issue e.g. she had her support network and did not want to move away from it. She did not stress that she saw this issue as a barrier to a potential career in academia, rather she did not see this type of role as being something she was likely to consider. This was another example of the type of discourse Reay (2005) highlights as being used by non traditional students e.g. '*not for the likes of me*'. Whilst I did not encounter graduates who spoke of how a lack of mobility might affect their opportunities beyond a PhD, this issue has recent attention in Inside Higher Ed and TES¹⁷⁰. I will pick up these themes again in the next section that concentrates on how graduates access postgraduate study.

Access to opportunities

Thus far this chapter has outlined the trajectories of a sample of graduates from North Wales. This section examines the career decision making process of these graduates, and focuses on the following research question:

- *What methods do graduates from North Wales utilise to access post graduation opportunities?*

This section is divided into two parts. The first focuses on how my cohort of North Wales graduates access employment opportunities, the second discusses postgraduate study. Both sections utilise data collected from the online and postal survey, face to face interviews, and social media.

Access to information on employment

A study by Try (2005) evaluated data captured from the Norwegian Graduate Surveys, and found that graduates either utilised a formal¹⁷¹ or informal¹⁷² approach to their job search

¹⁷⁰Article on Why academic couples struggle to find work in the same city http://www.slate.com/articles/life/inside_higher_ed/2013/10/academia_s_confounding_two_body_problem.html. Following article discussed career options after a PhD and mentions why it is important to move <http://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/blog/2011/apr/27/career-options-after-a-phd>

¹⁷¹ Jobs that are advertised in the '**formal**' job market are those that appear in the public domain, i.e. advertisements published in newspapers, trade magazines and, more recently, the Internet (Try, 2005).

¹⁷² '*informal*' methods include personal contacts such as friends, family and former employers may be a valuable resource (ibid).

strategy. I asked the cohort of North Wales graduates about the methods they had used in order to access employment opportunities. Table 21 provides a summary of their answers.

Table 21 Methods graduates used to find out about employment opportunities

Q. What methods did you/have you used to find out about employment opportunities?							
	Careers Service	College/University Lecturer	Employers website	Newspaper/Magazines	Personal Contacts	Recruitment Agency	Speculative Application
N	19	7	17	17	18	36	10

As with previous closed response questions in the online/postal survey, there was the option to provide more than one answer. My findings supported Try (2005), as the majority of respondents (87 percent) used one, or more of the formal methods outlined. The most popular formal method was recruitment agencies. Whilst informal methods were used to a lesser extent, personal contacts were the most cited source of informal employment information. University lecturers and speculative application were least cited. When taking an institutional approach I noted that respondents from Bangor University were most likely to use employers' websites or personal contacts and they were least likely to speak to their university lecturer. Those from Glyndwr University were most likely to use recruitment agencies or personal contacts. Those from the OU used both careers services and recruitment agencies but did not use university lecturers or speculative applications. In terms of subject/institution there were some differences. Social studies graduates from Bangor University mainly used the university careers service, whilst the main method for those from Glyndwr University were recruitment agencies. Business graduates from Bangor University were most likely to use employers' website or personal contacts, whilst social studies graduates from OU used personal contacts. There were three key areas of interest in the data.

Recruitment agencies

Almost half of my respondents had used recruitment agencies, with one third suggesting that this had been their most successful method. This is an interesting finding as university careers departments - a free resource that is available to graduates - often promote the view that graduates should be wary of recruitment agencies as such services may not have the graduates best interest in mind. I did not find any such concerns amongst my own respondents. Overall it appeared that the use of recruitment agencies was motivated by convenience or the general feeling that someone else was working for you to help you find

work. As one respondent mentioned: *They are in constant contact with [opportunities for] work. Some may not be suitable but at least they are thinking of me. Due to them I have been in work on a consistent basis* [Respondent 067]. Respondents spoke about being given access to a greater variety of jobs than what is immediately available advertised in newspapers and the internet. This method was particularly noted by one respondent as being *helpful when looking for first employment*.

One of the negative aspects of recruitment agencies, alluded to in the literature, is that such agencies may put individuals forward for positions for which they are unsuitable, or lack experience. This was evident amongst North Wales respondents, but was perceived as being a positive trait, indeed, a confidence raising process. A number of respondents mirrored the comment made in the following extract: *Recruitment agencies have been exceedingly helpful. First they have raised my confidence that I should be able to get the types of jobs that I gained previously i.e. professional jobs*. [Respondent 040]. Recruitment agencies may not have been discussed positively in the literature nor promoted by career services because previously, recruitment agencies focused on non graduate employment. Alongside the increases in graduate numbers there has been a change in the types of roles that recruitment agencies are being asked to fill. Ten years ago, in a more stable labour market with fewer graduates, recruitment agencies may have been called upon to fill an administration vacancy for a number of weeks or months. However, changes in recruitment practices (from permanent to temporary roles), and the influx of project-based employment means that such agencies are now asked to find graduates for officer level or managerial positions. As the clientele of recruitment agencies may still largely consist of individuals with lower level qualifications, graduates that do contact these agencies may accrue capital (due to their degree qualification) that they would not have if they were in the traditional graduate labour market. Overall reports of the use of recruitment agencies were markedly positive, but it should also be noted that the majority did mention that the roles they acquired were on a short term basis, or their first graduate roles.

University career services

Purcell, Pitcher and Simm (1999) surveyed one in three final year undergraduates at 21 UK universities regarding current aspirations and, amongst other topics, their experiences of university careers services. Graduates who had used their University Careers Advisory Service were very satisfied with the quality of information and guidance they had received.

Whilst there were other methods that my respondents favoured such as employers' websites, personal contacts and recruitment agencies, one in five respondents said that they had used university career services. Female social studies graduates at Bangor and Glyndwr Universities as well as male business graduates from Glyndwr University were most likely to say they had used them. Respondents utilised all three of the core activities of career services: information; guidance, and employer placement services (Watts,1997) although the first two were cited most frequently. One respondent suggested that they had been given excellent support with interview practice, whilst another noted: *The Careers service has been very good for courses and general support with CV.* [Respondent 012]. All were complimentary about this type of support. Overall, respondents reported that they tended to use careers advice alongside recruitment agencies.

However, despite these positive comments, the career services received the most criticism from the respondents I spoke to. I would like to point out that all respondents who complained about the services were reticent to do so as they appeared to recognise that the service has an ever changing remit. The respondents I spoke too appreciated the advice and guidance they had received, as well as the opportunities to gain valuable work experience. There was also acknowledgement that support was available to them as graduates and not just for when they were in university. However they did note that improvements were needed. Echoed by a number of other respondents, is the comment by one female aged 30-39. When I asked her which had been the least successful method, she said: *unfortunately, the careers service. I feel harsh saying this as I have been in contact and they are individually very good, however the support is never tailored to what I need - actual jobs or contacts - and it is generic.* [Respondent 039]. Greenbank and Hepworth in their 2005 study suggested that the working class students they interviewed lacked confidence in approaching Career Services. I detected little evidence of this. My respondents had a keen understanding of the services offered by university careers, were comfortable in talking to professionals with regard to their career, and they attended courses where necessary. However, overall they suggested that the careers services did not provide them with the service that they required. Graduates suggested they wanted individualised one-to-one support that offered direct information on local (and sometimes national) employment opportunities – similar, some might say to the service that recruitment agencies provide.

It is difficult to criticise such services as it is acknowledged that cuts over the last twenty years have left them seriously under-funded but with the same remit (BBC, 2013). Respondents felt that the careers services could improve by concentrating on providing a service that had more in common with that of the employment agency, i.e a direct link to employers with vacancies who were actively seeking graduates seemed to be paramount. In order to provide such a service that graduates want, the university careers services may need to capitalise on their existing links with local employers, and cement them so local and national employers would wish to promote their vacancies through them, as opposed to recruitment agencies.

The Jobcentre

As discussed in Chapter Six a study by Citizen's Advice Scotland (2013) suggest that despite being the first port of call for some individuals, local Jobcentres are often not particularly helpful for graduates. Respondents from the Citizen's Advice Scotland (2013) study suggested that they had a lack of confidence in the Jobcentre in finding graduate level jobs; were often told to apply for non graduate roles, or were advise to 'leave off' there degree qualifications on their CV. Furthermore Atfield and Purcell (2010) found that women were slightly more likely than men to have used the Job Centre. As only one respondent reported using the job centre I was unable to find evidence that conclusively supported or disproved the findings of either study. However conversations with a graduate, a former work colleague, who did not fit my selection criteria¹⁷³, but who had just finished her PhD at Bangor University¹⁷⁴ led to additional themes being raised.

Prior to entering BU to undertake her PhD, my former work colleague, hereon referred to as SM007, was employed as a Research Manager within a local government department. After becoming unsettled and unhappy in her role due to internal changes the respondent decided to enrol on a PhD at Bangor University. After completion she spent "*six weeks working on a temporary research job, following that I applied for JSA*"¹⁷⁵. After her first appointment with the advisor, in November 2012, she emailed me with the following comments about her

¹⁷³ The individual did not gain her first degree from any of the target institutions. However I include her views as she studied for a MA at OU, and was had just finished her PhD when I interviewed her

¹⁷⁴ I had various conversations with this respondent as she is a former work colleague. When she mentioned to me that she had to apply for Job Seekers Allowance I asked if she would mind giving me updates of her situation, particularly in relation to her experiences with the Job Centre

¹⁷⁵ Job Seekers Allowance

experience: *Will tell you more about jobcentre meeting sometime but overall it was a pleasant surprise. I got the usual “we can’t really offer you very much, most of what we do is low level” but I have got until mid March 2013 to look for well paid jobs so I am not required to take or apply for anything below a certain salary level. She offered this as I didn’t ask. Still need to sign on and do the job hunting but I feel I have a bit of a breathing space which is very nice and very unexpected.* I must stress that these comments are from one individual only, so will not reflect the experience of all graduates, but they are still illuminating. For instance there was the tacit acknowledgment by the job centre advisor that, as discussed in the Scottish CAB study (2013), that *we can’t really offer you very much* as most jobs were non graduate. What was different from the findings of the aforementioned CAB study was that the advisor did not expect Respondent SM006 to accept any job. There was *breathing space* to look for graduate roles. However the respondent suggested this may be more related to the lack of ability of the job centre to help graduates as opposed to any sense of treating graduates differently.

Respondent SM006 also noted that the job centre advisors appeared to have a lack of knowledge about new ways of job searching e.g. social media. After I had suggested to her that she use Linked In for such purposes she noted: *No one at the job centre mentioned using Twitter to find jobs!! The Jobcentre staff seem to be divided into two groups – the regular “signing on” staff who barely say anything to me. Then there is the personal adviser I see every couple of months for about 30 minutes who tells me “she tries to keep up with the jobs market but hasn’t really got the time”, nice though she is. You can see why private sector contractors get all these contracts to do job support!! It seems to me the jobcentre are behind the times and are really just about benefit monitoring. They really should be capable of doing proper job support. They seem to think widening your search either in terms of location and job type is the answer.* Whilst this comment does say a lot about the current structure of support available at Job Centres for all cohorts, in terms of graduates it suggests that despite growing numbers of graduates who are unemployed, this service is not one that is supportive of graduates. The last comment about widening the job search is something that can also be found after a cursory analysis of university careers services.

Employability

Following on from the previous point regarding advice given by university and government careers service I also return to a further discussion raised in Chapter Three, that of

employability e.g. a set of personal attributes that can help a graduate gain a suitable role. When I discussed the concept of employability skills in interviews with graduates opinion was polarised, particularly according to the age of the graduate. With younger graduates there was support for the employability agenda, as they felt that it was important to understand what employers wanted from them. Those that had been employed suggested that there was a definite need for an emphasis on the types of qualities that graduate employers might need. However, mature graduates were less supportive of employability skills. As Respondent 058 said: *I work as a nurse. I think it would be a worry if I did not know how to communicate, if I was not aware that we should not use overtly medical language to a patient, but it was ok to do this with a doctor.* She went on to say *I think I am little bit more advanced than the average graduate.* This was the main theme that I noted throughout interviews with mature graduates on this subject. They felt that the employability agenda was not suitable for them as they had already gained a variety of skills throughout their working life, and as parents/carers etc. They suggested that the employability skills they would appreciate included how to write for specific audiences. Respondent 058 noted: *I understand how to make medical notes and I understand how to write essays, but I would have difficulty if I was younger and aiming to change jobs. All the reports I have ever seen are written differently. I think the new graduates of today need more practical help and support and not be talked to as if they are idiots.* The emphasis on the need for employability can not only feel patronising to non traditional cohorts, but is often not useful. Findings from interviews with my graduate sample point to the need for a more involved discussion of employability, one that includes an understanding of what might help graduates. I would also support further questioning of the undertones of the employability agenda and a move away from the patronising discourse that often accompanies it.

As discussed in Chapter Two a university careers department suggested that graduates need to be flexible when they were considering their options, proposing that graduates should: move for a job or a postgraduate opportunity; work for different types of employers or consider different types of careers, consider undertaking further study or enter lower paid employment in order to be employed or to gain skills. I attempted to ascertain how flexible graduates are by posting a question on Social Media (Facebook and Twitter) with the

heading “*Graduating in a Recession – how flexible are you?*”¹⁷⁶ ¹⁷⁷ The first of two responses I received was from a respondent in this study (021).

In response to the article “Graduating in a Recession” and whether I have considered moving, improving my employability by working in different sectors, entering further study, taking lower paid employment, gaining work experience and diversifying to meet the requirements of the job market. Firstly, I have thought about moving in order to gain better job opportunities. My employment search for opportunities using my degree has seen me widen my geographical search to around twenty five miles (Chester) to forty miles (Liverpool) from my current location Prestatyn, North Wales. Secondly, my search for better job opportunities has seen me looking at a variety of job roles other than teaching, such as a PPI insurance claim handler, pricing trading endowment policies and a variety of graduate programmes with Network Rail, Barclays and Tesco. I have improved my eligibility to teach Mathematics by taking lower paid employment such as working as a teaching assistant in order to gain much needed experience within the classroom environment. I have also been applying for other employment opportunities that are non degree related in order to improve upon my teaching assistant salary. In answering the article “Graduating in a Recession” we must address whether the opportunity of going to University to obtain a degree is still a viable option. The Labour government, under the reign of Tony Blair, thought education should be available to all and thus inflated the supply of employees with degrees and therefore devalued the importance of a degree. A university student takes their focus off the job market to achieve their degree, however from my experience employers would rather employ an individual that has spent the whole three years in the workplace.

The respondent, a NTS, raises important themes in his comments but before I discuss these I would like to pause to discuss his family background. Respondent 021 reported that he come from a *not well very off* family, and that prior to attending university he had been *on the sick* e.g. receiving Government assistance in the form of Disability benefits¹⁷⁸. He decided to go to university as he recently passed his driving test and wanted to *get a good, well respected job*. I asked the respondent to elaborate on what he meant by this and he suggested that to him this meant a variety of roles, but in particular he was hoping to work

¹⁷⁶ This extended question was posted on Facebook and Twitter <http://graduatedestinations.wordpress.com/2013/02/14/graduating-in-a-recession-north-wales-graduates-how-flexible-are-you/>.

¹⁷⁷ This post went out to all my followers on Twitter (409 when I posted the question) and friends on Facebook (289). It was also reposted to various careers services. I had four responses to this question. Two are included in this chapter, the other two were excluded as they were very similar in detail

¹⁷⁸ Despite receiving this benefit which is based on the individual having a disability the respondent did not wish to self identify as having a disability. He was happy to talk about his impairment but said that he did not offer this data when he filled in any forms

as a secondary school teacher. He referred to government programmes that have encouraged people to train to be a teacher as a source of inspiration, however before this he wanted to gain a degree in a solid subject (business). Whilst his parent had not attended university he had both a sister and brother who had entered HE. Returning to his response it should first be noted that he is indeed flexible in terms of his career. He has been willing to consider other occupations, undertake further study and widen his search for employment to cover a wider geographical area - in short he has done all what has been advised of him. If being flexible is the answer – as it is so often portrayed by various sources – then this individual should have been able to access the type of employment he required. However this is not the case. Although he went on to do his PGCE straight after gaining his degree, when I interviewed him for this study he had decided to stop looking for teaching roles as he wasn't getting anywhere. As he explained *I look all the time for teaching jobs but I don't seem to be getting anything apart from on/off work. I am helping out but not working as a teacher.* Whilst he stressed to me that he was flexible he did point out that he *couldn't be flexible all over the country. I've got to try and work in one place at least.* When organisations talk about the need for flexibility there is often little understanding, or concern, about the practicalities of this. The respondent in question told me that he had a girlfriend who worked in Chester, so was able to work in that location, or even as far afield as Liverpool, however he stressed he couldn't be any more flexible than this e.g. he could not move to London, or other large cities.

As a result of the difficulties he faced in gaining the type of employment he wanted the respondent said that he felt going to university *wasn't worth it.* When the respondent first mentioned this I felt his comments were interesting in terms of the suggestion being that purpose of HE being only for employment purposes. He did not discuss the joy of learning, or indeed any personal satisfaction he gained from his degree. However when individual talked without interruption he revealed that his dissatisfaction was also be due to a feeling that he wasn't getting the same rewards as everyone else. He talked of other colleagues who were able to gain employment as a teacher far easier than he did, for instance he referred to a fellow student who was *guaranteed work in a Welsh school because they are first language Welsh* and of another student who qualified the year before him at Bangor University who would *have no difficulty in getting a job as he sounded like a teacher.* I asked him more about both statements as they fit specific themes I was investigating e.g. local

assets and Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital¹⁷⁹. Whilst only a brief commentary was given by the respondent it was clear that he was referring to the social-reproduction of the middle-classes made possible by their possession of forms of capital, particularly social capital (Devine, 2004).

As a way of understanding a further factor that may inhibit individuals from disadvantaged social backgrounds being able to be full flexible I also include the response from a further individual who contacted me via social media. Whilst her degree subject was not part of the cohort of graduates that I was concentrating on, her views of the existing labour market and HE are particularly valuable for this study.

"Hi Teresa, Well as you know I graduated as a BN Mental Health Nurse. At present I am waiting on a generic interview, but we are not guaranteed jobs in the area's of our choosing, and may even have to work as a member of bank staff on various wards if there isn't a position available. I may have to move out of area eventually, and on my application form I have applied for two different areas as well as my local area. The amount of positions available within the NHS are few and far between. As a Nursing Graduate I will have to be flexible with my choices of department and area, to give me a better chance of being offered a job within the NHS".

This individual highlights a specific issue of concern for some individuals: the ability to move for employment. From personal conversations I was aware that this individual is only able to consider employment within three counties of North Wales due to her family commitments. Whilst WP policies gave a strong message having caring responsibilities for a young child should not be seen as a barrier to engaging in education and training there has been little understanding that caring responsibilities will effect an individual's ability to take advantage of graduate employment and postgraduate study. As already suggested in this study I found evidence that graduates who are parents face the impact of the 'demands of real life' on their possible transition into postgraduate study. I believe that this is also a factor in terms of employment. In essence those graduates with caring responsibilities, those with ties to their local area (often individuals from an economically disadvantaged background) are less likely to be able to move for employment. Existing research suggests that a limited geographical mobility is particularly likely to affect females, and individuals

¹⁷⁹ I discuss local assets in Chapter Seven

form disadvantaged social backgrounds (Green and Canney, 2003). I did not collect systematically collect data relating to location (before and after graduation) so I cannot conclusively provide findings relating to this issue. However, in interviews with female graduates, all suggested that they still lived in their local area. The significance of a lack of geographic mobility is discussed by Hensen, de Vries and Cörvers (2009) in a study of graduates from the Netherlands. They found that the mobility of a graduate results in higher probability of jobs at the acquired education level e.g. graduate employment (p13). In contrast, a lack of geographical mobility increases the probability of graduates working in jobs below their education level, jobs outside their study field, part-time employment, flexible, temporary employment and (or) non graduate employment (p13) – all issues that have affected my female respondents at a higher rate than the males.

Social capital and the strength of weak ties.

