'WORKING FOR NOTHING?':

How do students and graduates utilise unpaid work for career mobilities?

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I've met a lot of people who just say "I'm not working for nothing", they see it as wrong morally.

Personally, I'm quite big on statistics so I look at the UK stats and say okay this many graduates are graduating…

Why would they pick me over that person when they've got so much choice?

So I need to give myself something to differentiate myself by, it literally comes to something as simple as that.'

(Zahir)

Acknowledgements

Glossary

AGR (NOW ISE) – Association of Graduate Recruiters (Institute of Student Employers)

BAME – Black, Asian and minority ethnic

BIS – Department for Business, Innovation & Skills (UK government)

CBI – Confederation of British Industry

ERASMUS - European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students

FE – Further Education

GDP- Gross Domestic Product

HE – Higher Education

HECSU – Higher Education Careers Service Unit

HEFCE - Higher Education Funding Council for England

HESA - Higher Education Statistics Agency

IFS - Institute for Fiscal Studies

IPPR - Institute for Public Policy Research

K4C – Knowledge for Change charity

NUS – National Union of Students

OECD - Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

OFFA - Office for Fair Access

OfS - Office for Students

ONS – Office for National Statistics

QAA – Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

UCAS - Universities and Colleges Admissions Service

UKCES - UK Commission for Employment and Skills

Abstract

A degree is no longer enough to guarantee graduate career success, so work experience increasingly provides a way to meet requirements of graduate employers. Such experience is often unpaid in the form of internships, work experience and volunteering. In a neoliberal culture that promotes individual agency and responsibility, education and hard work are often regarded as the keys to success. However, many such opportunities are unpaid, low paid or are created by personal and family contacts, all of which can further disadvantage individuals with less social, cultural and economic capitals. New graduates in 2016 accrued an average debt of £44,500 plus interest and faced strong competition in the labour market due to the record numbers of graduates and insufficient appropriate vacancies. Whilst paying for a degree may represent a sound investment in increasing future earnings this is not evenly the case.

Through qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews this research sought to understand the nature of unpaid work and career mobility experiences of students and graduates within a complex and changing context. It found that, for many, unpaid work forms an integral part of their lives. Mobility experiences such as international placements, volunteering and internships were important opportunities to develop career capitals. Pressures of study, work and family commitments posed a barrier and funded opportunities were highly valuable in widening participation.

The study found that unpaid career and mobility experiences significantly helped participants to gain tangible benefits and develop soft skills which made them more able to achieve successful outcomes, regardless of background and university attended. However, such opportunities magnified existing inequalities as young people starting with higher career capitals (e.g. parents with money and contacts) were able to access more valuable opportunities earlier. Unique contributions to the field were a typology of different forms of unpaid work experienced by students, a focus on the 'middle-band' (not just the highest achievers or most disadvantaged), application of interpretive phenomenology to careers research and a proposed new dimension of the concept of 'boundaryless careers.'

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Chapter One: Introduction

These are interesting times indeed. Politically, economically and socially, the landscape is changing rapidly for graduates embarking on their careers, making their transition from education to the labour market. During this, often extended, transition many will have explored different possibilities, different jobs, different countries to discover which path best matches their identity and fulfils their expectations. How they make use of such opportunities could be critical to their early career success.

2015 saw record numbers of students entering university - over half a million (UCAS, 2016a) and the first cohort of UK students emerging with increased levels of student debt. Both these facts are a direct result of changes in government policy and consequent reactions of universities (NUS, 2016). These graduates entered a competitive UK labour market recovering from recession, under austerity measures and with a proliferation of temporary and flexible working conditions (Department for Business, Innovation & Skills (BIS), 2016a; Standing, 2014). As more people attain degrees, the value of this form of capital decreases (Bourdieu, 1986; Prieur & Savage, 2013). Although a degree is the essential criterion for entry to graduate positions, in reality, it is often not enough (Tomlinson, 2008). Savvy students realise this whilst still in education (perhaps prompted by parents or careers advisers) and start to enhance their market offer by developing skills and gaining experiences to help them to stand out from the crowd. However, the playing field is uneven as some students have greater access to opportunities and the finance to support them than others do.

This context has provided fertile ground for a proliferation of opportunities for students and graduates to gain a competitive edge through internships, volunteering, placements and work experiences. Many work part, or even full-time alongside studies, balancing the need to gain experience with their stretched finances. The research explores the experiences of twenty-four students and graduates from the North West of England. It focuses upon the phenomenon of unpaid work they undertake during transition through higher education and into their career. The empirical fieldwork was undertaken during the first half of 2016 when most of the participants were in their final year or had graduated

just over six months ago. They were amongst the first affected by the joint policy initiatives of the steep increase in tuition fees along with the widening participation in higher education (and resultant higher numbers entering the graduate labour market). Many find themselves in the paradoxical situation of needing experience to get a job but needing a job to get the relevant experience.

The research is highly topical in the field of Social Policy, with the publication of the Higher Education White Paper (and subsequent legislation) which firmly puts students 'at the heart of higher education' (BIS, 2011; BIS, 2016). It is of paramount interest to students and graduates navigating their way from dependent young learner to independent professional adult. Universities face parallel tasks of teaching their students subject knowledge whilst urging them to develop a desirable 'graduate identity' (Hinchliffe & Jolly, 2011; Holmes, 2013). Arruda and Dixson's (2007) book 'Career Distinction: Stand out by building your brand' typifies the popular discourse which implores students to view themselves as a commodity, strategically marketed to potential purchasers of their labour. Many students have a portfolio of jobs to support them financially through university and build their CVs. This is, in part, a reflection of the modern labour market in which working patterns have become increasingly flexible and contracts have become more short-term and precarious. Major contributions to our understanding of this 'new era' of careers have been the concept of the 'protean career' (Hall, 1996, 2004) and the 'boundaryless career' (Arthur, 1994) which emphasise the freedom and flexibility an individual can experience when in control of their own career. Somewhat less idealistically, Standing (2014) identified the rise of a new social class of 'the precariat' who are defined by their precarious and insecure working terms and conditions which, in turn, impacts upon their lifestyle choices and their identity.

This research is also important to a wider circle of stakeholders who are closely involved in student experiences and graduate outcomes, namely parents, friends, mentors, careers professionals, higher education lecturers and tutors who support and advise students. Ultimately, it is in the national interest to harness the potential of new, highly educated entrants to the labour market to contribute to the local, national and global economy.

A question key to this research is how could a graduate in 2016 stand out in the recruitment process? The Association of Graduate Recruiters (2016) reported an 8% drop in graduate level positions (19,732 positions to fill compared to 21,427 in 2015) so extra activities and experience were often a requirement rather than added value. Internships have evolved to satisfy this demand from employers and potential employees in order to demonstrate work-readiness or 'employ-ability'.

The original focus of this study was unpaid internships; however, it soon became clear that there is a spectrum of similar 'opportunities' for willing students and graduates. What are the differences between an internship, work experience and voluntary work or 'a job'? This is a very important question and yet it is not an easy one to answer. Some organisations state their position clearly, for example, the BBC in advertising their hugely popular work experience programme say, '*Remember that work experience is unpaid but it's a learning experience and not a job*' (BBC Careers, 2016) whilst for others, internships can seem remarkably like 'jobs' but with little or no pay. Does this make them 'voluntary work'? Technically it might, although volunteering usually implies some dedication to a worthwhile cause for a 'not for profit' organisation.

Through this research I will explore individuals' experiences of these different types of 'career mobility' opportunities and how they make meaning of them. I will explore the benefits and outcomes of unpaid work, intrinsically and in relation to career and mobility capitals. Some may view them positively, as valuable opportunities to gain new skills and contacts whilst others may accept them as a short-term compromise. I will highlight how job vacancies may be repackaged as unpaid 'opportunities' and how this has become socially acceptable.

The research seeks to understand how students (who are usually characterised as being poor, even if only temporarily) might accept work which is unpaid. Is this a calculated investment of time and money in the short-term for the sake of longer-term career gains? This concept of delayed gratification has been identified as a key determinant of future employability (Dacre-Pool and Sewell, 2007) and linked to long-term success and happiness in life (Goleman, 1996). Alternatively, or additionally, do people obtain fulfilment from

some forms of work so that they are satisfied doing them without any prospect of tangible reward? Do people enjoy intrinsic benefits from work experiences such as a sense of security, belonging and achievement (Maslow 1954)?

The study considers how students and new graduates utilise and develop various forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1986) to gain competitive advantage within the field of the graduate labour market. Some may be more proactive than others in seeking out opportunities to increase their assets, asserting their agency and control. Some may undertake activities but without a conscious and deliberate effort to gain advantage. Others may be either unwilling, unable or unaware of the need to do this. This research does not seek to compare different groups or to judge their motivations and intentions, but rather to understand individuals' ideas about the world and how they link their past and current activities to their future careers. I am particularly interested in how they mediate structural constraints and opportunities through their own agency and support from other people.

The research questions central to this thesis arose from a context of rapid and radical change in higher education policy, research and practice (Burke & Christie, 2018). The research is informed by, and contributes to, contemporary debates regarding students from non-typical backgrounds (Brown, 2013) at a time when focus quickly turned from how to recruit sufficient numbers to how to support successful progression given the competitive nature of the UK graduate labour market (Tholen, 2013) and an ever-changing work environment (Mitchell & Krumboltz, 1996). A review of the survey of graduate employment destinations (HESA, 2016a) compelled universities to consider the longer-term employment prospects of their graduates. The new survey also broadened the definition of 'success' beyond occupational level to include whether work is meaningful, utilises skills and enhances well-being. This thesis complements landmark studies such as the longitudinal 'Paired Peers' project (University of Bristol, 2013) which compared the progression of two groups of students ('traditional' and 'non-traditional') beyond graduation, however, this study argues that categorising individuals can be over-simplistic and counter-productive. It builds on the work of Finn (2015) in foregrounding the unique stories of individual students and acknowledging how relationships and social background can shape their experiences during and beyond higher education. An increasing recognition of student mental health problems (Office for Students, 2019) and the importance of

resilience for progression and employability (Burke & Scurry, 2019) are powerfully illustrated in this thesis through the narratives of participants. Classic capital theories of Bourdieu (1986) and more recent iterations (Tomlinson, 2017; Brown & Wond, 2018) will be described and discussed in the literature review (Chapter Three) and this thesis will evaluate how young people without access to prestigious social networks and resources can compensate for disadvantages. This is situated within a wider, often polemic, debate in the fields of social sciences and careers work about the relative power of structure and agency upon the lives of individuals (Archer, 2008; Giddens 2013). Utilising a novel approach of interpretive phenomenology (Van Manen 2014, 1990) the research will explore and highlight how students and graduates can proactively deploy unpaid work and mobility opportunities to enhance their career chances and the challenges they face. Finally, the research synthesises theoretical models and research findings to formulate practical recommendations for student and graduate support.

Key Objective and Research Questions

This research aims to illuminate the everyday experiences and perceptions of local students and those who have come to the North West of England to study in relation to their career mobility. I will explore, through the literature review and the data, how this process can be inherently discriminatory and unfair, as access to and affordability of such activities may be unequal. However, whilst acknowledging this seemingly pessimistic and deterministic backdrop and the real challenges participants face, I also intend to identify individual successes and the people, condition and strategies that have made them possible. In order to do this, I formulated an overarching question and supplementary questions which I will now introduce.

How do students and graduates utilise unpaid work to mobilise their career opportunities?

The objective of the research is to understand how university students, at a key stage of transition in their academic and vocational career, access and undertake different forms of unpaid work experience alongside their studies to enhance their employment prospects.

Through accounts of lived experiences, I will illuminate the phenomenon of the unpaid opportunities and mobilities individuals undertake, their motivations and challenges some of which are explicit, deliberate and conscious and some less so. This will be elicited through interviews, reviewing the literature and by immersing myself in the topic through my work and through following news and social media which are also valuable context sources. Social mobility, geographical mobility and the ways in which they are interlinked will be explored.

Social mobility. As higher education has been heralded by successive governments as the key to social mobility (Milburn 2009, 2012) I am interested in whether students from different social backgrounds are able to take full advantage of career enhancing and mobility opportunities such as voluntary work, unpaid internships and international placements. I will explore whether there are factors influencing choices such as parental attitudes, networking skills and contacts, household budgets and even subconscious psychological factors such as ingrained beliefs, attitudes or self-confidence. I will seek to better understand how the participants make sense of unpaid work as an enabler within the context of their long-term career in relation to social structures such as class, ethnicity, gender and any other significant factors. Many participants will have accrued social and cultural capital (e.g. networks, qualifications) in their home country which they need to translate and exchange in a country where things are different.

Geographical mobility. Willingness and ability to move (or not move) may influence early career decisions and successes (Ackers, 2013, 2008; Ball, 2015; King & Ruiz-Gelices, 2003). Regional migration and mobility within the UK are emergent themes in literature and policy. Many students will choose to participate in an international experience during their degree, which maybe the first time some have travelled independently, or visited a low-resource setting. The research will go beyond the statistics to learn about the individuals' experiences of and feelings about their own mobility – past, present and future. It will explore the 'push and pull' factors that may influence graduates staying local, going global, or combining both in their study and in work.

Although issues of mobilities are directly linked to the research question, this cannot easily be examined by asking a specific, direct question but rather through interpretation of the

interviews across the participants. The following subsidiary research questions will provide access to lived experiences and interview questions will be based on these:

1. Why do students and graduates do unpaid work, internships, volunteering and work experience? What are the participants' motives and what did they hope to gain?
2. How do they access these unpaid work opportunities? What supports or thwarts their efforts?
3. What are the immediate and longer-term outcomes they gained through the experiences? Are they always positive or might they be negative?
4. How might experiences help in establishing their career?

I shall now explain each of these questions in more detail then answer these questions in through description and interpretation of the findings.

Why do students and graduates undertake unpaid work and internships, what are their motives?

Through the interview process I will seek to understand why people undertake activities alongside their degree which may be time consuming and unpaid (at a time when their income and time may be stretched). I will ask what they hope to achieve from participating - whether their motives are deliberately instrumentalist, for example gaining experience to list on their CV and making valuable professional contacts for the future, whether they undertake such activities purely for the intrinsic challenge and pleasure they give, or for genuinely altruistic reasons or a combination of motives at different times or for different activities.

How do they access them?

The research will investigate how people find out about opportunities, whether, for example, they responded to an advertised opportunity, sought them out proactively (e.g. by cold calling) or heard about them by word of mouth. Some people just seem to do more than others do. Are some people naturally more outward-looking and proactive or is their participation because of their social background and prevalence of opportunity? This is also related to the concept of self-efficacy, as discussed in the literature review (Dacre-Pool &

Sewell, 2007; Knight & Yorke, 2003). The research will also explore barriers to participation and the extent to which individual agency can hope to overcome structural limitations.

What are the outcomes?

This research seeks to understand and to expand upon the current literature regarding the outcomes, both career-related and personal, of undertaking such activities. Although it is easy to assume that the outcomes may relate directly to the motives, they may be quite different, particularly if the experience is very novel to the individual so they do not know what to expect. It will be interesting to learn whether outcomes are always positive or if there are unexpected negative aspects. If so, how does the individual make sense of these and can they still learn something positive from them? Do negative experiences have a detrimental effect or are they instrumental in helping to demonstrate or develop 'resilience' – a desirable and useful graduate attribute?

How might experiences help them?

An important question asked through the research is how people who have invested their time, energy and money in unpaid work expect and hope this will help them in their future career. For graduates, the question is whether it has helped them, or if they feel that it was wasted time and effort. If some people do such activities without using them as 'currency' in the labour market it will be interesting to gain further insight into reasons, for example, it could be because they do not see the relevance (Greenbank, 2015) or because they feel uncomfortable with this kind of 'self-promotion'. This relates to mobilisation of capital, i.e. using it to fulfil potential and create further opportunities. It also requires students to imagine their future and to translate the learning from one setting into a form that may be utilised in a new context (knowledge mobility). Although the research is a snapshot in time, located within their life-course, it will attempt to explore past and future dimensions of the participants' experiences.

My presence as researcher - reflection and reflexivity

Just as it is important to consider the impact of context upon the thoughts and actions of research participants, my location has influenced the approaches, theories, literature and

methods utilised within this research. I work at two of the universities included in the study (and have worked at the third as an associate) generally within Health and Social or Business and Management Schools. I am also a trustee for an international charity which provides ethical student and professional placements in global health. Many participants have been recruited through these sources, as I will explain later. I am a Chartered Occupational Psychologist and a qualified, experienced Careers Adviser. Appendix I introduces my background and life experiences in greater depth. In line with phenomenological methods I will write in the first person, where appropriate, to reflect my presence. Just as the words spoken by a participant are interpreted by me as the researcher, I acknowledge a further layer of interpretation and judgement takes place in the mind of the reader.

Brookfield (1998) suggests that a critically reflective researcher will consider their practice through four complementary lenses: - the lens of their *own autobiography*, the lens of the *learner* (in this case research participant), the lens of their *colleague's perspectives* and the lens of the *academic literature*. My own work and life have spanned across the North West and I am immersed in the research context which Giddens suggests is *'the only and necessary means'* to make sense of the phenomenon of social life (1993, p169). Throughout the research process, I have reflected upon how my own background knowledge, experience and opinions might influence the research. I will refer to this process throughout this report, considering some of the factors that may constitute the lens through which I view the phenomenon I am observing, the interactions with participants, the literature which most resonates and the interpretations I make. I have also engaged with professionals in the field (e.g. through networks and conferences) to seek consensus and challenge of my observations.

Chapter contents overview

Deciding how to present the research has its challenges, in particular, decisions regarding the situation of the 'context' chapter and the order in which to present the findings. As such, the presentation and order of this thesis is carefully considered but could easily have

been ordered differently. I have tried also to capture the 'messiness' of the research process through honestly explaining the various dilemmas and decisions I encountered.

Chapter Two uses systems theory (McMahon & Patton, 1995) to explore the wider context within which this research takes place to acknowledge significant influences of the economy, labour market conditions and the global market. It reviews the recent history of government policy relating to higher education and how this may have directly affected the experiences and opinions of the current cohort of students and new graduates as well as informing my own viewpoint. It summarises how the current economic climate and political ideology have led to a rise in internships, volunteering and other forms of work-related activities which students and graduates undertake in order to get a foot on the careers ladder and will review extant research specifically relating to this area. The consequences and impact of policy on widening participation in higher education and fair access to the professions are explored (Milburn 2009, 2012).

Chapter Three reviews academic literature, bringing together cross-disciplinary theories and concepts which have illuminated the research to date, from areas such as Psychology, Sociology, Education, Business and Career Management theory. These are situated within contemporary paradigms within social science. Sociological theories will contribute useful concepts of *forms of capital* (Bourdieu 1986) as currency within the graduate career and help to understand the interplay between individual *'agency'* and the *'structure'* (Giddens & Sutton, 2013; Archer, 2008) which can constrain or enable this. The concepts of the *'boundaryless career'* (Arthur 1994, 2014) and *'protean career'* (Hall 1976, 1996) will help to shed light upon the dynamics of the modern labour market and the experiences of young people beginning to plan and navigate their careers within it. Finally, it will illuminate the areas that require deeper and more up to date research and how this research will address this need. Although Chapter Three will predominantly review academic literature from peer-reviewed journals it is also important to include grey literature as this is highly relevant to the field of Social Policy and specifically to the dynamic pace of change in Higher Education research.

Chapter Four is concerned with methodological issues and will state my ontological assumptions and epistemological position in relation to the research question and describe

the philosophy that has continuously underpinned my methodological decisions. I describe and explain the methods undertaken and discuss the ethical and practical implications. The study uses interpretive phenomenology in the hermeneutic tradition (Heidegger, 1927; Van Manen, 1990 & 2014; Smythe, 2011), using the method of semi-structured interviews to explore the 'life-world' of the participants (Merleau-Ponty, 1962).

Chapters Five to Eight present the qualitative research findings in relation to the theoretical framework discussed in the literature review and in accordance with the philosophy underpinning the research. Key themes are presented in relation to Van Manen's five existentials of lived experience: lived body (corporeality); lived relations (relationality); lived space (spatiality); lived things (materiality) and lived time (temporality). Each chapter discusses the findings in relation to the academic literature and draws conclusions. Findings are also interpreted through the lens of Heideggerian philosophy to elicit deeper understanding of the nature of unpaid work and mobility as experienced by the participants.

Chapter Five first introduces the participants as a group and individually, describing the nature of the sample achieved and describing typical case studies to illustrate details of their lives. It interweaves biographical data with qualitative narrative of the embodied (lived body) experience of unpaid work. This will help to contextualise the rest of the findings.

Chapter Six explores the lived spaces the participants find themselves in and how they feel and make sense of them. The multiple worlds inhabited and the rules and expectations of each provide an understanding of unpaid work and mobilities which are often complex and unfamiliar.

Chapter Seven illuminates the significance of other people (relationality or communality) which was a recurrent theme in the interviews, both in supporting participants and compromising them.

Chapter Eight turns to the materialities of unpaid work and reveals how money, debt, clothes and technology are central to the experiences of the participants. It also considers how individuals themselves may be seen as 'things' – objects or commodities in the labour

market.   The chapter then presents findings relating to temporality (lived time). Participants reflect on their past experiences and future hopes of unpaid work and mobility and how they utilise such experiences in their career and personal development. Time is also identified as a scarce commodity which impacts upon ability to access (more) opportunities. These two existential themes of materialities and temporality are presented together in this chapter because they are smaller and incidental rather than essential aspects (Van Manen, 1990). Also, as the subthemes link together so strongly, some of the important findings and discussions which relate to 'things' and 'time' will have already been discussed in previous chapters (e.g. being in the right place at the right time is included under world/place but also relates to time).

Chapter Nine draws conclusions about the implications of the research in terms of the original contribution, practical recommendations and potential directions for future research.

Chapter Two: Context and Policy Analysis

This chapter identifies and critically analyses contextual influences upon the participants at the time of the research, with a particular focus on social policy. Setting out the context of the research is a central principle in hermeneutic phenomenology as Heidegger's philosophy asserts that humans exist and hold meaning only in relation to the world around them and at a particular point in history (Harman, 2007). In framing and interpreting the experiences of participants, it is important to acknowledge and foreground the 'hermeneutic situation' within which they (and myself as the researcher) were situated (Gadamer, 1960). Finlay (2011, p.112) emphasises the importance of this *'spatial-temporal lens'* of *'particular cultural and historical fields'*. The chapter presents a snapshot in time at the point when the participants were interviewed. A specific combination of contextual factors arose at the time of the research which made this cohort particularly fascinating to study, namely the increase in tuition fees and the widening participation agenda.

Systems analysis

The systems theory framework of careers provides a valuable lens through which contextual factors can be considered (McMahon & Patton, 2015, 1995). It acknowledges the macro-level global context and recent changes which are likely to impact upon student and graduate mobility, examining how mass participation in higher education, a rise in tuition fees, the increasing marketization of the HE sector and government funding for careers guidance provision may have influenced behaviours and attitudes of young people, particularly in undertaking unpaid work experiences. The framework also acknowledges the relevance of meso-level circumstances such as family, culture and community and the micro-level individual differences such as physical attributes, skills and beliefs.

Systems theory is an interdisciplinary and metatheoretical approach which evolved from the early work of biologist von Bertanlaffy (1969), applied to social science by Bateson (1972) and organisations by Senge (2006). The systems theory framework of career development (McMahon & Patton, 1995; Patton & McMahon, 2006; McMahon, Watson & Patton, 2015) incorporates and transcends the many different theoretical perspectives in

career studies and addresses the enduring question of whether individual agency or structural constraint should be the focus of attention (the answer being both and more) (see Fig. 2.1 below and permission for use Appendix II). It is congruent with the concept of the lifeworld as it acknowledges subjective and objective dimensions of experience. The model also maps readily across to the existentials of lived experience (Van Manen, 1990, 2014).

Figure. 2.1. Systems Theory Framework of Careers (McMahon & Patton, 1995)

The environmental influences include globalisation, political decisions, historical and social trends, the employment market, geographical location, socio-economic status and media.

Although I will now discuss each of these factors in turn, many will overlap, for example, employment rights may constitute legal and political factors; social media may have socio-cultural and technological roots.

Historical trends

As discussed earlier in the introduction, research and individual experience lives within a dynamic historical and social temporal context. Similarly, environmental influences such as political decisions, globalisation, the employment market, literature and media discourses cannot be separated from their context. At the same time as being rooted in the past, decisions and actions are likely to be motivated towards future aspirations and goals. Trends in population demographics, for example, can have a significant effect upon opportunities such as school and university places and employment rates. As the current cohort of 21-year olds are at the tail end of a population boom, graduates following them in the next few years will face less competition as the UK population of that age is smaller in numbers (Office for National Statistics, Census 2011). Population variance is, in turn, a result of complex and multiple factors.

Media developments such as the increase in e-learning (e.g. Massive Open Online Courses - MOOCS) have changed expectations of higher education, access to the jobs market and information is instant and independent and the developments in internet communications have provided new ways to be internationally mobile. Technology has also changed and continues to change the nature of jobs and the skills needed in the labour market and how opportunities are accessed (e.g. via social media). Reports by policy think-tanks and independent reviews (e.g. the Browne review, 2010) both influence and inform government policy and make headlines which in turn shape public opinion. Attitudes to debt, student consumer choices, the rise of internships and 'voluntourism' may all be influenced by media.

Globalisation

Globalisation is a key factor in the higher education sector with the numbers of university students moving to study in other countries at 5 million in 2014 and predicted to rise to 8

million in 2025 (University of Oxford, 2015). Higher numbers of incoming international students are diversifying the cultural environment of UK institutions and their hometowns and cities. Universities have developed many ways in which to engage with the wider academic community, by establishing international hubs, technology enabled learning, research partnerships and teaming up with international businesses in knowledge transfer initiatives. International opportunities for student work, study and volunteering placements (for example, Erasmus and Erasmus Plus) exist to *'prepare 21st century graduates to live in and contribute responsibly to a globally interconnected society'* (Sweeney, 2014a p6). However, government policies have not always worked in favour of HE internationalisation; for example, changes to visa requirements for some international students have restricted numbers from some areas (e.g. India) and created additional administration for universities.

A global graduate labour market

Globalisation has also created an expansion of opportunities for graduates who are willing to move, particularly across the European Union since the freedom of movement of workers was established in the EU treaties and the Bologna process sought to introduce comparable standards between member states (Quality Assurance Agency, 2008). Many top employers need graduate recruits who can work transnationally, indeed graduate mobility doubled within twenty years at the turn of the millennium (Parey & Waldinger 2008). Price Waterhouse Cooper (2012) one of the major accountancy recruiters, notes in its report 'Talent Mobility: 2020 and Beyond', that levels of mobile employees have increased by 25% over the past decade and predicts a further 50% growth by 2020. Their survey reports that 71% of graduates want to work outside their home country. The top paying graduate employer (outside of investment banking) at the time of research was the European Commission at £41k per annum for new starters (Highfliers, 2015).

For many careers, evidence on a CV of international experience is not only desirable to enhance employability directly ('the mobility imperative' Cox, 2008; Cairns, 2014) but also a 'rite of passage'. For students and graduates this often takes the form of a 'gap year', 'Grand Tour', 'Big OE' (overseas experience), a period of volunteering overseas or a fundraising trip (for example, to climb a mountain or build an orphanage). Such experience

serves as a proxy for other valuable employability currency, of economic, social and cultural capital to demonstrate admirable personal characteristics that deem the individual a valuable labour market asset (Barrie, 2004).

With internationalisation comes a need to educate and inform students of the range of opportunities. Young people need to be alerted, from an early age, to the possibilities and opportunities that can be reached by aeroplane in a couple of hours. This does not appear to be happening, for example, in a British Council survey (2014) only 24% of respondents said they felt they had sufficient information to make an informed decision about studying overseas. In the popular Graduate Career Guidebook (Rook, 2013) discussion of international opportunities is limited to a few pages on gap year voluntary work.

Geographical location and mobility

Geographical location and mobility are meso and micro-level factors which follow on from wider structural influences. The possibilities for international travel have grown exponentially within the past two generations. Just as the past decades have seen a shift to 'mass participation' in higher education they have also seen an accompanying increase in international travel, which has become much more practical (quicker) and affordable (cheaper airfares). In theory, this has opened up the opportunities previously only enjoyed by the more affluent. Young people are more likely to have been abroad than previous generations, either for holidays or as family migration has resulted in visiting families overseas.