As discussed in the latter part of the previous section some graduates may utilise informal methods and personal contacts in order to access employment opportunities. Amongst the graduates I surveyed, the second most frequent job search method was personal contacts (including friends, family and people they may have met through work or social functions). Whilst differences were small, I found that engineering graduates, those from OU and younger male graduates were most likely to utilise these contacts as were those from higher socio-economic groups. A typical response from such graduates included: *Friends and family who were already working in my field were very helpful in letting me know when certain vacancies were coming up* [Respondent 029]. Research such as that by Blasko, 2002; Furlong and Cartmel, 2005; Thomas and Jones, 2007) suggest that the social capital possessed by graduates from economically disadvantaged families may be unsuited to the graduate labour market. Discussions with my respondents supported the aforementioned studies as the following respondent noted: *My friends and family would not know about the jobs I am looking for so would not be able to recommend me.* [Respondent 037]. As with Greenbank and Hepworth's (2008) study, all respondents spoke well of their parents and close friends, highlighting the emotional support they received when looking for work, similar to that which had encouraged them to attend university in the first place. They also, contrary to existing research studies appeared to know that personal contacts had value, they simply recognised that their contacts would not always be helpful e.g. their parents would be unable to help, or be limited if called upon to provide practical job searching advice mainly because

their parents had no experience of the graduate labour market and the types of roles that they would be applying for.

Research by Granovetter (1978) on the strength of weak ties is helpful here for understanding how some graduates found out about employment opportunities. Speaking to individuals who had recently moved from one job to another, Granovetter attempted to learn about the job searching methods they used. He found that many individuals learned information leading to their current jobs through personal contacts (strong ties). However he also found evidence that these individuals also utilised acquaintances, friends of friends, past employers (weak ties) as a job search method (Easley and Kleinberg, 2010). In terms of my sample, male respondents from North Wales as well as those aged 30-39 or those from higher socio-economic groups were most likely to utilise strong ties, whilst those aged 25-29 or from lower socio-economic groups were more likely to utilise weak ties - mainly through former employment. I should note that respondents did not explicitly stress that they had gained employment through former employers, but when I analysed the trajectories of respondents I noted a significant number who gained further employment once a current project had ended, or had returned to an employer a number of times.

Informal conversations with other non traditional students who did not quite fit my brief reported that they had also gained employment from former employers on a number of occasions. Non traditional students may apply for local, short term project work – either through temporary agencies or via employer websites. Once the project is over this may lead to additional funding where additional roles become available. Respondents did not generally cite weak ties as being a method of finding employment. Only one respondent alluded to this, and as the following extract may suggest they did not feel this was a viable method. *“I have plenty of personal contacts, a lot of people who could support me when I am trying to gain employment, but sadly these contacts are people who I have worked with on the project... these people are not listened to when I am going for jobs. They are not the decision makers!!”* [Female, Respondent 043].

Access to information on postgraduate study

A key concern at the start of this study was to ensure that there was equal consideration of how graduates find out about postgraduate opportunities. One reason for this is because the literature on the transition from undergraduate to postgraduate study is scarce. Tobbell

et al (2008) argue that this might be due to an assumption that the transition, when compared to the one from secondary to further and higher education, is less challenging e.g. the environment does not change. However as already highlighted in a previous section, some respondents suggested there was a noticeable transition. A further gap in the literature is an understanding of how graduates find out about postgraduate opportunities and further study. Findings from the I-Graduate (2013) research study on the information needs of postgraduate taught (PGT) students noted that current and potential PGT students perceived that the information they need to help them choose a PGT course is already available somewhere, but the sources are scattered and sometimes out-of-date (even on institutional websites). Qualitative information at course level is also viewed as being important when choosing a course. Table 22 outlines the methods North Wales respondents used to find out about postgraduate opportunities¹⁸⁰.

Table 22 Methods graduates used to find out about postgraduate opportunities

Q. What methods did you/have you used to find out about postgraduate opportunities?											
	Careers services	College or University website	Research Council websites	General website	College or University staff	Personal contact	Charities and trusts	Learned Soc	Businesses	Spec	Employer
n	13	10	3	5	8	3	1	2	1	0	1

As the table shows, the most popular methods were related to the institution itself e.g. university careers service; the university website or university lecturers. Individual, subject or institutional differences are difficult to discuss as only one third of respondents (21) completed this section of the questionnaire. Many of those that did gave little detailed qualitative information. What was clear was that institutional services were used most often. careers services were used by those considering study options, with the target institution being the most important source of information. The lack of respondents who consulted research council websites for information may be a concern for these organisations, but as qualitative data on the reasons for these choices was not provided by any respondents¹⁸¹ it is difficult to draw conclusions. I would suggest that the reasons why institutional careers services would be popular choices is because these sources provide the most visible details of further study. What is notable for my study is that the few graduates who completed this

¹⁸⁰ 40 percent of respondents gave details of the methods they used to find out about postgraduate study.

¹⁸¹ This may have been because questions relating to methods to access postgraduate study were at the end of the survey. This is not unusual as Taylor Powell and Herman (2000) found that respondents who participate in surveys do not always complete the full survey.

section of the questionnaire, who went on to further study said that they did not consider using their careers service to find out information on study or employment options. This is consistent with a study by Mellors-Bourne, Jackson and Hodges (2012) who interviewed final-year doctoral researchers. They found that only one third had used their higher education careers service as postgraduates, substantially less than did so as undergraduates, while international postgraduates tended to use it more., a further one third claimed never to have used a university careers service at all. However, when asked, two thirds felt they would have benefited if they had used a careers service at some stage, especially female respondents. High proportions of those researchers who had used a university careers service had found it helpful, irrespective of when they accessed it, their current discipline or study mode. North Wales respondents did not feel that their institutions career service would have the detailed information that they required.

My own discussions with North Wales graduates supported one of the findings from the I-Graduate research study (2013). The report noted that most actual or potential postgraduate students felt that the information they needed to help them choose a course is readily available somewhere. Younger students agreed with the specifics of the I-Graduate study, namely that sources and information on postgraduate study are often not in one place, and can be out-of-date. However, interviews with mature students from Bangor University and Glyndwr University graduates showed that they recognised that they were at fault for not knowing the most useful sources. There was also the suggestion from two graduates (Respondents 042 and 047) that younger graduates would automatically know this information. However I found that all graduates knew more than they thought they did as most understood that there was scholarships and bursaries available from a variety of sources. They were also aware of a website called Prospects.ac.uk and followed articles on the subject in newspapers such as the Guardian. When I unpicked the data I felt that the underlying issue was that it was difficult knowing how to apply, rather than to find information about funding. Some graduates had used institutional support, e.g. courses from careers services to understand more, but this appeared to only put them off further for applying for funding. Respondent 047 summed up the views of many in her comments to me during the end of our interview *there are so many hoops to get through, so many different 'themes' in which you need to touch upon to bid for funding, so much work to do that it is actually easier to pay for the damn course.* This comment serves to highlight even more the importance of accessible information on funding sources and application procedures.

Several publications by university careers services note that charities are very unlikely to offer full funding, but it may be possible to combine several awards. Advice for graduates in the Guardian (21 August 2010) suggested that graduates should start early, in the first term if possible, as some charities operate strict deadlines. There are a number of problems with this advice. First is the difficulty involved in simultaneous applications from several different sources. Funding applications are a time consuming process. I raised this issue with a number of graduates and they agreed that they would need a great deal of support to be able to do this - not only in order to know how to apply, but further support to keep track of the money coming in from these grants. Respondent 043 noted that in community organisations *“there would a number of people who would be working on such applications, as opposed to just one person”*. There was also a concern about how they would be able to apply for funding within specific deadlines as *all the work would be going into the application itself*. Graduates with family experience of the above matters are more likely to be able to achieve successful outcomes in this area. There are ongoing attempts by careers services to deal with these issues, as many, including the institutions I have been concentrating on, offer short courses to provide advice as well as practical support for those applying for funding.

Conclusion

“Trajectory” as a concept for analysing post graduation experiences.

In the previous chapter I outlined my concerns with the practice of describing graduates experiences according to initial destinations. I noted that the word was not an adequate descriptor as it suggested that one was a student, then became a graduate who had their future pathway neatly laid out before them within six months. Common sense suggests that post graduation experiences are more nuanced than this, and graduates may not move so easily from the world of a student into the role as an employee, post graduate student, parent or carer. The word trajectory was one that I came to adopt as the best way to describe my understanding of post graduation experiences. Whilst there are other terms that could have been used, for instance “career”, I felt that this term that is synonymous with attempting to understand individual entry paths into the labour market only, and the continuing path and steps in the work life, within or between organisations. The term trajectory tends to focus more on mobility and transformation and recognises circumstances beyond the employment

contract. The term is also suited to this discussion as it is neutral, describing progression as well as changing orientations or discontinuous steps, or no progression (Valenduc, et al, 2009).

When using the term trajectory I also had in mind the work of Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin (1991) who drew upon the concept extensively to provide the theoretical framework for discussions of the relationship between illness and the types of work required to manage an illness (cited in Riemann and Schiitze,1991). While the subject is not directly relatable to graduate trajectories, there is some overlap when it is understood that Strauss and Corbin refers to trajectory as being the *social process of disorder* (ibid: 161). That post graduation experiences can be disorderly social processes that is often ignored in discussions of graduates¹⁸². The concept of trajectories utilising the more rounded view provided here enables us to instead see post graduation experiences as a longer, more eventful journey containing highs and lows. Such issues will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Seven.

Summary

This chapter has discussed the post graduation trajectories of a sample of graduates from North Wales. Like the previous chapter which focused on outcomes I found there were variations in graduate trajectories according to subject studied and institution attended. A main finding of this chapter was the number of respondents who reported having multiple outcomes when asked about their circumstances over a four year period. The likelihood of having these multiple outcomes depended on the subject studied as well as regional factors such as bilingualism, local networks and access to transport and socio-economic factors. I also presented evidence for how graduates accessed employment and postgraduate opportunities, noting that career services were used by graduates seeking information about postgraduate study, while recruitment agencies were preferred when graduates wanted to access employment opportunities. The next chapter outlines types of graduate trajectories and elaborates on the types of roles that respondents gained post graduation.

¹⁸²However the current economic climate has meant that there are now often various newspaper articles which warn graduates that they may not get a graduate level job as quickly as they once thought.

CHAPTER SEVEN. FINDINGS: TYPES OF TRAJECTORIES AMONGST GRADUATES FROM NORTH WALES

Introduction

In order to gain a deeper understanding of graduate trajectories, this chapter returns to existing literature on graduates with a specific focus on typologies. These available graduate typologies are then analysed for 'fit' with my own mixed methods data on North Wales graduates, before I outline my own typology of graduate trajectories. The chapter finishes with explanations for why some graduates tend to have certain trajectories.

Existing graduate typologies

Typologies, or the ordering of cases in relation to their similarities (Lewis-Beck, 1994), has played a meaningful role since the beginning of empirical social sciences. Types can help us understand and explain complex social realities and systems (Kluge, 2000), but as Bailey 1994 notes, we also utilise typologies on an everyday basis, for instance: male/female or employed/further study/unemployed. Typology construction is often derived from either the work of Max Weber (1947, 1949) or Howard Becker (1940; 1950 and 1951), see also Bailey (1994). Weber's ideal type methodology refers to an analytical construct, formed from the most essential elements of a given phenomenon (e.g. 'democracy' as a political system); whilst the 'constructed' type of Becker is a description of the most commonly found characteristics (ibid). One of the best known typological classifications is of types of welfare regimes proposed by Esping-Andersen. Using different institutional and ideological characteristics of countries, Esping-Andersen sorted them into three distinguishable welfare regimes (liberal, social democratic and conservative). His basic distinction between the three focused on the ways in which social welfare is produced and allocated between the state, the market and the family. The typology I construct here is most strongly influenced by Becker's methodology.

Bailey (1994) explains that an advantage of such classification systems is that they enable the researcher to condense complex data into manageable categories, which can then be analysed in further detail. Research by ESS EduNet (2013) uses the example of the United States, highlighting that even if one applied a lens to the country in terms of cities, this would still be a large task. However, if each city is considered to correspond to one of three 'types',

(‘manufacturing centre’; ‘service centre’ or ‘recreational centre’) then it is far easier to compare respondents socio-economic characteristics or, for instance membership of a political party. Similarities and differences between these types of centres and cities can be highlighted: for instance, are people from manufacturing centres more likely to vote for a particular political party? Such a classification can provide valuable information that can be used to understand the population. However, as Uunk (2004) noted, using a one-dimensional categorisation (as most typologies do) has its disadvantages. For instance, not all cities will fall clearly into one category and some cities will have elements of being both a service centre and of a manufacturing centre. Also classifying such large numbers of people, or other examples of ‘data’, has been criticised as being *static rather than dynamic* (ibid: 15). Categories or types may not evolve in accordance with changing circumstances e.g. the current economic crisis. Whilst Bailey (1994) acknowledges this and suggests that the criticism is valid in some circumstances, he argues that it should not be over exaggerated. As long as researchers are sure of changing contexts then the typology does not have to be static.

Chapter Three outlined four typologies relating to graduates. The first two typologies, both developed by Purcell and Elias (2004) during longitudinal Future Track research offers an employment classification relating to the types of occupations commonly found in the graduate labour market. The latter two typologies first proposed by Brown and Scase (1994) and then further developed by Tomlinson (2007) concentrate on labour market orientations. Chapter Three noted that the difficulty with utilising these typologies in relation to my own cohort of graduates is that they both concentrate on employment outcomes. However, despite this considerable difficulty it is still useful to evaluate these trajectories in relation to my own graduates as they may illuminate their experiences in greater detail. In this section, I will concentrate on discussing the main two typologies: Brown and Scase (1994) and Purcell and Elias (2004).

Labour market orientations - Brown and Scase (1994).

As discussed in Chapter Three the typology by Brown and Scase (1994), compared three different types of universities – an Oxbridge institution; a traditional institution and a post 1992, inner city university, and identified graduates as being either ‘Conformist’ and ‘Non – Conformist’ (See page 67 for a detailed discussion of this typology). My first difficulty with this typology was that I did not note any graduates amongst my respondents who did not

see career development as part of their personal development. All respondents I interviewed stressed their desire for a career, whilst the majority of those who completed the survey cited career based reasons as their motivation for entering university. A further difficulty with comparing my own cohort of graduates against Brown and Scase's (1994) data is that in order to get a more meaningful understanding of a graduate's attitude towards their career I needed to rely on interview data. Whilst the interview data illuminated attitudes towards careers in greater detail it is based on one quarter of the sample of graduates, and does not represent all institutions¹⁸³.

Returning to Brown and Scase (1994), within the conformist perspective they identified three 'types: *Traditional Bureaucratic; Flexible* or *Entrepreneurial*. The first type consisted of graduates who would look for full time employment as they perceived that a career can be obtained from a single large organisation. The latter two types differed as they had a greater understanding of how organisations are restructuring, however those described as being flexible were more likely to enter employment whilst the entrepreneurial graduates were more likely to consider self employment. In terms of my own sample and in line with findings from a study by Tomlinson (2007) I found there were no graduates who fit the traditional bureaucratic type as my respondents were evenly divided into the latter two categories e.g. flexible and entrepreneurial. After analysing the responses from my sample those who fit the flexible category were most likely to express dissatisfaction with their career. This has been mentioned in Chapter Six where I discussed these mainly female graduates, working on a temporary basis did not appear to be happy with this situation in the long term. These respondents noted that whilst they were aware that the graduate labour market had changed, they did not feel that they would still be working on a temporary basis beyond the first year or two after they graduated. A discussion with Respondent 011 highlights these feelings of disappointment with the graduate market many graduates face.

¹⁸³ The interviewees matched the profile of respondents from the survey e.g. half were from Bangor University, followed by Glyndwr and OU, and half were social studies graduates, followed by business and then engineering. I was unable to interview a respondent from Coleg Llandrillo Cymru

Interviewer: Is there anything else you would like to tell me about what you did in the first year after graduation?

Respondent 011: I think I've sounded more fed up than I meant too [laughs]. Believe it or not, my first year went quite well. I've made it sound terrible [laughs]. I was able to get a job that I liked, I really enjoyed the job, it was great. I enjoyed going in everyday – that's a lot more than what some people have. It's just as soon as I started it I was aware that I was on borrowed time...[Voice is muffled on the tape] these posts are short term. You know that you have funding for one year, but are unsure what will happen after that. Friends never quite understood why I wouldn't 'stand up for myself' and find out exactly how long I would be in the job so I could move on if not in it for longer than 12 months, but it's easier said than done. My mum would, well she would get quite worried asking me when I would be getting another job. She would say that "you've got the qualifications, can't you get a 'good job?'" I don't think she understood, well, she meant well, but it was frustrating because she didn't seem to understand that there aren't the same amount of jobs out there. The stress certainly put a dampener on my first year, but then I was very grateful to have gotten a job so quickly after graduation. I felt grateful, but also annoyed as the job was so insecure. The next year was even more up and down, but I made my choices to try and stick with that sort of work so I cannot complain. I could have just given up and tried to get any job, but the reason I went to university was so I could do a job I enjoy. That is the problem. I enjoyed the work I do, I went to university to work in these jobs, but I was not expecting the job insecurity to carry on.

It was apparent in this interview that the disappointment was not with the job that this person was doing, but more towards the type of employment: insecure, project funded. Elements of these sentiments were found in the survey and interviews of almost all graduates who were working on a temporary basis. I also expressed some similar views in Chapter One when discussing the personal context to this study. There is also a sub text to the above interview and two other interviews (also with female graduates), namely the theme that whilst graduates may understand that the labour market has changed in recent years, friends and family may have what Brown and Scase (1994) describe as a traditional view of graduate employment i.e. a job for life with one company. This puts additional pressure on the graduate where they are perceived, in the words of Respondent 043 as *doing well in getting their degree, but almost failing in not getting the job.*

Whilst I noted earlier that there were no respondents in my sample who fitted the non-conformist perspective, I did note that there were respondents whose experiences fit the individual categories within that perspective. For instance some fit the *socially committed* criteria (those who worked or wanted employment in the voluntary sector as they prioritised certain ideals over their occupational careers (Brown and Scase, 1994: 89). These respondents were generally female from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. A very small number of graduates matched the *ritualist* category (those who recognise the need for employment but conceptualise this in terms of income). This sub-group were graduates in business subjects. I found no examples of respondents who were *drop-outs*, those who had a marginal attachment to the labour market) (Brown and Scase, 1994, p89).

A problem I noted when using this typology was that it fails to reflect how orientations can change, for instance one may start off with a socially committed orientation, but due to financial concerns may move more towards a version of the conformist point of view. I did not see explicit examples of this but I have found in previous research projects¹⁸⁴ that individuals attempt consciously or unconsciously to present a positive public image to the researcher (Aronson et al, 2009). As such these conflicting views were difficult to gauge. I also did not feel that the categories were suited, or had a good fit with the purpose of my study. However, the method of evaluating labour market orientations did highlight some useful data regarding satisfaction or lack of it with the graduates career path.

SOC (HE): A classification of graduate occupations - Purcell and Elias (2004).

The most widely used typology in terms of graduates is that by Purcell and Elias (2004) who as part of a programme of research on graduate career paths, developed a measure of typical graduate occupations. Called SOC(HE), Purcell and Elias (2004) classified all Standard Occupational Classifications into one of five different categories: traditional, modern, new, niche and non graduate occupations¹⁸⁵. They found that graduates were distributed equally between each 'type' of graduate occupation: one fifth each were in traditional graduate jobs, modern graduate jobs, new graduate jobs, or in niche graduate occupations, whilst the remainder were in non-graduate positions (Further discussed in Elias and Purcell, 2004). In order to test the suitability of Purcell and Elias's (2004) classification

¹⁸⁴ Whilst researching employment barriers for North Wales Race Equality Network I interviewed local employment service providers about their approach to the local black and minority ethnic community. I found that a number of individuals I interviewed from such institutions wanted to come across as being as unconcerned as possible regarding race and equality issues. As such they often were more concerned about the way they came across to me, the interviewer, as opposed to talking about their services.

¹⁸⁵ See Chapter Three for a detailed discussion of the definition of each job type

for the purpose of this study I analysed the first job titles of my respondents, and compiled a table to show which type of graduate occupation they were in. As my emphasis is on trajectories I also decided to compare this against the job title of the graduate in their fourth year after graduation.