Higher education has become increasingly internationalised in recent decades (Collini 2012). Many students move across boundaries – geographical, psychological, social and cultural – in order to participate in higher education and even more take the opportunity to exercise such mobilities as part of or alongside their degree. Research suggests that students who participate in international programmes (such as ERASMUS) during university later achieve higher earnings, however, this could be because of previous advantage or disposition, and a causal relationship is not proven. The UK has been the biggest participant in Erasmus programmes with 24, 185 UK domiciled students studying abroad in 2013/14 (UK HE International Unit, 2016). Fabricius, Mortensen & Haberland (2016) lament the

paradox that internationalisation ought to have created an appreciation of diversity in culture, language and curricula and yet the reality is that it can accentuate differences and encourage conformity to a standard (e.g. English language, American culture).

Although the geographical mobility of early career researchers has been researched (e.g. Ackers, 2013, 2008) there is limited research into student and graduate mobility, particularly at a regional level, and this is a topic of particular interest in the light of recent context. King and Ruiz-Gelices (2003) also highlight the lack of attention paid to international student migration (ISM). They found that a year abroad, through the ERASMUS programme' conferred significant benefits for participants such as linguistic improvement, cultural experience, general personal development, higher rates of further study, higher earnings, better job profiles and less experience of unemployment. They also found that students who spent a year abroad were more likely to develop a European identity and to exercise international mobility in their future career. However, they do acknowledge that some of these outcomes could have been due to their family background prior to the year abroad making them more inclined to take up such an opportunity. They make a distinction between 'international' and 'internal' student mobility, the latter involving decisions about whether to move away (within the UK) to study and whether to return after graduation.

A recent report by the Higher Education Careers Service Unit (HECSU) shows that North West graduates are relatively geographically immobile, the majority preferring to either stay within the region to study (46%) or else return to the region post-graduation (25%) (Ball, 2015). In the context of students and graduates, mobility patterns are categorised as:

- Loyals – who were domiciled in a region, studied at a university in the region and remained there after graduation;
- Returners – these are graduates who were domiciled in a region, studied elsewhere then subsequently returned to their original region;
- Stayers – travel away from their domiciled region then remain in the new region to work and
- Incomers – go to work in a region in which they were neither domiciled nor studied.

Mobility decisions may be influenced by costs: there may be other 'push and pull factors' which come into play, in that the higher cost of being a student means fewer people move away to study then student debts and higher house prices makes graduates more likely to

move back home after studies (NUS, 2016). These factors do not explain regional variations though, North West students feel strong bonds with their family, community and region ('affective ties' Ackers & Gill, 2008 p124; Finn, 2017).

In the UK context, policy changes over recent years have changed the dominant patterns of student and graduate mobility and migration, at least for some. Strategies to increase the graduate population have changed the demographics and widened participation in higher education, leading to more students living at home and going to their local university. Other structural factors such as the economy have affected the labour market and the housing market, both of which have changed perceptions and choices (inevitably unequally) for graduates.

The 2016 referendum resulting in the decision for the UK to leave the EU is also likely to impact upon future student and academic mobility and research funding. It is noteworthy at this stage to acknowledge that, although this is currently a significant issue for the UK, at the time of the research it was not on the horizon. Retaining graduate talent within a region and attracting it from elsewhere is important for the North West region to develop and capitalise on investment opportunities. The next chapter will pick up on discussions of geographical mobility through academic literature.

Boundary spanning and knowledge-mobility

With increased internationalisation of the graduate labour market over recent decades (Collini, 2012) students and graduates face global competition for jobs within and beyond the UK. Careers are increasingly 'boundaryless' (Arthur, 1984, 2014; Arthur & Rousseau, 1996) demanding that early career graduates are flexible in their skills, their actions, their expectations and their geographical mobility in order to achieve success. Baruch and Reis (2016) identify the rise of both global and boundaryless careers in recent decades and analyse the relationship between the two, arguing that there are four types of careers: *boundaryless– local, boundaryless-global, traditional-local and traditional-global*. In relation to this typology, it is interesting to consider how students' and graduates' early careers take shape. Many typical global graduate careers lie within organisational structures, others may be local and yet boundaryless in other ways.

Mobility is a central tenant of contemporary careers. Williams (2006) highlights how migration has been key to the changes in the labour market, shifting the balance from bounded careers, shaped by organisational structures, to boundaryless careers, facilitated by the actions of mobile individuals.

> *'Free agent labour migrants are socially diverse, in terms of their skills and motivations, ranging from young people working abroad as part of a gap year or the 'Big OE' to itinerant specialists such as ski instructors, to the plumber or builder who moves from Eastern to Western Europe in search of employment'* Williams (2006, p595)

Williams identifies the fundamental position of knowledge and learning in this dynamic, suggesting that a primary drive for mobility is the seeking of 'lifetime learning' and that security, for free agents, lies within their employability rather than a specific employment (Opengart & Short, 2002). Furthermore, he argues that *'every migrant is a learner, knowledge carrier and knowledge creator'* who can contribute to organisations (and communities) specialist skills at the right time and can transfer knowledge to others. This builds upon the work of Tushman and Scanlan (1981) who describe individuals who carry out such a role as *'boundary spanners'* as in individuals who span boundaries, linking organisations with external resources. The term migration need not only describe spatial and geographical movement in the case of this study as students and graduates may regularly migrate, in a wider sense of the word, between organisations, roles and sectors. This notion of boundary-spanning offers a more positive perspective of the value they can bring, like a butterfly, cross pollinating places where they alight with new skills and ideas.

The UK Employment Market in 2016

The employment market is identified by McMahon, Watson & Patton (2015) as an influence upon career-decisions and behaviours of students and graduates. Employment market factors include labour market opportunities, unemployment rate, and the buoyancy of the economy.

The term 'graduate labour market' generally describes the patterns of jobs deemed 'graduate level' for example, specific management or technical positions offering good prospects and training at an appropriate skill level. In 2015 graduates had higher

employment rates, higher median salaries and suffered less unemployment in the recession than non-graduates (Dept. BIS 2016a). However, salaries for graduates have not significantly increased since 2008. There are some inequalities within the market with black graduates earning less and showing higher rates of unemployment. Young male graduates were more likely to be employed than young females, but this reversed in older graduates. STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering & Maths) graduates experienced higher employment rates, higher skilled work and higher median salaries than other disciplines. Interestingly, degree classification is significantly linked to earnings of young graduates with those achieving a 'first class' earning £3000 more per annum than those with an upper second (2:1) and a similar gap of £2500 between graduates with a 2:1 and a 2:2. Graduate vacancies and salaries in *'The Times Top 100 graduate employers'* had been rising for the past three years and salaries increasing, with the median salary reported to be £30,000 (High Fliers, 2015). Significantly, 31% of entry-level positions were expected to be filled by people who had already worked in the company, through work experience, internship or work placement, which emphasises the need for building very specific career capital alongside university.

The most significant source of graduate employment data for universities is the government survey of 'Destinations of Leavers of Higher Education' (DLHE) which is conducted annually around January. Figures from this survey indicate the percentage of graduates from each university (and course) who have taken up 'graduate level' employment. These statistics are then published in league tables and as 'key information sets' which are highly visible to students when choosing universities on the UCAS website. This frames the environment for participants as every university is accountable to 'OFFA' for targets to increase employability. The statistics are very important and yet they are fundamentally flawed (Christie, 2016) as they can only measure things that are measurable, such as salary and employment rates. If a graduate is employed in a low paid job that does not require graduate skills it is seen as a negative outcome, even though it may have good future prospects and be intrinsically rewarding (e.g. entrepreneur, charity, and creative work). Many graduates do not settle immediately into an established career or further study because they simply take up more hours with the employer they worked for part-time or they take time out to travel, volunteer or just to take stock. Burke (2015) suggests

this type of transitory destination is more prevalent for working class graduates, perhaps as a temporary measure or, more worryingly, long term. Qualitative research can inform developments by describing the stories and the real issues behind the numbers.

An additional emerging feature of the labour market, particularly in the West, is the 'squeezed middle' or the 'hourglass economy' (Parker, 2013). This suggests there are more opportunities in the very low and very highly skilled levels of jobs but little in-between (Portes & Zhou, 1993; Sissons, 2001). This may affect graduates directly who may be aiming for such mid-level jobs.

Whilst the graduate labour market is an established topic for discussion and study, the market for unpaid work amongst students is less so. The context of the early 21st century, resulting from a combination of environmental factors has given rise to a boom in employability-enhancing experiences. This research will identify and attempt to differentiate between these and to understand what they mean to the individuals who undertake them.

'Career mobility experiences'

One of the challenges within this research has been conceptualising and defining precisely the phenomena being studied. Perhaps this is positive as it suggests this concept has not been identified, isolated and researched before. This kind of challenge is also a feature of the phenomenon of phenomenology, for which Heidegger (1927) himself struggled to formulate a definitive definition. Essentially, I have observed that there are *things students and graduates do* (*'Knowing-How'* DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994) in order to facilitate their entry, establishment and progression in the labour market which ostensibly prepare them for work by teaching them 'how work works' and how to interact and behave (i.e. habitus & cultural capital). These activities also might help them to build a network of contacts who can provide subsequent opportunities, either a job itself, practical encouragement or support or vouch for credibility by introducing them to other people who can help or providing references. Most commonly, this credibility can be demonstrated when the student/graduate applies for jobs and is able to write and talk about their skills and experience developed through this opportunity and may feel more confident and

competent throughout the selection process where soft skills are so important for success (Houston & Cunningham, 2015; De Vries & Rentfrow, 2016). These activities, opportunities or experiences may include work experience/placements, internships, voluntary work, internationally or locally.

I have found that many of these terms are used to describe the same kind of 'opportunity' and so can be confusing for research and for young people entering the labour market. Whether they are indeed 'opportunities' is of significant interest to this study, as many of them could be exploiting a free or cheap source of labour. The main opportunity unpaid does provide is the chance to collect 'social capital' (Bourdieu, 1986) which can later be exchanged for economic capital in the form of paid employment and so may facilitate forms of mobility – social, geographical and career. For the purpose of this study I have chosen to exclude other activities students may undertake during their studies (part-time work, mandatory paid work placements included within the degree and extra-curricular activities such as university club membership or sporting activities although these can also serve the same purpose) and to focus on activities which involve engagement with the labour market which is initiated and voluntarily undertaken by the individual and hence illustrates the agency aspect of career mobility. I shall now identify and consider some of the main types of experience:

Work experience

> *'Work experience is crucial to bridge the gap between education and the world of work. At its broadest and best, work experience can open people's eyes to jobs they had never thought of, help inform career decisions, offer a chance to prove themselves to an employer and help instil the attitudes and behaviours expected at work. If we want people who are ready to work in healthcare, we need to be ready to help build their employability skills'* Health Education England (2015)

The Milburn report into Fair Access (2009) highlighted the key role of work experience as an entry point to the professions. This work experience may be gained through a range of different means such as internships, part-time work, placements or 'sandwich' degree courses that include a year placement in industry, volunteering and work shadowing. Work experience is typically undertaken during school or college; however, people may undertake work experience later in life to help them change career (Arnold, 1984; BBC,

2016). Jensen (2009) reports that graduates value work experience for numerous reasons for example, helping them learn what kind of work they want to do, exposing them to the lifestyle in a workplace, giving them responsibilities, knowledge specific to a sector, useful contacts and networks as well as often being a shortcut to a job within the company.

This is echoed by employers with nearly half the recruiters in a recent report warning that graduates who have had no previous work experience at all are unlikely to be successful during the selection process and have little or no chance of receiving a job offer for their organisations' graduate programmes (High Fliers, 2015). Dragoni et al. (2014) found that international work experience was particularly effective in developing leadership skills (such as strategic thinking) when it involved spending time in a country which was culturally very different from their own. However, McDonald (2011) suggests the value of work experience is often based upon 'who you know' so reproduces social inequalities. Waryszak (1999) points out that work experience can also impact upon students' self-confidence, values and social skills but that the effect can be negative as well as positive and that the prior expectations of students can be an important factor.

Volunteering

Volunteering is popular with many students and graduates for a variety of reasons, which will be explored in this research. The rise in demand for voluntary experience has been accompanied and encouraged by an emphasis on 'Big Society' (Scott, 2011) and a market for packaged international volunteer placements which combine the chance to volunteer with the opportunity to travel (volunteer-tourism or 'voluntourism') (Raymond & Hall 2008). In other words, volunteering has been extensively commodified. Interestingly these two forms of volunteering, whilst undertaken for similar reasons, may also be seen to contribute to quite different ends with local volunteering seen to strengthen and empower local communities, global tourism may facilitate 'fluidity' across spatial and cultural boundaries. In reviewing theories of volunteering motivations, Wilson (2000) distinguishes between those which emphasise individual self-development or rational cost-benefit analysis. Although the main beneficiary of volunteering might arguably be the recipient, he also found positive effects for volunteers in self-esteem, life satisfaction, self-rated health, educational attainment and lowered anti-social behaviour.

In international volunteering, the assumed positive benefits to the recipient (i.e. the host country or organisation) may be questionable particularly in medical or education related placements. Ethical questions arise when low resource settings are used as a 'skills lab' (Ackerman, 2010) where medical professionals can practice, often unsupervised at perceived low risk (e.g. of litigation or scale of consequence), a phenomenon termed 'ninja medicine' in Ahmed, Ackers-Johnson and Ackers (2017). Supervision and support are often lacking in the placements, charitable donations can create power issues and there may be emotional or personal safety issues for students (O'Donnell et al., 2014).

A further criticism of international volunteering as a means of gaining career capital is the that it is inaccessible to so many. Snee (2014) says that most young people who participate in 'gap year' travel are white, middle-class and without disability. She also questions the discourse of 'freedom and independence' in their time out, suggesting that many narratives of volunteers highlight the pressure they are under to do 'the right' kind of travelling and volunteering for future benefit. The media and social media discourse surrounding the phenomena of students international volunteering often criticise volunteer tourism for promoting 'poverty porn' and question the altruistic motives of participants as well as the usefulness of the experience (Guardian, 2016d; Easterly, 2006).

Whilst there is limited literature on different forms of work such as internships, volunteering and work experience, this is often subsumed into a more general body of research into student engagement in 'extra-curricular activities' (ECAs). Extra-curricular activities may include work related activities but more usually focus upon membership of clubs and societies or sporting pursuits alongside degree study. For example, Greenbank (2015) has suggested that working class students are less likely to see the need to engage in activities (such as internships) which will help them to secure top jobs and more likely to need to sustain part-time jobs alongside their studies. The Sutton Trust suggests that children from more affluent backgrounds are also much more likely to engage in private tuition and activities that help them gain access to selective schools, which in turn help them gain access to elite universities and jobs (Sutton Trust, 2014).

Internships

Internships are a popular way of gaining experience and building CV credentials. They are a relatively modern and complex phenomenon with roots in US medical training. Researching this phenomenon is complicated by the use of interchangeable phraseology by providers so that the same activity could be called an internship, volunteering, a work placement, job shadowing, work experience and could be unpaid, unpaid but with expenses, low paid (below minimum wage) or well paid. In addition, some internships require payment by the student e.g. Intern China CRCC Asia or are funded by the university or private business (e.g. Santander bank programme enabling SMEs to take on a paid intern at no cost to themselves). Particularly desirable opportunities have been auctioned for thousands of pounds (Daily Mail, 2011). The length of time and frequency of these 'episodes' of exposure to workplaces vary widely from one-off yet significant through regular few hours a week to longer term and more intense. Some placements are part of a university project and bear credit towards a degree, although this form of experience is not within the scope of this research. Often graduates will expect to undertake at least one internship either during a university summer holiday or upon graduation before they get a job.

Internships can be valuable in helping students and graduates consolidate and apply their theoretical education to practical, workplace issues and this is, arguably, one of the most fundamental benefits to the participant. The major benefit to employers is an increase in workforce capacity (especially if the intern is paid only the minimum wage, or not paid at all) although some employers may argue their reasons for engaging interns are less mercenary (e.g. bringing in new ideas, giving people a chance). There is clearly an investment of time incurred in training the interns and providing a meaningful experience.

In practice, 'internship' has come to be a catch-all term which covers any kind of work experience (paid or unpaid) undertaken by a student or graduate. Lawton and Potter (2010) outline four ways in which internships differ from general work experience: *length of time* – an internship can last for months (and may involve relocation) whereas work experience is usually just a couple of weeks; *hours* – interns are generally expected to work full time hours; *work expectations* – interns are often given specific work projects with deadlines

and objectives and *contribution* – interns significantly contribute to the host organisation when they undertake tasks which would otherwise be carried out by an employee.

Despite intense attention in the media and grey literature, there is little academic research specifically about internships. Where it does exist, it is often theoretical/conceptual in nature rather than empirical, perhaps because it is a relatively new phenomenon and open to many interpretations and grey areas. 'Internship' literature usually relates to American medical training (Neimeyer & Keilin, 2007). Furthermore, academic literature has, thus far, failed to capture the social construction of 'the internship' that is, how it is represented and perceived in the public eye.

Holloway & Roehlke (1987) call internships *'the linchpin between academic preparation and entry into professional employment'* (p.210) and this is how many students view internships, as an essential part of their portfolio. Internships are usually undertaken during the summer months or straight after graduation, although there has also been a rise in 'mid-career' middle-aged interns wishing to change career (BBC, 2016). There has been an increase in graduates undertaking internships as a 'first step' after graduation to help them to gain experience and to decide what to do next (Gillen, 2012). However, some may find this period of experimentation lasts longer then they had hoped and graduates (particularly 'working class' graduates) are more likely to 'get stuck' in a succession of internships and non-graduate roles (Burke, 2015).

There has been a shift in the nature and purpose of internships over recent years, according to graduate research experts High Fliers (2015), as they used to be marketed as an opportunity for people to try out a career area to help them to decide what to do. The emphasis has changed, and they are now seen as a highly advisable (if not compulsory) way to gain valuable experience in a chosen field, and more specifically a chosen company. Although the emphasis of an internship is upon gaining skills and experience, students need to be able to make a favourable impression from the outset, as the selection process for an internship is now as rigorous and competitive for many organisations as it is for a graduate job. Indeed, internships can lead to esteemed graduate roles either directly (about a third of graduate job recruits were selected from an internship programme with the company)

or indirectly (providing essential experience, perhaps in a different company) (Highfliers, 2015).

There are many online forums where interns can report negative experiences (*student room, rate my placement*) and organisations such as *Internaware* also campaign for rights for interns (for example, encouraging people who have undertaken unpaid internships to reclaim their pay retrospectively if they have done tasks which would have normally been carried out by a paid member of staff). There have been high court victories here in which interns have been financially compensated for lost pay (Perlin, 2012).

So why would highly qualified young people be willing to work for nothing? What are the benefits? Beebe, Blaylock & Sweetser (2009) made an interesting discovery amongst public relations interns, whereby they analysed responses to measures of job satisfaction to suggest that paid interns reported higher satisfaction than unpaid interns. However, unpaid interns rated factors other than pay as conditions creating satisfaction (such as 'learning skills', 'good relationship with manager' and 'opportunity for advancement') which all relate to human and social capitals.

Organisations have been good at repackaging their entry-level vacancies as positive steps on the career ladder. Maynard (1997) found that the letters of companies promoting unpaid internships contained more references to 'opportunity' compared with the marketing information for paid internships. He suggested that further research into the student perspective of benefits of internships would be useful. A report by the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) concluded that, although unpaid internships are 'perpetuating inequality and dampening opportunities for social mobility', fairly paid internships are a good opportunity for both the individual, particularly in times of high youth unemployment, and also for industry in attracting a diverse range of people (Lawton & Potter, 2010). Qualitative research can build upon this to explore how to optimise the benefits, financial and intrinsic, for both employers and interns.

Whilst there have been calls and promises to ban unpaid internships (IPPR, 2017) professional bodies have been taking a positive approach, considering how to make internships as beneficial as possible. The Chartered Institute for Personnel and

Development (CIPD) suggests that interns should be included in the same processes as an employee, such as fair recruitment and selection, induction, performance planning and management, mentoring and that together they should draw up an internship agreement (CIPD, 2009). They also call for the introduction of a nominal national 'training wage', however, this could lead to interns who are currently paid the minimum wage or above having their income reduced to this benchmark.

Swan (2015) suggests that students could be better prepared for internships by being taught skills of critical reflexivity, to openly discuss inequality and to know their rights so that they can discriminate between 'good' and 'bad' internships. She concludes that, while some of the issues need to be tackled by governments and businesses, universities can play a catalytic role. This is where careers guidance and employability/work-readiness education are vital. Fundamentally, across the curriculum, students need to learn how to cope in a workplace environment, especially after eighteen years of institutionalisation in full time education. This can be a tricky balance for professionals, as Durack (2013) asks:

> *'At what point do our actions cross the line from seeing to our students' professional development to pimping desirable first-time workers who lack experience to question the circumstances of their employment and who not yet have developed the judgment to recognize and the courage to challenge an exploitive opportunity'* *(p257)*

Universities have a key role in introducing students to suitable opportunities through marketing and direct referral (particularly for those students who lack the social capital to find their own). They are also complicit in building and managing the expectations of students regarding the potential benefits of such opportunities (Maynard, 1997) and 'normalising' internships as part of university life, even if they may have misgivings about the conditions. Most universities have a policy of not advertising or condoning unpaid internships, although in practice career consultants/placement coordinators may unofficially still pass on information about them as they recognise that, in some sectors they are the only point of entry to professions (Buzdugan, 2017)

Legal and ethical issues in unpaid work

A You Gov 'Omnibus survey' (You Gov, 2013) on internships showed that although 43% of respondents think that internships give an unfair advantage, 49% think that employers and interns benefit equally from the arrangement and 50% believe that if young people are happy to work unpaid the government need not interfere. Not everyone can afford to undertake a period of unpaid work though and this is one of the most contentious issues surrounding internships. A recent survey suggests that 74% of people say that they, or someone from a background like them, could not afford to undertake an unpaid internship (YouGov, 2013). Furthermore, unpaid internships are less likely to lead to employment than paid ones and employers might assume interns are happy to work for free. (Internaware, 2015). The official government internship recruitment website 'GradTalentPool' recently changed its policy to include only paid positions, however, this represents only the visible market yet more than a third of businesses admit that they recruit interns from family and friends rather than seeking to fairly attract the best people for the job (YouGov, 2013).

Even when internships are paid this may be at a low level as they are considered a position of training rather than a form of paid employment. This also makes the legal standing and the rights of an intern somewhat vague as they may not be officially employed and so may have no right to redress in case of issues with their employer. More importantly, they may not have any right to sick pay, holidays or even be insured on the premises (Perlin 2012). When undertaking even a paid internship the intern will often end up out of pocket, as they incur expenses such as travel, subsistence and purchase of suitable clothes.

The crucial question in determining whether internships are essentially exploitative or enabling is the extent to which the incumbent is learning new skills rather than doing useful tasks for the benefit of the employer. The UK government (Gov.UK, 2016) states that interns who are undertaking work experience where they are merely observing have no legal rights. If they carry out work, they would normally be entitled to the minimum wage. The legal rights of volunteers are also unclear. Government (BIS, 2010) guidelines state that volunteers are under no obligation to perform work and *'can come or go as they please'* although this may not be the reality.

A 'State of the Nation' report for the Social Mobility & Child Poverty Commission (Sutton Trust, 2014) estimate that one quarter of UK companies use unpaid interns and 82% of these employers think their contribution to the workforce is essential. However, the question remains as to whether they should be protected by a duty of care and safeguarding – if not legally at least morally. It recommends an end all unpaid internships by 2020, with the help of legislation if necessary.

Political decisions

Political decisions have considerably influenced the context of this research, through ideology and legislation (e.g. acts of parliament and white papers), government strategies, policies and initiatives (e.g. widening participation, raising tuition fees and removing the cap on numbers of admissions) and the prevailing rhetoric of politicians (such as George Osborne's 'Northern Powerhouse speech in 2014). I will summarise some of the key influences whilst acknowledging there are many more decisions that have played a part.

An independent review of skills - 'Prosperity for all in the Global Economy' (Leitch, 2006) was a catalyst for the reform of UK training and education, highlighting the urgent need to upskill the population in order to compete on the global economic stage. The UK is one of the largest economies in the world (IMF, 2016) and yet still struggles to compete globally in several key measures such as education, GDP, employment and wellbeing. Inequality can adversely affect growth and sustainability (Berg & Ostry, 2011) and have socio-economic consequences such as increased crime and lower wellbeing (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). Several key policies were implemented to help Britain raise its educational profile internationally. One of these was a target to increase the percentage of adults holding qualifications at or above Level 4 (i.e. HNC or first year degree level) from 29% to 40%. Every young person was legally required to remain in education, recognised employment or training, effectively raising the statutory school leaving age from 16 to 18. Once a young person enters further education (particularly a Level 3 programme) progression to university is a strong possibility. Students may feel pressurised by peers, parents and the college itself (FE colleges have targets for progression to HE and this is an area in which they compete and are judged).

Responsibility for the costs of H.E. participation

Higher education, historically, has been funded by central government with tuition fees and grants payable to students. Neoliberal economic policies such as privatisation and austerity during recent decades have provided a climate of *'responsibilization'* (Shamir, 2008) which requires individuals to accept responsibility, e.g. for their own education. The foundations had been laid for UK students' acceptance of this through 'Citizenship' (introduced as a national curriculum subject in 2002) a key message of which was *'no rights without responsibilities'* (Giddens, 1994). Lord Browne's (2010) independent review of higher education made recommendations which would radically change the system, creating the conditions of a marketplace where universities could effectively compete for 'customers'. This marked a shift in university culture as recruitment became more proactive and reached wider markets (international and local 'non-traditional' students).

In 2016, UK graduates left university with unprecedented levels of student debt. Individual responsibility for the costs was first introduced in the Teaching and Higher Education Act 1998 (under a Labour government) then later to £3000 (Higher Education Act, 2004). Following the Browne Review (2010) tuition fees were allowed to rise to unprecedented levels of £9000 per annum. At the same time, mass participation in higher education continued to grow to meet the skills agenda of the country. Financial support was initially made available to incentivise applications from students from lower socio-economic groups.

Full-time education also represents an 'opportunity cost' as many will have made a sacrifice of three years earnings as well as skills and experience potentially gained in that time in the workplace. They face increasing competition for 'graduate level' jobs because there are record numbers of graduates (745,005 in 2015) according to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA, 2017). Moreover, many have postgraduate qualifications and high degree classifications (70.2% of 2015 graduates attained a 2:1 or above). This raises a dilemma for employers as to how they can differentiate between job applicants. Work experience is one way.

For students and graduates, the risk inherent in investing time and money in high education to improve career prospects may not have been clear to them from the outset. The

commercial focus of universities and the progression targets of further education colleges may tend to emphasise success stories and possibilities rather than pitfalls. A new report describes the *'double jeopardy'* for new graduates experiencing the dual impact of higher student debts alongside the less certain employment outcomes, 52% of whom felt their degree was not worth the money:

> *"The graduates face a double jeopardy: they enter the world of work having paid far more for their education, with the debts hanging over them. Yet they receive far less benefit from this education in the labour market compared to previous generations, while living costs keep rising and the welfare safety net is shrinking"*

Sorana Vieru, Vice President, (NUS, 2016, p2)

Employers require work-ready graduates with skills over and above their educational achievements and increasing numbers of jobs in a knowledge economy need graduate-level skills according to a joint report by the National Union of Students and the Confederation for British Industry (NUS/CBI, 2016). This means savvy students not only work hard to gain a good degree but also need to enhance their 'employability', building their CV credentials early in their career (Tomlinson, 2008; Greenbank, 2015). There is longstanding research and debate around what 'employability' means and how people can develop and demonstrate it (Knight & Yorke, 2003; Law & Watts, 2003 and Harvey, 2003 and Dacre-Pool & Sewell, 2007) which Chapter Three will review. Careers services have traditionally held the expertise and responsibility for this aspect of education; however, later in this chapter I will discuss how recent governments have undermined this position.

As the larger cohorts of HE participants graduate, universities have been increasingly accountable for positive and equal outcomes. The 'Destination of Leavers of Higher Education' survey asks graduates what they are doing six months after leaving. Results are published and prospective students can choose universities (subject to their A' level results) with this in mind. For the main university league tables (such as the Times, Guardian and the Complete Universities Guide) employability is measured in terms of 'graduate level' jobs or continued study. There have been both positive and negative consequences of this distinction and the pressure for universities to demonstrate progression of students (Christie, 2016).

Higher Education – equality of access and opportunity

An obvious concern (Hillman, 2013) regarding the increase in tuition fees was that it might deter less well-off students from entering higher education. To redress this potential obstacle, a condition was applied by the government that universities raising fees over £6000 must develop and implement strategies to encourage access to lower socio-economic groups, for example, those students whose parents have not been to university; those living in particular postcode areas; students with disabilities; students of black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) or care-leavers. The 'National Scholarship' Programme was also introduced to offer funding to students considered the most financially disadvantaged. Those from the most disadvantaged postcodes are three times less likely to go to university than those from the most advantaged areas and are ten times less likely to go to the most selective universities. (Sutton Trust, 2014).

The 'Office for Fair Access' (OFFA) was established to negotiate access agreements with universities and review progress towards recruitment targets. Universities were required to encourage applications from and provide additional support for students from non-traditional groups such as care leavers; first in the family to go to university; those who had received free school meals (an indicator of poverty) or students with a disability. Students in further education provision were identified and offered 'Widening Participation' initiatives including residential summer schools, master classes and cash bursaries. Questions about the criteria were also included on the UCAS application and some universities or specific courses accepted lower grades from eligible students. As a result, even the 'stubborn' elite universities – made significant progress in recruiting, retaining and successful outcomes for students who have long been under-represented in Higher Education. (OFFA, 2014). Alongside the gradual easing of the cap on student numbers, this contributed to the trend of 'massification' of higher education from an elite institution to a mass service provision (Giannaki & Bullivant, 2016). As many of the students in this research fulfil 'widening participation' criteria, it will be interesting to see if and how any extra support has helped them.

Risks and rewards

'A degree is of benefit both to the holder, through higher levels of social contribution and higher lifetime earnings, and to the nation, through higher economic growth rates and the improved health of society' Lord Browne (2010, page 2)

Although the average student debt in 2016 was £44k (Sutton Trust, 2014), Browne (2010) described studying for a degree as a 'risk free activity' in that high earners will yield an estimated 400% on their investment in Higher Education and lower paid graduates will pay back nothing until they earn £21k pa. He also estimated that only 40% of graduates would repay their loans in full. Students were quick to recognise the possibility that they might never repay their student loans in full (and some might never even start to make repayments if their salaries were low enough). Rather than *'Unleashing Aspiration'* (Milburn, 2009) this had the opposite effect for some students. Collini (2010) severely criticised Browne's assertions that *'students are best placed to make the judgement about what they want to get from participating in higher education'* (Browne, 2010, pg. 25) saying they may be best placed to say what they want but not what they *'should get'* from education. When they committed to such important and consequential decisions, most of them were just seventeen and not necessarily 'rational consumers'. Indeed, commercial credit is not legally available to under-eighteen-year-olds (minors).

The policy context surrounding student fees and support is still subject to debate. In 2015 a policy decision was made to discontinue maintenance grants for students from poorer households (BBC, 2015a). Moreover, the government's own figures were analysed (Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2011; Johnston, 2013) to illustrate that poorer students will make relatively higher repayments over the duration of their career as they will take longer to repay. Female graduates are also at an unfair disadvantage as there is consistent evidence that they earn less than male, similarly qualified counterparts (Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2016; Futuretrack, 2013). 'WP students' are more likely to drop out of higher education thus accumulating debt without reaping the anticipated future financial benefits (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2005).

Careers Guidance Provision – impact of government policy

Quality careers guidance can impact on the individual transition of young people through education to career and life success as well as enhancing economic productivity and social equality (Hooley & Watts, 2011). The monitoring and tackling of youth unemployment have historically been the statutory responsibility of the Careers Service, operated through local government and tied in with provision of careers information and guidance, starting in schools. A labour market economy which is changing rapidly and full of opportunity requires a workforce who are well-equipped to make informed decisions about how to best invest their time and skills. This role of careers guidance is crucial and yet young people graduating have possibly suffered from a lack of individualised careers advice and guidance whilst at school or college due to successive government policies which have undermined and under-resourced this provision. Priorities of local management have swung dramatically in response to government dictates, for example from 'Better Choices' in 1995 (Watts et al., 1996) which insisted every young person left school with a clear and informative action plan, through Connexions where funding and staff were targeted at only 'disaffected' young people at risk of being 'NEET' (not in employment, education or training). It has also enabled the growth of private careers companies and more online provision of information to replace individual, face-to-face support (Hooley & Watts, 2011).

Careers Advisers have encountered continual 'de-professionalisation' and de-specialisation (Christie, 2015) being replaced by more generic 'Personal Advisers' whose remit was to provide a one-stop information service for young people about any issues including homelessness, sexual health and financial matters. Many experienced and highly skilled advisers were made redundant or left the profession. More recently, the responsibility (and funding) to provide careers guidance has transferred to schools, which has resulted in patchy provision, abandonment of universal provision and a disparate service. A thematic review by The Office for Standards in Education found that only one in five schools was adequately ensuring the provision of quality careers education and guidance (OfSTED, 2013). Funding cuts disproportionately disadvantage 'non-traditional' students with less social, cultural and mobility capital as they are arguably more likely to need this kind of brokerage.

Careers education can open new possibilities for young people beyond the realms of experience of their parents. A recent report by UCAS (2016b) states that children who have decided by the age of ten that they want to go to university are 2.6 times more likely to go to a more prestigious university and socially advantaged children are generally ahead of the game. Many of the participants of this research would have been affected by a lack of careers support at a crucial time, although having never had the help in the first place makes it unlikely that they would raise concerns about this.

In 2015 the government issued revised guidance regarding career provision, however, the message was still clear that resources were stretched and that young people at risk of dropping out of the system were the priority for individual professional attention (i.e. not those who are achieving academically and aspiring to higher education). They strongly asserted that people other than professional advisers should inspire the next generation of the workforce (for example, employers and other community members) (Dept. for Education 2015). Although employers and opportunity providers (including universities) can provide valuable information this may be limited to their sector or organisation and only a minority work with education to play their part. (UKCES, 2015). Forward-thinking employers realise that strong relationships with universities can raise their profile and enhance their recruitment successes, however, many top companies (and civil service departments) are highly selective in their links, restricting them to elite universities (High Fliers, 2015) and students who are predicted a high degree classification. Young people are left exposed to the pressures and promises of market forces when making important decisions about their future study and work. Admissions staff at universities or 'graduate ambassadors' who visit schools and careers fairs, with the purest of intentions, yet may not be in the best position to give informed and impartial advice tailored to the individual.

The issue of careers guidance is, for me personally, a very precious part of this research. Having worked in the profession for over twenty years I passionately believe in the efficacy of quality careers guidance and the life-changing catalysis it can offer. I echo the concerns of Hooley and Watts (2011) and Christie (2015) about the consequences of policy decisions upon the profession and, most importantly, the lives of the young people who have passed through the educational system whilst these changes have taken place. However, I am not seeking to reinforce my personal opinions, rather I am open to the possibility (and even

hoping) that the young people I interview have had the support they need, from a range of sources, in order to make sound and informed decisions.

So how effective have policy initiatives been so far in levelling the playing field? Where do the lines exist between disadvantaged and privileged and how do universities decide who needs help? Policy makers often need to categorise people according to clearly defined criteria to be able to administer state provisions such as benefits, taxes, pupil premiums (in schools) and bursaries. However, Alan Milburn (2009) argued that there is a 'forgotten middle class' in terms of opportunity and income. They may also be part of the 'squeezed middle' or centre of the 'hourglass economy'. There are students who are not from such privileged backgrounds as to benefit from all the aforementioned sources of capital; and yet neither are they sufficiently deprived to attract government funding or special concessions on entry to university (BBC, 2015a). This means that some students are unable to access additional support because one of their parents has a HE qualification, or because their family income is 'average'. These students, and their families, have been disadvantaged by the maintenance grant system. If their household income was over £25,000 the student received less financial support, as it was assumed their parents would support them financially through university. Students in this 'middle band' often need to work part-time which could make them more likely to drop out. This middle band are arguably more likely to succeed and repay their debts than their lower socio-economic group counterparts, with fewer social (and psychological) barriers and more support (e.g. parental and peer support, higher expectations) to achieve qualification and subsequent career success.

Socioeconomic status & individual differences

Social stratification and class have long been an interest of social scientists, beginning with classic theories of Marx and Weber (Giddens & Sutton, 2013) largely based upon power and ownership of the 'means of production' (e.g. factories, tools, transport). Social class in the UK has traditionally been most easily understood as rooted in occupation (Office for National Statistics, 2011). However, there is much more to peoples' understanding and experience of class than solely the job they do. Bourdieu (1979) suggests that social

stratification is defined by judgements of taste in terms of material goods (e.g. art, food and clothing) and cultural pursuits. Social classes are reproduced through the cultural capital of their environment (e.g. through parents and education) and internalised as 'habitus' (ways of seeing, acting and making sense of the world). These notions of social class have formed the basis of a new empirical study and definitions of social class. A survey of over 161,000 people in the UK with derived new classifications based upon indicators of social, cultural and economic capital (Savage, 2015).

Education and work have the potential to catalyse participants' social, geographical and career mobilities. Educators convey the message that attendance and good grades lead to success in employment. Research suggests that students who undertake a period of work or study abroad are more likely to achieve higher grades, gain employment soon after graduation and command higher earnings (British Council, 2014). However, some people are not easily able to take up such opportunities, e.g. because of physical conditions, domestic situations or lack of resources. In addition to these tangible constraints are less visible barriers that restrict mobility opportunities.

In Darwinian terms, the race to a successful career and the rewards that it brings, can only be achieved by the mechanism of 'the survival of the fittest' so there remains an uncomfortable and logical truth that not everyone can make it to the top of the pile. In a period of austerity following a 'double-dip recession' (and particularly in a neoliberal society) rather than a utopian age of full employment and absolute freewill in career choice, not everyone can be a winner. Despite the strategies and policies promoting and enabling social mobility and equality, the question is this: is it really in the interests of the establishment to readily and genuinely encourage and facilitate access to anyone and everyone to the higher echelons of power, wealth and opportunity?

> *'indeed, some measure of inequality is essential for the spirit of envy and keeping up with the Joneses that is, like greed, a valuable spur to economic activity'*
>
> Boris Johnson's Margaret Thatcher lecture (Telegraph, 2013)

Many of the participants of this research could be classed as being in the 'middle band' discussed in Chapter Four as they are not necessarily the highest fliers nor the most disadvantaged, but quite typical in many ways. They are a diverse group (if a group at all)

which often falls in between the cracks of comparative research and fails to grab headlines. This reminded me of a poem by W.H. Auden (1940) entitled 'The Unknown Citizen' (Appendix XI) which parodies the way in which people can be defined by official measures and labels and overlooked as individuals.

> *'Was he free? Was he happy? The question is absurd:*
> *Had anything been wrong, we should certainly have heard'*

Gender

This is a familiar concern regarding issues of gender equality, as women have faced a battle to break the power of the traditional 'old boys' network' which Gamber and Kleiner (2001) suggest has simply been replaced by the *'new boys' network'* which may be *'younger and hippier - but still remains as cliquish, as white and as Ivy League'* (pg. 102). They suggest that women need to capitalise on comparative strengths in communicating and building the networks which can help them to progress, however, access to these networks is likely to differ between women of different social groups and personal circumstances.

Internships, volunteering and unpaid work roles can be seen not only as devaluing the people who fulfil them but also others at the bottom end of the labour market, taking paid jobs that might otherwise have been filled by lower skilled workers or early career graduates (High Fliers 2015). Women are especially likely to occupy these positions. Swan (2015) severely criticises the *'proliferation and politics'* of internships for their exploitation of women arguing they are 'culturally feminised' in that many industries and roles in which feminine qualities are valued are the very industries which are more likely to rely upon unpaid interns.

Ackers (2003) has also written about the mobility experiences of female early career researchers who may have personal responsibilities and commitments to consider within their mobility decisions, and indeed more work needs to be done to address inequalities of opportunity. For example, their responsibilities as partners and/or mothers (e.g. shortage of childcare support, moving to be with partner in dual career couples, long hours and insecure contracts) and cultural/structural impediments such as the importance of networks and mentors. (Ackers, 2003) suggests that the roots of inequalities in career

mobility begin earlier in the way girls and boys are educated and encouraged, meaning males have more positive, successful role models and are more confident in putting themselves forward for high-level positions.

Age

Age may also be a factor which influences career mobility decisions and opportunities. Young people may face individual and structural challenges in developing necessary their career capitals and independence. Carter (2015) points out that employers may be reluctant to take on younger people; less than 25 percent of UK companies employ under-24s. Selection processes tend to focus on attainment rather than potential and young people are perceived to require more support than older, more experienced workers.

Youth employment has long been a concern to governments and many initiatives have been directed towards smoothing the transition from education to the labour market. The recent recession has only exacerbated the downwards trend in entry-level jobs over the past decades (IPPR, 2014; Carter, 2015). Unemployment levels for young people is consistently higher than those of older workers since records began and was 14.8% in summer 2015 (Office for National Statistics, 2015). A report by the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES, 2015) revealed that 40% of all unemployed people in the UK were under the age of 25.

> *'Some young people remain caught in a Catch-22 situation when it comes to getting on in today's labour market finding it difficult to get work without experience and difficult to obtain experience without work. Who you know and where you live have a big impact on the opportunities available'*
>
> ('Catch 16-24': Youth Employment Challenge UKCES 2015 p 4)

The raising of the school leaving age now means that all under 18s have a duty to participate in full time education, work or training and are still the financial responsibility of their parents under the Education and Skills Act (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2008). This helped to solve the long running problem of youth unemployment and could be seen as a positive change in helping to increase the skill levels of young people who would have previously gone straight to work in low skilled occupations (such as

manufacturing). However, whilst raising qualification levels may give some advantages towards future employability it simultaneously defers immersion in a working environment and renders the accumulation of value career capitals a spare time activity.

Race, ethnicity, faith and nationality

Whilst acknowledging that including all of these dimensions of social and individual identity in one heading is simplistic, it is also important to understand how they may intersect with many other aspects within the systems theory framework - history, politics, globalisation, socio-economic status and geographical location at the 'environmental level'; ethnicity, values, beliefs and interests at the individual level and community groups, education and family in-between. The careers systems theory framework (McMahon & Patton, 1995) suggests that community norms and values play a part in influencing career choices and opportunities. Similarly, BAME students and graduates or those whose families are from outside of the UK may experience unpaid work and mobilities differently from the UK domiciled participants.

Summary of context

To summarise the context, there are a number of factors affecting the decisions and actions of current graduates and their prospective employers, such as: –

- historical and social factors
- the influence of a global perspective
- the nature of the employment market
- political decisions about HE (e.g. funding)
- community, peers and family
- individual characteristics

Having outlined a multitude of diverse factors that may influence the environmental context for the research, it is important to say there may be other influences that are significant, locally and individually. The most important thing is not necessarily the reality of the context but how it is perceived and experienced by each person, some perhaps being blissfully oblivious to the bigger picture and others deliberately making decisions in accordance. Some significant events of recent years can be identified as directly causing

changes in the system (for example, the raising of student tuition fees) whilst others may have a partial contributory impact. Evaluating the relationships between complex and constantly changing variables and their impact upon individuals who have choice in how they respond is both a challenging and intriguing task for disciplines of social and health sciences.

Chapter Three: Academic Literature Review

This chapter will first explain the strategy I adopted in reviewing literature which is both informative and congruent with the epistemology of the research. I will then proceed to discuss the academic literature that has been relevant and influential to the study, identifying possible gaps to be addressed and work to be built upon. This will include 'grand theories' from Sociology about structure and agency and forms of capital; literature from interdisciplinary fields about mobilities and career studies; theory from education about learning and employability and a review of psychological literature around resilience and serendipity. These strands of literature will be woven together to inform understanding of student and graduate unpaid work and career mobilities and the nature of their 'boundaryless careers'.

When I first began the research, I realised there was no way of really knowing which body of literature would be most relevant, so it has been a continuous process. Some topics are central to the research question (internships, social mobility and geographical mobility) so they featured early in the literature review. However, some topics arose at the data collection and analysis stage so this would prompt me to explore relevant prior literature at that point, but I was not necessarily able to predict the themes and research them beforehand. Indeed, to do so could be counterproductive as it could influence my questioning and interpretation. Frost (2011) suggests that an initial literature review may sometimes be relatively short if the research is inductive in nature rather than theory driven, so will cover relevant research relating to the topic and identifying gaps. Also, this field of research is so topical that the literature is constantly changing, particularly in terms of social policy. I started with knowledge and opinions gained from my own professional and personal experiences and my interests have naturally acted as a compass and a filter. This could be viewed as subjective and biased; however, it is in keeping with the methodology of phenomenology as I aim to present just one possible view of the phenomena rather than claiming to find a definitive and absolute truth. Kara (2019) urges scholars, not merely to seek to fill gaps in literature but to add value to what already exists, which is a strong contribution of this research.

Once I had discovered and clarified the appropriate research methodology (which is discussed further in Chapter Four) the literature review strategy also became clearer. My strategy is best described as a 'critical literature review' (Jesson & Lacey, 2006) as I have sought contrasting arguments. I began by reading very widely across different disciplines and including grey literature. I tried to keep an open mind on what might arise during the interviews, so my literature review has followed a strategy of divergent thinking and 'horizon scanning' (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), 2016) before becoming more methodical and convergent over time. I understood the need for a theoretical framework to underpin my research so explored some classic theories and models from relevant disciplines (e.g. sociology, psychology, social policy and career studies). However, I accepted that the literature review, at this stage, was provisional and likely to change.

The theories such as boundaryless career, forms of capital and mobilities are prolific and too broad for a systematic review of literature, so I used various strategies to refine my searches. I combined key search terms in a review of academic databases using the university 'Library Search' and relevant databases (such as Sage, CINAHL, ASSIA, ProQuest, etc). Beyond my initial searches and reading of the relevant papers, I supplemented the literature by using a 'snowball' technique (Sayers, 2007) which involved following up references cited in these original sources and a 'reverse snowball' technique in identifying articles, which had cited key papers. As well as being a source of locating appropriate references these methods helped to triangulate and make links between topics that had initially seemed conceptually unrelated (for example, when I would notice the same author cited in journals from different disciplines).

The research draws upon literature with a regional, national and international focus. The work of Greenbank (2015), Ball (2015), Finn (2015, 2017) and Cunningham and Christie (2017) illuminates experiences of working-class North West students and graduates. European philosophy is a strong influence, in particular the writings of Heidegger (1927), Gadamer (1960) and Merleau-Ponty, (1962). The valuable contribution of international literature is evidenced in research from the field of career studies including McMahon and Patton (1995) and Hooley, Sultana and Thomsen (2017). American literature features particularly in literature regarding the psychology of work, such as the boundaryless career

(Arthur, 1994) psychological contract (Rousseau, 1995) and more recently exploring the nature of decent work (Blustein, 2019). Finally, the work of Ackers (2008, 2013) and Ahmed et al. (2017) is particularly pertinent to this research as it evaluates the international placements (in Uganda and India) which some of the participants undertook. Their work highlights the ethics of such placements and how they can build cultural awareness amongst participants.

There is a body of literature which forms a bedrock for the context chapter of the research which have constructed the context within which the research participants find themselves. Many significant and influential documents relating to policy review exist in the form of 'grey literature' sources such as official reports commissioned by the government, recent and historic government policies and reports of professional bodies and 'think tanks'. Pappas and Williams (2011) emphasise the emerging importance of grey literature, particularly for doctoral researchers in rapidly changing fields, because there is often a time lag between important changes and publication of peer-reviewed research. This is especially true of this area of research where social policy, the reactions of universities and the behaviour of students have been quick and sometimes unpredictable. However, they emphasise that the onus lies with the researcher to distinguish between sources and materials which are credible and accurate and those that are not.

Similarly, newspaper articles or reports from organisations who may have their own political agenda or standpoint, although they are not peer-reviewed or necessarily objective and factual, have their place in a contextual analysis as they both reflect and inform the attitudes and behaviour of individuals. I have endeavoured to construct a contextual picture showing balance and insight into media messages that may influence participants' attitudes and actions. Eisenhardt, Graebner and Sonenshein (2016) argue that *'grand challenges'* (or *'wicked problems'* Churchman, 1967) such as understanding and resolving social justice issues require more than specific literature review. Rather, an inductive approach *'involves openness to many rich sources of data'*, for example, including observation and social media *'that fully and accurately address the focal research question'* and *'a deep immersion in the focal phenomena over time'* (p1114).

The context I presented in Chapter Two is informed by desk research and also my immersion in the field as the researcher and also as a careers adviser and employability tutor before and during the lifespan of the research whilst key policy changes were shaped and implemented. Since then I have worked with undergraduates as an academic, observing and interacting with them whilst they were living with the consequences of these changes in their everyday university lives. Careers Advisers and university tutors can be key intermediaries, interpreting policy to support student decision-making and I am honoured to have this role.

I would like to acknowledge the presence of serendipity in my literature review which meant a particular paper appeared in front of me at a time when I was most receptive to it or made me notice an article which cited another article which I might never have otherwise found. Serendipitous comments from colleagues, which greatly influenced the direction of my searches and thought processes and chance conversations with neighbours, and relatives who put me in contact with interesting people who in turn told me about key writers. Serendipity, or 'happenstance', features in the literature of career studies, notably Mitchell, Levin & Krumboltz (1999) 'planned happenstance' theory of career management, and is later discussed in the experiences of participants in relation to career mobilities.

However, Goldacre (2011) warns of the dangers of 'cherry-picking' literature that only supports the researcher's own world-view so I was mindful of this as being blinkered could limit my learning and, more importantly, miss a vital direction in answering the research question consequently misinforming anyone reading my thesis or subsequent publications. Owing to the breadth of the research and the proliferation of literature about it, my own reflexive judgement about the relevance was a part of the process. I accept, from a phenomenological perspective, another researcher with the same question would be likely to present a very different set of literature.

Smythe (2011) suggests that, in hermeneutic phenomenological studies, the researcher will have gathered and read related literature but should only write the literature review after data analysis. This prevents the researcher from over-theorising or making assumptions. On reflection, I wish I had known this when I started as large chunks of my initial literature review seemed less relevant later, however, I am glad of the opportunity to have read

widely and I operate on the belief that no new learning is ever a waste of time. Smythe recommends reading beyond the field to open up wider horizons of understanding and suggests that *'Poetry, literature and any of the more artistic genres may bring you gems'* (p50). This was an affirmation for me as, from the day I started to write my PhD, I always felt inspired to turn to such sources to help understand and convey the meaning of experiences.

This chapter explores the fields of literature which best illuminate this period in the lives of the research participants. First, the research will be contextualised in the 'grand theories' of 'structure and agency' (Archer, 2008), 'structuration' (Giddens, 2013) and Bourdieu's 'forms of capital' (1986). Secondly, literature regarding international mobility in relation to students and graduates will be outlined and finally extant research about the specific kinds of 'jobs' and other activities which students and graduates undertake during their studies (unpaid, low paid and paid for) will be examined. Thirdly, theories of employability, 'the boundaryless career' (Arthur, 1994) and the associated 'protean career' (Hall, 1976) will be introduced to contextualise the relationship between the labour market and the individual approach required to navigate it. I will identify gaps in the current literature and how this research may bridge and build upon them.

This will set the scene for exploring and applying these theoretical concepts to the real-life experiences of students and graduates in considering how their decision-making and actions impact upon their career mobility. I will question how they are being prepared for entry into an uncertain labour market and show that, for many, their career starts before they even graduate (certainly through university and often much earlier). I will consider the dynamics of choice and constraint within this realm and how they may vary between different individuals and groups.

Theoretical framework

Phenomenology

Whilst this concept will be discussed in the methodology chapter it is useful to introduce key literature here to frame the research. Phenomenology is essentially the study of a

phenomenon (or phenomena), in this case the predicament many students find themselves in of feeling compelled to undertake unpaid work and mobility whilst being short of time and money. The fundamental purpose of phenomenology is to describe the shared experience in detail (Cresswell, 2013), interrogating that which is taken for granted or 'ready-to-hand (Heidegger, 1927). Van Manen (1990, 2014) proposes that lived experience can best be explored and understood through looking at different dimensions of it such as the body (corporeality), space (spatiality), relationships (relationality), things (materiality) and time (temporality).

Structure and agency

A central question in social sciences is how individuals exercise agency and make choices in a constrained environment (Giddens & Sutton, 2013) and where the power balance lies in different contexts. A second, related dilemma is whether societies are shaped and marked more enduringly by 'consensus' or 'conflict' (Brown, Hesketh & Williams, 2003). The phenomenon of 'responsibilization' in higher education (Shamir, 2008) underpins the experiences of students in recent years, largely owing to government policies which Chapter Two will explain. A dual impact of students taking responsibility for their higher education costs and the onus (through the 'agency' advocated through the employability discourse) of being employable adds pressure on individuals at a stage in their life which has traditionally been commitment-free. I have always been a strong believer in and advocate of individual agency and self-determinism, however, my eyes have been opened to the possibility that this may simply be an elaborate illusion created by a neo-liberal society. I have reflected upon this at length and shall continue to explore this as an alternative perception of 'reality'.

Whilst this research will foreground the individual perspective, the participants in the research have presented themselves very much as situated within their environments and relationships. Situating participant experiences within a systems theory framework (Patton & McMahon, 1995) and exploring their experiences of their 'lifeworld' (Van Manen, 2014, 1990) will facilitate an holistic and rich understanding of the phenomenon of unpaid work and how it helps to mediate between individual and structures.

This position is consistent with sociologists such as Elias (1897 – 1990), Giddens (2013) and Archer (2008) in viewing such dualisms (structure-agency, consensus-conflict and objective-subjective) as simplistic and unhelpful. Although the 'structure v agency' debate remains useful, Urry (2016) argues that our global system has become complex and humans are no longer the only agents that can change the dynamics. Knowledge, information and materials can also effect changes in a non-linear and unpredictable fashion so that any discipline that attempts to explain society in terms of regulated and controlled patterns will not keep pace. He suggests that 'academic mobility' (i.e. the interaction of different disciplines) is key in harnessing the creative thinking required for the future. This move away from dualistic, binary perspectives will also influence critical analysis of the research topic, in avoiding the temptation to view things such as internships and volunteering as inherently 'good' or 'bad'. Archer (2008) asserts that reflexivity is the key mechanism that mediates structure and agency so that by continuously engaging in dialogue with ourselves, society and others we can begin to make our own way through the world, designing and carrying out projects that are meaningful to us. This study will explore how participants are able to navigate their way through these tensions between taking responsibility and being proactive in shaping their careers (for example, by undertaking capital-building activities) and overcoming barriers (such as financial constraints, inadequate experience and lack of social capital).

Forms of capital

In studying the course of students through education into the field of work, particular consideration must be given to the influential work of Pierre Bourdieu (1986) who, building upon the work of Karl Marx identified different forms of 'capital' or resources which people may have access to. Social capital refers to the actual or potential resources linked to being part of a social group or network, for example, a student may be a member of an elite club in a university that gives him access to a powerful network of contacts, or his parents may know important business leaders in the community. There have been other theoretical contributions to the concept of social capital. Granovetter's (1973) classic paper 'the strength of weak ties' suggested, somewhat radically, that job prospects, social mobility and even social cohesion might be advanced through loose links, rather than well-defined

and immediate groups and organisations. This also provided a bridge between micro and macro level sociologies and was influential in the understanding of social networks. In practical terms, for graduates seeking opportunities, it suggests that they may be more successful if they find contacts outside of their usual social circle, who are likely to have just the same information as them. Unpaid work experience offers students and graduates an opportunity to cast their net more widely and to develop ties with people they have never met before. Putnam (2000) described social capital as the bonding within homogenous groups and bridging between heterogenous groups in relation to civic participation. He suggested that the US was becoming less socially connected and cohesive (e.g. because of TV). However, Gershon (2017) argues that advances in technology and social media have made bridging easier over recent decades so perhaps the theory is outdated.

Bradley at al. (2017) uncovered the practice of 'white-texting' amongst applicants for top graduate jobs in order to gain competitive advantage. Thich involves typing keywords in white font in the background and margins of job applications which match search criteria and will be picked up by computer searches but not show up on the page when read. This type of 'game-playing' demonstrates dual advantages of knowing this trick and having a surplus of relevant evidence to include. This is supported by her more general findings that middle-class students are better at finding ways to 'hyper-mobilise' their experiences to turn them into success. In contrast, Gershon (2017) suggests that technology can be instrumental in deconstructing the class hierarchy and weakening the effects of social capital as conceptualised by Granovetter (1973) as it makes opportunities more widely accessible.

Cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) can exist in different forms (embodied, objectified and institutional) and relates to ways of thinking and being, material possessions (art, books, clothes) and the value of educational qualifications. Prieur and Savage (2013) suggest that cultural capitals are constantly changing and evolving so that preferences (in music, food and cultural pursuits) are not as attributable to specific classes as they perhaps were at the time of Bourdieu's writing. Symbolic capital refers to status and recognition, which enable those with higher levels to dominate those with lower levels. Bourdieu proposed that these capitals can be exchanged for other forms of capital, such as 'economic' capital (i.e. money

through work). It is easy to translate all these concepts to the research topic and to see how students who have already accumulated advantage through their family background are likely to have the competitive edge in the graduate labour market (Giddens & Sutton, 2013).