Table 23 Evaluation of data on North Wales graduates according to the classification by Purcell and Elias (2004)

Respondent No	Job title year 1	Type of graduate role in year 1	Job title year 4	Type of graduate role in year 4
005	Legal secretary	Non graduate	Support worker	Non graduate
002	Marketing Officer	New	Teaching Officer	New
003	PA	Non graduate	PA	Non graduate
025	Family business bookkeeper	New	Family business Business Manager	New
001	Support Services Administrator	Non graduate	Information Officer	New
024	IT Project Manager	New	IT Project Manager	New
023	Community Development Officer	New	Community Development Officer	New
020	Trainee manager.	New	Marketing manager	New
030	Graduate Engineer	New	Engineer	Traditional
027	Manufacturing Engineer	Traditional	Advanced manufacturing engineer	Traditional
029	Electrical Engineer	Traditional	Sector Manager	Traditional
017	Resource analyst	New	Resource analyst/ manager	Traditional
014	Temp health coordinator	New	Asst health coordinator	New
007	Admin	Non graduate	Validation Officer	New
009	Business Dev Executive	Non graduate	Business Dev Manager	New
010	Document Supply Administrator	Non graduate	User Support Assistant Librarian	New
019	RMN	Niche	RMN	Niche
031	Senior buyer CCTV manufacturing	New	Contract manager	New
036	Teaching Assistant	New	Flying Start Manager	New
037	Shop Assistant	Non graduate	Shop Manager	Non graduate
039	Admin	Non graduate	Marketing Officer	New
051	Admin	Non graduate	Active Young People Co-Ordinator	New
054	Process Development Engineer	Traditional	Process Development Engineer	Traditional
056	Weatherspoon's Bar manager	Non graduate	Weatherspoon's Bar manager	Non graduate
041	Admin	Non graduate	Office manager	Non graduate
043	Admin/ Project worker	Non graduate	Admin	Non graduate
045	Housing support officer	New	Call centre	Non graduate
046	Hospitality Manger	Niche	Manager Mental Health Scheme	New
040	Undespisable		Housing policy manager	New
064	Performance officer	New	Quality and Performance Manager	New
066	Environmental Health support Officer	New	Regional manager	New

As the table shows, in the first year one in ten North Wales graduates were in traditional graduate occupations, one in twenty were in niche graduate occupations, just over one third of graduates were in new graduate occupations, with the same amount being in non graduate occupations. The high number of graduates in non graduate occupations was

expected as this is likely for graduates within the first year. When I used the Purcell and Elias's (2004) classification to evaluate the outcomes of graduates four years after graduation, I found that there were differences. North Wales graduates in traditional roles had risen from one in ten to 15 percent; there was one less graduate who was in a niche occupation, and just under half were in new graduate occupations. As data from the previous chapters showed there were fewer graduates in non graduate roles four years after graduation – dropping from one third to one in five. Despite the decrease this is still a higher level than might be expected from other data sources.

There were institutional differences. Graduates from Bangor University graduates, a traditional institution, were most likely to be in traditional graduate roles, for instance electrical engineer or RMN (although the latter was already in this position prior to starting university). Glyndwr University graduates were most likely to be in non graduate roles e.g. receptionist or shop assistant, or new graduate occupations such as tenancy enforcement officer or physical impairment facilitator. They had no graduates who were in niche occupations. Further study was the trajectory for respondents from Coleg Llandrillo graduate¹⁸⁶ but numbers are too small for analysis. All the OU graduates who were in employment twelve months after graduation were in new graduate occupations. Examples include performance officer and environmental health support officer. A further subject differences was that engineering graduates were almost all in traditional graduate occupations whilst graduates from business and social studies showed more variety – a split between new graduate occupations and non graduate roles. There were gender differences as males were slightly more likely to be found in traditional graduate roles, whilst females were found in new or non graduate positions. Age differences were less apparent but overall, younger students were more likely to be in traditional graduate roles, but also just as likely to be in non graduate positions. In analysing the types of roles undertaken according to socio-economic class, those from social classes 1-3 were more likely to be in traditional graduate positions, whilst those from economically disadvantaged groups (social classes 4-8) were more likely to be in new graduate roles.

Utilising Purcell and Elias's (2004) classification in terms of North Wales respondents is particularly interesting when we consider that one in four graduates were in non graduate

¹⁸⁶ Also to note is that only two graduates from Coleg Llandrillo completed the survey

roles. Higher levels of graduates in non graduate roles can be an indicator that there are too many graduates for too few graduate roles or evidence of economic constraints. The evidence from Chapter Five also suggests that it may reflect the decision by some individuals to take such roles as a 'breather' following an intensive time studying for an undergraduate degree. The number of graduates in non-graduate occupations is a concern as there will be a 'knock-on' effect on employment amongst those without degrees; graduates may capture jobs that would have been taken up by those without degrees. (Universities UK, 2010). However, it is noted that there is support for data from the previous chapter that the longer a graduate is in the labour market, the more likely they are to find suitable, graduate level roles.

Despite the valuable contribution of Purcell and Elias's (2004) research I experienced a number of difficulties in applying their graduate typology. Whilst Mosca and Wright (2012) had concerns with the term 'niche' graduate occupations, in so much as these roles could be undertaken by both individuals with or without a degree, I had the same concern with 'new' graduate occupations. According to my analysis I found that this type of graduate occupation accounted for the outcomes of a wide range of roles: from officer and coordinator (marketing officer, temporary health coordinator) to management roles such as business development manager and contract manager. Following an analysis of these roles I found that the salary differences were too small¹⁸⁷ and the job description was too similar to warrant the manager roles being placed in another category. The roles outlined above are the same positions that previously would not have required a degree qualification. The high levels of graduates in new graduate roles is also of particular interest as they tended to be jobs within local authorities or in the voluntary sector - a large number of which are temporary positions based on funding from various local and national sources. Further to this, despite the influx of funding into areas such as North Wales, a study by Mohl and Hagen (2011) regarding European funding found that there is no clear evidence that such funding sources actually promotes regional employment beyond the funding period. Instead, they suggested, structural funds payments seem to be used as capital subsidies. Evidence for this finding was noted in my sample of North Wales graduates as I observed that funded roles such as these often did not lead onto permanent employment.

¹⁸⁷ I looked for examples of these roles on three sources: one local and two national (www.wcva.co.uk, JobCentre Plus and Guardian jobs). The business development manager role alongside the contract manager position had an approx salary of £19-£27K pa. The marketing officer and welfare officer had an approx salary of £16 – 24K pa.

The most obvious problem with the Purcell and Elias (2004) classification is that it just concentrates on graduate employment, it says little about other post graduation experiences, self employment, or forms of inactivity. The emphasis on employment means that use of this typology excludes the experiences of approximately half of my sample of North Wales graduates. Whilst my attempt to apply Purcell and Elias's (2004) typology to discuss trajectories - by comparing the outcomes in year one to year four – meant that I could highlight changes over time, this was a stilted discussion which missed out a lot of information including how people got from one employment role to another.

A new classification: a typology of graduate trajectories

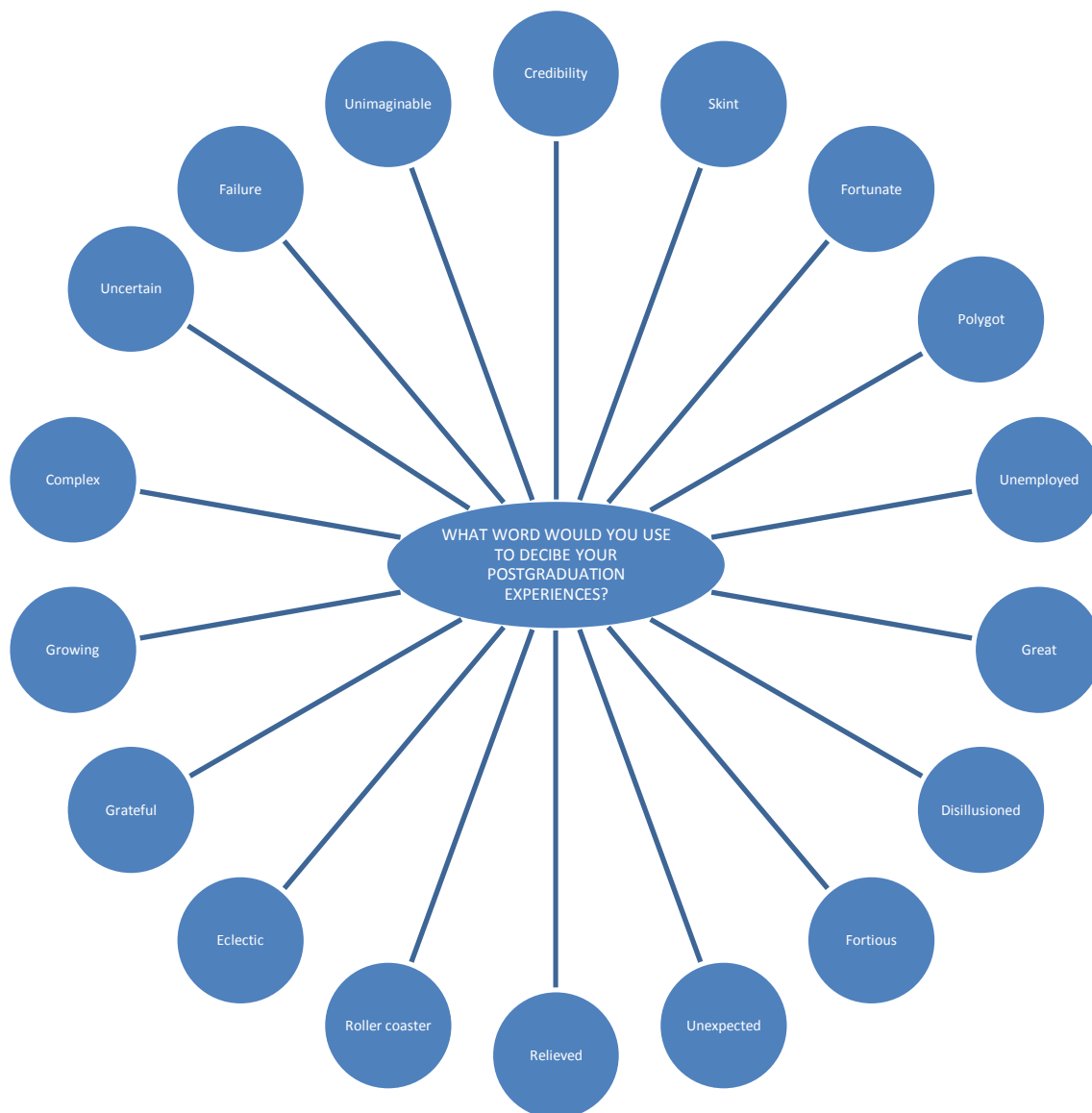
Whilst there is value in a purely employment based description of graduate outcomes there are a number of difficulties with this approach specifically related to the aims of my own study. As discussed in Chapter One, I was loath to contribute to a simplistic policy based discussion based on HESA destinations statistics alone in which graduates who enter full time employment are the only success stories. My experiences with trying to apply data from my own study to the above typologies led to the decision to devise a new typology of graduate trajectories. This involved three stages, which are discussed as follows.

Stage one. Describing graduate trajectories

To finish off my interviews relating to graduate trajectories I asked each respondent to *Describe your post graduation experiences in one word*. I was initially worried about asking this question as I wondered if it was too difficult a question to answer, given the complexity of graduate trajectories and the differences/similarities that respondents highlighted. I also felt I had to consider how graduates would feel about answering such a stark question. However, all interviewees were actually able to answer the question and all gave me their response very quickly. I also posed the question to three further respondents who had recently completed my survey online and had provided their email address, but who did not want to take part in a full interview.

Figure 8, overleaf, presents the responses

Figure 8 The one word that graduates used to describe their post graduation experiences



Whilst there was little consensus amongst graduates when I asked them about their experiences, a number of obvious themes emerged. There was the suggestion of satisfaction with their experiences: e.g. *Great* and *Relieved*, hints of the personal development they had gained: e.g. *Growing* and *Credibility*. There was also a number of references to the complexity of the graduate trajectory e.g. *Rollercoaster* and *Uncertain*. Finally there were suggestions of dissatisfaction amongst the respondents: e.g. *Failure*; *Skint* and *Unemployed*. Whilst this figure is only a snapshot is based on a one word answer, it was nonetheless useful as it made me consider graduate trajectories in a slightly different way. Instead of thinking of graduate trajectories on purely individual basis I began to sense

that there were some common themes to be found in both the survey data and in the interviews.

Stage Two: Analysing whether trajectories were Graduate or Non graduate

The often cited graduate/non graduate distinction made between graduate outcomes formed the basis for Stage Two of the process. Despite some concerns about dividing graduate outcomes in a dichotomous way, I felt I could add to the traditional literature on graduate outcomes as I would be taking into account other, non employment career choices. This decision, to include non employment outcomes, was cemented after collecting the data as one quarter of my respondents had engaged in some form of further study, and one in ten were economically inactive at some stage of their graduate career. I must stress that this division does not offer a value judgement that these are 'good' or 'bad' trajectories.

In deciding what to include in the distinction between graduate/non graduate careers, I drew upon the concept of a protean career, derived from Hall & Moss (1998), who state that an individual manages their career. This gave me the impetus to include further study and self employment as examples of a graduate trajectory (as long as these appeared to be the choice of the graduate, and were not undertaken as the only option due to a lack of employment). Despite interviews with graduates that suggested unemployment was not always a negative experience¹⁸⁸, I did not find evidence to support the notion that this is an option that the graduate would actively chose - instead this is a negative option which many of my respondents turned into a positive experience. Thus I do not include graduates who were unemployed as having a graduate trajectory. I also do not include graduates who undertook caring responsibilities as this is an option that does not rely on gaining a graduate qualification, whereas for example, further study does due to the qualifications needed to enter postgraduate study. The number remaining after this procedure was 40.

In order to divide types of employment into graduate/non graduate, I utilised a two point test devised by Burke (2012) to evaluate the job title of each graduate who entered employment at any stage after graduation e.g. up to four years after graduation.

1. Does the role require a degree level qualification?

¹⁸⁸ See Chapter Six where I discuss how graduates used periods of short term employment to develop skills, research self employment option and other positive uses of their time.

2. Does the graduate role pay the average graduate wage in Wales?¹⁸⁹

According to this test 60 percent (40) of respondents were in graduate occupations, the remaining being in non graduate roles.

Stage three – Continuity of trajectories

After evaluating the data collected on what my respondents were doing for a period of up to four years after graduation I began to observe that whilst some graduates appeared to have a linear or continuous trajectory – from HE to graduate level employment or further education – the trajectories of other graduates appeared to be far more disrupted. For example they appeared to change direction, experienced unemployment and held temporary positions. With these concerns in mind I turned to the literature that focuses on career trajectories. An article by Brousseau et al (1996) *Career Pandemonium: Realigning organizations and individuals* was exceedingly helpful as it reminded me of my original assertion when undertaking this study that the criteria for a successful career can differ from individual to individual. Brousseau et al (1996) took this further, noting that careers do not always follow the same pattern, offering a framework that classified career concepts: Linear – traditional upward movement, with variable tenure in job roles; Expert – little movement and long (sometimes life-long) role tenure; Spiral – lateral movement, with 7-10 year tenure and Transitory – lateral moves of shorter duration (3-5 years).

Whilst I did not feel that the managerial focus of the Brousseau et al (1996) study best suited a sociological study of graduates, his emphasis that trajectories being linear and transitory interested me. Research by Gautié (2003); and Fournier & Bujold (2005), drew upon these themes, suggesting that career trajectories can be characterised by several features:

- *Linear trajectories.* Going straight from education to work is not the norm. Some individuals may have this experience, but others have a fractured trajectory.
- *Transition phases* – e.g. from employment to employment; between different types of work contracts; or from employment to unemployment or *vice versa*. Such transitions are often more frequent at the beginning of professional trajectories;
- *Multiplication of transitions.* The intertwining constraints of professional and family life influence lifelong training, differentiated wage progression and geographical mobility.

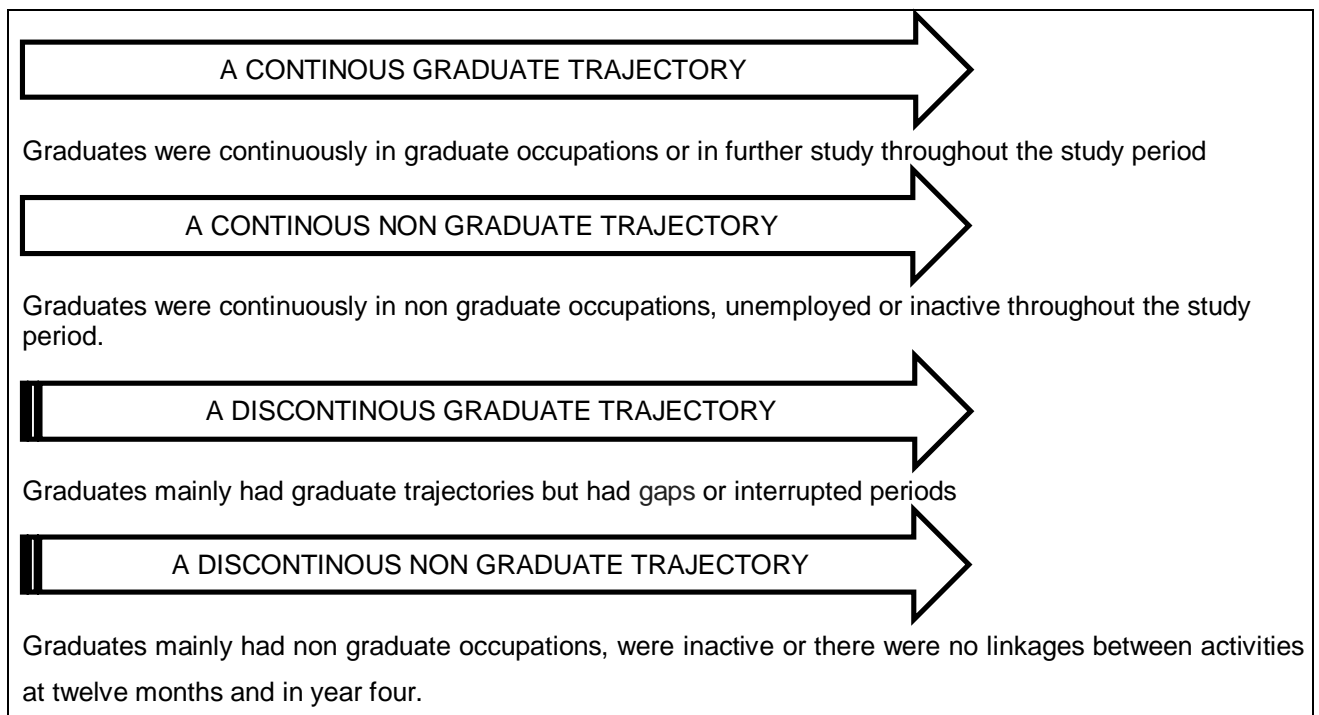
¹⁸⁹ I adapted this from Burke (2012) who had used this test to apply it the circumstances of graduates from Ireland.

Fragmentation of the trajectory can generate income inequalities, but also disparities in access to networks or information on upcoming vacancies or other career opportunities, which in turn can impact on later trajectories. I therefore decided that I would distinguish between those graduates who had a continuous trajectory and those who had a discontinuous trajectory. A continuous trajectory is where graduates either keep the same role throughout (this does not imply the level of the role) or undertake further study. The implication with this type of trajectory is that the choices made post graduation have had some purpose. A discontinuous trajectory is one in which the graduate experiences some intervals or gaps, or there are no apparent linkages between what they were doing at twelve months and what one was doing at four years. The implication being that there may be some impediments to these choices.

A typology of graduate trajectories

From the above analysis the following descriptive typology was devised.

Figure 9 A Typology of graduate trajectories



As Figure 9 shows this typology shows a distinction between continuous and discontinuous trajectories, as well as non graduate and graduate. Using this typology I then analysed the trajectories of all North Wales respondents. Table 24 outlines the types of trajectories respondents had. As the table shows, utilising this typology increases the level of

respondents who had graduate trajectories as over half of respondents had continuous graduate trajectories, whilst almost one quarter had discontinuous graduate trajectories. One in ten had a discontinuous non graduate and one in ten had a continuous non graduate trajectories¹⁹⁰.

Table 24 North Wales respondents and their trajectories

	Continuous graduate trajectory	Continuous non graduate trajectory	Discontinuous graduate trajectory	Discontinuous Non graduate trajectory
N	35	8	15	9
%	53	12	22	13

Key Characteristics of each trajectory¹⁹¹.

Further analysis of the trajectories of individual graduates highlighted a number of features associated with each trajectory type. These are outlined in Figure 10. There were *institutional* differences as graduates from OU and Bangor University, particularly the former, were more likely to gain a continuous graduate trajectory. Graduates from Glyndwr University were more likely to have a discontinuous trajectory, whilst the small (n2) numbers of Coleg Llandrillo Cymru respondents were shared between discontinuous graduate or continuous graduate trajectories. When we consider subject studied engineering is a subject where almost all graduates have a continuous graduate trajectory. Just over half of business graduates had a continuous graduate trajectory, whilst the remainder mainly had discontinuous graduate trajectories. Social studies graduates were in comparison to other subjects, were most likely to have a discontinuous graduate trajectory.