According to Bourdieu, education is central in reproducing social order and inequalities and yet those with lower levels of 'capitals' (e.g. working-class individuals) may believe that others succeed because of hard work or intellect. Bourdieu conceptualised the 'field' as the setting in which individuals (agents) and their social positions are located, usually hierarchically. Each 'field' has its own 'rules of the game', which are often not transferable or explicit and can further embed inequalities (Bathmaker, 2015). The graduate labour market here is considered as the 'field', which is the arena within which individual agents must compete for significant capitals (in this case the economic capital of graduate level salaries). Bourdieu's idea of 'habitus' describes the learned ways of behaving, speaking and acting within the social field, which is particularly relevant to social mobility and graduates' job-seeking and employability efforts, as often success will depend upon already having or at least developing so-called 'graduate attributes' considered desirable for employment (Barrie, 2004). Burke (2015) illustrates empirically how 'capitals', 'field' and 'habitus' may play out differently for working class and middle-class students, concluding that, despite measures to widen participation in higher education, middle-class students are still maintaining an advantage. This echoes a criticism of Bourdieu's work (Giddens & Sutton, 2013) that it seems impossible and pointless for the working-class to try to succeed in a middle-class education system (and labour market).

Bourdieu advanced Husserl's original concept of 'doxa' (based on the Greek word for opinion or probable knowledge) which is a useful thinking tool in this research. It refers to concepts which are arbitrary and 'taken for granted' in society and internalised to influence thoughts, beliefs and behaviours. These concepts are proliferated by social discourse and tend to benefit the powerful classes (Beer, 2012)

The Bourdieusian concept of *'symbolic violence'* may also be relevant to this research. It is defined as 'power which manages to impose meanings and to impose them as legitimate by concealing the power relations which are the basis of its force (Bourdieu and Passeron,

1977 p.4). It is a non-physical violation in which the 'victims' (less powerful) are consensual and it serves to maintain the status quo. In the case of students and graduates, although unpaid work may be exploitative those who undertake it are doing so willingly. However, this can work both ways as Burke (2017) proposes 'inverted symbolic violence' may discourage privileged graduates from undertaking unpaid opportunities which they consider beneath them.

Bourdieu's work has been highly influential yet criticised (King, 2000; Sullivan, 2002) for being overly theoretical and deterministic, allegations which Atkinson (2016) suggests ignore the empirical groundwork and complexity behind it. Despite criticisms, Bathmaker (2015) suggests that notions of capital, particularly Bourdieu's work, are still fundamentally useful in understanding and transforming higher education to provide different and appropriate notions of successful outcome. It is certainly useful to have a language through which to understand and communicate the imperatives upon students (and individuals in general throughout life) to develop holistically and socially rather than solely learn academic knowledge. It may also help to console and explain lack of success to students who have put their faith entirely in an idealised meritocracy.

In practice, different forms of capital which relate to and are valuable for career entry and progression are often referred to collectively as 'career capital' (DeFillippi and Arthur, 1994) which includes *'Knowing-Why', 'Knowing-How'*, and *'Knowing-Whom'*. 'Knowing who' relates to social capital in the form of networks, contacts and social support. 'Knowing how' relates to human capital of career related education, skills, experience and training. 'Knowing why' (Arthur, 1994) relates to 'career identity' which is conceptualised as a 'cognitive compass' (Fugate, Kinicki & Ashforth, 2004) which directs and anchors an individual through times of uncertainty in their career. The concept of career capital builds upon the work of Bourdieu's forms of capital (1986) and other proponents of social capital (Granovetter, 1973; Putnam, 2000). It also relates to Becker's (1993) concept of 'human capital' which is a term used to describe the whole 'package' of qualifications, experience and education in which people financially invest to enhance their future earnings. Brown and Wond (2018) suggest that the concept of career capital is under-used yet can be useful in supporting individuals to be strategic in their activities.

Recently Tomlinson, McCafferty, Fuge and Wood (2017) have incorporated the traditional concepts of capital with some newer ideas of 'identity capital' (Holmes, 2013; Jackson, 2016) and 'psychological capital' and applied them to graduate careers. Identity capital is the extent to which people can construct a narrative and self-concept of themselves and their projected future identity. Jackson (2016) conceptualises the importance of the 'pre-professional identity', which they develop through work-related learning. This will influence how students and graduates see themselves and how they can communicate and present themselves to potential employers. Psychological capital is defined as 'the capacity for individuals to adapt to challenging personal and job market circumstances and establish a relatively high locus of self-control and persistence' (Tomlinson et al., 2017, p31). This develops the work of Luthans & Youssef (2004) suggest that psychological capital incorporates includes hope, efficacy, resilience and optimism ('HERO') required to manage the transition to the labour market. People with high levels of psychological capital are proactive, self-efficacious and resourceful, perceiving an internal locus of control (Rotter, 1954, 1990). Resilience (Robertson & Cooper, 2013), flourishing (Seligman, 2011) and other such concepts have become very popular in the discourse about graduate employability. However, these concepts can be contested (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013) as they can imply that failure to cope with stress and challenge is the responsibility and fault of the individual rather than a natural response to structural adversities.

Capitals can, in theory, mediate between agency and structure by providing leverage. However, as Chapter Three discusses, unequal access to capitals can further entrench inequalities. This research will seek to apply contemporary theories of capitals to students and graduates during their final years and early career transition to understand their relevance.

Mobilities

A central focus of this thesis is the geographical mobility experienced by students and graduates taking up opportunities (e.g. higher education, national or international work and placements) through daily or weekly commutes, short-term trips (weeks or months) or longer-term relocation. Geographical mobility is highly-context specific and encompasses two distinct dimensions (Haley, 2017). Firstly, their prior experiences of being mobile or

not (e.g. moving away from home to go to university, travelling outside of the UK for holidays, immigration) which is likely to be explained by sociological theories of habitus (Bourdieu, 1989). Secondly, moving after graduation to secure employment is, a form of mobility informed by theories of employability and labour market intelligence (Tholen, 2013; Ball, 2015). However, this research also seeks to understand geographical mobility during university study, for example, international placements and volunteering (Ahmed, Ackers & Ackers-Johnson, 2015) as well as regional and national movement (such as travelling to London to undertaken unpaid internships).

Mobility is not confined to matters of physical and spatial movement. The term 'social mobility' has gained traction since the landmark Milburn report (2009) and describes the movement of people (or lack of) through social structures. The study of mobilities in social science (Urry, 2000; Sheller & Urry, 2006; Cresswell, 2010) is a useful lens through which to analyse unpaid work and career opportunities such as international volunteering. It enables us to capture the complex lives of students and graduates beautifully, as described by Mitchell and Krumboltz (1996):

> *'Trying to place an evolving person into the changing work environment is like trying to hit a butterfly with a boomerang'* (p.263)

Cresswell (2010) describes some of the key characteristics of mobilities study which are applicable to this research: it bridges disciplines of science, social science and humanities; includes the movement of people, objects and ideas rather than just transport; as well as movement, mobility is interested in immobility, fixity and stillness and engages with the politics of mobility (as opposed to being an objective commentator).

Kaufmann, Bergman and Joye (2004) describe how spatial and social mobility are interlinked, introducing the concept of 'motility' which is the capacity of people (or other entities such as goods or information) to enact mobility in the context of their circumstances. This incorporates not only mobility per se but also the access to opportunities, competence to undertake them and appropriation of these opportunities, i.e. knowing how to utilise them. Their notion of *'mobility as capital'* (p745) suggests that this ability and willingness to move can be valuable in obtaining other forms of capital (such as economic, cultural and social). In the context of graduate recruitment, evidence of past

mobility (such as international study or volunteering) may be a valuable asset on a CV or questions such as 'Are you willing to relocate?' may act as an early sift which may automatically disadvantage some groups (such as those with caring responsibilities).

Students and graduates have traditionally been considered as relatively mobile populations (King, Findlay & Ahrens, 2010) characteristically being free of responsibilities and traditionally hailing from higher socio-economic groups affording the economic capital required. University, for many students, meant a move away from home to shared yet independent living. Student programmes such as Erasmus have facilitated European and cultural exchanges for many years. Inter-railing and gap years abroad have provided opportunities not only for geographical mobility but also exploration of identity and widening social circles as a rite of passage. Graduate employers may harbour expectations of mobile and flexible employees, not only geographically but in terms of their knowledge, skills and identity and offer further opportunities for migration. Mobility is viewed as a both form of capital (Kaufmann et al., 2004) and an end in itself. Evidence of travel on a CV serves a proxy for other capitals (economic, social, cultural and symbolic) as well as implying personal attributes such as ambition, flexibility and proactivity. This 'mobility imperative' recognised as a hallmark of academic careers is adopted by Cairns (2014) to describe the expectations upon students and graduates to act as *'de facto goodwill ambassadors'* (p. 95).

Mobility can depend upon and stretch across different generations of a family so that the actions or attitudes of parents can strongly influence the paths of children (Doherty, Patton & Shield, 2015; Ackers & Gill, 2008) so that increased mobility can have a cumulative effect. For the participants of this research, their decisions whether and when to have children are likely to impact upon their future mobility, as Ackers and Gill (2008) described in their study with early career scientific researchers throughout Europe. Is early exposure to travel and diverse cultural awareness likely to lead to later mobility? This research will explore attitudes towards and statements of intent regarding future career mobility. Are their choices rooted in the 'present' rather than investing in the 'future' as is suggested of working-class students by Greenbank & Hepworth (2008)? How can student and graduate mobility be understood in terms of temporality? In the 'new era' of 'boundaryless careers'

and technology has long term resettlement given way to shorter term and newer forms of mobility (Ackers, 2013)?

Immobility is often seen as a negative limitation rather than a proactive choice, with terms such as 'sedentarism' often used. Skelton and Gough (2013) discuss the issues of urban young people and how their im/mobilities are *'influenced by institutional and structural urban features, as well as social identities such as gender, race, disability, class and nationality'* (p462) so that geographical mobility will be understood differently across individuals, places and times. Skeggs (2004, page 49) asserts that: `'Mobility and control over mobility both reflect and reinforce power. Mobility is a resource to which not everyone has an equal relationship'*.

As well as structural enablers and constraints to mobility for young people and early career graduates there may be deeply personal ties that prevent them from either being free to travel or even yearning to in the first place. Faist (2013) questions the assumption that often links mobility with developed, modern societies and views traditional (e.g. feudal) societies as 'static'. Inherent in this is the implication that mobility is desirable and forward thinking whereas 'sedentarism' is dated. Technology and speedier travel are facilitating other ways to maintain global presence (Sheller & Urry, 2006) and different forms of mobility are beginning to be recognised (Ackers, 2008). However, those with home commitments may find it hard to exercise their choice not to relocate long term or may feel that relocating means risking the opportunities and experience in their current location. In this way, this 'mobility imperative' (Cox, 2008) can represent *'a new form of indirect discrimination'* (Ackers, 2008). Ackers (2013) suggests that, in the context of academia, excellence is often equated with having an international profile which in turn is often equated with (usually long term) physical mobility. This can disadvantage those who are less mobile (often women and those with caring responsibilities) which means that, not only do they face potential constraints to access directly because of their responsibilities but also because they may be less able to be in the position to accumulate valuable career capitals.

The 'new mobilities paradigm' moves away from a dualistic division of mobility and fixity (and an assumption that the former is more desirable than the latter) to embrace the

significance of materialities which facilitate mobility. For students this might include everyday things like a building, an airport, a bus, a whiteboard, a textbook, or a computer (Brooks and Waters, 2018). Even within 'immobile' populations (local students) there are mobilities such as the commuter journey to university (Holton & Finn, 2017).

The term 'career mobility' is generally understood as the movement (usually upwards) of people within or between organisational contexts and boundaries (Kornblum, Unger & Grote, 2018) although there is an increasing recognition that both individual and structural factors interplay (Feldman & Ng, 2007; Forrier, Sels & Stynen, 2010; Burke & Christie, 2018). Brown & Wond (2018) bring together notions of mobility and capitals to describe the combination of resources (beyond economic) that individuals require in order to manage modern careers. They highlight the necessity to have these capitals but also to be aware of their value and be able to utilise them. They also state that, although career capitals are pertinent to the individual, they are also contextualised and may include aspects of both 'bounded' value (e.g. specific skills relating to an occupation) and transferable value. As Kaye, Williams and Cowart (2018) explain, careers are often described and judged in spatial terms ('boundaryless careers' being a further example) and yet *'up is not the only way'* - not everyone can 'move up' nor wants to. The mobilities turn in social science (Cresswell, 2010; Sheller & Urry, 2006; Urry, 2000) offers a language and interdisciplinary philosophy which marks a shift from fixed and static notions of the world, to embracing fluidity and movement. Mobility studies take a new approach in engaging with the politics of movement, rather than remaining static and objective (Cresswell, 2010) which is important for this study as the policy context is so fundamentally dynamic (as I will explain in Chapter Two).

Although there is a clear relationship between economic capital and geographical mobility (as undertaking mobility opportunities costs money), the links between other forms of capital and mobility are less explicit and predictable. Study of the facilitating influences of social capital (e.g. networks and contacts) and cultural capital (e.g. qualifications and personal characteristics) upon graduate employment and mobility capture the zeitgeist of the decade (Burke, 2015; Bathmaker et al., 2013; Tomlinson et al., 2017). Inequalities in distribution of and access to capitals, for example, for non-traditional students at less prestigious universities is cause for concern. The 'big picture' evidence currently shows that

equality amongst graduates is still far from a reality (IFS, 2016). Students and graduates who can benefit from the social capital of others (parents' contacts, education-based networks such as quality work experience) will have a head start in securing lucrative opportunities which then further advance their career capitals. As well as highlighting qualitative evidence of such experiences this research seeks examples of people who have developed strategies to succeed and examples of good practice in universities to start to address this imbalance.

Given that widening access to participation in higher education has been a strong thread of government policy in recent years, social mobility and equality of access to successful outcomes after graduation is still very much 'work in progress' with research showing that, typically, white males from higher socio-economic backgrounds continue to get the top earning jobs (IFS, 2016). In order to compete, students are increasingly required to demonstrate forms of capital (explicitly and implicitly) through the recruitment process. This may be through their educational achievements, but when more applicants have high grades than there are vacancies then other indicators of potential suitability are important. Such indicators are usually required in the form of competencies or 'graduate attributes' (Barrie, 2004) and must be evidenced, usually through participation in internships, work experience, volunteering, working or studying abroad or extra-curricular activities which can enhance 'career mobility' in many ways – geographically, socially and psychologically. Although there has been research into each of these different types of activity this research will reconceptualise and synthesise these opportunities for career mobility.

'Knowledge mobility' is another concept particularly used in the context of international highly skilled migration (Ackers, 2004) yet also relevant to other fields. Work experience provides a vehicle for acquiring and transferring tacit knowledge (as opposed to explicit), which cannot be passed on purely through verbal transmission, for example, how to behave in a workplace or how to perform specific skills. This research will further explore concepts of mobilities within the context of student and graduate unpaid work, employability and particularly the boundaryless nature of their early careers.

Graduate 'Employability' and career management

A 'graduate job' (for the purpose of the destinations of leavers from High Education) is classified in accordance with Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) codes (ONS, 2016) and SOC codes groups 1 (professional), 2 (managerial) and 3 (associate professional) are deemed to represent a skill level appropriate to graduate employment. A concept which has gained almost universal acceptance over the years is that of 'employability'. Employability is closely linked to responsibilization (Shamir, 2008) and serves as an objective for students, keen to see a return on their investment in higher education. It has become an accepted metric with which to measure the success of both individuals and universities. University metrics and league tables rely on new graduates entering graduate occupations, which is presumed to be a proxy for the quality of their degree. This has largely been driven by government policy, pressure from employers and international competition to improve the skills of the workforce.

> *Embedding employability into the core of higher education will continue to be a key priority of Government, universities and colleges, and employers. This will bring significant private and public benefit, demonstrating higher education's broader role in contributing to economic growth as well as its vital role in social and cultural development. (*Higher Education Funding Council, *2011, p5)*

Yorke (2006) was the first to label this construct and to initiate debate about what it is and the extent to which it is linked to subsequent employment:

> *"A set of achievements - skills, understandings and personal attributes - that make individuals more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy."* Knight & Yorke (2003, p5)

This is a useful and holistic definition as it encompasses the individual responsibility for achievement, the pragmatic 'being-towards' purpose of employability and the greater good of the world. In this way, the concept of employ-ability means possessing the specific attributes and capitals which are most in demand by employers at the appropriate level and in the correct quantities. Many universities have constructed their own versions of graduate attributes as objectives toward which their students should aspire.

Knight and Yorke's (2003) model of employability is widely accepted and utilised in higher education. Their 'USEM' acronym represents four 'inter-linking and inter-dependent areas of: Understanding (of disciplinary subject matter and how organisations work); skilful practices (academic, employment and life in general); efficacy beliefs (reflects the learner's notion of self, their self-belief, and the possibility for self-improvement and development) and metacognition (self-awareness, how to learn and reflection. It encompasses knowledge of strategies for learning, thinking and problem solving, and supports and promotes continued learning/lifelong learning).

Dacre-Pool & Sewell (2007, 2010) developed and validated the CareerEDGE model (Career development learning, Experience, Degree, Generic skills & Emotional intelligence) which clearly designates 'experience' as one of the essential building blocks of employability. Like Knight and Yorke, they spotlight self-efficacy and metacognitive skills such as reflection as being the instrumental to employability. Interestingly, they also suggest that there may be attributes which are positive and conducive to future success and yet, conversely may even work to the detriment of 'being employable'. Students who show promise in enterprise and entrepreneurship may be viewed by employers (through standardised selection processes) as risk-takers and non-conformists. This illustrates that 'employability' may not be everything.

Although models of employability are of practical value, they do not always acknowledge the external influences upon career success. Roberts (1977, 2013) has long argued the importance of sociological constraints upon career choice and yet this has not always been a popular contribution to a field full of optimism about individual agency. Employability could be an example of Bourdieu's 'doxa' in that it is an abstract concept that has become accepted as a taken-for-granted truth. Perhaps a meta-perspective of employability is that it is the extent to which an individual is able to hyper-mobilise whatever capitals he or she has in order to gain paid work, rather than a measure of the capitals per se. Robertson and Cooper's model of career success behaviours (University of Manchester, 2013) is evidence-based and pragmatic, suggesting that graduates 'explore, connect, communicate, reflect and persevere'.

Brown et. al. (2003) provide an analysis that considers the interplay of structural and individual perspectives. They consider the duality of employability from both a 'consensus' perspective - that individuals willingly take responsibility for their own livelihood by upgrading their skills to take up opportunities and from a 'conflict' perspective – that there are positional issues of power which reproduce inequalities in the labour market. Tholen (2014) highlights how the media portray the graduate labour market, frequently spreading dramatic headlines about the failure of certain graduates (e.g. media studies) to secure successful jobs. This is based on assumptions that the graduate jobs market is elite, requires special skills and is more highly paid then the labour market in general. This is changing, as Tholen argues, due to the changing dynamics of supply and demand meaning many graduates enter 'non-graduate' jobs (at least initially); an emphasis on soft skills which are not exclusive to graduates and the divergence in the range of graduate salaries.

There is a great deal of pressure upon universities to prepare students for future employment. Employability features as an outcome (the percentage of students from a particular course and university who have found graduate employment) in league tables and statistics (Unistats Key Information Set) which automatically flash up (in red!) on UCAS webpages for students in the process of choosing universities. This can impact upon admissions – and hence future viability – of courses, institutions and the livelihood of academic staff. The evidence of this multi-faceted and nuanced idea of 'employability' was hence reduced (for this cohort) to purely the attainment of a successful graduate level destination within six months of leaving university. Judgements of employability and career success at the time of this research were solely based upon whether they had managed to get into a 'graduate level' position within six months of leaving university. This has since been recognised as somewhat unidimensional and the 'Destinations of Leavers of Higher Education' has been revised to span a longer time scale (15 months) and a wider range of criteria (Graduate Outcomes, 2020).

There are fundamental questions concerning 'employability' – as surely 'being employable' is not a definitive and objective measure. What makes a graduate attractive as an accountancy trainee may be very markedly or subtly different from the ideal journalist or teacher although all may require a similar portfolio of soft and hard skills. Deciding exactly which skills, understandings and attributes might make people employable and how best

to develop them has engaged university academics and support services in debate. Stoten (2018) questions whether the concept of employability is valid or useful as proving a direct relationship between employability and employment is tricky when there are so many personal contextual factors which may affect the career path of new graduates. Also, the strength of the economy, policy changes, skills shortages and demographic fluctuations could significantly affect opportunities. Creating an illusion of objective criteria against which students can compare and improve themselves can raise expectations unrealistically as they may believe that, if they meet them, they will be guaranteed a good job.

A review of employability strategies (Pond & Harrington, 2019) concluded that *'There appears to be a clearer focus on the summative graduate employment rather than on employability as a philosophy'* (p60). There is a danger that education has become overly focused upon outcomes in the country's bid to compete on the world stage of education quality. Conversely, if the focus shifted to developing a genuinely holistic development of individuals and groups to both fulfil their potential and engage with the world through creative pursuits, nature, volunteering, open-minded discussion, etc then other outcomes such as academic attainment and employability/career success might automatically follow. However, in the current climate of standardisation and regulation it takes a brave (or privileged) educator to step outside the box.

Career studies - A transdisciplinary approach

> *'One value of the concept of career is its two-sidedness. One side is linked to internal matters held dearly and closely, such as images of self and felt identity; the other side concerns official position, jural relations and style of life, and is part of a publicly accessible institutional complex. The concept of career, then, allows one to move back and forth between the personal and the public, between the self and its significant society'.* Goffman (1968, p119)

Career development literature or 'career studies' is a little known yet longstanding academic field with a history of over a century, since at least the work of Parsons on 'Choosing a vocation' in 1909. It is an academic magpie, gathering theories from psychology, sociology, philosophy, business and anthropology amongst others and the professional training of careers advisers is underpinned with a diverse body of theory (Bimrose, 2013). It is also my field of professional specialism and, although my reading

continuously leads me into new disciplinary territories, picking up an article in career development feels like a homecoming. Career development literature is an important focus for this research as it is both individual and societal in focus, investigating both subjective and objective in nature but, more importantly, the spaces in between the dualities of structure and agency (as so eloquently expressed by Goffman).

What is 'career'?

It is useful to define what is meant by the word 'career' and how this has changed over the past decades:

> *'a succession of related jobs arranged in a hierarchy of prestige, through which persons move in an ordered (more-or-less predictable) sequence'.* Wilensky (1961)

This contrasts sharply with newer definitions of *"sequences of job opportunities that go beyond the boundaries of single employment settings"* (Arthur, 2014: p628)

> *'In its broadest sense, Career Studies addresses the fundamental questions of how we live and what it is to be human. It is a transdisciplinary field of socio-cultural enquiry that focuses on life purposes and meanings and the more prosaic matters of achieving those ends.'* McCash (2008: 6)

Interestingly, the dictionary definition of *'career'* as a verb is *'to move swiftly in an uncontrolled way'* (Collins dictionary, 2016) which seems very appropriate to contemporary career paths.

In reviewing the extensive literature of 'career studies' I rediscovered a theory that fits well with the research topic – that of 'the boundaryless career' and the associated concept of the 'protean career' which constitute a useful lens through which to study the experiences of early career graduates (and, significantly, students). I will now outline the theory and its relevance, offer a critique, consider how researchers have supported and developed the theory and then highlight gaps this research will seek to address.

The Boundaryless Career

The concept of the boundaryless career was first introduced by Michael Arthur in 1994 and has remained an enduringly popular theory. Since publication, there have been over 5,000

publications relating to the boundaryless career and many authors have further developed, contextualised or critiqued the original premise. Its most prominent theorists have been US based (Arthur, 1994; De Fillippi & Arthur, 1994) or in New Zealand & Australia (Inkson, Ganesh, Roper & Gunz, 2010) where different social structures (political, legal and cultural) may exist and fewer studies originate in the UK.

The concept was first inspired by the CEO of General Electric who envisioned 'boundarylessness' in organisational terms, believing that flexibility of employees to work across different departments would benefit the business. Arthur recognised that this could also pertain to the actions of individuals in managing their own career. It is perhaps best understood as the antithesis of a traditional definition of career.

The protean career (Hall, 1996 & 2004) is a concept closely aligned with Arthur's work with the emphasis being on the characteristics and agency of the individual rather than the opportunity structure (or lack of structure) within the organisation and wider labour market (Roberts, 1977). Hall defines the protean career (as opposed to a traditional career) as:

> *'one in which the person, not the organization, is in charge, the core values are freedom and growth, and the main success criteria are subjective (psychological success) vs. objective (position, salary)'* (Hall 2004, p4).

Charles Handy's (1989) futuristic portrayal of the workplace introduced the notion of 'portfolio workers' defined recently by Wood & Michaelides (2016) as 'self-employed individuals who do assignments, either in series or in parallel, for a number of different organizations or clients, on a (typically short-term) commercial rather than employment contract basis'. Williams (2006) also describes 'free agent learners and workers' who migrate between spaces, creating and transferring knowledge – spanning boundaries. The role, characteristics and importance of boundary spanners was first developed by Tushman (1977) and further discussed and defined by Williams (2002). Boundaries may exist between disciplines, nations, generations, class, organisations, sectors and cultures.

Arthur identified six features of a boundaryless career, all of which signify *'independence from, rather than dependence on, traditional organizational career arrangements'* (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996, p.6). A boundaryless career moves across boundaries of separate

employers; judgements of marketability is drawn from external sources rather than an employer; external networks or information support the career; the career does not follow or depend upon internal hierarchical structures of an organisation for progression; personal or family reasons lead a person to choose to work outside existing career structures and finally a boundaryless career may be in the interpretation of a 'career actor' who may perceive their career as such regardless of the organisational restraints.

In his original conception, the focus was still more on the organisation and 'the career' itself rather than the individual 'career actor'. At the time, it was quite ground-breaking as, for many, the traditional well-trodden career path within a large local company or public service was the expectation. As time went on, the United Kingdom continued along a trajectory of '-*ations*' - privatisation, marketisation, globalisation, technologisation and the demise of the large, local, paternalistic employer, all of which rendered the semi-prophetic principles of Arthur's work increasingly relevant.

Arthur and Rousseau (1996) further developed the concept of 'boundaryless career' to emphasise the individual's responsibility for managing their own career and developing networks to sustain a supply of work (not unlike the Protean Career). In a developing knowledge economy, the worker (at least in theory) holds the means to production and the tools. Career identity consists of personal meaning and values, which give people direction and purpose when carving their career niche. Other key dimensions which make an individual employable are suggested to be 'adaptability' (Fugate, Kinicki & Ashforth, 2004), 'proactive personality' (Seibert, Crant & Kraimer, 1999, 2001) and a willingness to explore the environment and design one's life (Savickas, 1997). Proactive personality has been linked to information seeking, identifying opportunities and acting upon them, perseverance, feeling in control, self-efficacy, coping and self-direction (McArdle, Waters, Briscoe & Hall 2007). Beck, Giddens & Lash (1994) theory of 'reflexive modernisation' suggests that individuals are increasingly continuously constructing and reconstructing their own identities transgressing structural boundaries of gender and class, which presents an optimistic hope of break away from more deterministic views (e.g. Bourdieu).

Arthur could probably not have predicted the ways in which his original 'extra-organisational' definition would be stretched. Graduates will increasingly encounter career

roles which extend beyond not only organisational boundaries but also across global geographical boundaries (physically and virtually – Sheller & Urry, 2006) and time boundaries (technology has 'enabled' work to be done around the clock – at home, on the train and on the beach). Eminent Occupational Psychologist Sir Cary Cooper has condemned *'the epidemic of email'* saying that the compulsion to read emails *'at night, weekends and holiday'* is bad for individual health and national productivity (Cooper, 2015).

Perhaps the most controversial of the above six features in the current labour market is the extent to which the individual makes a positive choice to work outside existing career structures. A major criticism of the boundaryless career concept (and related concept or protean career) is that it is overly individualistic, emphasising personal agency and independence as a positive ideal (Inkson et al., 2010). However, this flexibility can come at the cost of security and predictability of employment which can have a significant impact upon personal financial stability (e.g. access to credit and mortgages) and entitlement to benefits such as pensions, maternity pay and paid leave) and quality of life (buying a home, going on holidays, etc.) (Ackers & Oliver, 2007, Standing, 2014).