Despite the research evidence in Chapter Two and Three indicating the importance of degree classification for future destinations, and later trajectories I have not discussed this issue until now. I have not included this in Figure 10 as unfortunately during the data analysis phase I realised that the data on this was flawed; I had inadvertently not included all the different degree classifications e.g. I had not given graduates the option to indicate that they had gained a 2.2. As such the data regarding the influence of degree classification

¹⁹⁰ Appendix I provides an outline of general demographic characteristics of respondents under each type, as well as the subject studied, institution attended; class of degree, and the respondents prior circumstances to starting university, as well as if the family attended university.

¹⁹¹ Appendix F outlines the type of trajectory for each respondent.

Figure 10 Key characteristics of each type of trajectory

Key characteristics of a continuous graduate trajectory

- Male
- 21-24 or 30-39
- Socio-economic classes 1-3
- From OU or Bangor University
- Has an engineering degree
- Family attended university
- Local contacts or Network
- Welsh language skills
- Access to own transport

Key characteristics of a continuous non graduate trajectory

- Slightly more females
- Aged 25-29 or 30-30
- Socio-economic classes 4-8
- From Glyndwr University or Bangor University
- Has a business degree
- Family attended university
- Little or no Welsh language skills
- Does not have access to own transport

Key characteristics of a discontinuous graduate trajectory

- Female
- Aged 25-29
- Socio-economic classes 4-8
- Attended Glyndwr University
- Has a social studies degree
- Less likely to have a family background in university
- States that does not have suitable local networks
- Little or no Welsh language skills
- Does not have access to own transport

Key characteristics of a discontinuous non graduate trajectory

- Female
- Aged 25-29
- Socio-economic classes 4-8
- Has a social studies or business degree
- Attended Glyndwr University
- Less likely to have a family background in university
- Little or no Welsh language skills
- Does not have access to own transport

remains unclear in terms of my own sample. However when I plotted the data I did note that whilst there was a observable representation of those who gained a first class honours amongst graduates with a continuous graduate trajectory (the graduate pathways with the least amount of disruption), there were higher levels of graduates with this classification amongst those with both types of discontinuous trajectories. As my data regarding degree classification is not conclusive in this instance, I would with some caution suggest that degree classification may not be an important indicator for the type of graduate trajectory. Perhaps of more influence is whether a graduate is the first in their family to attend university, as when I evaluated the data on those who had family members who had previously been in HE, I found that whilst just under half of graduates with continuous non graduate or discontinuous graduate and non graduate trajectories had family members who had been in university, this proportion rose to 85 percent for those with continuous graduate trajectories.

When we consider *gender*, overall, males were more likely to have continuous graduate trajectories (68 percent of males compared with 41 percent of females). Females were more likely to have discontinuous trajectories (26 percent compared with 18 percent for males). The *age* of the respondent was also an influence as younger graduates (those aged up to 24 years old) were most likely to have continuous graduate trajectories, whilst those aged 25-29 were most likely amongst to have a discontinuous graduate trajectory. Graduates who were in *socio-economic classes* IV-VIII were most likely to either have discontinuous graduate trajectories or discontinuous non graduate trajectories, whereas graduates from social groups 1-3 were most likely to have continuous graduate trajectories.

Explanations for types of trajectories

The economic recession

In a report for the ESRC, Vaitilingam (2009) identifies the impact of recession on individuals, employers and economic structures: *it has increased uncertainty in economic markets, hampering the rate of hiring and investment decisions. [T]he longer the firms wait, the more economic activity will slow down. Public spending cuts will become inevitable* (p5). The latter has been particularly worrying in North Wales, as in the rest of the country, the public sector is the major employer in the

region. Countless media reports have picked up on this highlighting that employment prospects for graduates will and have been particularly bleak since the start of the recession in 2008. *Recession-hit graduates 'working as cleaners and porters'* (The Telegraph, 28 Jun 2012) being a typical headline, outlining grim tales of the over-indebted and underemployed graduates. Statistical data from ONS (2013) supports these headlines as they found that since the onset of the recession, the unemployment rate for new graduates was 20 percent in the third quarter of 2010 - almost double the rate before the start of the recession, which stood at 10 percent and unemployment for around 1 in 10 recent graduates.

The picture for this sample of North Wales graduates was in many ways more promising as levels of unemployment were relatively low at six months, and decreased even further throughout the trajectories. Whilst there were instances of temporary employment, these also declined throughout a graduate's trajectory. Despite these positive examples some respondents were frustrated with their trajectories as they perceived their options were limited to being employed on an temporary basis, undertaking a position with a zero hour contract, or entering non graduate employment [Respondent 014]. This is in part consistent with research by Standing (2011) who asserted that the recession would be more likely to effect females and those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. However, whilst Standing was not referring to those without qualifications, my research supported his observations that gender and previous economic status would be an indicator of whether you likely to be working on a temporary basis. I also found that these factors would influence if a graduate's trajectory was discontinuous or non graduate. Further examination of the reasons for disruptions in female graduates' trajectories as well as those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, point to cuts in funding for local authority and third sector projects (the trajectory of Respondent 043 is a good example here). Whilst the recession effect was not as noticeable as expected e.g. unemployment did not increase, it is noted that the 'casualties' appeared to be least advantaged graduates. Future research, when the economy is more buoyant, could illuminate if these discontinuous trajectories are influenced by the economic recession, or if they constitute a further example of how NTS do not have equality of outcomes.

Personal Choice

An often neglected view is that graduate trajectories are based on personal choice. When graduate first destinations, in particular, are discussed there is little attention paid to graduates who do not fit within the confines of what a graduate 'should' be doing. Within this short sighted perspective there is little acknowledgement that not all graduates entered university for employment based reasons, but instead were fulfilling a life long dream to go to university. I found two examples of this amongst my respondents. The first graduate, Respondent 019 already had a career as a RMN and embarked on further study as she always wanted to go to university. Respondent 008's trajectory is another example.

Respondent 008 from Bangor University had a discontinuous graduate trajectory. She had multiple outcomes throughout the study period - a combination of caring responsibilities, volunteering and further study. Her interview revealed that in year one after graduating she had her second child, but alongside this she was working on a voluntary basis for a children's charity. In year two she was still 'not available for employment' but decided to return to university and undertook a MA qualification in the same subject area that she gained a degree. In year three she was still enrolled on the MA course, but as she had a new baby she was concentrating on that. When asked about her current circumstances she suggested that she was going to return and continue with her postgraduate studies.

In the current discourse on graduates the trajectory of this respondent would largely be ignored as she was not available for employment. Her volunteering experience would most probably not be included in the literature on graduate internships, or other forms of unpaid employment, as she volunteered due to a simple desire to help, as opposed to being a strategy to gain a graduate position. Further to this, her postgraduate study may only have been discussed as an example of those who 'drop out'. However I gleaned far more than this. I instead interpret her trajectory as a powerful example of someone who may be defined as a NTS wanting to, as she suggested *test her own limits*. Alongside this she started a family, but she still kept the desire to continue with her studies. Whilst this respondent may not have the typical graduate trajectory, her story is none the less useful for when trying to

understand the variety of graduate trajectories. Her story also highlights a different way in which to portray non traditional students who graduate.

Field, Habitus and Capital

The previous chapter highlighted that engineering graduates appeared to have smoother trajectories compared with those from other subjects. This view is endorsed in this chapter by the finding that graduates from this subject were more likely to have continuous graduate trajectories. Success is subjective, however there is the unmistakable understanding that the trajectories of engineering graduates are closest to the commonly understood notion of a successful graduate. As previous studies have shown (Browne, 2010; Clark, Zukas and Lent, 2011; Clark and Connolly, 2012, as well as Clark and Zukas, 2013) Bourdieu's theoretical concepts can help us to understand graduates and their transition to working and further study

A study of the IT sector by Clark, Zukas and Lent (2011) focused on three cases selected from a broader longitudinal project. They found that in order to understand transitions they needed to focus on the organisational context (field), the habitus of the individual making the transition, and the resources (capital) that individuals could deploy. Looking at the engineering profession through a Bourdieusian perspective there is evidence that this profession is a field. It is a structured social space (an established employment sector) with rules (the requirement to make progress towards Chartered Engineer status¹⁹²), forms of authority (The Engineering Council) and patterns of normal behaviour (engagement with structured work placements) (Bourdieu, 1990; 1993). The engineering field comprises of experts who are characterised by their ability to develop appropriate solutions to engineering problems, using new or existing technologies, through innovation, creativity and change. Clark and Connolly's (2012) study of engineering graduates is particularly helpful for understanding the types of tasks that graduates from this subject undertake as the researchers gathered data through semi-structured interviews. Participants were asked about their route into engineering including their choices in

¹⁹² Contemporary chartered engineers are degree-qualified, and have gained professional competencies through training and experience. The formation process of a chartered engineer generally takes a minimum of four years. The Engineering Council regulates the practice of professional engineering in the UK (Engineering UK, 2013).

relation to university study and the process of acclimatising to graduate work. They found that graduate recruits were immediately assigned work tasks, described as *delivering engineering solutions for the firm's clients*, alongside other professionals. I found evidence for this in the trajectories of two engineering graduates I interviewed, as both outlined a variety of engineering tasks that they were required to do. Respondent 029 said that he worked on an engineering programme straight after university *that taught me all the nuts and bolts I needed become a well-rounded engineer*. The other respondents all had job titles that indicated they took part in graduate level or higher level employment.

As the employment in this sector is mainly organised through project teams, finding graduates with the right dispositions is important (ibid). This is where the habitus of the graduate is central. The typical engineering graduate, according to HESA statistics and supported by my own study, is male, under the age of 25, and generally from a middle class background. Of further significance is that all but one of the engineering sample from North Wales had a family background in the subject area. This supports findings by Reay, Crozier and Clayton (2010) in their study of working class students making the transition into HE and beyond where they note that a person's habitus can influence their general dispositions to behave in a certain way within a field, in which they feel familiar. This is discussed in more detail in the previous chapter. My own findings confirm that engineering graduates were more likely to have family members in the engineering profession (See previous chapter).

When attempting to understand the relatively good performance of engineering graduates when compared to those from other subjects, these early family experiences, or individual habitus are exceedingly helpful. A person's habitus, a system of dispositions (lasting, acquired schemes of perception, thought and action), develop in response to the objective conditions they encounter and helps them to develop a 'feel for the game'. To put this into context with the trajectories of engineering graduates, specifically the respondents in this study, qualitative questionnaire data showed that their entry and understanding of the engineering field was greatly aided by having a father who had been or was already part of this wide employment sector. For instance only two engineering graduates reported that they had a period of unemployment throughout their trajectory. One respondent

discussed in their questionnaire responses how they used the time that they were unemployed to work with their father developing further skills that might be useful for employment. Whilst the skills they developed were not described in any detail, it is notable that after this time the graduate reported in year two that he went onto undertake a MS in Electrical Studies for a two year period. When asked about his current or recent circumstances, the respondent was working as a quality manager, whilst combining further study. A further respondent who also had a father working in the engineering field was unemployed in year one but then by year two, and until the end of his recorded trajectory for the purposes of this study, was working as a maintenance engineer. Whilst this cohort of engineering respondents is small, these findings regarding habitus and family support, are consistent with the Bourdieusian understanding of a professional field.

A further issue is the existence of capital. University participants in the aforementioned study by Clark and Connolly (2002) spoke of their university studies as helping them to learn the 'basics' or 'fundamentals' of engineering. I found similar commentary in the qualitative survey responses from my own sample of graduates. Gaining a degree qualification is a well known form of capital. Despite observations that as the numbers of graduates increase a degree as a form of economic and social capital decreases, I would suggest that an engineering degree has the same level of gravitas that it always had, perhaps even more so since the growing support for STEM subjects. Engineering has value for graduates and employers, as this subject, along with other traditional degree subjects, has a rich professional heritage and pedigree: one that appears to be conferred on those who gain a degree in this area. Qualitative survey data collected my sample of engineering graduates supported this. Respondent 028 noted that his engineering degree had been *part of the desirable selection criteria. I gathered that I was given the job due to my degree.* Respondent 027 suggested their degree was vital.

Bourdieu's concept of social capital is also interesting here as he refers to this asset as helping people gain access to employment through the direct and indirect employment of social connections. I found that engineering graduates who had what might be called a negative episode in their trajectory e.g. being unemployed or having multiple outcomes, appeared to 'recover' very quickly. For instance

Respondent 027, who was recorded as having multiple outcomes in year one (unemployed followed by temporary employment), by year two of his trajectory had entered a permanent role. The comments of three out of every four of these graduates referred to social connections they had utilised to gain employment. My North Wales sample pointed to existing, or previous employers, who offered them employment after graduation. Just over half reported that they utilised family connections and two respondents recalled the work experience they gained whilst doing their degree as being instrumental when they were looking for full time employment. The work experience included the opportunity to gain a vital reference as well as access to a wider social network – evidence of the strength of weak ties (Grannovetter, 1963)

Local assets

A further explanation that emerged from the literature and then evidenced by the research data was that local assets could potentially confer degrees of advantage or disadvantage on graduates, cashable only in the immediate local context. In the case of graduates from North Wales the assets in question are: local connections and Welsh language skills ¹⁹³. Research in 2005 by Menter a Busnes concluded that Welsh language skills were likely to be required by 55 percent of employers in the public sector, 58 percent in the voluntary sector and 34 percent in the private sector. Table 25 shows the frequencies of Welsh language skills amongst the North Wales respondents.

Table 25 Percentage of graduates who have Welsh language skills.¹⁹⁴

	Continuous Graduate	Continuous Non Graduate Trajectory	Discontinuous Graduate Trajectory	Discontinuous Non Graduate Trajectory
Welsh	89	65	64	36

After analysing graduate vacancies from a number of local employers across North Wales, I noted that such skills were almost always part of the essential criteria for

¹⁹³ After digesting the work of Pierre Bourdieu in the early stages of this study, coupled with my own anecdotal data regarding entry into the North Wales graduate labour market I began to ponder on the existence of what I termed to be local capital (definition as above). My concern with using this term was that it was too similar in ways to what Bourdieu already discussed in relation to social and cultural capital. I also observed the theoretical discussions on the extension of Bourdieusian theories in various papers by Atkinson (2011); Burke, Emerich and Ingram (2013) and the follow up by Atkinson (2013). As I could see value on either side it was a difficult to choose whether to include the assets outlined above as being an example of local capital. However, I felt it was important to use this data as many graduates suggested these issues were important in the local labour market, but local assets was a more suitable descriptor.

¹⁹⁴ Number of graduates who stated or alluded to local networks accounted for 15 percent of the sample of graduates. They are not included in the table as the textual discussion is more illuminating than actual numbers

employment in the public sector and in the voluntary sector, whilst the situation was mixed in the private sector – sometimes such skills were essential, sometimes not needed at all. Analysis of individual trajectories found that whilst overall percentages were high, graduates with continuous graduate trajectories were most likely to mention that they spoke Welsh, and describe these skills as *fluent* or *very good*. Two thirds of graduates with continuous non graduate trajectories had Welsh language skills, but most suggested these skills were *good* or *fair*. Those with discontinuous non graduate trajectories were least likely to speak Welsh and those that did say they spoke Welsh said that their skills were *fair*. A number of respondents explained how their Welsh language skills had influenced their trajectories. For instance Respondent 012 noted that: *Many of the temporary jobs I got were directly because of my Welsh language skills*. Whilst Respondent 028, another graduate with a continuous graduate trajectory, agreed that these skills were important: *Where I work as everyone speaks Welsh...it is quicker to communicate with fellow Welsh speakers*".

Alongside this, two respondents claimed that their lack of bilingual skills had inhibited them in the local labour market. For instance Respondent 015, who had a discontinuous non graduate trajectory, said: *My degree has not lead to the job I would have liked. Have applied for jobs such as Family Support Officer, youth worker but you need bilingual skills for these roles*". In the subsequent interview with this respondent she suggested that she often came across roles where she felt that she had the requisite experience and qualifications, but decided not apply as bilingualism was one of the essential criteria. Consistent with findings from a WISERD report by Mann (2011), a further theme found throughout the interviews, was economically disadvantaged Welsh speakers self-excluding from using Welsh in the workplace due to lack of confidence. Respondents 011, 048, 057 and 062 stated that they felt that the Welsh they spoke at home was not the same as the more formal Welsh needed for employment purposes. As Respondent 048 stated: *I can certainly carry out a conversation in Welsh, write quite well but I wouldn't want to write a report in Welsh, give a presentation or even speak for any length of time. It's not about my Welsh, it's about writing in Welsh in a professional manner*. Questioning these respondents further I found that Respondents 011 and 048 were subsequently self-excluding from applying for employment that requires bilingual

language skills. In light of policies designed to increase the numbers of individuals using the mother tongue in work settings, this is a cause for concern.

Local networks, described by Morris (1989) as: *the direct and indirect connections between individuals which result in a structure of social relationships* (p.328), can be useful in areas such as North Wales. Employers with vacancies can infer something about a worker's ability if the firm currently employs individuals from the worker's social network (Hellerstein, McInerney and Neumark, 2011), whilst those with strong networks can identify potential opportunities for employment, or other opportunities. Around ten percent of my respondents made some reference to the need to *know people*, for instance:

Respondent 025, was a male Business graduate from Bangor University whose parents had a car showroom. When asked about his local contacts he said: *My family have their own business so business was in my blood. It was natural that I would be able to get a job with them.*

An extract from an interview with Respondent 029 - an engineering graduate aged 25-29, who was from an advantaged social background - also pointed to the influence of social networks.

Since I have gone to university I have been in the same utilities organisation. My skills at university, and previous employment experience have been applied throughout. After getting to know the job for the first year or two I was then promoted to sector manager".

Interviewer: *How did that job arise? How did you hear about that job?*

Respondent 029: *Well the previous sector manager was retiring, he knew my dad, and I was the person who had a degree and had been there the longest.*

Interviewer: *How did he know your dad? Did the post require a degree?*

Respondent 029: *My dad worked in the same company [that I am in now] so he knew most people working there. Yes you needed a degree though as otherwise you would not be qualified to the correct standard*

In the interviews with both respondents they elaborated, discussing how they had lived in their local area all their life, as had their family. Traditional Welsh communities, as Day (2010) highlights, are even more so likely to have such networks as these communities often have strong family connections: people who have been to school together, worked together and lived in the same neighbourhoods. These shared experiences have enabled the formation of local networks. This loyalty to place, a sense of family and community connection (p30) are often indicative of local networks. Those who mentioned having connections would refer to Wales being a small region, thus it being easier to get to know lots of people. For instance Respondent [029] noted that in his first employment he worked with *half of his village*, whilst in university he worked for various pubs in the area. Through this employment he built up his local connections, *mainly because I was Emry's lad*. Other respondents would also draw upon the connections that they had built in their local area. Respondent 019, who entered university to fulfil a long held dream, worked as a nurse in North West Wales mentioned in the questionnaire she completed that she was able to gain her nursing role as her mother had worked in Ysbyty Gwynedd for many years. Whilst Respondent 030 mentioned that his father worked as a farmer and then his parents began running their own B&B when they got older, and as such had strong local connections.

When discussing my research with a colleague she highlighted a further dimension often involved in social networks in North Wales i.e. networks through the Welsh language. We were having a conversation about the Scotland and their possible independence¹⁹⁵, and she mentioned that *Scotland has all the imposing institutions of power*, and then as an aside said *Wales only has the language*. Research by Morris (1989) is useful for understanding this in more detail. Her study of the language contact in Anglesey found that local e.g. born and bred, bilingual Welsh/English speakers had the largest and densest networks, with a higher number of kin and friendship contacts and therefore a higher number of multiplex relationships than the other groups. In comparison English speakers had the smallest, densest relationships (p114). I found support for this finding as it was the

¹⁹⁵ At the time of writing Scotland had made a bid for independence from the UK government. See her for further details of this <http://www.scotreferendum.com/questions-and-answers/>

English only speaking graduates who were least likely to have large networks, or to cite local connections as helping them gain employment or other opportunities. Morris's study, conducted in 1989, also showed how the Welsh language became a tool to enable local people to gain managerial employment in the locality. Morris noted that amongst her sample of the community in Anglesey there were concerns from the local people about the influx of managerial vacancies going to English speakers, from outside the local area. This explains the policy of local authorities across North Wales, particularly in North West Wales, in designating some jobs as 'Welsh essential'..

When one considers the idea of community the image conjured up is one of belonging, of warmth and of friendship. Community is an orienting device (Blackshaw, 2010: 1). Whilst the previous paragraphs demonstrated the bright side of this concept, with the light there often comes the dark side (ibid), one in which for some there is exclusion and the denial of resources (ibid: 151). As Day (2006) notes: *the more closely you look at these communities the more evident these differences and divisions become* (p118). Research by Drakakis-Smith, Day and Davis (2010), supported the aforementioned view of a community as the vast majority (83 percent) of their sample (mainly older individuals who had moved when they were of working age) said that they had not encountered any problems in settling in. However, the small minority that did encounter difficulties felt these difficulties were centred around language and anti-English feeling (19%), and problems with attitudes of neighbours and 'local' people (17%). Whilst the Welsh language has been seen as a major way of maintaining the *Welshness of Wales* (Day, Davis and Drakakis-Smith, 2010: 1406) this has also meant that some feel excluded from their local community. Respondent 011 is a good example here.

Respondent 011: It was/is very pretty, it's a small, close knit community, people are friendly overall. But I didn't like it sometimes as I felt it was 'too' close knit, insular.

Interviewer: you say too close knit? How do you mean?

Respondent 011: My mum and dad might have influenced me there because I didn't think that at the time, I maybe just felt that my mum and dad seemed to not mix with people as

much. Since I've gotten older they have commented that they felt that they were not Welsh enough [even though they had lived in Wales for 20 years]. My dad wanted to be self employed but would say that he would only get regular work if he was working with/ for xxx as it was classed as a 'local firm'

Interviewer: What do you mean by 'local firm'?

Respondent 011: Their family were local, had lived in area, were born in the area and most probably every one of their relatives had been born and bred in Wales [laughs]. He had a few people working for him, he was a local man employing local people.

Interviewer: You emphasise 'local' quite a bit [laughs].

Respondent 011: [laughs] I suppose 'local' is just another way of saying someone who was born and bred in the area, first language Welsh, strong ties to the area. We had strong ties but that was because I was in school.*general conversation about parents view on education*

Respondent 011: Education, my father felt I had to do better than other people who had other things going for them.

Interviewer: What do you think he mean by that?

011: Its difficult when you are explaining it to someone else as it sounds like you are suggesting that there is a big conspiracy, but my dad will always point out the 'locals' or the 'bigwigs' - sorry he has a nickname for everyone and everything [laughs] - will always do well no matter how thick they are. He just says that people born here have advantages that I don't - they speak the language, they have friends that I don't have and they will use them to gain jobs. Perhaps some would think he was being a typical English person trying to dominate the Welsh but I understand what he means.

The respondent acknowledged that people may not agree with her view especially as *there is such encouragement to learn the language*¹⁹⁶. However, her experiences of trying to find employment in North West Wales, for her, meant coming up against

¹⁹⁶ The respondent is referring to encouragement from the Welsh Assembly Government for individuals to learn Welsh. This policy has meant that individuals are often able to access free Welsh lessons.

individuals with the perceived advantages she didn't have e.g. speaking Welsh (fluency was important she felt) and having friends who were *born and bred there*. Her view was replicated, but not as in as much detail, by others who had struggled to find steady employment in North Wales. The general feeling from such respondents (five in total) to varying degrees was that the difficulties they faced was due to their language skills and not being born here. The implication being that the image of Welshness needed for high status employment in North Wales was a fixed image that did not allow for incomers. The Taffia, a loaded term that suggests the existence of a small group of Welsh speakers who appear to run Wales. As Owens (2000) describes: *the Welsh-language scene [in the early 1990s] was a tightknit community with everyone knowing everyone else. Many ... were artists or ... worked in the arts or ... were employed at S4C or ... were involved at the local media. HTV and the BBC in Wales are notoriously populated by the Taffia – an exclusive clique of Welsh speakers whose backgrounds in Welsh-speaking schools and Welsh universities, coupled with their ability to speak the language, has led to the sort of nepotism notorious amongst Oxford and Cambridge graduates in London media circles (Owens, 2000, pp. 33 and 34 cited in Evans, 2010)*. Evans (2010) suggests that if one unpicks some of the commentary there is some basis to the existence of the Taffia as it is correct to say that Welsh speakers are well represented in public services, the dominant employment sectors of the region, although he points out that this is not the case for the very 'top' positions (p140). However, graduates, with or without Welsh language skills, are not likely to be applying for the latter positions so may not observe these subtle differences. Overall the evidence amongst my sample of North Wales graduates suggests that Welsh language skills are the basis of local networks.

Lack of mobility

A lack of mobility in terms of getting around the region, as well as the perception of there being a lack opportunity to move away from the local area were additional factors affecting a person's trajectory. In both cases my interviews found that these were issues that affected females. A study by Green and Owen (2006), on behalf of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, observed that car ownership is a positive influence in improving access to job opportunities over a wider geographical area. According to the National Travel Survey (2012) 80 percent of males and 66 percent

of females had a licence. This is also supported in studies by Hine (2008) who found that females traditionally had more limited access to improved means of personal transportation and Neuss (2008) who surveyed women in England and found that they were less likely overall than men to have driver's licenses and took longer to get to key destinations. This means that females are more likely to have more limited local mobility and as such seek work closer to home when compared to men, taking jobs in a more geographically confined area and relying more on non-automobile transportation (Hine, 2003).

I found examples of the same themes amongst my own sample as it was only females, or those from lower economic capital who did not have a car¹⁹⁷, as such they were likely to be found with discontinuous or continuous non graduate trajectories. Interview data highlighted the importance of having a driving licence and access to own transport in the survey data that pointed to the importance of access to a car. For instance Respondent 042 noted that whilst she would not have gained her current employment without a degree qualification: *having a car is mandatory as I have to travel to see clients*. This of course is a very practical reason for the respondent needing to drive, however, whilst it might be considered that a driving licence is a requirement for employment wherever a degree of travel is involved, a driving licence is essential/required for a variety of graduate positions in North Wales e.g. employment with local councils, voluntary organisations and some private companies. In local job advertisements a particular phrase is often utilised – especially for employment within local authorities, the ability to travel within the local area. Information I have gathered from a variety of job seekers – including graduates outside this study – shows that this phrase is synonymous with the need for the applicant to have a driving licence. As such further respondents mentioned the need to drive in North Wales in order to access the types of graduate employment opportunities they were seeking.

"I found a driving license essential unless you want to limit your job search quite drastically". [Respondent SM003]

¹⁹⁷ I was unable to collect comprehensive data relating to percentages of those with cars who were single or had families

There have been vacancies that I have not considered as I am not able to drive”
]Respondent 022]

Whilst the numbers of those without own transport are small and not representative of the wider local community, and nationally, it is notable that all of those graduates who suggested that they needed to drive to gain employment had discontinuous trajectories.

The prospect of gaining employment or other opportunities in another location, region or country often leads individuals to move out of their local area. A report by The National Union of Students (2009) shows this can be a factor that can affect females more than males. Their study *Meet the Parents: the experience of students with children in further and higher education*, involved qualitative interviews with 36 students. They concluded that for women, the choice to study, as well as what and where they studied, were often intrinsically linked to their caring responsibilities. Family considerations are not just important when considering accessing HE, they are determinants of geographical mobility, particularly for females (Gemici, 2011).

In my own interviews with female respondents I found that this lack of mobility continued beyond graduation. Amongst the female graduates I interviewed all but one stated that due to their caring responsibilities they would not consider moving away from their local area for either employment or for postgraduate study opportunities. Whilst one respondent (015) noted that working in North Wales had made their job search more difficult due to the need for Welsh language skills, when I asked her about her opportunities to move for employment to an area that did not require Welsh language skills she was reticent. She went on to explain that she couldn't expect her husband to move away from Wales. I asked her what her husband did for a living, and if he would be able to do his work in another area. Whilst acknowledging that he could work anywhere if he wished as he was a delivery driver, she commented that she couldn't "*exactly expect him to move for me*". This began to be an uncomfortable interview at this stage as I felt, rightly or wrongly, that my questioning style had come across as judgemental, as opposed to me just being interested in the subject. As such I did not probe for answers as much as I would have liked too. Her geographical mobility also appeared to be motivated by her

parents, with the respondent citing her mother in particular: *my mam would be very hurt if I moved away*. Geographical mobility of any kind presents a challenge not only for those in the household, but also for parents and other immediate family. Green and Canny observe (2003) that moving away can result in polarisation, with different family members expressing different attitudes. When, later I reflected on my original questioning style for this particular section I felt that whilst it may have needed refinement – which I put in to place the next time I raised the issue – I did feel that female mobility appeared to be a sensitive area for some to discuss. This for me is an interesting issue in itself

Further evidence of the influence of family ties were also provided in much the same way by Respondent 010 who pointed out that she liked living in Wales as she fit in and that she knew people: *they know me, I feel comfortable here and can be myself*. In an attempt to learn from my earlier interview with Respondent 015, I tried to gather Respondent 010's views using a slightly different tactic. After she asked me where I was from as she couldn't place my accent I told her that I had been born in Nottingham. As we had been talking about family in general she asked if I had lived there long. I said that I had and at times had been tempted to move back there as a large part of my family lived there. At a later stage I brought the topic up about whether she would consider moving to pursue a career. Referring to my earlier discussion she pointed out that all her family were in North Wales: *I have nothing to move for, it is all here*. This attachment to place and strong sense of local belonging is indicative of what Day (2010) points to as being one of the most distinctive qualities of the 'Welsh' (p27). Cultural comfort and family all appearing to influence whether female graduates moved away from their local area, or not. As Green and Canney (2003) point out, relocation can effect individual networks and relationships (Jarvis,1999 cited in *ibid*), issues which have far more consequences for females due to the caring responsibilities they have alongside this. But this does mean that the females that I interviewed were limited in their employment options?

The only female graduate who did not have caring responsibilities was actually in the process of moving away when I interviewed her. Whilst her role had not been confirmed when we last spoke there was an understanding it was middle management. What is notable is that whilst she had exceeded her expectations

with this well paid role, she [Respondent 063] felt that she would only be able to move for employment purposes for the next five years. This was because by then she anticipated that her mother and father would more than likely need her to take care of them. So even females without immediate caring responsibilities would have caring responsibilities at some point that would impact on their geographical mobility. I regret not having tried in different ways to delve into more detail with the male interviewees who stayed in their local area about this topic e.g. did they feel like they could move if they wanted too? However, despite the interview structure being semi structured there didn't seem to be the same opening to discuss this question with the male graduates.¹⁹⁸

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed existing graduate typologies, and noted where they are not useful for understanding graduate trajectories especially their failure to take in to account postgraduate study, unemployment or other forms of inactivity and their inadequacy when trying to understand experiences past first destinations. I expanded on the discussions in the previous chapter and outlined a new typology of graduate trajectories. It consists of four types of trajectory: a continuous graduate trajectory; a continuous non graduate trajectory, a discontinuous graduate trajectory and a non graduate trajectory. The types vary according to: institution attended, subject studied alongside socio-economic characteristics. This chapter also highlighted the influence of habitus, field and capital, as well as personal choice and regional factors. These and other findings will be discussed in Chapter Eight in relation to the wider context of research and policy.

¹⁹⁸ The interviews with the male graduates in this study were often very different than those I conducted with females. Whilst it felt very conversational at times with female graduates, most male graduates (apart from a male respondent from OU) answered questions in detail, but did not depart too much from the topic when my questions began to wonder in to areas such as their decision making process or what options they perceived to have

CHAPTER EIGHT. CONCLUSION

Introduction

This mixed methods study has given an insight into the experiences of a sample of graduates from North Wales. It has outlined their experiences in university, post graduation and their long term trajectories. This concluding chapter briefly reviews the key findings in order to explore the broader methodological, theoretical and policy implications. The chapter then provides a discussion of the limitations of the study, and offers some thoughts for future research.

Findings

As the findings from this study have been discussed in detail throughout Chapters 5-7, this section will simply summarise how they have contributed to the objectives of this study.

To use existing data to establish the relevance of students access to and experience of HE for post graduation destinations

The demographic profiles in HESA statistical data are reflected in my own data relating to the socio-economic composition of students, although, my own sample contained a higher proportion of older students at OU and Glyndwr University. In terms of access to HE, many of my respondents were assisted in entering HE via a combination of informal (family members) or formal (private tuition) support. In common with findings from a study by Archer and Merrill (2001) parents of students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds found it more difficult to provide informal support as they did not appear to have the requisite educational capital. However, interviews showed that their parents navigated this difficulty by instead directing their children to ask friends or family members for support. Providing formal support was much more difficult for economic reasons. Engineering graduates from all institutions, irrespective of background, gave more frequent examples of both informal and formal support.

The interviews also highlighted some aspects of the experiences of the North Wales graduates whilst undertaking their degree. In contrast to various studies (i.e. Graham and Donaldson, 1999; Bamber and Tett, 2001 and Bowl, 2003) which state that non traditional students are more likely to face difficulties in integrating into

student life, constructing assignments and understanding academic language, interviews with my own cohort of similar students supported an alternative, more positive view. In support of research by Reay, Crozier and Clayton (2009) I found that all of my respondents who shared characteristics of non traditional students, appeared to relish their time at university and reported that they enjoyed writing about a variety of subjects and took an active part in seminars. All interviewees acknowledged that university was a difficult process, but mature graduates and interviewees who were first in their family to attend university all mentioned the valuable social networks that they had developed whilst in university. As found in a study by Hernandez and Dunlop (2013) on Hispanic women in the United States, these networks were used interchangeably for study and emotional support.

To collect and analyse primary data on the destinations of graduates from a specific region

HESA data shows that, even when subject studied is taken in to account, English and Welsh graduates have similar destination profiles. On an institutional/subject level, the statistical data showed heterogeneity, with the expected subject and institutional outcomes. My data on graduate outcomes beyond the short term basis is consistent with findings from existing studies and data sets such as the HESA Longitudinal Survey and the Futuretrack series by Purcell and Elias (2004). For example, full time employment increased, temporary employment decreased and unemployment fell. Self employment was low overall, but increased over the study period. Postgraduate study was the option for one quarter of respondents, with work and further study being the preferred option. Due to my questionnaire design I was able to ascertain that one third of respondents had multiple outcomes. These multiple outcomes could be consecutive, or concurrent and accounted for the circumstances of 17 percent of graduates in year one and for one in ten graduates by year four. Multiple outcomes of graduates highlighted hidden levels of temporary employment (a mixture of graduate and non graduate roles), part time employment and volunteering.

A noteworthy gender difference was that female graduates were more likely to have multiple outcomes that included temporary employment, whilst male graduates appeared to be more likely to be unemployed. Younger respondents who were in

social classes I-III were the least likely to have multiple outcomes, or to be employed on a temporary basis, or even to have trajectories that were interrupted by unemployment. I also observed that males were most likely to go into further study only, whilst females combined their studies with employment – I was not able to find evidence to suggest why this, but seems likely to be related to finance and family support e.g. females are more likely to require a wage whilst studying. Further research in this area is needed to see if there is some support for this.

To develop a typology of post graduation trajectories beyond first destinations

Chapter Seven introduced my typology of graduate trajectories. This typology is useful for further research as it takes into account a wider range of trajectories e.g. postgraduate study and forms of inactivity, and also highlights that some graduates have disrupted trajectories, whilst others have smoother outcomes. The reasons for this are related to both the subject studied and socio-economic characteristics. For instance, engineering graduates are likely to have smoother trajectories, whilst social studies and business graduates are proportionally more likely to have disrupted trajectories. The typology of graduate trajectories also shows that females are more likely than males to have non graduate trajectories, or to have a discontinuous graduate trajectory. Furthermore, age combined with social class also appears to have an influence on the type of trajectory as younger and more advantaged students are the less likely to have disruptions. Various reasons were given for a person's trajectory: from personal choice, to the influence of the recession, as well as mobility, local assets and forms of capital.

To critique the literature on how graduates access post graduation opportunities, using primary data from my study

My findings support previous research by Try (2005), as the majority of respondents (87 percent) used the formal methods outlined. The most popular formal method was recruitment agencies. My findings also noted the dissatisfaction of graduates with university careers services (due to a lack of individual focus), as well as the popular use of recruitment agencies – particularly amongst social studies graduates. Informal methods to gain employment opportunities, as discussed in previous studies, are more likely to be used by graduates from advantaged socio-economic backgrounds. There is less research on how graduates access postgraduate

opportunities, but overall I found that the institutions themselves were most likely to provide this information.

Theoretical implications

This thesis has shown that overall, the concepts of Pierre Bourdieu are able to contribute significantly to an understanding of both access to HE and experiences beyond graduation. The concept of field - a setting in which agents and their social positions are located (Bourdieu, 1984) - was easier to locate in terms of student experience e.g. university or further education college, but more problematic in relation to post graduation experiences. This is because the graduate 'field' depends on the subject studied (e.g. business graduates, overall, are less likely to inhabit the same space that social studies graduates do), and choice of institution (e.g. graduates from elite institutions are more likely to have greater 'choice' than those from post 1992 institutions). The field that the graduate enters after graduation is also often likely to change within the first twelve months after graduating, as the shift towards a knowledge-driven economy has meant that graduates are no longer centred around single jobs and specific organisations (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996; Gee et al, 1996, cited in Tomlinson, 2007).

This is demonstrated most acutely in the varied nature of the trajectories of social studies graduates. As discussed in Chapter Six, when all three subjects are compared the social studies graduates have the most variety in their trajectories i.e. the greatest levels of multiple outcomes and (or) temporary employment. I offered two explanations for the variety of outcomes found amongst the trajectories of social studies. First is the suggestion that this degree subject has particular transferability. There is much evidence for this: social studies graduates in this study were found in a wider range of occupations, when compared to graduates from either business or engineering, and they were also represented at opposite ends of the graduate labour market e.g. associate professional and technical occupations (graduate occupations) or administrative and secretarial occupations (non graduate roles). There is a further explanation drawn directly from Bourdieu's study of universities, *Homo Academicus* (1988). Bourdieu highlighted how some subjects, especially medicine and law, and their subsequent graduates, act as agents of reproduction for the state (Webb, Schirato and Danaher, 2002: 132). However the function of

social studies and its relationship with fields of authority is more complicated, making it difficult to envisage a 'typical' career trajectory. As I pointed out in Chapter Six, one might immediately understand what a business or engineering graduate might 'do', beyond graduation. However, the typical career path for a social studies graduate is less apparent. This is an area of interest for further investigation – do social studies graduates from universities in London, and other large cities, have a more predictable career path, when compared to those from smaller, regional locations?

The concept of field was most applicable to the experiences of my regional sample of engineering graduates. This comes as no surprise considering that: *engineering is the...profession that applies scientific theory to design, develop, and analyse technological solutions* (Thompson, Frodeman and Mitcham, 2010). The key term, for me, being profession. This is a degree that sets the graduate on the road to a professional qualification. That this subject is a field is also evidenced when one returns to the commentary on field in Chapter One: *fields have their own set of rules, rituals, designations, and titles which constitute an objective hierarchy, and which produce and authorise certain discourses and activities* (Webb, Shirato, and Danaher, 2002: 43). Like other employment fields such as medicine and law there are specific ways to behave e.g. the use of professional terms, and the joining of professional bodies e.g. Engineering Technicians (EngTech), Information and Communications Technology Technicians (ICTTech), and Chartered Engineers (CEng). The discourse, and general terms used in engineering would certainly be different from that of occupations in business or social studies. As is commonly understood with a field, amongst the engineering graduates in this study there were structured positions, into which individuals could progress e.g. graduate engineer to engineer (Respondent 030). That engineering is a specific field is also evidenced in the trajectories of engineering graduates, as they were less varied: two thirds were in full time employment, and they were least likely to have multiple outcomes or be unemployed.

Examples of habitus, *durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures* (Bourdieu, 1992: 53), were also

found amongst engineering graduates, particularly when one considers that Bourdieu 'refers to habitus as *something historical, and being linked to individual history* (Bourdieu, 1993: 86, cited in Reay et al, 2004:1104). That *individuals inherit procedures to follow, paths to take* (Bourdieu, 1992: 53) is evident amongst my small cohort of engineering graduates as the majority had a family background in that specific field. One respondent with an engineering degree discussed how he gained a great deal of informal knowledge regarding mechanics when he was growing up as he would be around his father and his father's work colleagues whilst they were working. I also found that this informal knowledge often continued post graduation to help most gain employment after graduation. As discussed in Chapter Seven, all but one graduate from this subject had a continuous graduate trajectory. Whilst the emphasis in this thesis is not on 'success' in limited terms e.g. gaining full time employment, it is noted that there appeared to be very little disruption in the trajectories of engineering graduates. I was unable to collect regional or UK data relating to female engineering graduates, as such I have an interest in investigating if family influence is also a factor for female engineering graduates.