Inkson et al. (2010) offer a thorough critique of 'boundaryless career', analysing fifty-six peer-reviewed articles. They question the usefulness of the label 'boundaryless career' in relation to individuals (rather than organisations) and suggest that little empirical evidence has been offered in support. They highlight the ambiguity of the 'boundaries' to which Arthur referred and his lack of appreciation of equally important boundaries (such as geographical, work-home). Arthur (2014) later suggested a shift to discussion of 'contemporary careers' or 'career mobility', which encompasses geographical boundaries and subjective dimensions. They also highlight the limited transdisciplinary attention given to the concept beyond the business sphere. Perhaps their most fervent criticism is the overstatement of the boundaryless career as being the opposite of an organisational career and the change being so sudden, comprehensive and inescapable, when there is still plenty of evidence of boundaried, organisational careers. Graduate schemes are attractive perhaps because they offer the prospect of a steady career with promotion prospects and graduates may especially welcome some stability early in their career. Wilensky's (1961) article suggests that men with more orderly careers are more socially connected and

involved. Interestingly, he too identifies the 'middle mass' of upper-working and lower-middle for his study:

> *'But what about the vanguard population - the great middle mass around which Fortune magazine's portrait of the "soaring sixties" is drawn? What portion of the growing middle- the lower middle class and upper working class-can be said to have orderly careers?'* (p. 524)

Gunz, Evans and Jalland (2000) argued that organisational boundaries have not disappeared at all, they have just become more complex and permeable so that the conceptualisation of a boundaryless career is semantically problematic. They also posit that alongside an increasing globalisation of organisations is a powerful 'localisation' and a 'degrowth' movement (partly as a response to environmental concerns) which Urry (2016) has termed *'glocalisation'*. Inkson's (2006) suggestion that it would be more accurate to describe careers as 'boundary-crossing' seems most pragmatic.

A further criticism of the boundaryless career concept is that it remains largely theoretical (Brocklehurst, 2003) as the evidence offered in the initial paper is statistics of working patterns in high tech industries in Silicon Valley, United States. My criticism of Arthur's theory is that it does not consider the nature of the horizontal boundaries relating to careers, for example, the erosion of non-working life owing to raising of retirement ages, work-related curriculum and technology increasing hours worked at home. This research will explore the latter two.

The utility of Boundaryless Career – moving forward

Recent developments under the 'umbrella' of the boundaryless career include links with Bourdieu's forms of capital (Chudzikowski & Mayrhofer, 2011), identity theories (Brocklehurst, 2003; Ibarra & Barbalescu, 2010), entrepreneurial proactivity (Uy et al., 2015) and optimism (Higgins, Dobrow & Roloff 2010). A strength of Arthur's work is that it aims to encapsulate issues pertaining to both individual and organisation, rather than focusing upon one at the expense of the other. Where it avoids oversimplification and binary logic (e.g. there are 'boundaries' or 'no boundaries'; the employer is bad – the employee is good) and encourages a more nuanced perspective it can continue to contribute to the understanding of career development.

Despite the criticisms, the consensus seems to be that the 'boundaryless career' concept has catalysed discussions of what dynamics of career and organisational changes might mean and that discussions should not be limited to the levels and types of boundarylessness.

Career metaphors

Inkson (2006) suggests that the terms 'boundaryless' and 'protean' career should not be taken literally but are useful as metaphors which enable people to make sense of their changing world:

> *'Metaphor typically gives physical or visual texture to abstract concepts such as "career," and thereby provides a currency for understanding one's situation and that of others, and for developing new insights'.* (Inkson 2006, p48)

In fact, many of the concepts central to this research are quite abstract and metaphorical (e.g. world of work, capitals and field). They can create a common, taken-for-granted language and yet can also confuse and over-theoreticize experience. Inkson (2002) identifies common metaphors for careers (as inheritance, construction, cycle, matching, journey, encounters and relationships, roles, resource, and story) and suggests that metaphors can be helpful, but they can limit our ability to view experiences in new and different ways.

One metaphor often used in the context of employability is 'learning to play the game' (Bathmaker, 2015) when undertaking activities such as application forms, CVs and interviews. However, the rules of this game are not always explicit, and advantage may be commanded by some 'players' by virtue of their prior acquisition or inheritance of forms of career related (social, cultural, mobility – Bourdieu, 1986).

An interesting study by Clarke (2009) identified behaviour patterns within the context of boundaryless careers. 'Plodders' remained loyal to a company and anticipate job security; 'pragmatists' actively pursued opportunities for development within the company; 'visionaries' had a long-term plan which could involve crossing company or country boundaries to achieve career goals and 'opportunists' were likely to have changed careers and companies as a result of opportunities which arose (unplanned). This made me think

about how students and graduates might differently approach unpaid work opportunities and later labour market entry. Some will know the rules of engagement and take control of opportunities to gain strategic advantage, not considering themselves exploited, perhaps in some way exploiting employers for their own gains. Others might believe in equitable exchange, giving labour and new ideas in fair exchange for experience, consistent with 'consensus' theory (Brown et al., 2003) of employability in a boundaryless career. Some may feel lack of control over their situation and guided by necessity rather than choice and open to exploitation (also relating to 'conflict' theory of employability - Brown et al., 2003). Attitudes towards unpaid work may be influenced by a number of factors such as background (achievement, class, other circumstances) or psychological factors (personality, the meaning they attribute to circumstances). Perhaps an individual could fluctuate at different times or in different contexts. This will be explored through data analysis and later in the discussion.

The idea of control is central to the theory of 'planned happenstance' (Mitchell & Krumboltz, 1996) which acknowledges the importance of both planning and flexibility within the context of a changing world. I have noticed parallels in theory about how career plans are formed and how policy is made – with tensions between the rational-comprehensive model and 'muddling through' (Lindblom, 1959). This 'changing work environment' has been the focus of interests of researchers, think tanks and policymakers for many years. Serendipity has long been acknowledged as an important factor in scientific discovery and invention and is described by Merton and Barber (2004) as a discovery made by accident. Sunstein (2017) suggests the internet is narrowing our chances of discovering new things by chance as we increasingly build our own echo chambers. He advocates instead building an *'architecture of serendipity'* (p.5) enabling us to come across a diversity of information which can expand our horizons.

Learning through working

Literature about learning, particularly work-based, can offer insights into the experiences of unpaid work and mobilities. Dweck (1986) identified different motivations; learning (or mastery) oriented and performance oriented. Changing the focus away from outcomes to

processes, we can understand how students can develop some of the skills, behaviours and attitudes which will prepare them for work through exposure to work environments.

Learning *through* work, and *in* work, hold a very different quality to the university classroom-based learning *for (and about)* work, commonly delivered through career education (Gray, 2001). Garnett (1997) defines work-based learning as learning at higher education level derived from undertaking paid or unpaid work. Students can develop confidence, learn skills and apply theoretical learning to real-world challenges as well as metacognitive skills such as 'learning how to learn'. Theorists such as Kolb (1983) and Moon (1999) emphasise that being able to reflect upon experiences and adapt behaviours for future situations are the key to experiential learning. Wenger (1998) suggests that a powerful support for learning at work is the 'community of practice' which is the groups who *'share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly'.* Lave and Wenger (1991) had realised that situated learning often takes place as a result of complex social relationships, not only between manager and worker but between peers and colleagues and can take place in informal and virtual spaces such as staff rooms and chat rooms. Students undertaking internships, voluntary placements and other forms of unpaid work can learn so much from these opportunities beyond the skills required for the job itself. In fact, such learning opportunities can catalyse significant changes for the individual. Transformative learning is a concept developed by Mezirow (2000) who suggested it consists of three elements: changes in the self (psychological), beliefs and behaviours. A key condition of learning that creates change is what Mezirow calls 'disorienting dilemma' (like Heidegger's concept of 'thrownness') which may be triggered by a crisis. Morgan (2010) believes that travel to a different place can be effective in catalysing this change, a link acknowledged through the commonplace phrase 'journey' as both metaphorical and literal description of learning. He also suggests travel may provide more impetus for this transformation when it involves cultural and geographical 'otherness' which is certainly the case for many of the participants. Boyd and Myers (1988) suggest that emotional and social influences play a strong part in this transformation. Similarly, in her ethnographic study of international student experiences Brown (2009) concludes that:

'the international sojourn has the power to effect a growth in intercultural competence, as well as a shift in self-understanding, with long-term implications for personal and professional life. Such change is the result of exposure to diversity and of the geographical and emotional distance from the home environment' (p. 517)

However, for 21st century graduates the world may be a confusing place where, beneath and beyond a veneer of criteria and objectivity is a rather more complex and unpredictable environment of endless (or certainly multiple) possibilities. While some may find this exciting, for others it could be overwhelming.

Gaps in the literature

As explained in the previous chapter, a significant challenge in undertaking this literature review has been that no one body of research or set of terms has fully encapsulated the phenomenon I am exploring. This research aims to understand the work-related experiences that young people engage with as part of their early 'boundaryless career' which afford them the social, cultural and economic capital to progress and advance first through the 'game' of recruitment and selection then subsequently through their career. There is a wealth of literature around 'extra-curricular activities (ECAs)' (Roulin & Bangerter, 2013; Greenbank, 2015; Milner, Cousins & McGowan, 2016; Stuart, Lido, Morgan & May 2008); work placements and work experience (Waryszak, 1999; McDonald, 2011; Dragoni et al., 2014); volunteer tourism (Brown, 2005; Raymond & Hall, 2008; O'Donnell, McAuliffe & O'Donovan, 2014) and internships (Perlin, 2012; Swan, 2015). However, these are usually discussed in isolation and documented as discrete activities that are often quantified in some way (such as surveys or statistical reports). Although there are pockets of literature relating to some of the specific activities (such as work experience, internships, volunteering and international work and study) students may undertake during their degree to get their first graduate job, there is surprisingly little research that views these activities as a boundaryless portfolio from the perspective of the individual. Nor is there much literature about how these unpaid work activities relate to a concept of 'career' which is broader and more long-term (e.g. that it can be transformative and can challenge and support longer term career planning). I aim to present them as part of the same 'boundaryless career' of a student and early career graduate. I believe this study makes a unique contribution in bridging these gaps.

There is a wide range of literature which has informed the development of this research to date from social policy; from sociological theories which provide a contextual backdrop; from psychology which can help us to understand the individuals' motivations and perceptions and from career studies which provide an integral link between societal structure and individual agency. The extent to which these dimensions will be discussed further will depend upon themes emerging from the data. This research seeks to contribute by filling some of the gaps identified and by building upon the integral, transdisciplinary approach advocated by Dany (2014) in using a dual focus on both structure and individual agency and their interplay within the early careers of the participants.

As well as the dominance of US-informed theory, another limitation of the literature around boundaryless careers is that it is almost exclusively about professional, established career 'actors' and there is a lack of discussion of early career experiences or how 'boundarylessness' can begin even before the acknowledged start of their career. This concern echoes Williams' (2006) suggestion that 'free agent' migration and knowledge transfer is often associated only with elite and highly skilled individuals. This is a missed opportunity, given that careers are beginning much earlier and transitions between education and work much longer and more complex. In my observations of students and graduates, higher education could be considered as a precursor and yet an inclusive part of a career.

Within the literature around mobility there is little insight into 'immobility' and the choices people make to stay local in their studies and work and studies, again, often focus upon highly skilled or professional migration. Immobility is often seen as negative, rather than a positive choice. This research will seek to understand the extent to which geographical mobility is perceived as 'imperative', desirable and attainable to the participants and the 'push and pull factors' which influence it.

Few studies offer a qualitative approach to the issues pertinent to this research, with many studies being more conceptual in nature, based upon surveys or using 'qualitative' data collection as an add-on open question at the end of a survey ('small q' – Willig, 2013). Perhaps this reflects the theoretical roots in business and occupational psychology (Roberts, 2013) which has a tendency towards quantitative and more 'objective' data.

Qualitative research can complement statistics to enable researchers, educators and policy makers to illuminate individual and collective experiences and to represent 'the student perspective' (Tymon, 2013) which can, in turn, inform policy and student service.

There is a gap in research generally regarding the everyday experiences of 'typical' students. Deficit model-led research looks at the problems for the most disadvantaged (often where funding is available) and the HE impact agenda and policy-makers may seek to identify and highlight best practice and the success of the highest achievers (e.g. 'HighFliers' research report, 2015). Although both have a place, they may have limited application to the largest group of the student and graduate population. This research seeks to understand and present the experiences (including the successes and the challenges) of this group. This focus upon 'everydayness' is congruent with the philosophy of Heidegger and Bourdieu and the methodology of phenomenology. Focusing upon what works rather than simply amplifying what doesn't work is important for progress. This is an approach advocated by 'appreciative inquiry' (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). The diversity of this literature review and the convergence of disciplines and emerging ideas makes a unique contribution to knowledge.

Chapter Four: Methodology and Methods

This chapter will begin by identifying the ontological assumptions underpinning this research and a discussion of the appropriate epistemological position and methodology. I will then describe and explain the decisions I made regarding methods I chose to research the topic and questions.

Ontology, epistemology and methodology

Ontology is the study of the nature of being and epistemology is the study of knowledge. As humans, we are born into a specific historic and social context that influences who we are. We also exist in relation to other people, the world, material objects and time. Heidegger's seminal work, 'Being and Time' (1927) fundamentally addresses the nature of being. He introduces the concept of 'Dasein' (from the German words 'da' – there and 'sein' – being, literally 'being-there') to describe the human who is openly engaging in the world. Even inanimate objects exist in relation to their purpose (he gives the example of a hammer and how it exists in relation to its purpose as a 'hammering-thing'). Dasein's relation to the future means she/he is always in the process of 'becoming' and this bestows actions with an 'intentionality'. There are parallels here with humanistic notions of Maslow (1954) and Jung who suggested that humans are naturally self-actualising and evolving. This seems especially relevant to the group in the research who are, by the nature of their status, engaging in activities which are future focused (education and work experiences).

Knowledge consists of different types of information. Some things, particularly in the natural world, are more 'objective' in nature. They can still hold different meanings, names and associations but sometimes it is helpful to be able to assume shared understanding in the form of explicit knowledge. There are other things, particularly in the social world, where meanings are individualised interpretations perceived differently between people and through time. There is also the aspect of 'construction' in that people interact with other people and their environment in forming and co-producing 'the truth'. Truth, according to positivist approaches, is based upon the Greek word 'veritas' which relates to the kind of objective fact which may be 'proven' in a court of law by method of logic.

Phenomenology aligns itself instead with the Greek concept *'alitheia'* - an uncovering or revealing of meaning. In relation to this research, the way in which an individual perceives and makes meaning of their experiences is of central importance. This research aims to shine a light; to reveal 'alitheia' – a 'truth' of the underlying phenomenon of unpaid work experience. This truth cannot necessarily be directly or easily accessed by a single question or articulated coherently by a single participant. Phenomenology seeks to painstakingly seek out the truth by reading between the lines, interpreting what is said, and what is unsaid to construct and reveal how it is. There is also a sense of shared meaning, for example, of norms, values and behaviours arising from interaction between the individual and their peers, media, family, university, employers, etc. This is conceptualised by Heidegger as 'the-they', the 'other' and pressure felt by Dasein to conform to the 'norm' and the influence of the attunement or 'mood' of the time. This conceptualisation of 'what knowledge is' leads me to my choice of a congruent methodology.

Methodology

The primary methodology in this research is 'interpretive phenomenology' in the tradition of Heidegger. It explores the phenomenon of unpaid work experiences and how they can offer students and graduates opportunities for career mobility. The foundations of phenomenology were laid by Husserl (1936) through the concept of the lifeworld (*lebenswelt*) and meaning of 'lived experience' as the main focus for human sciences research and philosophy. Heidegger was a student of Husserl but departed from his idea that it was possible and necessary for researchers to 'bracket off' their own experiences. Heidegger advanced the application of phenomenology with an emphasis on understanding human experience (and fundamentally the nature of existence) through language. Following in the tradition of Heidegger (1927) are scholars such as Gadamer (1960), Arendt (1958) van Manen (2015) and Smythe (2011) whose work has been most influential to this research.

Whilst Heidegger provides philosophical notions that may help us to understand and interpret the world, he does not suggest methodology with which to do this. Those who have followed in his tradition (Gadamer was his student) have developed hermeneutic phenomenology as a methodology but not as a set of prescribed methods. Hermeneutics

is the practice of analysing texts to uncover meaning. Hermes is the Greek god of transition and boundaries and the messenger between the mortals and the deities. Hermeneutics originally related to the study of biblical texts but more recently has developed to mean the analysis and interpretation of texts such as literature, poetry, newspapers or, in the case of this research interview transcripts. Phenomenology is the study (*logos* – Greek) of 'that which appears' (Greek – *'phainomenon'*) as experienced by humans as opposed to any objective study of things, instead *'returning to the things themselves'*. Hermeneutic phenomenology therefore seeks to understand human experience through analysis of the words written or spoken by people about it. There is an acceptance in phenomenology that it is impossible to access pure experience itself as it is pre-cognitive, we can only observe reflections and thoughts about it ('point towards it' rather than put a finger on it). Although language is a vehicle for transmission of understanding experience, it can also fall short of being able to truly describe experience itself. For this reason, Heidegger, would often turn to art and poetry make up his own words (such as *'Dasein'* – there being) or put together words with hyphens showing relatedness. In phenomenological research it is considered appropriate to include references to poetry, literature, art and cultural discourse (Van Manen, 1990) when it helps to represent dimensions of experience.

There are two general approaches to phenomenology (Denscombe, 2007) the first of which seeks to represent, genuinely and descriptively, the experience of the participants through pure description. This is closest in nature to Husserl's original conception of phenomenology, requiring the researcher to 'bracket' all past knowledge (theirs and others) and to focus on the participants' direct experience. The question is whether it is possible, necessary or desirable to do this. Indeed, this issue was one of the main departures of Heidegger from the work of his master, Husserl.

Van Manen (1990) criticises descriptive approaches as having the *'character of conceptualisation, journalistic accounts, personal opinions or descriptions of some other state of affairs'* which are useful in their own right but do not elucidate the meaning of the lived experience. He suggests that all description is interpretation anyway as it is not possible to directly access pure experience. Interviewees, on recounting their lived experiences already interpret and attach meaning. An interpretive form of phenomenology was most appropriate for this research as it does not seek to distinguish between

description and interpretation, posting that all description is a form of interpretation. The questions posed by Smythe (2011) in Appendix X. strongly resonated with my view of the world and of research. The hermeneutic phenomenological approach seemed particularly relevant to the topic at the stage of data gathering as it acknowledges the importance of social and historical context, which is key as it acknowledges the influences and impact of issues such as student finance and labour market forces upon the student/graduate, which will affect their experiences of work.

Van Manen (1990) contributes a pragmatic and creative approach to phenomenology which translates theoretical works on the lifeworld (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Shutz & Luckmann, 1973) and applies them to the field of education. He identified four key themes (date; and later extended this to include a fifth) which are *'fundamental structures of experience'* and *'productive categories for the process of phenomenological question posing, reflecting and writing*. (1990, p. 102). These categories, or existential themes, are *lived body* (self/corporeality); *lived space* (spatiality/world); *lived things* (materiality); *lived human relations* (relationality or communality) and lived time (temporality). Applying this framework to the field of career-related research constitutes a useful and unique contribution.

Hermeneutic phenomenology has been vociferously criticised by Paley (2017) for its *'arcane, hyphenated language'*; because it is often unclear exactly how meaning is distilled from qualitative accounts and owing to the complexity of the philosophy underpinning it. More generally, Bourdieu (in Throop & Murphy, 2002) spoke against phenomenology for focusing too much on individual experience and agency without acknowledging the influence of structure.

The philosophical foundations of the approach are congruent with the research and the typical methods employed (as described by Frost, 2011) matched my own ideas about how to gather information. My preference was to adopt a form of an interview or dialogue, which encourages the participant to answer freely and at length about work experiences within the much wider contexts of their lives and the multiple roles and positionalities they occupied. Interpretive phenomenology is particularly useful where the research topic involves 'issues of life transitions and identity' (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). However,

upon further research and reflection I felt that following any 'pure' methodology might be overly prescriptive and restrictive for my research, especially as there are aspects of various methodologies that fit the data and answer the research questions equally. Gadamer (1960) asserted strongly that fixed methods are not appropriate for a hermeneutic phenomenology. This is further supported by Curt's criticism of 'methodolatory' (in Willig, 2013), whereby researchers are more interested in and committed to following a pure research method than they are in the research itself. As a new researcher, I felt that a fixed, systematic method could be both reassuring and yet restrictive, so I turned to Van Manen's writing on the topic when I felt 'stuck'. He describes interpretative research as being like a craft or a scholarship that is to be learnt from reading good examples of hermeneutic texts and also from 'turning towards' the topic, that is immersing oneself as the researcher and adopting a sense of 'wonder'. The hermeneutic circle (or spiral as it is also described) means that research is not clearly delineated into progressive stages, like positivist research, but oscillates between the parts and the whole, revisiting and reinterpreting continuously. Researching, analysing and writing occur throughout and are inseparable as activities.

The research asks what it is like to be a student and graduate in these times, in this part of the world. Furthermore, how did participants make meaning of the expectations, demands, choices, information and consequences they face in transition between university and the workplace? Finally, how can work experience help or hinder this progression? I believed that the best way to understand the lived experience was by talking to students and graduates themselves and encouraging their freedom to use their own words and interpretations of situations.

My own observations and discussions with professional colleagues from working and studying within universities over the years have also helped to inform my worldview. This contributes a perspective of 'insider' to some extent and I have spent time with some of the participants outside of the interview context where I have been able to observe interactions and events with them and the wider 'student body' over a period of years.

From reflective practice to reflexive praxis

Reflective practice is *'the ability to reflect on one's actions so as to engage in a process of continuous learning'* (Schön, 1994). My years of professional training have taught me to be a reflective practitioner, habitually 'stepping back' during and after activities to make sense and to consider how I felt, what went well, what didn't go so well and what I could do better next time (Gibbs, 1988). Schön's work has attracted criticism on the basis that it ignores the wider context of individual actions (Boud & Walker, 1998) and that it is not possible to simply distance oneself from a situation and observe it objectively (Moon, 1999; Ekeburgh, 2007). According to Fook, White and Gardener (2006) reflection can often be superficial and passive (discussed by Finlay, 2008).

Reflexivity is a more dynamic approach that appreciates the actor can be a cause and an effect. Archer (2008) posits reflexivity as a mediator between individual agency and societal structure and emphasises its relational context whilst Bourdieu (1977) suggests it is a way in which social science can acknowledge its many biases. However, reflection and reflexivity alone could be considered introspective 'self-absorbed navel gazing' (Finlay, 2008) if not accompanied by critical action. The notion of *'praxis'* (doing) originated with Aristotle (384–322 BC) as one of the three basic activities of humans, along with *'theoria'* (thinking) and *'poiesis'* (making). More recently, Arendt (1958) believes that philosophy has been overly concerned with contemplation and her theory of action emphasises the collective power of humans to do the unexpected, unpredictable and irreversible. This is certainly observable in the context of policy where actions can often lead to unintended consequences. Although I find this slightly unnerving compared with Schön and Gibb's somewhat formulaic and solipsistic guidelines for reflection, it is also an exciting and compulsive challenge. Mellinger (2008) argues that reflexive praxis is essential to be a change agent. Consequently, I have changed my own views and the way I do things as a result of my learning. Rather than a one-way process, this is a continuous and cyclical process which is still ongoing. As an academic, I am now as aware of the impact it has upon me and my work as the impact I have upon the field.

A significant strength of phenomenology is that it seeks to understand the lived experience. The government seeks to put students 'at the heart of the system' (Gov.uk, 2011) but how

well do we understand them? Students' experiences can be complex and diverse; they have freedom to choose their actions from a vast range of possibilities of actions. As Tomlinson (2008) suggests, they are not simply rational or homogenous consumers of a commodity. Yet, there are aspects of experience they share. The experiences of many in investing time, resources and hope in their future whilst living with the challenges of the past and the present deserve to be uncovered. Students are asked questions through the National Student Survey, Destinations of Leavers of HE survey and many module evaluations, so it could be argued that their voice is being heard loud and clear as these results contribute directly to judgements about the quality of their university provision. However, customer satisfaction and destination surveys are framed within the context of the consumer relationship and questions of value for money rather than individual lived experiences.

Method

The next section will explain the processes undertaken and the decisions I have taken in order to address the research topic. I will describe the sampling strategy, discuss the use of interviews as the primary source of data and explain how the research has been conducted in an ethical manner. Finally, I will describe the process of analysing and presenting the findings.

The Sample

The inclusion criteria were as follows:

- Full-time student or recent graduate (within 5 years)
- Have undertaken unpaid work experience that is not mandatory to their degree. This may be an internship, work placement, volunteering, work shadowing, international placement, etc.
- Any age - Although most of the participants were aged around twenty, some were older as I was interested in the different experiences across ages and life-stages.

Initially I was looking for people who had undertaken a significant and discrete period of 'experience' (for example a weekly commitment over a period of months or a block of four weeks). However, early into my research it became clear that I was trying to impose my order upon to their complex life stories and so became less stringent about this. Even asking

them to try to count how many weeks or hours they had spent doing work experience was difficult and seemed to obstruct and detract from the point. If I were to conduct a survey, I would possibly focus upon this to link the estimated number of hours of unpaid work experience with different characteristics of the participants. It seemed that, when people reflected upon their experiences, the length of time was sometimes discussed but also that it was possible to have a significant experience which changed the course of their life within an afternoon.

I had also originally planned for 'North West universities' to be an inclusion-criteria as my initial research plan was to compare the participants from different types of university. Earlier in my research I had thought it necessary to replicate the methodology of natural sciences in terms of comparing 'control and 'treatment' groups. However, I soon learnt more about qualitative research design and that social sciences need not and cannot simply replicate the scientific method. This approach seemed to be overly simplistic and less appropriate to inductive study of an increasingly prevalent phenomenon. The universities included in the study were therefore primarily selected for their utility in accessing a range of students and graduates in terms of demographics as practical sources of a purposive, convenience sample rather than being inclusion criteria.

When I began the research, I specifically asked for participants who had experience of unpaid internships (UK or international). However, as I will discuss in Chapter Six, this was not a straightforward binary criterion but a complex picture of different types of experience over time. Some of the participants had undertaken work experience earlier (e.g. at sixth form) but had not had the resources (time or money) to do any, or much, whilst studying (e.g. Rina, Sarah, Harriet). Also, two participants heard about the research and wanted to be involved because of their views against unpaid work (Brad, Augustus). However, on interviewing them, it transpired that they had undertaken other forms of unpaid work (volunteering, international placements, etc). A positive outcome was that the research could reflect the views of participants who were not able or willing to undertake certain forms of unpaid work. This was one of the many aspects of student and graduate experience which, I realised, cannot be easily reduced to simple categories. The same can be said about class, ethnicity and 'widening participation' eligibility. Whitaker (2015) calls this practice of labelling and sorting people for the purpose of distributing resources

'categorical conditionality'. Such categories can often be imposed on students to order and simplify administration of bureaucratic processes (and research) yet can be inappropriate and even insulting to the students and graduates. Indeed, a sense of indignation was expressed by Sarah and Cathy about being labelled 'widening participation' students.

Student participation and graduate career outcomes are issues that receive high levels of policy and media attention, for example the Higher Education White Paper (Dept. for BIS, 2016) and reflect my own professional background and interests. Being a student and lecturer at various universities meant that studying students at the institutions where I work and study was an obvious choice, as I could understand the context and access to them. Significantly, many of this group were the first cohort to exit university with unprecedented levels of student finance debt due to the government's decision to allow tuition fees to treble to £9,000 per annum.

The research focused upon a 'middle band' of students and graduates who were neither the highest-flying elite nor the lowest achieving or disengaged. In my professional experience of education and careers guidance, research and resources are often targeted at extreme ends of the student spectrum (for example, government policy to support disaffected youth or gifted and talented, examples of research/reports). This is a social injustice as many of the young people in the middle of the population may benefit from extra support and will go on to form much of the working population (and taxpayers) of the future. It is difficult to find a word to describe the population I hope to represent as words like 'average', 'typical' and 'normal' seem to hold derogatory meaning.

The philosophy of Heidegger, continued in the phenomenology of authors such as Van Manen (1990), exalts the 'everydayness' of lived experience and the mundaneness of the lifeworld. These students and graduates are an interesting group to me for research purposes as they could be seen as occupying a position in society which is relatively powerless (lack of capitals, particularly economic) however, they have the potential to move into positions of power and influence later in their lives and careers as managers, as educators, as parents, as voters. They are also ideal participants for a phenomenological study as they are sufficiently eloquent to talk about their experiences in detail (Van Manen

2014). I believe that identifying and studying the 'middle band' and everydayness in unpaid work and career mobilities, particularly social mobility, is a unique contribution to the field.

Sampling strategy

The sampling strategy most appropriate to phenomenological research is purposive, whereby participants are sought and included because of their experience of the phenomena being examined. Patton (1990) suggests it is appropriate when the aim is to find 'information-rich' cases to study (cited in Clarke, 2009). This is a form of non-probability sampling in that it seeks to include people with specific characteristics rather than a sample necessarily representative of the wider population in which it resides. An important aspect of purposive sampling is the professional judgement of the researcher which I believe I am in strong position to justify as I have an established career and academic history working in this field. I also called upon the professional judgement of contacts within the institutions who suggested or referred participants (although the irony of using my social networks to help recruit is acknowledged). A phenomenological study does not claim to be representative of the population as it does not present findings as generalizable to a wider group, nor does it seek merely homogenous or typical experiences but also those which contrast.

Although there was no methodological requirement to achieve a strictly representative sample it is important to gain the perspectives of a range of people (maximum variance) so as the recruitment progressed, I took steps to create some balance. For example, in the early stages there were very few males, so I attempted to recruit more. However, one group I felt was particularly hard to engage with was 'white, working class males' which tends to be an issue for Student Support services in general. This is echoed in research (Greenbank, 2015; Higher Education Academy, 2014b) that such students may be the ones who are in most need of support and yet least likely to access it. As discussed in Chapter Two, the raising of school leaving age and fewer trade occupations means that sometimes these students will drift into higher education and then be more likely to drop out or later to be unemployed. I did specifically target two potential participants who were suggested to me by tutors, as they had interesting experiences of unpaid work and were less engaged in university life. They unfortunately did not respond.

The sampling strategy was also partly theoretical as I started without any preconceived theoretical framework (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Denscombe, 2007) and revised my inclusion criteria based on initial and tentative themes. For example, I stopped worrying about the fact that few lower classification students were presenting themselves for interview and wondered whether this could reflect a link between students' level of engagement with research/commitment to study/likelihood to undertake non-compulsory unpaid work. This then influenced my decisions about how and where to look for further participants.

The sample also contains a strong contingency of 'convenience' and 'cluster' sampling (Denscombe, 2007) as I was able to call upon a network of established contacts, such as experienced careers advisers, work placement coordinators and lecturers, through my own work at the universities included in the study. They were able to give access to discrete groups of students (for example, volunteers on a student elective placement, participants on a leadership programme or students on an employability module).

Finally, the sample was enhanced by use of 'snowball sampling' (Denscombe, 2007) as in three interviews the participant said, "you should talk to *x* about this for *y* reason" without any prompting from me. In fact, all these three interviewees were part of a leadership programme at University Y who were brought together from diverse backgrounds. This gave me access to people who might not otherwise have actively volunteered.

Sampling in practice

Many of the participants were recruited through three programmes I was involved in (usually from a planning and delivery point of view rather than direct contact). Interviewing the participants was revelatory in that it captured rich descriptions of the experiences and impact of these opportunities. Appendix III gives further details of them as examples of good practice which is evident in the experiences and subsequent outcomes of students.

I had access to three discrete groups: -

- Elective Student Placement volunteers through placement charity – from universities W & X

- University X Biomedical Science undergraduates undertaking a mandatory 'Employability' module I was teaching (I did not engage them in the research until after the module had finished to avoid any conflict of interest).
- University Y undergraduate leadership programme

The first two groups are particularly interesting in that they opted/were selected to undertake a work-based programme within a 'new university' which gave them opportunities usually only available to 'more privileged/affluent' students or more elite universities. One involved funded international healthcare placements in a low resource country (K4C) another gave students intensive coaching and access to inspirational speakers, developmental projects and an international business exchange trip with the explicit objective of getting them into top graduate schemes (LP). It is important to point out that these students had also been involved in other types of unpaid work such as internships and work experience.

Other recruitment methods

I also verbally invited other groups I taught about the research. This included the above and in-house staff development programmes at University Y and a local NHS graduate scheme. Just one participant came forward from this method of recruitment. I sent the Business School (University X) information about my research and asked if they could find participants. Helpfully they sent an email to the whole cohort (200+) of Business undergraduates; however, this blanket approach yielded only one response. I might have considered following up these potential channels had I struggled to recruit but this was not an issue.

In conclusion, my network of contacts proved to be a highly valuable resource in recruiting participants and was far more fruitful than other methods of recruitment I tried such as the blanket email to a whole cohort of people I did not know (even that was organised by contacting someone I knew). In some ways, this is ironic given my belief that utilisation social capital gives such an unfair advantage to some students in obtaining work and experience. It is undeniably an essential resource for successful research.

Practicalities

I sent the 'participant information sheet' Appendix V (usually by email) and when someone showed interest, I contacted them by phone or email to arrange a convenient time and place. One challenge was finding suitable rooms in which to conduct interviews. It was important to interview students on their university premises for reasons of safety (mine and theirs) and professionalism. However, rooms are very hard to find as they are in demand at the time of year I was interviewing and sometimes even harder to book in practice (especially when you are not a student or member of staff). This is another reason I was grateful to have contacts within the universities who could organise and book rooms for me.

Later in the interviewing process, I conducted more interviews by skype as this was more practical and convenient (for both me and the interviewee). I was initially unsure about this medium, but soon realised this was due to my own preference for face-to-face interviews, however, I was pleasantly surprised as it certainly it did not seem to impede the process or the quality of the interview (in terms of content or recording quality). I had expected that it might be more difficult to establish rapport using skype (Adams-Hutcheson & Longhurst, 2017), but this was not the case, as Deakin and Wakefield (2013) also found in their research. In fact, some of the participants were obviously very relaxed in their own homes when I spoke to them, possibly more than they might have been had we been sitting in a strange office on campus. It may be that younger people are more used to holding conversations in this way. My only ethical concern relating to this was that it might make the interview feel less formal and perhaps encourage them to be more open than they might like. Although such openness can be a gift to a qualitative researcher, to counterbalance this I always made sure that I was friendly yet professional, always starting the conversation with a clear agreement about the purpose. Research about the use of Skype is a relatively new field (Oates, 2015) and yet any challenges in technical and establishing rapport are counter-balanced with the advantages of accessibility. Of course, if research participants are likely to be less conversant with technology or less likely to have access to it then this might be different (for example, with remote or socially excluded populations), however, I judged this to be appropriate for students and graduates.

Sample size and 'saturation'

How many participants is 'enough' is a key question in conducting qualitative research and yet there are no rules (Patton, 2002). From an ideographic perspective, even a single case study could be enough if it illustrates adequately the experience of the phenomena in question; in fact, I can recall at least three of the interviews I conducted that would be worthy and rich enough in description to write a whole thesis around. Brocki and Weardon (2006) present a review of studies in Health Psychology that use Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) varying from one to 30 participants although small samples are likely to be more manageable for in-depth analysis. My objective was to obtain a sample of twenty-four participants, spread across the universities with a balance of disciplines, ethnicities, genders and backgrounds. This target was reached easily and quickly. Qualitative researchers will often stop interviewing once they reach 'saturation' (Bowen, 2008) that is, once they reach the point whereby no new points are being raised. I felt I could have continued interviewing people and new, interesting information would keep arising. Van Maanen (2015) sums this up beautifully in discussing studies of individuals' careers:

> *'There is always more to learn, and surprise is just around the bend. Exit from the field is then largely arbitrary, having little to do with either theoretical or empirical saturation'* (p. 41)

Phenomenological research is about illuminating even the most ordinary of experiences, not necessarily the most dramatic and original, so that even if 'saturation' does appear to be reached it is especially noteworthy as it signals shared human experience. Braun and Clarke (2006) point out that saturation is probably only relevant to methods which purport to present a complete and truthful analysis which phenomenology does not claim to do.

The Interview as a Method

Whilst I have been trained in different kinds of interviews and would say that I am skilled and have many years of experience in talking to this group (students and graduates) within the context of education, it did initially seem a bit unimaginative to use this method in my PhD. I undertook some scoping of other possible media, such as creative methods, action research, focus groups and surveys and the advantages and disadvantages of interviewing.

However, upon researching various methods I came to realise that the method should be chosen to satisfy the methodology and the research question, not my craving for variety, and that if a key research aim is to seek out, foreground and amplify the voice of the student then the voice of the student is the most valuable resource. Language, according to Heidegger (1927), is *'the house of our being'* and is the closest we can get, often, to direct experience of a phenomenon. He loved to experiment with language, reconstructing and inventing words to describe new concepts. I have always been fascinated with language and how depth of meaning can be hidden beneath words and phrases.

Qualitative researchers most often choose to use semi-structured interviews to collect data, according to Willig (2013), partly because they are flexible in the methods of analysis which can be used with them and because they are relatively straightforward to organise (compared to, for example, longitudinal studies and focus groups). This does not mean they do not need careful planning or that they are immune from logistical hiccups (as I discovered).

Kvale (1994, pg. 3) defines a qualitative research interview as: -

> *'an interview the purpose of which is to gather descriptions of the life-world of the interviewee with the intention of interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena'.*

The method of interviews worked well as the participants were articulate and comfortable in talking about themselves, although this may mean people who are not comfortable talking about themselves and their experiences may not have volunteered for such a research project. Although I had less experience of research-specific interviewing, I was reassured by the words of Van Maanen, an ethnographer in career studies: -

> *'Nothing much can prepare you for intensive fieldwork….if you cannot figure out how to build a certain type of rapport with often recalcitrant and always suspicious others, then it is time to think about a nice career in economic sociology or experimental social psychology where the so-called 'data' are unlikely to be quite so cagey, to talk back, to question the questioner'. Van Maanen (2015 pg.7)*

A further potential limitation of interviews is that what people say is merely their interpretation of events and may be differ from mine or other peoples' accounts of the same topic, or their own accounts on a different day or when speaking to a different

person. Whilst this could be a problem in research which claims to seek an 'objective truth' it is a given in phenomenological approaches. An interview represents just a snapshot in time of the conversation between this researcher and that participant and is not possible to recreate.

At the beginning of each interview, I reminded the participant of the purpose of the interview and confidentiality. I gathered some background data from them before checking that they were happy to be recorded (voice) and beginning the interview.

I made sure the environment was conducive to the discussion, considering small but important things like the positioning of chairs in the room and the distance between us being close enough to record both voices yet allowing them personal space. I displayed a notice on the door saying, "interview in progress, do not disturb" and I checked that they were comfortable and whether they had any time constraints. I tried to build rapport with the participant at the beginning to help them to feel at ease whilst still maintaining a professional manner. With some participants, it was evident that they felt a little nervous initially, but this always dissipated within a few minutes.

Initially I started with a very long list of specific and structured questions that I thought would sufficiently address the research questions and provide useful data. I piloted this questionnaire with two participants (Zahir & Harriet). However, as the first interview progressed, I quickly realised the questionnaire was too long (eighteen questions with sub-questions), very specific and more like a survey. Also, the introductory questions alone (ethnicity, class, etc) elicited long, detailed responses which I had not expected. I sought the viewpoints of my supervisors, a subject expert as well as the literature to rethink the questions. I then revised my questioning approach to include a short 'cover sheet' containing specific questions (Appendix VII) then a shorter list of more general, open questions. This worked much better and allowed the interview to flow better and elicit richer responses. I had in mind some key topics to cover and tend to start with a 'grand tour' question (Spradley, 1979) about work experience. I had not initially intended to include the two pilot interviews in the sample and one of them (Harriet) did not meet my original sampling criteria (North West university). However, the interviews were so rich in

detail and relevant that I was able to use them. Also, I felt it was ethical and respectful of the time and labour of the participants to include them.

Overall, I guided the interview in a chronological manner, starting with their past experience and background (educational, family) and then through what they were currently doing then forward onto their future plans. I had some specific key questions that I asked at an appropriate time or at the end, when I asked if there was anything else they thought might be relevant and if they were satisfied with the interview. I also asked if they might have any objections to me contacting them again later in case there was anything I had missed. Although this 'loosely structured' format may be less convenient when it comes to analysing content, this was a worthwhile sacrifice. According to Smith et al. (2009) the participant is the expert on the topic and so they should be given the freedom to guide the interview.

A presupposition of phenomenology is that reflective accounts are not necessarily 100% accurate descriptions of what actually happened, but this is not problematic as the focus is upon the participant's subjective experience of it. The aim is to get as close as possible to the experience itself rather than participant's retrospective thoughts and feelings about it. Blustein (2019) calls such accounts 'experience-near'. However, this does not mean that the account is any less valuable than an 'in the moment' account (for example, through ethnography or direct observation) as reflection upon experiences can give them their significance and meaning. One such example is transformative learning, which may only be recognised by the participant once it has happened (and been reflected on according to Mezirow, 2000) rather than at the time. This reflective dimension of experiences is intrinsically valuable.

I regularly reflected upon my interviewing style after interviews and checked whether I was asking the 'right' questions (i.e. not leading or judgemental). Frost (2011) suggests that phenomenology goes hand-in-hand with an approach that is person-centred, and this is appropriate to the research question as it seeks to understand the views of the participant. As an overall guiding principle when interviewing and making any other contact with participants I observe the core conditions of a person-centred approach (Rogers, 2003) which are congruence (being authentic and genuine, not showing a façade), unconditional

positive regard (acceptance and non-judgement) and empathy (to aim to understand and acknowledge what the person is experiencing).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was granted through the university ethics committee (Appendix IV). This included a risk assessment. Kvale (1994) sets out five issues a researcher needs to address in order to practice ethically - the benefits of the research, informed consent, confidentiality, the consequences of the study and the role of the researcher in the study. I shall explain now how I addressed each of these issues within my research.

Kvale (1994) asserted that ethical research should not only advance knowledge but also 'contribute to enhancing the human condition' (in Frost, 2011 pg.138) which is an objective close to my own professional values. Although the aim of PhD research is to make an original contribution to academic knowledge, my aim is for subsequent and consequent work to enhance the experience of students and graduates. Firstly, I believe that the participants may have gained some benefit from our interaction, such as helping them to understand their experience through the dialogue. Secondly, my deeper understanding of the experience of these students and graduates has already helped me to further develop my professional practice and those of my colleagues (for example in my teaching and training) and, thirdly, my research has influenced my involvement in other, practical projects such as co-authoring a book and a careers blog. Some of the participants said to me, or to other people after their interview, that they had found the interview interesting or enjoyable. Van Manen (1990) suggests that phenomenological interviews can have a positive, even transformative effect upon participants even though this is not the aim. Gadamer (1960) suggests that the researcher too is a changed person at the end of such a conversation.

All participants were asked to read and complete a consent form (Appendix VI) which is a standard form designed and approved by the University of Salford. Additionally, I obtained written consent (email) from all participating universities on the grounds of having obtained full ethical approval from Salford. On reflection, I wondered whether the consent form and participant information sheet could ever fully prepare participants for a semi-

structured qualitative interview, as it is difficult to know exactly what will emerge. However, a positive aspect of this is that the interviewee has choice in directing the interview as they wish and may choose to avoid topics that are emotionally upsetting if they wish (Frost, 2011). At the end of each interview, I always made sure I asked the participant whether they felt OK about what we had discussed and told them they could get in touch if there was anything they wanted to add, amend or withdraw.

Confidentiality is an important issue in research and has been throughout my career, particularly in working with vulnerable young people. I understand the importance of clearly expressing the extent and limitations of confidentiality and of checking that the participant understands this too. It is not enough to assume that they have read and fully agreed with a written statement and the possible consequences of not attending to matters of confidentiality can be serious (morally and legally). Confidentiality exists between us in that I will not discuss individual discussions with anyone else outside of the interview (for example, with tutors, careers advisers or other participants). However, the content of the interview is not confidential, as it constitutes data to be presented in my thesis and in presentations and possibly academic papers. Although the interview is not confidential, it is treated respectfully. In my previous safeguarding training I have learnt that confidentiality cannot always be guaranteed, for example, if someone were to disclose during the research process something that meant they or another person were being harmed, I would have a duty to report this to a designated person (in this case a safeguarding officer of their institution). Although universities do not have a legal responsibility for adult students, they arguably have a moral obligation, particularly for safeguarding vulnerable students. This highlights the importance of 'contracting' at the beginning of the interview i.e. checking they have read and understood the participant information in relation to confidentiality. I have noticed that, on the consent form, I stated that the information was strictly confidential, although I understand now more fully that this is not an accurate description. However, I sought to mitigate any risk of misunderstanding by explaining how the information would be used at the beginning of each interview.

I made sure that I was aware of how to refer people to specialist support if it was needed but, thankfully, this was not required. In fact, I found the participants to be highly resilient

and resourceful, many having gone through significant trials and moving on to achieve more than they perhaps might have done before.

I thought a lot about anonymity of the participants as their interviews often disclosed personal and private information about them. I had originally stated, at the time of interview, that I would assign them a unique code number (as this is the method I was accustomed to using in quantitative research). However, the more I learnt about qualitative research the more I realised this would not be appropriate. A key value of this research is telling the stories behind the statistics, so to talk about them without giving a real sense of them being a person seemed incongruent. I assigned pseudonyms by substituting participants' real names with names which matched their age group and ethnicity. I gave the participants the option of keeping their real name in the research (which one person did) or suggesting their own pseudonym (which 'Augustus' did). Although I use pseudonyms throughout, I also realise that people could be identified by means other than their name, for example, by a combination of identifiers such as gender, age and activity (e.g. 'Uganda volunteer) or through verbatim quotes that may contain idiosyncratic phrases or other individualised information. I have made every attempt to protect anonymity, both in this thesis and when presenting quotes at conferences or in written papers.

There was a possibility that talking about their life, their experiences and their future hopes and plans might prove stressful and anxiety-provoking to participants. Because of this, I included a clause in the participant information sheet to warn of this possibility and suggested that anyone who had suffered from mental illness might prefer not to participate. I also gave details about where they could access further support if needed (including websites and details of university careers services). I was confident in my own ability to deal with such eventualities as I have interviewed people about their careers (and the challenges they face in relation to them) for over twenty years and I have dealt with many tears. None of the participants were visibly upset or disturbed by the interview.

Another ethical risk I identified was that of overstepping professional boundaries as, being a qualified Careers Adviser, I knew that I might see a need for intervention and yet it would not be my role to step in and provide that support. For some of the participants (i.e. University Y Biomedical Science students) I was also their tutor for a module entitled 'Using

your degree for Career Success' so was within my remit to advise them if necessary. However, for others I made sure that I signposted them to the relevant services with whom I had established links.

I was concerned about how I would make the transition from an advisory role (Careers Adviser and tutor) to a researcher role; however, I found this easier as I could focus upon the experiences without having to find solutions. I have been mindful of the context of the interview interaction (Potter & Hepburn, 2005) and the possibility that a semi-informal, relaxed environment and structure can lull participants into disclosing more than they intend to, so I was very careful to direct the conversation back on track and to signpost to appropriate people and services where necessary.

My professional practice as a Careers Adviser and Chartered Occupational Psychologist has been governed throughout my working life by the ethics code of the British Psychological Society of which I am a member. I have also looked to alternative ethical codes of conduct for guidance from the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC, 2016) (as a Practitioner Psychologist I am a member and from the Career Development Institute (CDI, 2016). A central value common to the HCPC and CDI is 'trustworthiness' which I feel encompasses many of the other aspects as it also means acting in a professional and competent manner and respecting the needs and wishes of the 'client'/participant.

I have learnt over the years that it is very important to check whether I have fully and correctly understood what people mean, rather than automatically second-guessing. I have done this during interviews using counselling-based tools like reflecting back and paraphrasing. This was a useful technique as it often encouraged them to explain further what they had experienced and sometimes there was a contradiction between what I thought they meant and what they said they meant (although this could be for many reasons – I was wrong, they were unaware of the emotions they were giving away or they thought twice about what they had said and changed it).

Analysis

I transcribed all the interviews myself, which was a painstaking and time-consuming task, however, it was worthwhile as it helped me to get a sense of the data. Listening and re-

listening to the interviews was particularly valuable in the stages of analysis and writing as I could often remember what particular people said and find the relevant quotes.

Undertaking an interpretive phenomenological research project can be *"collaborative, personal, intuitive, difficult, creative, intense, and conceptually-demanding"* (Smith et al.., 2009, p.80) and the time I found this most was during the process of analysis, especially as a researcher still quite new to qualitative research. I explored computer-aided analysis in the form of software package 'NVivo version 11' (QSR) which was useful in the coding of the data, as I analysed each transcript as a whole, writing memos about notable themes or points of particular interest. As well as coding the data at this stage, I was interpreting as I went along. I began with identifying themes that were strongly or regularly expressed and started to create a coding framework, adding new codes and merging some as I analysed more. As I progressed, I found NVivo was most useful in helping me to manage and organise the data as, with twenty-four interviews there is a lot of information to analyse. Welsh (2002) suggests that an effective strategy is to utilise the strengths of both manual and computer-aided approaches, which I did.

Initially the main analysis method I intended to use was 'thematic analysis' (Braun & Clarke 2006) as suggested by Willig (2013) as a good method to use as a new researcher as it is possible to learn as you go along. After transcribing a few interviews, I felt limited by pure thematic analysis (which I had planned to do from the outset) as I noticed that each individual account was fascinating, rich in meaning and with recurring themes. I also noticed seeming contradictions within interviews and times where people would say one thing and yet I felt they might mean another. To take this to pieces, copying and pasting quotes from NVivo to generate overall themes took them out of context and struck me as disrespectful to the participant and demeaning of their experience, in contrast with idiographic approaches (Langdridge, 2007) which can involve in-depth analysis of just one interview. I have endeavoured to incorporate different 'layers' of analysis, deductive and inductive, i.e. both themes arising directly from the research questions and new themes emerging (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006) and individual as well as collective.

This moving from the whole to the parts, to the parts and back to the whole is the guiding principle of the hermeneutic circle (Austgard, 2012). Although I started to also code in a

'top down' manner using the theories I had identified (about Boundaryless Career and Social Capital) it felt like this was imposing an unnatural order. Although these concepts are, I believe, highly relevant to the research they are perhaps more about the context than how individuals perceive and experience things. Therefore, trying to code their literal expressions did not work. These concepts relate to my interpretation and theoretical constructs about the world they live in and some work needed to be done in the middle to link the two. Although I refrained from making assumptions and attempting to fit the data into early prescribed categories, the approach was different from grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) as I had already conducted a literature review and crafted specific objectives and questions (partly because of the structured nature of the PhD programme). The analysis, therefore, was neither a purely 'top down' nor 'bottom up' process but a dynamic, circular and iterative one.

Discovering the limitations of analysis with NVivo left me at a temporary loss as to how to proceed. However, I was reassured by the work of Gadamer (1960) and Van Manen (2015) which advocates an approach unencumbered by standard procedures, reflecting the unique *'horizons of understanding'* of the researcher, the participants and the context. Smythe's (2011) chapter on how to conduct interpretive hermeneutic phenomenology was incredibly reassuring and inspirational and gave me the confidence to honestly document and reflect upon the process I painstakingly undertook:

1. Initial analysis and reflection during fieldwork to identify strong and recurring ideas.
2. Reading all transcripts and interview memos to gain an overview of tentative themes.
3. Coding using NVivo with a combination of preset codes based upon the existentials of the lived world (Van Manen 1990, 2015), (noting that some link to more than one) and holding 'miscellaneous' quotes for later allocation to codes.
4. Reading through interview data for each code and coding into finer categories.
5. Revisiting early interview transcripts again to check for missed data to code.
6. Processing (longhand) all the NVivo coded data by existential category including numerous quotes verbatim for each and through a process of writing and interpreting, searching for meaningful themes across and within categories. Beginning to link back to theoretical framework. This produced approximately 50,000 words of draft analysis.
7. Exercising reflection and reflexivity, consulting the literature and discussing tentative 'findings' with professional subject experts (lecturers, Careers Advisers,

students & graduates themselves) and attending conferences (such as the AGCAS research conference).

8. Drawing up 'final' themes (at the same time understanding that I or someone else could have drawn different conclusions or presented the same conclusions in a different way).
9. Returning to NVivo to select the most appropriate quotes to both support and to counter claims.
10. Taking a break from the data and NVivo, returning to the literature, returning to working with students and returning to the individual interviews to check my understanding.
11. Finalising themes through the lens of Heideggerian philosophy of 'being' as central
12. Focusing on the phenomenon of unpaid work itself through and beyond the stories and themes.
13. Re-reading the interview transcripts and literature to check if the themes link and resonate.
14. Refining themes and reducing superfluous content to focus upon the central phenomena.
15. Returning to the literature and wider context (policy and environment).

Although the above process may seem less than concise and does not necessarily follow any given formulaic textbook process of analysis, it is fully consistent with the approach I have chosen in that it honestly reflects the complex, reductive nature of the enquiry and with the scholars linked to it. Gadamer (1960) strongly opposed the use of prescribed methods in the study of lived experience saying that *'the method of phenomenology and hermeneutics is that there is no method'.*

Qualitative research can be a complex, messy and satisfying pursuit which is not quite the linear process suggested by a numbered list. In presentations I have often used the visual analogy of a creating a tapestry from an entangled and colourful ball of wool, as opposed to sorting, grouping and measuring the strands. I was delighted to find the following quote which translates my images and my sojourn with NVivo into words:

> *'At this point it is useful to think of the qualitative research project as a rich tapestry. The software is the loom that facilitates the knitting together of the tapestry, but the loom cannot determine the final picture on the tapestry. It can though, through its advanced technology, speed up the process of producing the tapestry and it may also limit the weaver's errors, but for the weaver to succeed in making the tapestry she or he needs to have an overview of what she or he is trying to produce. It is very possible, and quite legitimate, that different researchers would weave different*

tapestries from the same available material depending on the questions asked of the data' (Welsh, 2002 pg.6).

Although this is perhaps unorthodox in a methods chapter of a PhD, I would like to acknowledge the tool that was by far the most useful to me at all stages of the research, that is my brain. I thought about everything - a lot. I am naturally a person who tends to overthink things and I have quite a good memory. I am good at making connections between different things. These skills were more useful to me, at all stages of the research, than learning about software programmes. Acknowledging the value (and limitations) of subjectivity in qualitative research is liberating. Neuroscience is uncovering scientific evidence of how our brains help us to interact with the world (Guillery, 2017) not only processing sensations but making sense of our social environment. New directions of study combine this with traditional principles of philosophy (e.g. neurophilosophy and neurophenomenology).

Writing as process

Writing has been a key part of the process of interpretation and research throughout the entire study. If the final thesis were to be 100,000 words, I estimate I will have written at least five times this number of words. Van Manen (2014) suggests that phenomenological writing is more than just the recording of thoughts; it is also the process of thinking them. This parallels Merleau-Ponty's (1962) view of spoken communication as construction rather than simply transmission of information. Part of the process of analysis for me was writing about each existential category and the quotes and evidence surrounding it (supporting and refuting) before reducing this to a smaller selection. At times, the sheer volume of interesting data was overwhelming, and it was difficult to see a way to organise it. Taking time away from the writing gave me a clearer perspective and a realisation that this final thesis is only one possible interpretation and like the tip of an iceberg. An 'intuitive leap' (Smythe, 2011) and confidence in my abilities as a researcher were the decisive points of finalising the themes, rather than a specific deductive method.

According to Corden and Sainsbury (2006) participant quotes serve multiple purposes in qualitative research in providing evidence, explanation, illustration as well as deepening understanding and enhancing readability. Use of quotes also gives voice to the participants

and establishes them as humans rather than simply units of data. I undertook some *'light tidying-up'* of quotes which involved removing some speech fillers (e.g. um, er, you know, kind of, like) and repetition from quotes as Corden and Sainsbury's research amongst qualitative researchers (2006 p.18) suggest that including every hesitancy can be a disservice to the participant. They acknowledge the subjectivity of such decisions, as I do. This was also congruent with the methodology of phenomenology (Crowther, Ironside, Spence & Smythe, 2016) whereby the focus of the research is shared experiences not necessarily perfectly reproducing the verbatim responses of individual participants which is more appropriate to methods such as narrative analysis.

Robustness and rigour of the research

Phenomenology (and qualitative research in general) is often criticised as being 'subjective' and lacking reliability and validity (e.g. Paley, 2017). However, these are concepts of value that are invented and reinforced through positivist paradigms and do not fit qualitative research. There have been attempts to reconceptualise judgements about the value of qualitative research using terms such as 'dependability' and 'rigour', however I found some of them to be inappropriate as there is often an inherent assumption that data would remain consistent over time and between different researchers (Guba, 1981). Polkinghorne (1983) suggests that 'trustworthiness' is a more useful aspiration of phenomenological accounts and can be ascertained through: vividness, accuracy, richness and elegance.