Examples of institutional habitus - a concept developed by Reay (1998) and Reay et al (2001) as a tool in which to understand how the 'feel' of an institution can influence student 'choice' – were also found. Reay et al. (2001) argued that, in relation to HE choice, 'a school effect' interacts with class, gender and race to impact on HE choices, noting that all universities and colleges, have an identifiable institutional habitus. I have utilised this concept to offer an explanation of expected outcomes for graduates from each of the regional institutions. For instance, Chapter Five provided evidence from HESA statistics, that first destinations matched the institution habitus e.g. Bangor University graduates had comparably levels of engagement with full time employment and further study, whilst OU graduates were more likely to be combining work with further study and Coleg Llandrillo graduates were mainly in full time employment. The main divergence from the expected habitus effect was found amongst graduates from Glyndwr University where levels of postgraduate study were higher than expected.

In Chapter Six I evaluated the trajectories of graduates beyond first destinations and also found evidence of the expected influence of institutional habitus. Graduates

from Bangor University, a traditional institution, settled into employment or returned to further study. Whilst this was the trajectory for most graduates, there were examples of multiple outcomes at this institution. The trajectories of OU respondents showed great similarities with their suggested institutional habitus e.g. concentration on full time employment or combining this with postgraduate study. As expected there was variation found amongst the trajectories of graduates from Glyndwr University. Full time employment formed the main aspect of the trajectories, one third of respondents were self employed, one in ten had periods of postgraduate study (work and further study being the popular option) and almost half (43 percent) of Glyndwr University respondents reported instances of multiple outcomes. The lack of obvious difference between the trajectories of Bangor University graduates and those from Glyndwr University is consistent with a study by Chevalier and Conlon (2003) who found that institutional differences tend to be more pronounced when elite universities are compared against other types of institutions, than when traditional and post 1992 are compared.

Instances of Bourdieu's three forms of cultural capital was also found amongst the North Wales respondents. In its institutionalized form, cultural capital refers to credentials and qualifications such as degrees or titles that symbolize cultural competence and authority - an obvious example of this form of capital being the degree qualification. However I have also highlighted that as more individuals gain such capital then the actual capital attached to a degree is linked to the degree was obtained and in what subject. Whilst there were subject differences I did not find as many differences as expected between the traditional and post 1992 institution. My findings suggest that on a regional level the concern for employers was the match with the employment sector. There is a need for further research in this area because at present the literature focuses on the capital gained from attending a specific institution where greater prestige corresponds to greater capital. It would be interesting to test these findings in other regions of the UK to find evidence of an institutional and (or) subject effect in relation to regional labour markets.

An example of embodied cultural capital, long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body, was found amongst those graduates with Welsh language skills. As outlined

in the previous chapter, Welsh language skills are almost always part of the essential criteria for employment in the public sector and in the voluntary sector (the situation was mixed in the private sector in North Wales). Graduates also displayed cultural capital in its objectified state as in interviews many gave examples of how they were now able to consume or understand the cultural meaning of books, art and television documentary programmes. Whilst now able to consume such objects I found that non traditional students often cited financial reasons of why they would not be able to carry on with such pursuits. Whilst I also found evidence to support Reay, Crozier and Clayton's (2009) view that NTS are able to move between two different fields e.g. their home life and university, I would suggest that it was more difficult for some graduates to do this post graduation, and they may decide not to enter postgraduate study due to the personal costs they would incur: for example a sense of isolation from their family background as well as the time and effort involved in undertaking postgraduate study. Even as I completed this final chapter I found further examples of this in conversations with non traditional students I was working with.¹⁹⁹ Such students are more likely to find it difficult to be able to continue with their cultural capital development as unlike students from traditional backgrounds, they do not have constant reinforcement of the ideas that they learn whilst in university. However whilst teaching I have found one departure from this observation. The era of austerity and brutal cuts has meant that NTS are often being taught something that is directly applicable to their everyday life. In recent conversations with students many talked about how they 'brought their work home'. Whereas normally they would only be able to discuss what they had learnt with fellow students, now they used what they had learnt to try and 'educate' their family.²⁰⁰ This is an emerging area of research that may be helpful to understand in greater depth the isolation that NTS can experience whilst in HE.

Examples of the efficacy of social capital were in particular found amongst the engineering graduates as I noted that even when they had what might be termed a negative episode in their trajectory e.g. being unemployed or having multiple

¹⁹⁹ At the time of writing I am working full time as a teaching associate with Bangor University.

²⁰⁰ I found examples of this in a number of seminars that I have conducted with students over the last academic year.

Students who appeared to represent some of the characteristics of NTS mentioned that the rhetoric around the government cuts was something that they were able to talk freely about as their family had an understanding of the issues. The views of one student on particular summed this up when he suggested that his family felt that all benefit claimants were 'scroungers' until he discussed some facts he had learnt whilst at university.

outcomes, they appeared to 'recover' very quickly. For instance, one such respondent was recorded as having multiple outcomes in year one (unemployed followed by temporary employment) and by year two of his trajectory, the role had become permanent. This is in contrast to some social studies graduates, mainly female or from disadvantaged backgrounds - generally both - who reported that they lacked the social contacts who would help them gain employment. This is not to say that either business or social studies graduates did not exhibit capital, clearly they did. Interviews showed that graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds were more likely to refer to cultural capital, whilst those from advantaged backgrounds referred to both social and cultural capital. The difference between the three subjects was that engineering graduates tended to show more signs that they were *groomed to follow in their parent's occupational footsteps* (Devine, 2004:169).

Throughout the study I have emphasised the subject differences I have encountered. These subject differences were first discussed in detail in Chapter Four where I noted that analysing the prospectus and websites for each institution in terms of each subject was a helpful way to show how the value of each subject is communicated. For instance, despite some institutional variations the practicality of a business degree was emphasised; utility was a theme that I observed over and over again in the promotional material regarding engineering, whilst the flexibility of a social studies degree was stressed. On further examination I also noted that an engineering degree appeared to have capital beyond the degree itself as it was an example of a disciplines which lead to professional accreditation. This is in contrast to social studies where the occupational pathways are often less clear, and even business studies where the emphasis for these graduates appeared to be self employment as opposed to going on to study for a MBA. Professional recognition gives engineering a specific gravitas that I did not see amongst the other subjects. The value of subject capital, and the link to professional recognition would be interesting to investigate in relation to other STEM subjects. Further evidence on the trajectories of these graduates may point towards the need for social studies and business to provide clear professional recognition.

Evidence of regional assets that confer degrees of advantage or disadvantage on graduates, cashable only in the regional context, was found amongst my sample of graduates. The regional assets in question were: local connections, Welsh language skills and access to transport. Data collected with the regional cohort of graduates suggested that a driving licence is essential/required for a variety of graduate positions in North Wales e.g. employment with the statutory, voluntary organisations and private sector. Welsh language skills are almost always part of the essential criteria for employment in the public sector and in the voluntary sector in North Wales. Two thirds of graduates with continuous non graduate trajectories had Welsh language skills with most suggesting these skills were “good” or “fair”. Those with discontinuous non graduate trajectories were least likely to speak Welsh and those that did say they spoke Welsh said that their skills were “fair”. The last example of a regional asset was the need to have local networks. Around ten percent of respondents made some reference to the need to “know people”. Overall males, specifically young men, were more likely to suggest that they knew people who could help them gain employment. Females also appeared to have local connections, but they would point to these being networks of support e.g. to help them find out information about services for clients, as opposed to being suitable for help with gaining employment. I would propose that it would be useful to test these findings in relation to other regions in the UK, or across Europe in order to see if there are other examples of regional assets.

Methodological Implications

I found three main methodological implications arising from my decision to combine qualitative and quantitative methods. They relate to the practicalities of using a mixed methods approach, the use of HESA statistical data and the use of social media as a data collection tool retrospectively.

In Chapter Four I referred to a methodological concern I had with using a mixed method approach: *Is mixed methods seen as the answer to everything?* (Cresswell, 2011: 269). Clearly it is not, but this is not a criticism of a mixed methods design as such. For this study, it was a superior method to just a purely quantitative or qualitative approach. A quantitative approach would have limited my research to

being an outline of destinations and long term trajectories. In contrast, an exclusive focus on qualitative methods would not have provided a baseline with which to compare North Wales against England and Wales. However, a mixed method is not the answer to everything. I found it difficult at times to relate HESA statistical data to my own data collected from interviews and social media. The qualitative data from the survey, face to face interviews and social media is not a statistically random sample of the total graduate population in the region. At times the quantitative data was stronger for answering certain questions, but then at others the qualitative data was more fruitful.

Throughout this thesis I have noted my concerns about the use of HESA data in order to understand graduate outcomes, noting that six months after graduation²⁰¹ is too early in which to evaluate a person's situation post graduation, and that the data is often used to define successful graduates or institutions. I also highlighted the technical issue: if a graduate fills in the HESA survey on one day, their data only relates to that day. They could be classed as working full time but they may also have been previously unemployed prior to that and have worked on a voluntary basis²⁰². All these issues that I have raised make it all the more stranger that there is a lack of critical evaluation of the use of HESA data.

In light of my findings I would first state that there is the need to take into account the variety of 'first destinations' that graduates may have within the first six months. By take into account I mean that HESA should give the facility for graduates to record their destinations in full. The mechanism I used in my survey was a simple one. I gave respondents the chance to record their circumstances, and gave space for further details. Whilst I did not explicitly stress multiple outcomes, one third of graduates recorded such details. There is also a need for the numerous longitudinal studies, discussed in previous chapters, to be put into context, or compared against an additional HESA study to be conducted between six months and three and a half years. For instance as is currently done, graduates should be surveyed six months after graduation, then there should be an additional study eighteen months after

²⁰¹ The period in which graduates are asked about their circumstances

²⁰² I will offer some policy implications for these issues later in this chapter

graduation, followed by the existing three and a half year HESA study. This would provide a more rounded understanding of destinations.

As discussed in Chapter Four I utilised social media for various purposes. Google Docs was used to design and host an online questionnaire as well as to store responses, I used Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn to both promote the study and to pose additional research questions, and I set up a blog in which to post updates of the study. Whilst social media are useful for quick collaboration and dissemination purposes e.g. my ongoing blog and social media updates²⁰³, I was concerned not to release my findings before they have been analysed prematurely. I erred on the side of caution and instead released short blog posts that either posed questions arising from my research, or examples of short findings (See footnote 64 and 68 in Chapter Four for an example of this). My experience of using social media has led to potential opportunities for research collaborations as well as general, helpful interest and feedback from researchers whose work I have cited in this study. Overall my experience of social media supports the view that this medium is above all about communication and is therefore ideal for researchers who wish to make their research more widely available.

Policy Implications

The research has identified a number of questions which challenge some of the assumptions around the expansion of higher education

The knowledge economy

That the contribution of universities is central to regional and local economies is central is nothing new (Williams, Turner and Jones, 2008). From the early middle ages, universities such as those in Paris and Oxford were centres for the spread and flow of knowledge. These institutions transformed thinking and practice across Europe (Hildreth, 2006). Today, what we term as being the knowledge economy conjures up an image of *smart people, in smart jobs, doing smart things, in smart ways, for smart money, increasingly open to all rather than a few* (Brown and

²⁰³ Twitter account was used most often throughout my PhD - https://twitter.com/Beyond_Grad. Followed by my Linked In profile <http://uk.linkedin.com/pub/teresa-crew/36/353/2a5>, followed by my Facebook profile My ongoing blog - <http://graduatedestinations.wordpress.com/>

Hesketh: 2004: 1). In the knowledge economy universities are creators and consumers of knowledge the country benefits from the outstanding talent of academics and graduates, whilst enlightened employers actively seek to diversify their talent pool (Williams, Turner and Jones, 2008). However Brown and Hesketh (2004) challenge this and questions whether the demand for university graduates has actually increased in the way that the proponents of the knowledge economy suggest. Over the last twenty years graduates have gone from comprising of 17 percent of the population to 38 percent. Perhaps due to this increase there is a growing trend in the percentage of recent graduates working in non graduate jobs: twelve years ago it was one third of graduates, now it's approaching 50 percent (ONS, 2013). Despite this, gaining a degree means increases the likelihood of being in work compared with those with lower qualifications. My study supports statistics from the ONS that graduates have had consistently higher employment and lower unemployment rates than non graduates.

Further to this, there has been a lack agreement of what constituted 'policy success' (McConnell, 2010, cited in Harrison, N. (2013). My study supports previous studies that individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds tend to benefit from HE, more on a personal level e.g. the joy one receives from learning and achieving, as opposed to securing the economic prosperity promised by successive UK governments who promoted WP policies (Byrom and Lightfoot, 2013). Whilst the massification of HE has been productive for society in producing a well-trained, highly educated work force, the meritocratic aims have not been met. Yes, the graduates who were previously from non traditional backgrounds talked to me about feeling more the richer for the experience of HE, but they also wanted to have a career following their endeavours: instead they have mainly had a disrupted trajectory. This is a poor outcome for graduates who have expected to gain a career beyond graduation and is made all the poorer when one considers that such graduates are often blamed for this outcome by their supposed lack of employability skills.

Wales and the knowledge economy.

The difficulties surrounding a concept such as the knowledge economy are highlighted even more in the case of Wales. A report in 2006 by Hepworth, Binks and Ziemann for the Department of Trade and Industry suggests that overall Wales

is a weak 'knowledge nation' as its low earnings and employment performance approach are comparable of that of the North East. They point out that 55 percent of employment was concentrated in low value sectors such as traditional manufacturing, agriculture and tourism-related activities). They also refer to the business knowledge economy being almost exclusively concentrated in the south around Cardiff, Newport and Bridgend with almost the entire north of the country being reliant on the public sector for knowledge-intensive jobs. Since this report was written there have been some developments in so much that there is a regional presence for the Welsh Assembly Government and a HE fees policy that has made a university education even more attractive for Welsh students. Even with these changes there is still more that can be done as there are criticisms that the Welsh Assembly Government building has created far too few employment opportunities for the local community and the aforementioned HE policies have incentivised Welsh student migration. Further to this as my own research indicates that as Welsh language skills appear to be required for many graduate entry level positions in the region, and that gender affects migration patterns, there are serious implications for female graduates in North Wales. Welsh Assembly Government action is needed to increase the opportunities available for graduates in North Wales as otherwise migration flows will increase.

Employability.

My analysis of the employability agenda has shown that some individuals, particularly those with disrupted trajectories are often blamed for such outcomes i.e. for not being prepared – or indeed employable. This view conveniently ignores that many who have entered university through access courses, or of their own accord later in life have often spent time in the work force developing their leadership, team working and various communication skills before they even entered university. The problem is, it appears, they have not developed the right type e.g. capital. If we take leaving university as a key transition point where individuals have to carve their own niche within a new social landscape (O'Regan, 2010: 52), we need to prepare our graduates for this transition. Policy makers would suggest that universities are doing exactly this by developing employability strategies for graduates who are deficient in these skills, as well as ensuring there are better links between universities, employers and business. Whilst I would support the need and desire to help

students as much as possible, this view conveniently ignores that behind the employability rhetoric there are loaded assumptions made about the supposed deficiencies of graduates who were non traditional students. Whilst university career services do arrange for graduate employers to give presentations to potential graduates regarding employment opportunities, these presentations are geared towards an image of a graduate that pre dates widening participation policies. Until there is an acknowledgment that the non traditional student turned graduate does not have the same opportunities as a traditional graduate, unless they acquire additional capital and transmit middle class attitudes, then widening participation remains a policy that in some cases has led to equality of access but not outcomes.

Challenges for the HE sector

As a starting point there is a need to consider the discourse used to describe diverse groups within HE, and ask: is this discourse reflective of the students that they engage with? If not already doing so, HEIs also need to consider utilising their Alumni department in order to carry out longitudinal, long term research to examine graduate trajectories, as opposed to just destinations. Within this framework HEIs could consider what they already know about graduates from different subjects, how this is portrayed in promotional material and how it can be improved in accuracy. There is an immediate need for universities to evaluate how socio-economic characteristics influence graduates outcomes in the long term. Is there further work that could be done within university careers services in order to encourage those from non traditional groups to apply for employment with specific employers, or to help provide relevant information and guidance for postgraduate study in subject areas where they are underrepresented. There is also a need to consider existing literature on employability skills, alongside the institutional practices to see if they discriminate or include all students. For instance does prior work experience 'count' towards any course credits on employability skills?

With regard to policy implications for *university careers services*, I relate my comments to the domain of the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS) - the professional body for careers and employability professionals working with higher education students and graduates and prospective entrants to higher education. My interviews with graduates pointed to the need for university

careers services to consider whether they should adopt a more market led approach – such as that provided by recruitment agencies. This could generate revenue and also provide the rationale to bid for funding on projects that concentrate on providing advice and guidance in line with gender, age and class, or even for individual subject areas. HE careers services, if not already, should also be creating their own strong links with local employers. Promoting local graduate talent to local and national employers, in the same way that the university is promoted to students. By working together with local businesses HE careers services can support graduates into work that is central to the local, regional and national economy. Alongside this I would also point to the need to involve graduates in the inception of new projects - as partners or on a committee - with a dual purpose of promoting and dissemination. Within this there is an obvious need for the results of existing projects to be communicated to graduates as well as funders as a way of raising the profile of the careers service.

Whilst postgraduate study is seen as the new WP issue (Stuart et al, 2008) these comments, as well as the earlier discussion about finance, point to lessons that other institutions can learn from OU. The OU cohort of graduates only accounted for just over ten percent of the sample of North Wales graduates, but over half of this small number of graduates went on to postgraduate study. Barriers relating to finance can also be better overcome using an approach used by OU, where students pay for their postgraduate studies module by module, as opposed to paying for the entire MA or PhD programme up front. The diversity of postgraduate provision means that more nuanced approaches are needed in relation to widening participation to postgraduate study. Thus far there has been little research on successful strategies to promote access and success for under-represented groups within postgraduate education (Moore, Sanders and Higham, 2013). I would support research by Zimdars (2007) who recommends that activities to raise aspiration should not stop once students enrol onto undergraduate courses. I found like him that family experience of HE was a significant factor influencing whether someone progressed to postgraduate study (Stuart et al, 2008 cited in Moore, Sanders and Higham, 2013). Accessible information, advice and guidance may also be a specific issue that need greater depth of inquiry, as does the provision of up to date information in relation to fees and finance.

When further study is considered, research by the Department for Business Innovation and Skills (2009) found that males from STEM subjects were less likely to be self-financing and more likely to receive research council support than were females (Wakeling and Kyriacou, 2010). Respondent 047 summed up the views of many in her comments to me during the end of our interview: *there are so many hoops to get through, so many different 'themes' in which you need to touch upon to bid for funding, so much work to do that it is actually easier to pay for the damn course.* This comment serves to highlight even more the importance of accessible information on funding sources and application procedures.

Limitations

This study had four limitations. First is that basing this study in a small region such as North Wales limits the findings to the context of the locality. Whilst the research may only be applicable to North Wales in certain ways e.g. the local labour market and regional issues such as Welsh language skills, there are some themes that can be generalised to other sites of study, for example, temporary employment, engagement with postgraduate study and multiple outcomes. A second limitation of the study is the small, non-probability sample of convenience. The size, convenience, and homogeneity of the sample limit the generalizability of this study. Thirdly, my incomplete data relating to graduate's location before and after graduation leaves open an important question: do graduates move away from their local area? Findings relating to this issue would have been particularly helpful for an area such as North Wales as research by Bond (2006) on Scottish graduates and Bristow et al (2011) on Welsh graduates suggests that these locations are net losers of graduates each year. Lastly my study was unable to include the experiences of graduates with a disability or those from an ethnic minority background. There is a need for further research in this area as existing studies tend to focus on the experience of graduates in the short term. The need for research that focuses on graduates with a disability, includes the specific question of how the recent cuts to disability benefits may be affecting such graduates.

Recommendations for further research

In addition to the above there are four other areas which need further investigation. As noted throughout this thesis there are inadequacies in the information base on graduates: studies tend to have an over reliance on HESA statistical data, to the detriment of small scale cross-sectional and longitudinal data sources. Whilst there are valuable large scale studies e.g. Futuretrack, they are often non region specific and offer little information for the graduate living outside London. In this age of austerity it is important that graduates are able to make decisions about their education based on up to date, relevant information. More regional studies should be commissioned by HE institutions and research organisations and the results should be disseminated as widely as possible, with the use of various methods. This will ensure that we move away from a government dictated discourse on the benefits of HE to one that is grounded in research with graduates themselves.