Finlay (2018) suggests that the following questions can help to establish the value of the research:

> *'Is the research vivid in the sense that it generates a sense of reality and draws the reader in? Are readers able to recognise the phenomenon from their own experience or from imagining the situation vicariously? In terms of richness, can readers enter the account emotionally? Finally, has the phenomenon been described in a graceful, clear, poignant way?'*

Phenomenology makes no claim to be replicable as the interview takes place at a specific point in time as a result of a specific, but not standardised sequence of discussions and the resultant data almost certainly would be quite different (i.e. 'unreliable') on a different day,

in a different mood and with a different researcher. Long and Johnson (2000) acknowledge the dilemmas and argue that qualitative researchers should accept that *'reliability is unlikely to be a demonstrable strength of their work'* (pg. 31).

Psychological research is often also judged upon the 'construct validity' of concepts or themes, in that each one should be demonstrably unique from the others as proven by statistical analysis. However, in dealing with human nature and lived experience, it is more useful to find the connections than the delineations between phenomena.

Researchers often carry out a process of returning to their interview participants with either the interview transcripts or the overall findings to check that they are a true representation of their experience (known as *'member-checking'*, Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The purpose of this is to ascertain reliability (i.e. that the participants would say the same if interviewed at a different time) and validity (i.e. that the findings are a valid account). I had originally believed that I should do this to 'prove' that my interpretation of the data was correct and to keep the participants informed of the outcome of their efforts. Indeed, one of the participants asked if she could read my thesis once it was written. My initial thought was that she perhaps overestimated how interesting it would be! Then I thought for a long time about the ethical implications of this. I would like to respect her wish, however, what if she is not happy with my interpretations and general discussions? Will she feel respected by what I wrote? I kept this in mind whilst analysing and writing up the interviews whilst trying to prevent it from overly influencing how I presented the research. I also recognised that some participants know each other quite well (for example, two participants who are now in a relationship) and could easily identify each other which would compromise anonymity.

As I came to understand more about epistemology and phenomenology, I realised that the above methods are inappropriate in this study. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) advise against seeking such validation as the participants memory of prior events may have changed, they may not be aware of verbal or non-verbal aspects of their account which the interviewer may interpret along with their words or they may not be accepting of aspects of the data which show them in a negative light. Member checking is not congruent with hermeneutic phenomenology as the 'data' does not purely 'belong' to the participant, it is

co-constituted between the researcher and the participant within the historical context, at a specific point in time and within the prevailing mood. Participants may not recognise or agree with my interpretation as I bring to the research my 'horizon of understanding', which is informed and influenced by my experience and the literature. Furthermore, as Ashworth (1993) suggests, participants may feel the need to protect their 'socially presented selves' and reject information which seems incongruent. Although this goes against my initial noble intentions, I am satisfied with this decision not to consult. I have had professional conversations throughout the research process with my supervisors and colleagues in the same field through which I have practised relational reflexivity (Archer, 2008).

Researchers may also use mixed methods in an attempt to triangulate their data, for example, so that a larger scale survey may support the findings of their interviews. Initially I had planned to do this too, however, I realised that the kind of information gleaned in an in-depth qualitative interview is valuable in its own right. I have situated my research, however, within a context which is thoroughly measured and illustrated with quantitative data (labour market statistics, big data, surveys) and I believe the approaches are complementary.

Inclusion of frequency counts is occasionally used in presenting strength of themes in qualitative research (for example, '80% of the participants mentioned work experience as being valuable for their CV' or the word 'lucky' was mentioned 27 times) and at the stage of using NVivo word frequencies did help me to formulate and confirm codes and themes. Although the sample is small and not significant in a statistical sense, however, I took the decision to include these numbers occasionally as a form of description (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Although pure phenomenological research and numerical measurements are not congruent it is noteworthy that the founder, Husserl, began his career as a mathematician and argued that phenomenology is, first and foremost, rooted in logic (Hartimo, 2006).

Signs that my research was relevant were that when I presented aspects of it at conferences or with groups of students, or when I discussed it with fellow careers professionals, there was a strong sense of resonance in that many emphatically told me that it mirrored their experience and there were non-verbal agreements like the 'phenomenological nod' of

recognition (Van Manen, 1990). Throughout the four years of my research I found increasingly that grey literature reflected many of my observations (for example reports by organisations such as the Sutton Trust about unpaid internships, newspaper articles, etc.) as the first generation of mass participation & high debt students made their transition to working life.

As a reflexive researcher and practitioner, in addition to making an original contribution to knowledge the key question for me at the end is 'So what?', that is, how can this knowledge advance or inform understanding and practice and demonstrate impact? I will discuss how the research has changed my practice in the final chapter.

Presentation of findings

In writing the findings chapter there are a number of key objectives. Primarily, it is important to acknowledge that I present findings which are informed and interpreted through my own 'horizon of understanding' (Gadamer, 1960) whilst being true to the participants. Secondly, there is a judgement call in choosing what to include and exclude in order to capture the most pertinent information, hold the attention of the reader and call an inevitably arbitrary halt to the process of interpreting (Van Maanen, 2015) could continue with always something else to discover.

I had tentatively identified three groups within the data (SELF – OTHER PEOPLE – WORLD) but there were things that didn't really fit into this. I found 'Beck's Cognitive Triad' (1976) (SELF – WORLD – FUTURE) useful which describes how people with depression think and their irrational belief system about these three things. This made me realise 'future' seemed a significant dimension of the accounts of participants, as was the past (and so 'temporality' could be a fourth theme). Secondly, although this is based on depression it could equally be applied to positive or even relatively neutral or mundane thoughts and experiences. I then read Van-Manen's work (1990) and realised that the general themes he used (four existentials) related to the tentative groupings I had noticed. Van Manen's 'four existentials' are: - Lived body, lived human relations, lived space and lived time. He later (in 2014) added a fifth category of 'things'. Although Van Manen writes from a context of education these existentials are often used in healthcare research (Thomson, Dykes &

Downe, 2011) and can form a useful set of categories through which to explore, reflect and write about human experiences.

The customary heading of 'findings' is not entirely congruent with phenomenology as it suggests that the researcher has discovered something tangible that was simply waiting there to be found, whereas the nature of phenomenological observations is that they are co-constructed as the result of a 'fusion of horizons' of the researcher, participants and the context (including literature and social discourse). Churchill (2018) uses the Latin term *'capta'* to describe that which the researcher captures from the data, which represents a transformation rather than simply a repetition of the data itself. Moreover, the aim is not to answer a question definitively or to test a hypothesis rather to shed light on a matter, even to raise more questions and stimulate further thinking and debate. There are certain caveats to presenting phenomenological 'findings' – that the picture presented is just one possible interpretation of the stories and that the findings are not necessarily generalizable or repeatable.

I chose to use the existentials of the lifeworld (Van Manen, 2015, 1990) based upon Merleau-Ponty, 1962) as a framework for exploring and presenting the interview data because, after reading through the transcripts again and considering other approaches, it seemed suitable as the themes I had identified matched so closely with the existential categories. It also complemented the systems theory framework model (McMahon & Patton, 1995), acknowledging the significance of both individual, interpersonal, environmental and temporal factors in career decisions (such as undertaking unpaid work and mobility experiences):

Being-human (corporeality). This explores unpaid work as an embodied experience in terms of gender, ethnicity, age, social status and other features that make them who they are perceived to be (by themselves and others) and how they can mediate access to and experience of unpaid opportunities. It also incorporates the physical and mental pressure unpaid work can cause and the consequences of this. I have also interpreted this as including identity, personal agency, values and how they present/interpret themselves which link to theories of psychological and identity capital.

Being-in-the-world (spatiality). This theme considers how participants' experience aspects of geographical location as well as subjective spaces in their transition between the worlds of education and work through unpaid working. This relates not only to physical location but spheres such as 'work', 'university' and 'abroad'. From a theoretical perspective this could also include 'boundaryless career' and structural constraints individuals might perceive but not articulate or be aware of explicitly. This is linked to cultural capital and Bourdieu's notion of 'field' and 'habitus'.

Being-through-things (materiality). This existential explores participants' experiences of material things such as money, technology, food & clothes in relation to unpaid work as well as abstract things such as debt, skills, education and career. It also explores whether participants experience themselves as a 'thing', a commodity in the labour market. This is about economic capital (money) as well as symbolic and cultural capitals.

Being-with-others (relationality). This explores the significance of relationships with various others, highlighting the nature and the functions of these relationships in the context of unpaid work. specific and non-specific other people who are involved in their career mobility (individual friends & partners, 'peer' comparison group, parents, role models, mentors, gatekeepers, business contacts, prophets). This is where 'social, cultural and symbolic capital' theories fit in, as they are ways in which people relate to each other. Social capital is about 'knowing the right people' and having access to valuable opportunities, e.g. through word of mouth.

Being-in-time (temporality). This explores experiences of objective time as a commodity, time as an organising concept for experiences (past, present and future) and also time as the Greek *'telos'* in the striving towards plans, wishes and ambitions (Heidegger's 'being-towards'), past reflections, backstories, future plans & fears, delayed gratification towards some future goal. In addition, descriptions of the amount of time spent doing particular career mobility opportunities and time as a tangible resource. A temporal dimension is useful in understanding individuals' intentionality, how they expect unpaid work to help them build and exchange capitals and providing early glimpses of their success in this endeavour.

A strength of using this framework according to Rich, Graham and Taket (2013) is that it offers different yet interwoven points of focus through which to holistically understand lived experiences. The existentials are congruent with a systems approach (Patton & McMahon, 1995) as they acknowledge the interplay of individual, contextual and temporal dimensions. I found this approach helpful and appropriate in addressing the research questions which fundamentally explore individual and contextual factors of unpaid work and mobility experiences. However, systems theory framework posits that the individual is the central focus of the system whereas phenomenology and Van Manen's existentials strongly advocate that the phenomenon being studied (accessed via individual accounts) is the ultimate focal point.

The central concern of Heideggerian philosophy, upon which Van Manen's work is built, is that of 'being' and that the individual (*Dasein*) exists in relation to its physical body, others, the world, time and things. Prefacing each theme with 'being' has the effect of transforming it from an abstract noun into a mobile process (e.g. 'being vulnerable' rather than 'vulnerability'). Within every aspect of 'being' there is also an element of 'becoming' as individuals are continuously in a state of transition. Perhaps this is truer of this group than many other, as previously discussed, they are moving between different spaces – in their world, career, identity, relationships and life circumstances.

I present each subtheme in relation to 'Being' which serves as a reminder that all the different dimensions of unpaid work experience are observed through the subjective existence of the individual (an approach adapted from Blustein, 2019). I also highlight how the themes relate to the wider conceptual framework, e.g. Bourdieusian concepts such as forms of capital, habitus and symbolic violence and theories of motivation, boundaryless career and others discussed in the literature review. An interpretive leap (Smythe 2011) is then taken in order to consider how the themes could relate to philosophical notions of Heidegger whereby experience of *'what it is like to be in unpaid work'* and *'what it is like to exercise mobilities'* may expose more fundamental and common insights into *'what it is like to be human'*.

Within every aspect of being is also an element of becoming, as the temporal nature of experience overlaps all the existentials, not just the final one. A further caveat about the

findings is that they are, by nature, complex and sometimes seem contradictory and paradoxical. Phenomenology aims to present experiences as they are, rather than as unnecessarily simplified. At first, I was concerned with how I could delineate and differentiate themes as conceptually distinct from each other, however, as I learnt more about the data and about phenomenology, I realised that they are linked to each other and to many other things. Rather than discrete boxes in which to place quotes, the five existentials are linked so that some things could just as easily be considered as belonging in one category as another. For example, I had a node in NVivo of 'geographical mobility' and I wasn't sure whether to place this under 'body' as some people talked about this in terms of their identity (parents nationality or their openness to moving around) whereas some quotes were linked to past (being well travelled) or future intention to move. In the end, I put this under 'space' as it was predominantly about places. According to Merleau-Ponty (1962), being in the world means existing in a reciprocal and communicative relationship with it.

Summary

To summarise, this research takes the stance that the phenomena of unpaid work and mobilities can be usefully explored and understood by interviewing students and graduates about their experiences. My position as a researcher is influenced by my own view of the world and, in turn, is acknowledged as an influence upon the research questions, literature selected, analysis of data and interpretation of findings. The methodology I felt to be most appropriate is interpretive phenomenology and the philosophy and theories of key thinkers such as Van Manen (1990, 2014), Bourdieu (1986), Heidegger (1927) and Smythe (2011) have helped to shed light on the picture. Applying this methodology to higher education and career studies makes a unique contribution to contemporary debates.

Chapter Five: Being Human

Findings chapters overview

The following chapters present the participants' lived experiences of unpaid work and career mobilities. Table 5.1. below introduces the subthemes which will be presented through the lens of Van Manen's existentials (1990) as discussed in Chapter Four:

Table 5.1: Themes and subthemes

Being human	i. Being in a physical body (age, gender, ethnicity) ii. Being vulnerable and resilient iii. Being oneself (authentic)
Being in the world	i. Being unpaid in the world of work/labour market ii. Being in different worlds (mobility & boundary spanning) iii. Being in the right place at the right time/being lucky
Being and others	i. Being supported and connected ii. Being compromised iii. Being like everyone else & different
Being and things	i. Being without things (sacrifice & deficit) ii. Being through things iii. Being a commodity (objectification of being)
Being and time	i. Being at a point in time and in transition (present focus) ii. Being transformed (past focused) iii. Becoming - being optimistic and being mortal (future focused)

This chapter, 'Being Human' introduces the characteristics of the overall sample and details about the individual participants along with the types of unpaid work and mobility experiences they undertook (Table. 5.2). It then highlights the embodied nature of unpaid work and mobilities which can help us to understand the phenomenon itself. The following chapter 'Being in the World' will present findings about the different worlds – physical and metaphorical – that students and graduates find themselves in (spatialities). These two

chapters are presented first as they are most essential aspects of the phenomena (Van Manen, 1990).

The significance of social capital and relationships are considered in Chapter Seven, 'Being and Others' as other people were a strong and regular feature in the interviews. Chapter Eight includes findings relating to both things and time combined. This is partly because many of the quotes and subthemes in earlier chapters link with these themes so there is less left to say. The materialities of unpaid work (clothes, money, technology, skills and time) are presented in 'Being and Things'. Finally, time (temporality) is an overarching theme and particularly significant to this group's experiences of being in transition. This is presented last as it leads into discussion of the future (of policy, participants and practice). These five dimensions of lived experience are interrelated and 'being' is a central tenet, as it was in the work of Heidegger.

Being human – Corporeality and unpaid work

This theme explores participants' lived experiences of unpaid working and mobilities as they often described their experiences in deeply embodied terms. Within this theme are three subthemes:

i.   Being in a physical body – *introducing the individuals*
ii.   Being vulnerable and resilient
iii. Being oneself

In the 'individual' sphere of McMahon and Patton's systems theory framework model (1995) it seems that the characteristics fall into two categories: embodied, biographical characteristics (physical attributes, age, gender and ethnicity, disability) and acquired attributes characteristics (abilities, aptitudes, skills, values, beliefs and knowledge of the world of work). The latter will be discussed as 'things' in Chapter Eight. Social class/status will be discussed within 'world' as this is where the framework locates it and because most participants did not strongly relate to this personal classification (indeed, some vehemently rejected it).

Table 5.2: Participants' experiences and outcomes

Pseudonym	Unpaid work and mobility experiences	Destination outcome
Brad	No recent unpaid work, volunteered as a football coach in college, undertook a 2-week overseas placement in China as part of an extra-curricular leadership programme at university	Well-paid graduate programme with a global IT & electronics company (South of England). A contact he made on placement encouraged and supported him in applying
Cathy	Numerous voluntary positions in her local community (e.g. mentor, breastfeeding project) 6 - week voluntary placement in Ugandan healthcare through university, caring responsibilities	Currently studying Masters' degree in Social Policy and self-employed Doula
Dominika	Numerous short-term unpaid internships in media and journalism, paid internship in university careers service, active voluntary animal rights activist	'Dream job' with Vegan Society upon graduating, now Press Officer for UK Home Office
Ella	Work placement at a fashion house in London, China leadership placement	Worked as a PA for university Director for a year then successful in securing place on a 'Big Four' accountancy programme
Harriet	Work experience with a GP, volunteered in hospital café, paid graduate internship with a Clinical Commissioning Group.	Year off after graduating to travel and underemployed in low paid, zero hours contracts (e.g. cleaning buses) then got a 'Big Four' graduate accountancy programme in London.
Hassia	Paid for volunteering at Moroccan orphanage, volunteers for European Culture & Travel Club at university	Worked in Corporate Social Responsibility on graduating, then taught English in Spain and travelled
Holly	Took a gap year to do numerous voluntary positions including a hospice and dementia & Parkinsons' charities, summer placement in clinical trials (London - applied for job then told it was unpaid), studied in New York	Scientific copy editor in London
Imogen	Volunteered as an ambulance paramedic in Israel and in US hospitals, co-wrote a journal article as an undergraduate (unpaid)	Worked in an auction house for a year. Applied for graduate Medicine, now training as a Doctor in a Russell Group university in London
Justine	Work experience in geriatric care	Studying Master's in Clinical Research in Rotterdam
Jack	Digital labour – unpaid editor of a student website and music journalist, work experience in local newspaper, unpaid short-term internships in London creative industries, paid graduate internship at university. Plays gigs in a band (barely covers costs)	Studied MA in Publishing, now working for Bloomsbury publishers in London

Jennifer	Voluntary community work in India, Sierra Leone, Tanzania and Uganda; caring responsibilities for brother	Occupational Therapist for NHS
Kayla	Volunteered six weeks for a nature reserve, underemployed in care work upon graduating	Trained apprentices in local construction company, now Senior Environmental Adviser for an international company
Kevin	Carer for his mum, undertook voluntary placement in Uganda	NHS Physiotherapist
Kaitlyn	Undertook voluntary placement in Ugandan healthcare	NHS Mental Health Practitioner
Malik	Numerous local unpaid jobs in retail, IT, car mechanics, catering & photography. Volunteer for a local community project feeding homeless	Web-developer
Millie	Many short-term voluntary roles and university projects with employers which led to paid work. Also undertook China leadership placement through university.	Campaign Manager at a top global PR & Marketing company
Mary	Unpaid work experience for British Library and in Marketing for a cosmetics company. Short term unpaid internships in local SMEs (advertising agencies) which led to a prestigious paid year placement	Senior Account Manager at a global marketing company
Rachel	Numerous unpaid internships including researcher for the BBC, runner for a film company, worked in Canada for a year, paid university internship	Information Assistant at North West university, aiming to work in research support
Rina	Volunteered at a GP surgery, in charity shops and for the International Service in Ghana in children's education	Initially struggled, took a graduate internship at university, took time out to travel, now working as a research analyst
Rosie	Six week nursing voluntary placement in India	NHS Adult Nurse
Sarah	Work experience and volunteering with a GP and in a hospice	Now therapeutic radiographer at a North West specialist cancer hospital. Active volunteer for a breast cancer awareness campaign.
Augustus	Set up a local community organisation to collect food from local businesses and feed homeless, unpaid consultancy work during his degree, internship in university, China leadership placement	Times 'Top 50' graduate employer management scheme in London (public transport management)
Violet	China trip, paid internship at university, unpaid project for the Army (extension of university placement), casual lecturer	Lecturer, placement manager and manager of the leadership programme at the North West university where she studied
Zahir	Volunteered for local charity, paid for volunteer project in Morocco and paid for internship in China, university China placement, university placement Marketing for high end supermarket	Was offered a top graduate programme with Virgin in London, chose a Marketing graduate programme in Austria as it was a new challenge and 'felt right'

Being in a physical body - Characteristics of the sample

This part of the chapter will present characteristics found from the biographical questionnaires along with qualitative observations about them from the interviews. The sample comprises twenty-four students and recent graduates from different North West universities (the universities are described in Appendix IX).

Table 5.2 provides a brief description of each participant, using pseudonyms, with the kinds of unpaid work and mobility opportunities they had undertaken. It also gives a snapshot in time of subsequent graduate destinations when they were later followed up (in 2017). Their individual biographical details are not provided here to preserve anonymity, instead the sample categories and described below (Table 5.3) to provide an idea of the spread of participants from each.

I chose to distinguish between and categorise their degree disciplines in keeping with the Labour Force Survey user guide, cited in the annual government Graduate Labour Market Statistics report (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2016a): -

- STEM – Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths
- LEM – Law, Economics and Management (including Business)
- OSSAH – Other Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities

University and course of study. As this was not a comparative study it is not necessary to have equal proportions of students from each university, level and discipline. The aim of a sample in phenomenology is to achieve a good variety of demographics, which was achieved. Three of the participants attended 'other' universities. One of the universities was originally targeted alongside the main three for participants but only one came forward. The other two approached me when they heard about the research. When I started the research, I thought that I should aim for a structured, representative sample across the named universities. However, as I learnt more about methodology, I realised that I needed a 'purposive sample' whereby the most important criterion was the participants' experience of unpaid work and mobility. Therefore, the three main universities selected were more of a means to achieving this and a feature of the sample rather than a criterion. Because of this I judged that inclusion of three participants from

other universities was acceptable and these participants made a significant contribution to the research.

Sample Description. Table 5.3 (below) shows the distribution of the different participants across the key criteria. I will discuss each in turn, illustrating with qualitative findings which relate to the characteristic. Pseudonyms will be used for all quotes.

Table 5.3. Criteria and distribution of participants

Criteria	Number of students
University attended	W – 6 X – 8 Y - 7 Z (Other) - 3
Status at time of interview	Undergraduate – 15 Postgraduate – 3 Graduate - 6
Degree discipline	STEM – 11 LEM – 8 OSSAH - 5
Gender	Male - 6 Female - 18
Age	23 & under – 16 Over 23 - 8
Ethnicity	White British (WB) – 16 European (EU) – 2 Asian British (AB) – 5 Other - 1

Initially I was looking for people who had undertaken an unpaid internship for a fixed term, however, early into the research I realised the picture was much more complex (and indeed interesting). Even asking them to try to count how many weeks or hours they had spent doing work experience was difficult and seemed to obstruct and detract from the point. When people reflected upon their experiences, the length of time was sometimes discussed but it was common to have a meaningful experience within a short timeframe.

The range of undergraduate and graduate participants gave a valuable insight into a range of experiences at the different stages, for example, in reflecting upon how they made sense of experiences and were able to mobilise capitals in the way they expected. Although the

purpose of the research is not to prove or refute a consequential link between unpaid work and subsequent outcomes, some of the graduate accounts suggest that investment in and acceptance of unpaid work and mobility may enhance chances of success. One particularly significant finding was that destinations were positive across the universities with little difference in successful outcomes between them. Similarly, many participants with non-STEM or non-vocational degrees were successful in accessing quality graduate level employment. Both findings contradict the expectations of some of the participants and grey literature about graduate outcomes (Gov.uk, 2019). Perhaps these positive destinations were aided by the initiatives described in appendix IV. Even if they are anomalous and do not represent typical destinations of their degree and institution this is encouraging as it suggests that individuals can take actions to gain career capitals and compete with graduates from more prestigious universities.

Degree classification and status. A high proportion of the participants had attained, or were expecting to attain, a high degree classification (mostly first class). Whilst this could have been identified as a skew or limitation of the sampling approach, it is also an interesting phenomenon in itself. Three main reasons are possible for this 'skew', firstly, as the research call was for participants who had undertaken some form of additional unpaid work, they may be more proactive, conscientious and willing to volunteer for unpaid academic research. It may also be that students who do work or volunteer are more motivated in their studies (this could be cause and effect or linked to other factors). There was no incentive offered for participation and final year students are often busy with coursework.

There is a recognised issue of 'grade inflation' nationally. Bachan (2015) reveals data from HESA (2012) that the number of 'first class' degrees more than doubled over the period 1994/5 to 2011/12 from 7% to 15.8% so although this sample is not representative of the graduate cohort it is illustrative of a growing phenomenon. Ella (pseudonym) told me this was exacerbated by a new marking system at her university. She said she was angry about this, feeling it devalued her hard work, but many students liked it because they got higher grades. There was also a feeling that students are putting pressure upon academics to award higher grades now because of tuition fees (Guardian, 2015).

Gender. Eighteen females and six males took part. There were more female participants than male which may be because females were more prepared to talk to me (a female researcher), had more noteworthy experiences or were generally more open to interviews.

Gender was rarely discussed as a significant challenge except in relation to caring responsibilities (which were also raised by males). Sarah expressed how being female was a positive attribute in relative terms and dependent upon context:

> *'there's a lot of angry customers and they (staff) always send me out, being a white straight female who has privileges, as they see it because there's a lot of drag queens who work there and gay people so for me to go out and speak to the customers, they're often more accepting which is horrendous but true'* (Sarah)

Hopefully, this signifies an increase in gender equality although it could just be that structural inequalities in the labour market had not yet affected this group (Graduate Market Trends, 2013). Gender roles sometimes figured in early career female participants 'fitting in' their mobilities around partners (Ackers, 2003).

There were no noticeable differences in the types of unpaid work tasks that males and females carried out or attitudes towards them as there were aspects of menial work undertaken willingly across the board. However, more females reported falling back on caring or customer service type jobs to support them financially whilst building their career (e.g. Sarah, Justyna, Harriet, Kayla).

Age. Although no age criteria were specified in the call for participants, the majority (sixteen) of participants were aged '20 – 23' the remainder being more 'mature' students. This group may be more in need of work experiences to gain credential for their future employability, whereas more mature students already have work experience. Alternatively, older students may have less freedom to pursue unpaid CV-building activities if they have financial and time commitments attached to running a home, family, car, pets, etc.

Age was cited as a barrier to mobility and career opportunities for older and younger participants (being too old or too young). The younger participants associated their age with lack of experience and credibility (e.g. Jack, Harriet, Malik).

> *'I was predominantly unemployed, and the problem was that I was still quite young'* (Harriet talking about her 'gap year' before university)

> *"At that age I mean you're not going to change the world or make a massive contribution'* (Zahir on being 19)

Violet, a mature student with four children, had a lot of prior work experience but not specific to her career aspirations. She felt she needed to do extra work, going 'above and beyond' in a work-based project, undertaking an international placement then being underemployed as a casual lecturer. Having left school at sixteen, her maturity and personal circumstances motivated her to work extra hard and make sacrifices:

> *'I think it's the fact that I don't like being told no I can't do something, and the more challenges life throws at me the more determined I am to get through them… I didn't just come to university to get a degree… I came to university to get a first-class degree and that's why I took all the short-term projects, internships and things like that, to link in and develop my employability for later on…I'd have never had the opportunity to go to China with four children, it's just not somewhere you'd pick as a holiday destination, the cost would be prohibitive'* (Violet)

Jack equated getting older with labour market value and upward mobility when talking about work experience in journalism. He accepted unpaid work as inevitable for young people, perhaps reflecting a message conveyed by society that they are of no value, particularly working-class young people (Willis, 1978, Jones, 2012):

> *'it's just the way it goes, it's only once you start moving up, once you've kind of got a more valuable skill set as it were… so it's more around the (age) 16 to 18 mark or 16 to 20 mark where you're not getting paid then after that I think there's more opportunities for you to actually make some kind of money from it even if it's only minor'* (Jack)

Also implicit in Jack's quote is an assumption of meritocracy and steady career progression in a graduate career. Unfortunately, this may not always be the reality. This will be discussed later in Chapter Seven (being compromised).

Interviewing participants of this age and life-stage is interesting as their childhood/family life is still relatively easy to recollect and reflect upon and yet their future is very much in focus (even if lacking specific focus). The research participants were part of the generation labelled 'Millennials' (born in the 1980's and 90's) who are often derided in the media for being 'snowflakes, narcissistic and entitled' (Daily Mail, 2019). Whilst emphasising

generational characteristics can be oversimplified and counterproductive (Haslam-Ormerod, 2019), many of this group have one thing in common – that they have come of age in a capitalist, neoliberal-dominant society. It was sad that some participants viewed age as a hindrance (whether 'too old' or 'too young') and that they had perhaps internalised labour market messages of skills shortages and supply exceeding demand (Tholen, 2013).

Although this research primarily focuses upon the experiences of younger students and graduates it includes a small number of mature students (mid-twenties). Mature student numbers in UK universities have dropped by 60% (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2017). Butcher (2015) explains this is a direct result of the changes to higher education funding, meaning that cost is a barrier to older potential students and disproportionately those who are less affluent. He views this as a critical issue of social injustice and certainly in the context of this research, this added financial commitment both compels mature students to enhance their employability through relevant (often unpaid) work experience and also makes paid work more necessary to support themselves and dependents.