This study has consistently underscored the need for new directions in research on non traditional students and on those that become graduates - research that does not treat them as invisible or as problematic because they are different from traditional students. Such research would incorporate an understanding of their contribution to HEIs, and illustrate the benefits that institutions and employers accrue by having such students. Questions could focus on what binds such students together, regardless of age; how characteristics, including that of age, relate to and complement each other; and what their interplay is within broader contexts. Difference would be seen as richness, and multiple lenses would be used to capture the complexity of the student experience.

Whilst I have added to the research evidence on postgraduate study by confirming the influence of finance on the decision to attend and the apparent 'degree as end product' view of subject graduates, there are still many research gaps. I would concur with Wakeling and Kyriacou's (2010) suggestion that: *we need better to understand the whole process of entry to postgraduate research degrees, from initial perceptions of the qualification, through information gathering, application and entry.* Chapter Six highlighted that a further area, in terms of postgraduate study, that would benefit from additional research is the information sources that graduates use to find out about postgraduate study. Only one third of my sample provided

information relating to how they found information on postgraduate study, and employment beyond their studies. Institutions, and especially careers services, should conduct a mapping exercise of who uses their services, and for what reason. They should consider how to encourage postgraduate students to use information, advice and guidance available to them through the careers services, and to engage earlier.

Geographical mobility and how it effects the employment opportunities of females is a further area that I feel would benefit from further research, particularly in the context of academia. My interest in this came from reading a report by Newsome (2012) *The chemistry PhD: the impact on women's retention*. Her study found that large numbers of women concluded that the characteristics of academic careers are unappealing, the impediments they will encounter are disproportionate, and the sacrifices they will have to make are too great. This was an interesting finding as STEM subjects are promoted as being vital to the economy and as such we can not afford to lose any possible additions to the knowledge economy.

Over the last forty years countless governments have released an identikit of statements professing that they are: *committed to a Britain where social mobility is unlocked* (David Cameron, 'The Coalition Manifesto' 2010). Sadly, despite the personal gains made by non traditional students in HE and beyond, this research supports previous studies that indicate pre entry factors, not talent and ambition, are a strong predictor of economically successful trajectories. Whilst education has been promoted as the *great equalizer*, as an engine for social mobility (Wildhagen, 2013: 519), other, more realistic commentators point to the degree qualification merely being the credentials for entry into a competition for graduate employment (Brown and Hesketh, 2004). As dominant social groups are able to draw upon, what appears to be a limitless, renewable store of economic, social and cultural capital, access to the winners enclosure (ibid) will be reserved for the few, and not the many.

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Appendix A: Business & Administrative Studies degree courses available from each institution

BANGOR ²⁰⁴	COLEG LLANDRILLO ²⁰⁵	GLYNDWR ²⁰⁶	OJ ²⁰⁷
Accounting and Banking BA / BSc (Joint Hons)	BA (Hons) Management & Business	BA (Hons) Business Accounting	Business Studies
Accounting and Economics BA / BSc (Joint Hons)	BA (Hons) Retail Management (Top-up) *	FdA Business Management with Accounting	Computing & IT and a second subject
Accounting and Finance BA / BSc (Hons)	Foundation Degree (FdA) Accounting & Finance	BA (Hons) Business Management	Leadership and Management
Administration and Management BA (Hons)	Foundation Degree (FdA) Management & Business	FdA Business Management	
Banking and Finance BA / BSc (Hons)	Foundation Degree (FdA) Retail Management	HNC Business Management	
Business and ICT BA (Hons)		BA (Hons) Business Management and IT	
Business and Law BA (Hons)		BA (Hons) Business and Events Management	
Business Economics BA / BSc (Hons)		BSc (Hons) Entrepreneurship	
Business School Studies plus Another Subject		BSc (Hons) IT Management for Business	
Business Studies and Finance BA / BSc (Hons)		BA (Hons) Business Marketing	
Business Studies and Marketing BA / BSc (Hons)		FdA Business Management with Marketing	
Business Studies BA / BSc (Hons)		FdSc Rural Business (Sustainable Food)	
Economics and Another Subject (Joint Hons)			
Financial Economics BSc (Hons)			
Management with Accounting BA / BSc (Hons)			
Management with Banking and Finance BA / BSc (Hons)			
Marketing BA / BSc (Hons)			

²⁰⁴ <http://www.bangor.ac.uk/courses/undergrad/index.php.en?view=keywords&keyword=B&prospectustype=undergraduate>

²⁰⁵ <http://www.llandrillo.ac.uk/course/ba-hons-management-business/>

²⁰⁶ <http://www.glyndwr.ac.uk/en/Undergraduatecourses/BusinessManagement/>

²⁰⁷ <http://www3.open.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/qualification/business-and-management/index.htm>

Appendix B: Engineering degree courses available at each institution

BANGOR ²⁰⁸	COLEG LLANDRILLO ²⁰⁹	GLYNDWR ^{210 211}	OU ²¹²
Computer Systems Engineering BEng (Hons)	BEng (Hons) Civil Engineering (Top-up) *	BEng (Hons) Electrical and Electronic Engineering	BEng (Hons) There are three pathways:
Computer Systems Engineering BSc (Hons)	BSc (Hons) Commercial Construction Management (Top-up)	BEng (Hons) Electrical and Electronic Engineering (4 years including foundation year*)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engineering Design • Energy and sustainability; • Environmental technologies.
Electronic Engineering BEng (Hons)	Foundation Degree (FdEng) Civil Engineering*	BEng (Hons) Aeronautical and Mechanical Engineering	
Electronic Engineering BSc (Hons)	Foundation Degree (FdSc) Construction	BEng (Hons) Aeronautical and Mechanical Engineering (4 years including foundation year*)	
Computer Systems Engineering (Hons)	Foundation Degree (FdSc) Vehicle Performance Technology	BEng(Hons) Aeronautical and Mechanical Manufacturing	
		FdEng Aeronautical Engineering (Manufacture)	
		FdEng Aircraft Maintenance	
		BEng (Hons) Performance Car Technology	
		BEng (Hons) Performance Car Technology (4 years including foundation year*)	
		BSc (Hons) Motorsport Design and Management (top-up level 6)	
		BEng (Hons) Renewable Energy and Sustainable Technologies	
		Fd Eng Industrial Engineering	

²⁰⁸ See Bangor University Engineering page for further details

<http://www.bangor.ac.uk/eng/listcourses.php?menu=2&catid=4690&subid=4700>

²⁰⁹ See Coleg Llandrillo Cymru page on Engineering courses for further details <http://www.llandrillo.ac.uk/course/hnc-general-engineering/#qualification-tab>

²¹⁰ See Glyndwr University's Engineering pages for further details <http://www.glyndwr.ac.uk/en/Undergraduatecourses/ElectricalandElectronicEngineering/> and <http://www.glyndwr.ac.uk/en/Undergraduatecourses/AeronauticalandMechanicalEngineering/>

²¹¹ There is also a separate degree course that includes a foundation year

²¹² See for OU Engineering page further details <http://engineering.open.ac.uk/pathways>

Appendix C: Social Studies degree courses available from each institution

BANGOR ²¹³	COLEG LLANDRILLO ²¹⁴	GLYNDWR ²¹⁵	OU
Criminology and Criminal Justice BA (Hons)	Foundation Degree (FdA) Police Studies	BA (Hons) Criminology and Criminal Justice	Combined Social Sciences
Cymdeithaseg a Pholisi Cymdeithasol BA (Anrh) (Sociology and Social Policy)	BA (Hons) Public & Social Policy	BA (Hons) Youth and Community Work	Criminology and Psychological Studies
Health and Social Care BA (Hons)			Economics and Mathematical Sciences
Social Policy and Another Subject (Joint Hons)			Environmental Studies
Sociology BA (Hons)			International Studies
Social Studies BA (Hons) part-time			Philosophy and Psychological Studies
			Politics, Philosophy and Economics
			Social Policy and Criminology

²¹³ See Bangor University page on Social Studies <http://www.bangor.ac.uk/so/listcourses.php.en>

²¹⁴ See Coleg Llandrillo Cymru page on Public and Social Policy <http://www.llandrillo.ac.uk/courses/university-courses/public-and-social-policy/>

²¹⁵ See Glyndwr University's page on Criminology and Youth and Community Studies <http://www.glyndwr.ac.uk/en/Undergraduatecourses/CriminologyandCriminalJustice/>
<http://www.glyndwr.ac.uk/en/Undergraduatecourses/YouthandCommunityStudies/>

Appendix D: Ethical Approval form

Declaration to be attached to the Topic Form

For research degrees (Phd, MPhil and MA by research)

A copy of this declaration accompanied by a copy of the research proposal should be sent to Anwen Evans, Secretary, CBSSL Ethics Committee (CBSSLEthics@bangor.ac.uk)

Prior to undertaking any research project, students and supervisors should familiarise themselves with the University's Research Ethics Policy. The policy document can be found at the website below

<http://www.bangor.ac.uk/ar/ro/recordsmanagement/REF.php>

Researchers should note that the following research activities would normally be considered as involving more than minimal risk and, consequently, require ethical review by the College Ethics Committee:

- I. Research involving vulnerable groups – for example, children and young people, those with a learning disability or cognitive impairment, or individuals in a dependent or unequal relationship.
- II. Research involving sensitive topics – for example participants' sexual behaviour, their illegal or political behaviour, their experience of violence, their abuse or exploitation, their mental health, or their gender or ethnic status.
- III. Research involving groups where permission of a gatekeeper is normally required for initial access to members.
- IV. Research necessarily involving deception or which is conducted without participants' full and informed consent at the time the study is carried out.
- V. Research involving access to records of personal or confidential information, including genetic and other biological information, concerning identifiable individuals.
- VI. Research that would induce psychological stress, anxiety or humiliation or cause more than minimal pain
- VII. Research involving intrusive interventions – for example, the administration of drugs or other substances, vigorous physical exercise, or techniques such as hypnotherapy.

Data Protection

If it is anticipated that human participants will be engaged, duly signed Consent forms and information sheets should be drawn up and a copy lodged with the secretary of the College Ethics Committee. Special attention must be given to compliance with the legal requirement of checks by the Criminal Records Bureau

when dealing with children and vulnerable adults. The College Manager should be able to guide applicants through this process. The student must discuss with supervisors and agree procedures to ensure confidentiality of respondents.

Declaration by student:

The student should sign either of the following declarations, as appropriate, followed by a declaration by the supervisor.

I certify that I have read the Research Ethics Policy of the university and my supervisor agrees with me that none of the issues raised there is relevant for this research project because (Maximum of 200 words overleaf)

(Sd) Teresa

Crew

Date: November 2011. **Name of researcher** Teresa Crew

Declaration by supervisor:

I have read the University's Research Ethics Policy and the College Ethics Policy and, in my professional judgement and on the basis of information given to me by the student (**delete as appropriate**)

EITHER

All the relevant ethical issues have been addressed satisfactorily and I recommend that approval is given subject to these steps being taken (**enumerate**)

OR

All the relevant ethical issues will have been addressed satisfactorily subject to following steps being taken by the student, and I recommend that approval be given by CBSSL Ethics Committee

(Sd).....Date.....

Name of Supervisor.....

Ethical declaration for: Beyond Graduation: the post Higher Education experiences of graduates in North Wales.

Student: Teresa Crew, School of Social Sciences, College of Business, Social Sciences & Law.

Overview of the study.

Widening participation, a flagship policy of the New Labour government in 1997, has led to a noticeable change in student demographics. Wales is an interesting case study as Welsh Higher Education institutions consistently attract a wide social mix of students. However discussions of graduate outcomes are often dominated by a UK-wide experience with little reference to *regional graduate communities*.

Aim of the study.

This longitudinal²¹⁶ study will illuminate the experiences of graduates in North Wales making the transition into postgraduate education and/or employment. The research will provide a comparison of the trajectories of individuals from 4 institutions²¹⁷ across North East and North West Wales who graduated in 2007/08. Variables such as age; gender; institution attended; subject studied will be analysed.

Research Design and Methodology.

1. Quantitative analysis of data sets including Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), Welsh Assembly Government, the Labour Force Survey (LFS), as well as the longitudinal Future Track Survey in order to correlate origins and destinations of graduates in Wales and to benchmark them against the rest of the UK.
2. Interviews with graduates. In depth qualitative data will be collected via biographical narrative interviews: exploring their experiences as a student and post graduation trajectories. Interviews will be conducted in a manner to suit the respondent: face to face, email or telephone.
3. Interviews and focus groups with representatives from Bangor University careers departments to ascertain procedures for engaging with students before and after they have graduated

Recruitment of research participants.

Selection criteria for respondents will include gender, age (mature students – those aged over 25) and subject studied.

Research participants will be recruited using one of three methods:

- Via the Alumni list for graduates from 2007/08
- By attending graduate events such as graduate employment and postgraduate fairs;

²¹⁶ Research participants will be asked about their experiences one; two and three years after graduation.

²¹⁷ Bangor University; Glyndwr university; Open University Wales and Coleg Llandrillo Cymru

- Contacts gained through the promotion of the study.

Ethical Issues.

I have examined the University's Research Ethics Framework, Management of Research Ethics and I do not consider that the research project raises issues on the following grounds:

- Participation is voluntary: respondents are able to withdraw at any time. If a respondent does withdraw, any data they gave will then be deleted.
- Data collected will be stored on a password protected laptop and external harddrive. Only myself and my two supervisors will have access to any data.
- The data collection instruments and consent forms for the study will be provided to respondents in both Welsh and English. Respondents will be offered the choice of being interviewed in either Welsh or English.

Individuals who express a wish to take part in the study (either via biographical interviews or focus groups) will be given a covering letter and an information sheet that:

- Fully explains the purpose of the study
- Outlines the research method as well as the types of questions they are likely to be asked during the interview/focus group.
- Assures the respondent of issues relating to confidentiality, data storage and identification.
- Provides my contact details (Email and mobile number) as well as those of my two supervisors

Name of Student: Teresa Crew

Signature: *Teresa crew*

Dated:

November 2011

Appendix E: Beyond Graduation - Information Sheet for graduates.



School of Social Sciences

Bangor University

Gwynedd LL57 2DG

Phone: 07549003134

E-mail: sopc2c@bangor.ac.uk

Beyond Graduation - Information Sheet for graduates.

Introduction:

I am conducting research into the **post graduation experiences of graduates across North Wales** for the purpose of my Ph.D. This study is being carried out in conjunction with the School of Social Science, Bangor University and is funded by the Economic Social and Research Council.

Supervision.

This project is supervised by Professor Howard Davis and Dr Sally Baker. Please feel free to contact them via email h.h.davis@bangor.ac.uk and sos806@bangor.ac.uk if you would like to have any further information about the project.

About the study:

This study will focus **on individuals who have graduated, within the last five years**, from one of the following institutions:

- **Glyndwr University, Wrexham;**
- **Open University in Wales;**
- **University of Wales, Bangor, and;**
- **Llandrillo Coleg Cymru**

This study aims to inform developments in policy, practice and service provision. Findings and recommendations will assist organisations in North Wales to:

- Gain a thorough understanding of the experiences of North Wales graduates, post graduation, and, in turn;
- Deliver careers advice and guidance that is responsive to local graduate need.

Method:

This stage of the project will be completed over a twelve month period and involve:

- **Interviews with North Wales graduates** to discuss their post graduation experiences, concentrating on issues relating to employment, unemployment, under employment²¹⁸ and post graduate study, and;
- **Interviews with University and College Careers Services** to discuss issues relating to careers advice and guidance for graduates aged 25 and over.

²¹⁸ Employment where the skills of a highly qualified person, such as a graduate, are underused in their current employment (Office National Statistics, 2010).

Interviews with graduates in North Wales

Face to face or email interviews will be conducted. The areas of substantive interest to be explored include:

- The institution you attended and subject studied;
- Your experiences in the employment market, post graduation, and;
- Whether you have undertaken further, post graduate studies.

Participation is voluntary. This means that you are free to withdraw at any time and do not have to give a reason for doing so. **If you decide to withdraw, all the information** that has been provided i.e. name, contact details and any interview data **will be deleted.**

Interviews may be recorded, with your consent, or alternatively the interviewer can take written notes. Information provided during interview is **strictly confidential.** Interviewees **will not** be identified in outputs arising from this work. It is anticipated that interviews will take *up to* one hour to complete.

Opportunities to take part in further aspects of the study.

This study is longitudinal which means that I am interested in following the experiences of graduates in North Wales over a specific time frame. Shorter follow up email or face-to-face interviews can be carried out with interested participants.

If you take part in this interview **you do not have to agree to take part in any subsequent interviews** as participation is always voluntary.

If you would like to be kept up to date with the progress of this ESRC study, please feel free to email me using the contact details given in this information sheet to register your interest. Additionally, you will be given the opportunity at the end of the interview or focus group to request that you are kept up to date with how the study develops.

Next steps:

- If you have any further questions regarding the study you are welcome to email me on sopc2c@bangor.ac.uk or speak to me in person.
- If you would like to take part, please complete the consent to interview form and return by email to the aforementioned email address. Following receipt of your consent forms I will then contact you to discuss a convenient time and date to interview you for the purposes of the study.

Thank you.

Teresa Crew

Appendix F: Participant consent to interview form



School of Social Sciences
Bangor University
Gwynedd LL57 2DG
Phone: 07549003134
E-mail: sopc2c@bangor.ac.uk

Participant consent to interview form
Please tick the boxes that apply to you.

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for this study

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason. If I decide to withdraw all the information that has been provided i.e. my name, contact details and any interview data will be deleted.

I understand that all information provided will be anonymised and stored on a confidential database. The database will be stored on a password protected laptop and external hard drive (for back up purposes) that only I and my two supervisors will have access to.

I understand that if I require further details regarding this study I am able to contact Teresa Crew via email (sopc2c@bangor.ac.uk) or mobile (07549003134). I also understand that I am able to contact the supervisors of the study via email: Professor Howard Davis (h.h.davis@bangor.ac.uk) and Dr Sally Baker (sos806@bangor.ac.uk)

I agree for this research interview to be recorded and for the recording to be used for the purposes that have been explained to me.

I give permission to use the anonymized data for research purposes

Name: _____

Address: _____

Post code: _____

Telephone number: _____

Signature _____

Date: _____

Please email your completed form to sopc2c@bangor.ac.uk. Thank you.



Ysgol Gwyddorau Cymdeithasol
Prifysgol Bangor
Gwynedd LL57 2DG
Ffôn: 07549003134
E-bost: sopc2c@bangor.ac.uk

Cyfranogwr caniatâd i ffurfio cyfweiliad

Ticiwch y blychau sy'n berthnasol i chi.

Rwy'n cadarnhau fy mod wedi darllen a deall y daflen wybodaeth ar gyfer yr astudiaeth hon.

Rwy'n deall bod fy cymryd rhan yn wirfoddol ac yr wyf yn rhad ac am ddim i dynnu'n ôl ar unrhyw adeg heb roi rheswm. Os byddaf yn penderfynu tynnu'n ôl yr holl wybodaeth sydd wedi'i darparu hy fy enw, manylion cyswllt a bydd unrhyw ddata cyfweiliad yn cael ei ddileu.

Rwy'n deall y bydd yr holl wybodaeth a ddarperir yn ddiennw, a storio ar gronfa ddata gyfrinachol. Bydd y gronfa ddata yn cael ei storio ar liniadur diogelu gan gyfrinair a'n allanol cathrena galed (am yn ôl i fyny at ddibenion) mai dim ond bydd I a fy dau oruchwyliwr yn cael mynediad at.

Rwyf yn deall os wyf angen manylion pellach am yr astudiaeth hon fy mod yn gallu cysylltu â Teresa Crew drwy e-bost (sopc2c@bangor.ac.uk) neu ffôn symudol (07549003134). Rwyf hefyd yn deall fy mod yn gallu cysylltu â'r goruchwyliwr yr astudiaeth drwy e-bost: Yr Athro Howard Davis (hhdavis@bangor.ac.uk) a Dr Sally Baker (sos806@bangor.ac.uk)

Rwy'n cytuno ar gyfer y cyfweiliad hwn ymchwil gael ei gofnodi ac ar gyfer cofnodi gael ei ddefnyddio at y dibenion sydd wedi cael eu hesbonio i mi.

Rwyf yn rhoi caniatâd i ddefnyddio'r data anonymized at ddibenion ymchwil

Enw: _____

Cyfeiriad: _____

Cod post: _____

Rhif ffôn: _____

Llofnod: _____

Dyddiad: _____

E-bostiwch eich ffurflen wedi'i llenwi i sopc2c@bangor.ac.uk

Diolch yn fawr.

Beyond Graduation.

This study aims to gain a thorough understanding of the experiences of North Wales graduates so university careers services are able to deliver careers advice and guidance that is responsive to local graduate need. Section One will ask you questions regarding your age, gender and other personal circumstances.

1. What was your home address post code when you started your university course?

Please type the first four digits of your postcode

2. How old were you when you started your course?

21-24

25-29

30-39

40-49

Other:

3. Are you?

Female

Male

4. To which of these groups do you consider you belong?

White

Mixed

²¹⁹ Online version is provided here as word version (used to be sent out in the post to Bangor University Alumni was 'lost' when I moved to two external hard drives that subsequently broke

- Asian/Asian British
- Black/African/Caribbean/Black British
- Other Ethnic group

5. Do you consider yourself to have a disability?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to answer

6. What was the main occupation of your father?

7. What was the main occupation of your mother?

8. Has anyone in your immediate family ever studied at university? Tick all that apply

- Husband/Wife/Partner
- Mother/Father
- Son/Daughter
- Sister/Brother
- None of the above
- Other:

9. What did you do prior to starting university? Tick all that apply

- Full time employment

- Part time employment
- Self employed
- Student
- Unemployed
- Stay at home parent
- Carer
- Other:

9a. If in employment prior to starting university please provide your job title

9b. If in further study prior to starting university please provide the name of your course

10. Why did you decide to attend university? Tick all that apply

- Existing qualifications were inadequate to meet career ambitions
- Wanting to do something different with life
- Seemed to be a natural progression
- Encouragement from tutor at a school or college
- Disillusioned/bored with current career
- Always wanted to go to university
- Wanted to be a role model for children
- Other:

Section Two. Your time at university

The following section will focus on asking you questions relating to your time at the further or higher education institution that you attended.

11. Which university did you attend?

- Bangor University
- Coleg Llandrillo Cymru
- Glyndwr University
- Open University
- Other:

11a. What made you decide to study at the above institution? Tick all that apply

- Reputation of institution
- Closest institution to you geographically
- Course content
- Cost of living in the area
- Scholarship/Bursary provided
- Friends/Family already there
- Other:

12. What subject did you study?

12a. Why did you choose this particular subject or course? Tick all that apply

- To help me advance in my present job/career
- To help me change jobs/careers

- Reputation of the course
- General interest in the course or subject
- To develop new/existing skills
- Because it was necessary for my job/required by my employer
- To enter a particular profession/occupation
- Other:

13. What was your degree classification?


- First-class honours
- Upper second-class honours
- Lower second-class honours
- Third class honours
- Ordinary degree
- Other:

Section Three: Your experiences post graduation

The following section will ask you questions relating to what you have been doing since leaving university. Please answer all questions that apply

14. What were your circumstances twelve months after you graduated? Please type in any that apply: i.e full time or part time employment; voluntary employment; work and further study; unemployed; not available for employment or other (provide details if choose

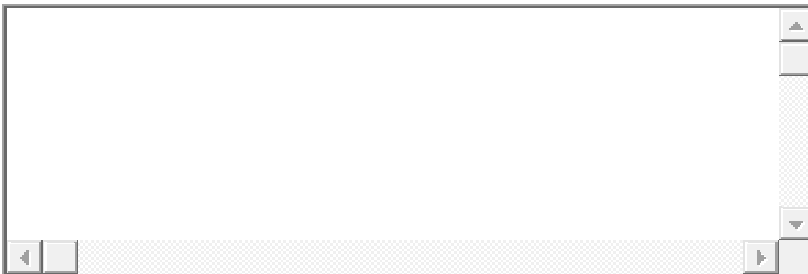
other).



14a If in employment twelve months after you graduated, please provide your job title

14b If in further study twelve months after you graduated, please provide the name of your course

15. What were your circumstances two years after you graduated? Please type in any that apply: i.e full time or part time employment; voluntary employment; work and further study; unemployed; not available for employment or other (provide detail if choose other).



15a. If in employment two years after graduation, please provide your job title

15b. If in further study two years after graduation, please provide the name of your course

16. What were your circumstances three years after you graduated? Please type in any that apply: i.e full time or part time employment; voluntary employment; work and further study; unemployed; not available for employment or other (provide detail if choose other).



16a. If in employment three years after graduation, please provide your job title

16b. If in further study three years after graduation, please provide the name of your course

17. Which of the following statements best describes your current or most recent circumstances? Please type in any that apply: i.e full time or part time employment; voluntary employment; work and further study; unemployed; not available for employment or other (provide detail if choose other).



17a. Please provide your current or most recent job title

17b. Please provide your current or most recent employment classification

- Managers, directors and senior officials
- Professional occupations
- Associate professional and technical occupations
- Administrative and secretarial occupations
- Skilled trades occupations
- Caring, leisure and other service occupations
- Sales and customer service occupations
- Process, plant and machine operatives
- Elementary occupations
- Other:

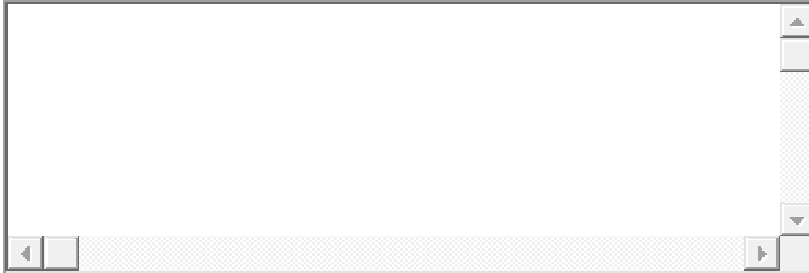
17c. Please provide your current or most recent job sector

- Agriculture, Forestry And Fishing
- Mining and Quarrying
- Manufacturing
- Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply
- Water supply, sewerage, waste management and remediation activities
- Construction
- Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles
- Accommodation and food service activities
- Transportation and storage
- Information and communication
- Financial and insurance activities
- Real estate activities
- Professional, scientific and technical activities
- Administrative and support service activities
- Public administration and defence; compulsory social security
- Education
- Human health and social work activities
- Arts, entertainment and recreation
- Other service activities
- Activities of households as employers; undifferentiated goods- and services-producing activities of households for own use

Other:

17d. If in further study, please provide the current or most recent course you have taken part in

18. How useful has your degree been in gaining employment?



19. Do you? Please tick all that apply

Have a full driving license

Have access to a car

20. Do you have any Welsh Language skills? i.e. can you speak, understand and write in Welsh. Please indicate your level - none, fair, good or very good



Section Four. Accessing postgraduate opportunities

This final section will ask you questions relating to the methods you use when looking for opportunities after graduation.

21. What methods did you/have you used to find out about employment opportunities? Please tick all that apply

- College or University Careers Service
- College or University lecturers
- Employer's website
- Newspaper/magazine advertisements
- Personal contacts (including friends, family and people you have met through work or social functions)
- Recruitment agency/website
- Speculative application
- Other:

21a. Which has been the most successful method that you have used and why? Please indicate your reason(s) for your answer

21b. Which has been the least successful method that you have used and why? Please indicate your reason(s) for your answer

22. If applicable, which methods did you/ have you used to find out about opportunities for postgraduate study? Please tick all that apply

- College or University Careers Service

- College or University website
- Research Council websites i.e AHRC, ESRC
- General websites i.e Direct Gov or Prospects
- College or University staff
- Personal contacts (including friends, family and people you have met through work or social functions)
- Charities and Trusts (i.e Carnegie Trust)
- Learned societies (i.e British Academy; The Royal Academy of Engineering)
- Businesses (Santander; Barclays)
- Speculative application to University or other organisation
- Other:

22a. If applicable, which has been the most successful method that you have used and

why? 

22b. If applicable, which has been the least successful method that you have used and

why? 

I accept that my responses to the questionnaire will be used only for the purposes of this study, and that my anonymity will be preserved in any research outputs.

Thank you for taking part in this study, your participation is greatly appreciated. Please leave your email address if you would like to be kept up to date with details of this study. This information is completely secure. The next stage of this study will involve contacting a number of graduates for a follow-up interview - leaving your email address does not mean we require you to take part in further stages of this study. Thank you again for taking the time to fill in this questionnaire.



Never submit passwords through Google Forms.

Powered by [Google Docs](#)

Appendix H: Beyond Graduation. Interview Matrix

Purpose of question/statement Research issue	Question/statement
<p>Thank you My name, purpose of the study, supervisor and funders</p> <p>Confidentiality, Duration How interview will be conducted Opportunity for questions</p> <p>Signature of consent</p>	<p>I want to thank you for taking the time to meet with me today.</p> <p>My name is Teresa Crew and I am conducting research into the post graduation experiences of graduates across North Wales for the purpose of my Ph.D. I have compiled an information sheet so that you fully understand the details of this study before you take part. As you read the information I will just outline the main details. This study is being supervised by Professor Howard Davis from the School of Social Sciences, Bangor University and is funded by the Economic Social and Research Council. You have been invited to take part as you graduated in 2007/08 with a degree in one of the following areas: Engineering and technology; Social Studies or Business & Administrative studies</p> <p>The interview should take approximately an hour. I will be asking you questions about your experiences at university and what you have been doing since graduating. I will be taping the session because I don't want to miss any of your comments. Although I will be taking some notes during the session, I can't possibly write fast enough to get it all down. Because we're on tape, please be sure to speak up so that we don't miss your comments. All responses will be kept confidential. This means that your interview responses will only be shared with my supervisor, Professor Howard Davis, and we will ensure that any information we include in our report does not identify you as the respondent. Remember, you don't have to talk about anything you don't want to and you may end the interview at any time. If you decide to end the interview all your responses will be deleted. Are there any questions about what I have just explained?</p> <p>If you willing to participate in this interview can you complete this consent form and then we can carry on with the interview.</p>
<p>Introduction Childhood</p>	<p>As I have discussed this study is looking into your experiences since you have graduated. Before I ask you about university and employment I would just like to start this interview by familiarising myself with your early family life. For example where you were born? where you lived when you were growing up, Follow up questions Can you describe the neighbourhood you grew up in? Have you always lived in this area Tell me about your parents. How old are they? What did they do for a living? Did they go university, if so which university? How, would you say, they viewed the value of education?</p>
<p>Prior to university</p>	<p>Turning to what you were doing prior to starting university, can you outline the types of jobs you did?</p>

	<p>Follow up questions</p> <p>Have you done any forms of further study?</p> <p>Have you had any periods of unemployment?</p>
Transition from previous employment/study to university	<p>So moving onto your time at university, can I just ask you why you initially decided to go to university.</p> <p>Follow up questions</p> <p>What was the reason why you attended (name of university)?</p> <p>Why did you choose to study your particular subject? Did you have a particular job in mind</p> <p>Were there any people who encouraged or discouraged you into going to university?</p> <p>What did you hope to gain from going to university?</p>
University experience	<p>Can you tell me about how you felt about your overall experience at university?</p> <p>Follow up questions</p> <p>Were there any areas that you found more difficult than other? For example understanding the lectures, completing your coursework, fitting your studies in alongside your other commitments</p> <p>Were there any areas that you found easier than other?</p> <p>Was your time at university as expected?</p>
Trajectories	<p>Ok, so we have covered your time at university, so the next part of this interview will concentrate on what you have been doing since university. Would you mind outlining what you have been doing since you graduated i.e the types of what job or courses you have done, how long they have lasted, if you were happy or unhappy in these jobs/course. If it helps, I can sketch a timeline of what you have been doing since graduation.</p> <p>Follow up questions</p> <p>Have you been employed on a temporary basis? Did you have the opportunity for further work once the contract ended? If not why is this?</p> <p>Have you been unavailable for work for any reason or unemployed? How long did this last?</p> <p>If you have undertaken further study why is this?</p> <p>If you have not considered further study, why is this?</p> <p>Has your degree been helpful or unhelpful to you? Can you explain why you think this</p> <p>Have your experiences post graduation been as expected? if not how have they been different?</p> <p>Do you still live in the same area that you lived in when you were at university?</p> <p>If you have moved, why is this? i.e to upgrade your house, for employment reasons</p>
<i>Access to opportunities</i>	<p>Take me through your ways of looking for jobs or courses, what are your most useful methods?</p> <p>Follow up questions</p> <p>Have you used your university careers service if not, why?</p> <p>If yes, what has been your experience of University careers services?</p> <p>Have friends or family tried to help you when you are looking for jobs i.e do they tell you about vacancies? Have they recommended you to any employers</p>

	<p>Have you used employment agencies? How helpful have they been?</p> <p>Are you aware of postgraduate scholarships or other sources of funding for further education?</p> <p>Where would you look for these opportunities?</p>
<p><i>Regional skills</i></p> <p>Welsh language skills</p> <p>Car</p> <p>Networks</p>	<p>Do you think there is anything that makes it either easier or harder when trying to get jobs in north Wales or even your local area i.e the county you live in.</p> <p>Are there more or less opportunities if you have Welsh language skills</p> <p>Are there more or less opportunities if you drive?</p> <p>Have you got to know people who have been helpful to you when you have been looking for jobs or any other opportunities such as internships</p>

Appendix I: Respondents – Types of trajectories

Respondents with continuous trajectories

Resp no	GEN	AGE	SEC	Prior to uni	Family in uni	Reason in uni	INST	Subj	Degree class	Welsh	Access to Transport
002	F	21	4	Student	Yes	Natural	BAN	BUS	U2	Fluent	Yes
004	F	21	6	A levels	Yes	Nat. Qual, Enc	BAN	BUS	L2	Very good	Yes
009	F	40	5	Placemnt Off	Yes	Quals. Diff. Enc	BAN	SOC	U2	Very good	Yes
010	F	40	99	Library assist	Yes	Quals	BAN	SOC	1ST	Good	Yes
013	F	21	7	Student	Yes	Nat. AWTG	BAN	SOC	U2	Fluent	Yes
014	F	25	5	Waitress	No	Parent Enc	BAN	SOC	U2	Good	Yes
016	F	25	6	SnrAsst	Yes	RM	BAN	SOC	U2	Very good	Yes
019	F	50	7	RMN	Yes	AWTG	BAN	SOC	U2	Very good	Yes
020	M	30	3	FT Emp	Yes	Quals	BAN	BUS	U2	None	Yes
021	M	21	8	Unmp	Yes	Employment	BAN	BUS	U2	Fluent	Yes
024	M	21	3	FT Emp	Yes	Diss	BAN	BUS	L2	Good	Yes
025	M	18	5	Student	Yes	AWTG	BAN	BUS	L2	Fluent	Yes
026	M	21	1	A Levels	Yes	Quals	BAN	ENG	U2	Good	Yes
028	M	25	6	IT Repairs	No	Quals	BAN	ENG	U2	Fluent	Yes
029	M	25	3	Trainee Eng	Yes	Natural. Parents	BAN	ENG	L2	Fluent	Yes
030	M	21	4	Student	Yes	Multi	BAN	ENG	1ST	Fluent	Yes
032	M	21	6	A Levels	Yes	Natural	BAN	SOC	1ST	Fluent	Yes
033	M	25	3	Student	Yes	Nat. Diff	BAN	SOC	U2	None	Yes
035	F	21	99	Second Chef	No	Quals. Diff.	CLC	SOC	99	Very good	Yes
036	F	25	7	PT & mum	Yes	Employment	GLY	BUS	U2	Good	Yes
040	F	30	99	PA & vol	Yes	RM	GLY	SOC	U2	Good	Yes

046	F	25	8	Rnist. Stud	Yes	Diff. Enc tutor	GLY	SOC	1ST	Fluent	Yes
050	M	25	4	Del driver	Yes	Quals. SE	GLY	BUS	U2	Very good	Yes
051	M	25	4	Admin. Acss	Yes	Nat. Dif	GLY	BUS	U2	None	Yes
052	M	30	6	Factory worker	Yes	Quals. Diss	GLY	BUS	L2	Very good	Yes
053	M	30	2	Mgr DIY Store	Yes	Diff	GLY	BUS	1ST	Very good	Yes
054	M	21	1	Checkout OP	Yes	Diff. Diss.	GLY	ENG	99	None	Yes
059	F	30	3	SE	No	Unders mngt	OU	BUS	U2	Very good	Yes
060	F	30	2	Parent	Yes	Enc. RM	OU	SOC	1ST	Fluent	Yes
061	F	25	7	Nursery nurse	Yes	Diff. RM	OU	SOC	IST	Good	Yes
063	F	30	5	Research Mgr	Yes	Diss	OU	SOC	PASS	Very good	Yes
064	M	25	1	Pfmce Off	Yes	Quals	OU	BUS	L2	Fair	Yes
065	M	30	6	Student	Yes	Diff	OU	SOC	L2	Good	Yes
066	M	30	7	Post office	Yes	Diff	OU	SOC	U2	Good	Yes
067	M	30	7	Sales. Argos	Yes	Diff	OU	SOC	U2	Fluent	Yes
CONTINOUS NON GRADUATE TRAJECTORY											
Resp no	GEN	AGE	SEC	Prior to uni	Family in uni	Reason in uni	INST	Subj		Welsh	
001	M	21	99	FT Emp	No	Multi	BAN	BUS	U2	None	Yes
003	F	30	6	PA	No	Qual. Diss	BAN	BUS	1ST	Fair	Yes
005	F	18	2	A levels	No	Natural	BAN	BUS	U2	Very good	Yes
007	F	30	6	Admin	Yes	Quals.	BAN	SOC	U2	Fluent	Yes
022	M	25	7	Bar work	No	Quals	BAN	BUS	U2	Good	Yes
037	F	25	7	Shop ass	No	Quals. Diff	GLY	BUS	U2	Fair	No
041	F	25	6	Parent	Yes	Nat. RM. Diff	GLY	SOC	1ST	None	Yes
056	M	30	6	Odd jobs	Yes	Quals	GLY	ENG	3RD	Good	Yes
068	F	25	3	Health Officer	Yes	Nat	BAN	SOC	1ST	Good	Yes

Respondents with a discontinuous graduate trajectory

DISCONTIOUS GRADUATE TRAJECTORY

NO	G	AGE	SEC	Prior to uni	Family in uni	Reason in uni	INST	Subj	Degree Class	Welsh	Transport
008	F	30	7	Parent	No	Diff. Role model	BAN	SOC	U2	Good	Yes
011	F	25	6	Event planner	No	Quals. Diff	BAN	SOC	1ST	Basic	Yes
012	F	25	7	Access	No	RM. Diff. Enc	BAN	SOC	U2	Good	Yes
017	F	19	5	Student	Yes	Natural	BAN	SOC	U2	None	Yes
023	M	25	5	A Levels	Yes	Natural. AWTG	BAN	BUS	L2	None	Yes
027	M	25	6	Hotels etc	Yes	Parent enc	BAN	ENG	L2	None	Yes
031	M	30	99	Tech buyer	No	Diff	BAN	SOC	1ST	Fluent	Yes
034	F	25	7	Cust Serv	No	Diff.AWTG	CLC	SOC	1ST	Good	Yes
042	F	25	99	Access	No	Quals. Parents	GLY	SOC	1ST	Good	Yes
047	F	25	7	Carer	Yes	Quals. Diff	GLY	SOC	1ST	Very good	Yes
048	F	21	7	Trainee Mngr	No	Part of job	GLY	SOC	U2	Fair	Yes
055	M	21	6	A Levels	Yes	Quals	GLY	ENG	99	None	Yes
057	M	25	2	Prodctn Op	Yes	Quals	GLY	ENG	U2	Some	Yes
058	F	40	6	County clerk	No		GLY	SOC	U2	Good	Yes
062	F	25	2	Spar	Yes	Nat. Quals	OU	BUS	1ST	Basic	Yes
DISCONTIOUS NON GRADUATE TRAJECTORY											
NO	G	AGE	SEC	Prior to uni	Family in uni	Reason in uni	INST	Subj		Welsh	
006	F	21	6	A levels	Yes	Natural	BAN	BUS	Ord degree	Fluent	Yes
015	F	25	4	Parent	No	Quals. Diff	BAN	SOC	1st	Good	Yes
018	F	50	1	FT Emp	Yes	AWTG	BAN	SOC	1st	Good	Yes
038	F	30	4	MngrÉtam	Yes	Natural	GLY	BUS	U2	None	No
039	F	30	5	Reception	Yes	Quals	GLY	BUS	1st	Fair	No
043	F	25	7	Access	No	Quals. RM. Diff	GLY	SOC	1st	Fair	Yes

044	F	25	7	Min wage	No	Various	GLY	SOC	U2	Fair	Yes
045	F	25	7	Bar work	No	Quals. Parents	GLY	SOC	99	None	Yes
049	M	25	6	Sales Asst	Yes	To be SE	GLY	BUS	U2	Fair	Yes

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