Ethnicity, nationality & cultural heritage. Sixteen participants were 'white British', two EU nationals, five 'Asian British' and one Israeli (or 'other'). The cohort were diverse and yet these categories do not fully describe their rich heritage, for example, many of the 'British' participants having parents who had migrated from other countries. The influences of their backgrounds were frequently cited in their approach to opportunities. (Brad, Ella, Imogen, Mary, Dominika, Justyna). Mobilities, geographical and social, were experienced and shaped differently as a result. I realised this early in my first interview with Zahir, for whom ethnicity was a highly relevant topic encompassing skin colour, religion and cultural expectations in relation to his career and mobility. This also intersected with his age, gender and family role compared to his sister, all of which influenced many of his decisions and actions. Zahir contextualised his experience growing up in a Muslim Indian culture as:

> *'full of customs and traditions, it's a fascinating culture, it's amazing but if you're critical and analytical and questioning it can be quite frustrating'* (Zahir)

He was acutely aware of the *'deep-rooted feeling among the older generation'* that as a male he should *'do something proper'* in his career, such as Law, Accountancy, Medicine or

Pharmacy rather than Marketing – considered a *'bog roll degree'.* He also explained that people in his community usually only to other Muslim countries and did not approve of friendships between males and females, whereas he was immersed in a western culture from school age and enjoyed travel and integrating with people of all backgrounds and gender.

UK students travelling to low resource settings often talked about cultural and religious differences and how these influenced work practices. Some of the participants were highly motivated to be internationally mobile in their future lives, often as a result of their unpaid work experiences and family influences. Cultural expectations can also inhibit mobility though, for example, if young people are expected to live near their family.

Age, gender and ethnicity are often described as problems and disadvantages in literature (Shaw, 2013; Swan, 2015, Fedici, 1974), big data reports (Futuretrack, 2013; Dept for BIS, 2016b; Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2016) and political discourse (Huffington post, 2019). Furthermore, being labelled as 'disadvantaged' could be counter-productive and demotivating.

Religion. An interesting hypothesis arose during the interviews. When analysing the participants' biographical details and interviews a great many of them seemed to have had a religious upbringing (even though most of them did not describe themselves as religious now). For example, they attended faith schools or described their parents as having religious traditions and beliefs. For some participants (e.g. Augustus) their faith and identity remained a key motive for the unpaid work they undertook:

> *'voluntary work is definitely a factor in terms of religion because you probably*
> *know we are Muslims, so we have a responsibility to look after our neighbours'*
> (Malik)

This pattern could just be a coincidence or something I noticed because of my own religious upbringing. Valuable social contacts may be made through faith-based community groups. I wondered whether exposure to faith predisposed people to unpaid work (in the many forms already described). This could be a positive force in encouraging altruism and serving others for reasons other than worldly rewards (heaven, karma, etc) as well as cultivating prosocial behaviour and a 'Protestant Work Ethic' (Weber, 2001). Career choice may, for

some, have a spiritual dimension of a vocational calling (Frigerio, 2016). Does it make people more likely to work unpaid because it fosters an acceptance of subservience, even exploitation? Evidence as to whether religious people are more altruistic is mixed. Acts of 'prosocial behaviour' such as international volunteering may be seen as egotistic (Bennett & Einolf, 2017) and *'virtue signalling'* (Bartholomew, 2015) particularly when broadcast on social media (Guardian, 2016d). There are also potentially positive influences of religion, or spirituality in its broader sense (*'residual religiosity'* Forster, 1989). Heidegger himself was the son of a church official and studied Theology early in his academic career. De Botton (2013) suggests that organised religion has rituals and values that could benefit secular society (namely wisdom, community, kindness, education, tenderness, pessimism, perspective, art, architecture and institutions). Perhaps finding alternative ways to incorporate these elements into our lives could be beneficial to individuals and society.

Being vulnerable and resilient

Participants very frequently expressed feelings of physical and mental stress during, or as a result of unpaid work and wider career mobility experiences which took them outside of their comfort zone. It is difficult to separate the symptoms of physical strain from mental strain as they are inextricably linked, as well as to external factors such as concerns about money or the future. Although questions about wellbeing were not part of the interview, many participants described debilitating anxiety or physical symptoms of exhaustion due to the pressures of working unpaid whilst paying their bills.

Rachel described the struggles she experienced:

> *'I went to uni as a mature student, so I was supporting myself, so I had to work as well. I worked at a music festival from the Friday night so I got back home at about six in the morning on the Monday, had a shower and went straight to the first day of my internship and because you were working such late nights you may be getting four hours sleep a night at this festival and I'd been working pretty much solidly so I was like 'oh God I'm so tired' I fell asleep standing up on my feet, it was like one of those moments where you are like 'oh my God' because obviously I didn't want the guys to think I was not paying attention or bored or whatever'* (Rachel)

This expresses clearly the conflicting demands she faced from moving between different physical places and working patterns (late nights and weekends to a 9 to 5 office job) and

the added labour of trying to present herself as a keen employee whilst suffering fatigue and sleep deprivation.

An interesting linguistic feature of Rachel's quote is how she switched from talking in the first person to the second person, as if dissociating from her stress, (other participants sometimes did the same). Perhaps this was a subconscious coping mechanism that helped her get through the situation. Such dissociation is described by Mind.org (a national mental health charity) as one of the ways in which the mind copes with stress which can be a positive adaptive response as long as it is not extreme withdrawal from reality.

The physical nature of labour has historically been central to notions of work/labour/action (Arendt, a student of Heidegger, 1958) in the evolution from agricultural through industrial and yet less obviously in the information revolution. Although higher education largely prepares 'knowledge workers' these students and graduates often undertake physical roles to supplement income (e.g. service sector, care work) where staff may be on their feet for long hours and work night shifts. Even knowledge work is carried out by the physical body and can cause stress and elation as well as occupational hazards of eyestrain from computer use, tiredness from long commutes or fitness from climbing stairs to the office.

Conversely, positive experiences of unpaid working have the potential to contribute to physical and mental wellbeing:

> *'I wasn't well in second year but I felt I needed to do something so I went to work with my auntie because that's safe and it was related to what I wanted to do, but it kind of was to tick a box and say I'd worked in palliative care and, to be honest, it was amazing, I really loved it and so it worked out well '* (Sarah)

Exposing oneself to being vulnerable and the responses this evokes may be different between individuals, as situations which cause stress for one person might be a valuable challenge for another. Mary considered the lack of support and direction during her internship to have been a positive factor:

> *'It was just the amount of responsibility that I had taught me so much more… because my manager didn't really like working with other people so I was left on my own…and that was probably the best way for me to learn because it hadn't been just taught to me by my manager, I had to figure everything out myself'* (Mary)

Mary shows that pressure and challenge can provide fertile ground for learning, yet an important factor is likely to be the level of support available to the individuals with some needing more, or a different kind of support, than others.

The examples given demonstrate that pressures arose from the unpaid work itself, but also from juggling studies with the necessity to work for money and for experience, expectations and actions of others (parents, culture, peers) and uncertainty about whether they have done enough to prepare for their future:

> *'I just kind of have moments of panic where I'm like oh my God because it hits me that this is the first time in my life where I haven't got any clear path because I've always gone straight from school to sixth form, to University always knowing what my next step was gonna be, so realising that this is the end of that, it's very strange'* (Hassia)

An underlying positive outcome many of the participants described was a sense that they had knowingly put themselves outside of their comfort zone in the opportunities they chose to pursue (particularly but not exclusively international experiences). Although this may have seemed *'scary'* or taking a risk many expressed that the experience enhanced their confidence in their ability to deal with problems and maximised their learning.

Ella had a history of anxiety that resurfaced before and during her placements in London and China, nevertheless she employed techniques she had learnt earlier, from a counsellor at college, to help her to manage it and pushed herself to do these things despite her fears:

> *'the anxiety got to me a little bit and I could feel myself starting to panic but with CBT and stuff I know how to calm myself down, so I just sat there on the bench and had a little chat with (trip organiser) and it was just because there were so many new smells and everything else but I recognised that it was about throwing yourself into it and if you didn't integrate you're not gonna get the full experience…'* (Ella)

Kayla's emotive reflection on the year after graduating (*'the worst year of my life'*) was compounded by the *'shock'* she experienced about how tough it was to find a good job:

> *'it took me to the bottom of my core to bring myself out of it… you know, I was down and I was very disheartened, but I knew that something had to come because I wasn't ready to accept that that was my life you know, and I just kept going and applying for jobs'.* (Kayla)

Kayla asserted that university had not adequately prepared her for the turbulent and uncertain transition to working life.

> *'I was so naive to think that it was so simple - it's not at all and you know I just wanna be able to tell people not to make the same mistakes I made'* (Kayla)

Despite this negative experience, many stories also illustrated how participants recovered from setbacks, demonstrating positive coping strategies, perseverance and determination. This is a phenomenon I noticed in the accounts of many of the participants who had described tough times; they often found some kind of mental strength to persevere on their path or to take different action (Kayla, Brad, Augustus, Ella, Zahir, Imogen). There seemed to be two dimensions to this response to risk, the first being how they initially approached and decided to undertake a challenging opportunity ('courage/daring') and the second being how they carried on in the face of failure and adversity ('resilience/persistence').

Some participants were unclear about the kind of support they could expect from their university. Sarah illustrates eloquently how the environment stunted her growth as an independent adult:

> *'at this university you are very spoon-fed in the fact that I had an app that told me which washing machines were free, so I didn't even have to go down in the morning I could literally look on my phone and see, which is ridiculous, so I kind of expected from the University that I was just gonna get emails like 'ah there's this work experience going, Sarah, that we've specially selected for you' which obviously they weren't, I realised halfway through second year that actually I've done no recent work experience... Why?... So, looking back I should have gone out and found it myself, but they provided an environment that made me think that that was just going to get given to me'* (Sarah)

This highlights the question of how universities can best support students in their everyday lives and in preparing for their future, particularly for students from 'widening participation' cohorts who may not have the social capital to secure work experience. I will discuss this further in Chapter Nine.

A factor which potentially contributed to pressure and anxiety, and an enduring theme of this research, was that the students and graduates defined themselves as being in deficit. This meant students were not only accepting of working for nothing (financially) but

positively grateful (Swan, 2015), emphasising the intrinsic benefits (Beebe et al., 2009; Maynard, 1997).

Graduate resilience and how to build it features strongly in contemporary careers literature, (e.g. 'bouncing back', Robertson & Cooper, 2013; psychological capital, Tomlinson et al., 2017). Brown (2012) talks about vulnerability as a precursor to, and a basis for strength and perseverance rather than its opposite. Interestingly, Pasero (2016) suggests that working-class students may have an advantage over more privileged young people as they are more likely to have overcome setbacks on their journey through higher education and work. Copeland, Kasim and Bambra (2015) even found regional UK evidence of 'Northern grit' in resilient responses to adverse economic conditions due to 'family-based social capital'.

'Psychological capitals' are likely to have contributed to the participants gaining necessary degree classification, skills, experience and perhaps subsequent career success (Luthans, Luthans & Luthans, 2004: Barrie, 2004). Meta-cognitive skills of being able to reflect upon and communicate these capitals are key (Dacre-Pool & Sewell, 2007). However, it is important to remember the contested nature of these concepts (such as resilience and optimism) and whose purpose they serve. Imploring young people to carry on regardless of exploitation, poverty and stress is an illusion of empowerment which may benefit the system more than the individual.

There was a strong belief amongst participants that they were responsible for and in control of their own career success (agency). Many students and graduates were working hard in their studies and being proactive in securing unpaid work. This supports Dacre-Pool and Sewell's (2007, 2010) emphasis on the importance of both self-efficacy and work experience in employability. Many alluded to the meritocratic belief that a good degree plus unpaid work would improve their chances and yet none of them explained how they knew this or why they thought it. Indeed, many provided evidence to the contrary. The discourse of employability emphasises the role of personal agency in success, however, as Christie (2016) suggests, this can have a damaging flipside as graduates who struggle to find meaningful and successful outcomes post-graduation may logically deduce that failure is their fault, being unaware of the structural constraints influencing their chances. It

reinforces responsibilization by asserting that the root of success (and mental wellbeing) lies solely within the individual.

There was evidence of resilience in some of the participant accounts, however, many did not seem to be resilient in thoughts, feelings or actions instead being vulnerable and anxious. However, despite this, they did not give up. Perhaps a more appropriate definition of their agentic mobilising of unpaid work towards careers is 'persistence'. This offers hope for students and graduates as it shifts the emphasis away from feelings and identity to very practical actions they can take. Encouraging our young people to be persistent could be helpful. This raises questions about another exalted graduate attributes of flexibility and adaptability (Savickas, 1997) when unwavering inflexibility and dogged, single-minded determination may sometimes be needed in order to succeed.

Although it is generally considered a negative emotion Heidegger suggests that anxiety is a positive sign of being human (Dasein) and experiencing being a separate entity from others and the world. This, he posits, is a step towards authentic freedom.

> *'Anxiety is there. It is only sleeping. Its breath quivers perpetually through Dasein, only slightly in those who are jittery, imperceptibly in the 'Oh, yes' and the 'Oh, no' of men of affairs; but most readily in the reserved, and most assuredly in those who are basically daring'* (Heidegger, 1929 p. 108 in Krell, 1993 p. 339)

This relationship between anxiety and daring suggests that anxiety and daring are paradoxical and dynamically linked emotions in participant accounts. This paradoxical nature of experiences will be discussed in Chapter Nine.

The issue of mental wellbeing is important to this study, not only in itself (as it is concerning that unpaid work and mobility may be contributing to stress) but in how it affects student and graduates' propensity to engage in career-enhancing unpaid work and gain positive benefits from it.

Being oneself – identity, motivation and authenticity

Participants often alluded to this theme throughout their interviews when they talked about identity, motives, personality and values in relation to undertaking unpaid work and mobility opportunities. It is also a key aspect of the research question– what motivates an

individual to volunteer for such experiences while others do not? The research sought to understand why some of the participants were prolific in the volume and variety of unpaid work and voluntary activities they undertook. There seemed to be a combination of 'push and pull' motives, with some people being highly proactive and enjoying variety in life whilst others viewed unpaid opportunities as a key to leaving behind a less desirable situation such as their geographical location/limited labour market or social class:

> *'it's really hard to get any opportunities back home, it's a cul-de-sac at the end of the motorway and everyone's just building ships, that's why I wanted to come to uni and go different places'* (Jack)

Many participants demonstrated a high level of proactivity and hard work in gaining career mobility experiences alongside their degree study and part-time work. Some participants seemed to be serial volunteers, constantly on the lookout for new and valuable experiences. This was apparent during the interviews and it is difficult to capture in short quotes but here is an example:

> *"I am one of those really annoying try-hard people… it's one of those things that I think once you've learned it you cannot ignore it any more so you start looking at everything as an opportunity, there's much more out there if you look for it you know, but yet none of that was paid I've not been paid for any of that that was all just me doing… some people think it's wasting my time but I think it's gaining amazing experiences"* (Imogen)

Others were more pragmatic about the need to 'make the most of it' and 'have a go':

> *'It's good to keep busy and it's about being proactive because obviously with the student finance being quite high, there's no point in going to university and just sitting around and not really making the most of it'* (Milly)

> *'I do more than the average person because experience, well it's something you can't just learn from a book you have to go and do it and by doing that you show the employer in the job interview that you are passionate and that you try'* (Dominika)

The above quotes illustrate how different motives may spark interest in unpaid opportunities. Milly focuses on the value for money aspect of higher education and making the most of the present whilst Dominika sees work experience as an essential extension of her degree which is focused towards working life and the future. Imogen was highly

enthusiastic about the 'amazing' experiences themselves so the fact that they may someday be helpful is almost incidental.

Although some of the participants did appear to play the game of taking up unpaid opportunities simply for the extrinsic, utilitarian purpose of CV building, others felt uncomfortable with it. For many, the motivation changed during the experience (or on reflection afterwards). For others there was a mixture whereby some activities were 'for show' and others to fulfil more genuine personal motives. Although many cited their reasons for doing unpaid work as 'something to put on their CV', as might be expected, sometimes this was an afterthought and one with which they felt a degree of awkwardness. Kevin, for example, was grateful of the opportunity of a funded voluntary placement in Uganda, as both his elder brother and sister had travelled the world whilst he was primary carer for his mum:

> *'I never really thought like "this can go in my portfolio" and "this can be good for jobs" but everyone's telling me, even on my last placement 'oh that'll be really good for interviews and for jobs…I kind of feel uncomfortable thinking like that'* (Kevin)

For others the original motive may have been extrinsic but then the participant found a genuine, intrinsic satisfaction which became the primary motive. Sarah explained how she volunteered in a charity shop whilst at sixth form, primarily for her UCAS personal statement. She described it as *'useless'* and yet she enjoyed it so much she continued doing it when she went to university. Similarly, Imogen described her unpaid care work which she had started *'because I wanted to get work experience for my CV and start going down that medical route'* as something she intrinsically enjoyed:

> *'I actually dragged my dad into it as well, every Sunday morning I dragged him out of bed at 7 AM and we'd go and feed them breakfast which was so much fun'* (Imogen)

Augustus had instigated and coordinated a voluntary service gathering food from local businesses and taking it to local homeless people and yet he deliberately omitted this experience from his CV and job applications:

> *'in Islam a lot of it is reflecting on why you do something and then rectifying your intentions to get rid of the ego and to make sure that you are not doing it for any*

other reason other than what you should be doing it for, so yeah, it doesn't sit right with me' (Augustus)

This suggests Augustus (and perhaps others) are reluctant to 'play the game' (Bathmaker et al., 2013) of undertaking unpaid work purely for the career capitals it confers, however, he made a clear distinction between volunteering and the unpaid placements, internships and work experience that were more career-focused:

'I mean I had other professional and work experience I did, internships and stuff like that which I spoke about' (Augustus)

Students who can rely upon an education from an elite institution with the cultural and social capital it bestows may have more time also to develop a wider range of activities and interests as an end in themselves, freed from the pressure to spend the time enhancing their CV. This will be further discussed in Chapter Nine.

Zahir was modest in his reflections of what makes people succeed in graduate recruitment. He was successful in two top graduate scheme assessment centres and others for placements and internships:

'They're just looking for nice people, honestly it seems like a really simplistic generalisation but the people who are successful, they haven't necessarily been the most qualified or haven't necessarily had the most experience or anything like that they just completely engaged and completely interacted with everyone' (Zahir)

If this is the case, the question remains as to how these elusive attributes can best be communicated and potential recognised in the early stages of selection.

Recruitment processes rely upon high level verbal ability skills and confidence in self-promotion:

*'I think a lot of it is down to confidence and kind of selling yourself and I think some people are good at that, some people just aren't, because I'm more kind of timid and I don't like to boast about what I've achieved where some people it comes to them more naturally' (*Mary)

Woven through these stories about unpaid work experience were biographical narratives of developing identity, striving for authenticity and multiple motives (Jensen, 2009; Holmes, 2013; Jackson, 2016). Traditionally, going to university has been a time of freedom to explore and reinvent identity. Choosing what to study, who to make friends with, which

clubs and societies to join and how to dress are part of this transition to adulthood. 'Public stories' (Finn, 2015) about 'being a student' often portray it as being a carefree time of life. For many participants, this was not the reality of their situation, particularly with the steep increase in tuition fees (Guardian, 2017) and particularly if they had caring responsibilities or needed to work to support themselves as well as undertaking time consuming unpaid work to enhance their employability.

Higher education and early career experiences can shape the formation of character in both how people see themselves and how they present who they are to the world (Brown, Hesketh & Williams, 2003; Hinchliffe & Jolly, 2011; Tomlinson et al., 2017). Developing 'self-awareness' has long been a cornerstone of careers education since the classic 'DOTS model' (Law & Watts, 1977). However, the pressures of the employability agenda may shape what is seen as appropriate and desirable. Nowhere is this more evident than in the 'digital footprint' and 'personal branding' advice students often receive (Hooley & Cutts, 2018). 'Self-awareness' is, therefore a misnomer as it must adopt a spin and develop those aspects of their selves which are seen as desirable to potential employers. In other words, they must be different but in a socially acceptable way (Gershon, 2017).

An interesting observation was that participants rarely got out of their unpaid work experience (only) what they had expected to (CV building). Experience gained through these unpaid opportunities was often described simultaneously in terms of mobility capital and as personally beneficial:

> *'it's a great thing to put on my CV and it's a great thing to talk about at interviews I wouldn't take it back for the world'* (Imogen)

Acknowledging the intrinsic benefits of undertaking experiences could be useful in helping students and graduates to succeed in placements, as well as more generally in higher education (in the words of Nietzsche *'the end of a melody is not its goal'*). This addresses the research question about motives and outcomes relating to unpaid work experiences.

Brown et al. (2003) suggested that individuals are motivated to be either *'players'* or *'purists'* in their approach to CV-enhancing activities. However, this was an over-simplification of their experiences as an individual might be both a 'purist' and a 'player' at the same time, utilising some forms of unpaid work for career capitals and yet others for

altruistic motives. This aligns with work of Holdsworth and Quinn (2010) who found that motivations of students who volunteer are often complex and include both instrumental and altruistic motivations.

Of course, the research interview is very different from the job interview, but I was struck by the modesty and humility of the group overall. One possible explanation is that they were naively unaware of the need to promote themselves in an employable light (Greenbank, 2015) or they may lack the skills necessary to communicate in this way. A more positive explanation is that they are aware of this expectation but refused to be drawn into it, preferring instead to be themselves (authentic).

Summary

Working is an inherently human, embodied experience just as exercising geographical mobility by working in another city or country is also experienced physically. Knowledge and cultural capital are embodied, inherently grounded within a real person rather than free floating. It sometimes seems that humanity and individuality are overlooked by policy makers, statisticians, higher education providers and graduate employers and they are treated as a homogenous group (Tomlinson, 2007). This study focuses on a cohort of students and graduates who were part of the 'widening participation' agenda which presented an opportunity to highlight everyday experiences (Van Manen, 1990) of individuals who were neither the most nor least dis/advantaged.

This chapter illuminates the emotional and practical complexities of career and mobility decisions and how they are influenced by social and biographical circumstances (McMahon & Patton, 1995).The experiences of the participants bring to life the literature, describing the pressure of being seen as employable whilst also striving to establish an authentic identity (Hinchliffe & Jolly, 2011; Holmes, 2013; Jackson, 2016). Participants' accounts highlight how they remained persistent and optimistic even when they did not feel especially resilient (Luthans et al., 2004; Tomlinson et al., 2017). Charting their progress (Appendix XI) illustrates a positive interplay of structure and agency (Giddens, 2013; Archer, 2007) enhanced by quality work-related initiatives (Appendix III) particularly where financial support was available. Above all, the qualitative, 'appreciative inquiry' approach

of this thesis (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005) complements and contrasts 'grey literature' reports which often paint a pessimistic picture for graduates, particularly those who are already disadvantaged (Sutton Trust, 2019).

Chapter Six: Being in the World

The previous chapter introduced the individual participants through whose eyes we can now explicitly explore the phenomenon of contemporary unpaid work and career mobilities. This theme explores participants' experiences within 'the world' in a physical (spatial) and a metaphorical sense (e.g. 'world of work' and 'boundaryless career') under the following subthemes:

i.   Being in the world of (unpaid) work

ii.   Being in different 'worlds'

iii.   Being 'in the right place at the right time'

Being in the world of unpaid work

Although the research began with a focus on unpaid internships, it emerged that they are only one form of unpaid work undertaken by students. This subtheme identifies and delineates different types of unpaid work described by the participants and how they relate to career mobility.

Different types of unpaid labour

I undertook a mapping exercise of different types of unpaid labour in its broadest sense, to the extent that some of forms may not commonly be viewed as unpaid work. This builds on the work of Swan (2015) who identified the ambiguity of the term 'internship'. Some forms of unpaid labour are explicitly labelled, often when they involve 'going to work' i.e. a physical location and yet, if we consider the alternative term 'labour' it is easier to recognise many other forms of unpaid tasks which expend physical and mental energy and take time. This relates to Arendt's (1958) concepts of work, labour and action. I will outline the types of unpaid work highlighted through this research and then explain, illustrate and discuss each in turn. Some have already been identified and described briefly in Chapter Two (e.g. volunteering and work experience). The types identified are: unpaid internships; work experience; work placements; volunteering; 'opportunity not a job'; paid for experiences, opportunity cost work; over and above work; underemployment; job

applications/ employability-focused labour; travel to unpaid work; emotional labour, domestics/caring and digital labour (although some may slightly overlap).

Unpaid internships. These tended to be quite industry specific (e.g. creative industries) and short term. Terms are often interchangeable and confusing, as Rachel illustrates in describing her experience with the BBC:

> *'I say internship, but I don't know what they called it they probably didn't actually call it an internship they called it work experience, it was zero hours contracts although we worked full-time so we worked Monday to Friday nine till five for five weeks'* (Rachel)

Unpaid interns often did real work, sometime the work they applied for as 'paid' only to be offered the 'opportunity' to do it for nothing but valuable experience. This supports Swan (2015) who also identified this phenomenon and argues that internship providers tend to emphasise intrinsic rewards when money is absent (Beebe et al., 2009; Maynard, 1997). This perhaps also explains why few participants openly expressed a sense of exploitation. (Perlin, 2012). The findings also echo Perlin's (2012) assertion that unpaid internships have become a normal and accepted phenomenon and as important as a degree, yet they can perpetuate social inequalities and exploitation. Unpaid internships were just a small part of this picture and they did not conform to the government definition that they should either be paid or purely observational (Gov.uk, 2016).

Work experience. Although it may seem unusual to class this as unpaid work as such, even at an early age (high school), work experience focused on developing future skills and awareness in preparation for work. Usually nothing is expected from the student who typically observes work practices or undertakes menial, low-skilled or routine tasks.

> *'when you're 16, I think work experience put me off stuff rather than make me want to do stuff, so it was useful for thinking 'actually I don't ever want to work in A and E, I never want to be a paramedic' it was more useful for that'* (Sarah)

Work experience is valuable in developing 'opportunity awareness' (Law & Watts, 2003). Both positive and negative work experiences (even short term) could still be hugely life-changing and influential (Ahmed et al., 2017) even if only to discount future career ideas (Houston & Cunningham, 2018). A fundamental assumption of the usefulness of work experience in selection has been challenged by a recent meta-analysis (Van Iddekinge,

Arnold, Frieder & Roth, 2019) which found that it is a very weak predictor of future work performance, job related skills and likelihood to stay in the job. However, when faced with a surplus of applicants who all have similar attributes it is one way to discriminate between them. Neary (2014) expressed concern that unequal access to work experiences can disadvantage some students, as not all high schools arrange work experience and some may charge a fee to do so (TES, 2014).

Work placement. This is optionally undertaken during a degree but not a paid 'sandwich year'. In some cases, the employer may be paid, e.g. by the university, to 'employ' a student in the UK. In other cases, the placement might be overseas and funded (paid for but not paid e.g. China, Uganda, India placements detailed in Appendix IV).

> *'one of them was 150 hours marketing project but they didn't know what they wanted marketing, so they got an undergrad in to do it'* (Violet)

This differs from work experience as it is usually longer term, more formally organised and undertaken at a later stage (higher education rather than school or college).

Volunteering. In some cases, volunteers offered valuable skills and expertise on a 'pro bono' basis (which might otherwise have been undertaken for payment) whilst other instances were arguably more beneficial to the volunteer (e.g. observational placements in international healthcare). There were also accounts of informal community-based activities:

> *'I just like to get involved I always have, even just little things like donating to charities or one-off money collections for instance I collected money as a friend of a friend's daughter had passed away, so I got involved'* (Cathy)

Both formal and informal types of volunteering were common (Cnaan & Amrofell, 1994; Bennett et al., 2017). Participants usually spoke most favourably about volunteering and it appeared to be the most rewarding in terms of intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Volunteering activities seemed to help foster longer-term and more productive relationships and lead on to other opportunities more than unpaid work and internships did (Lee & Brudney, 2012).

'An opportunity not a job'. This was a common situation whereby the student/graduate applied for a paid role but was offered an unpaid 'opportunity to gain experience' almost as a consolation prize. This may be a cynical exploitative move by the employer or a genuine wish to help. In the case of Rachel, this was doing the same job as the paid recruit:

> *'yeah I didn't get the actual job, but I was offered an opportunity to go and do some of the work if you like because they felt like I did a good job in the interview but didn't have enough experience'* (Rachel)

In Milly's case this offer of unpaid opportunity came from her rather than the employer:

> *'I was looking for jobs but I didn't use the word 'job' because I didn't want to seem like I was after something so I just used the word 'opportunity' then the HR manager just got back to me when I emailed her and I asked her if she had any opportunities and she said you can do a month placement'* (Milly)

This reflects the relative powerlessness of students and graduates in the labour market and their need to make sacrifices and compromises in order to gain experience which will be discussed in later chapters. It also shows how the 'opportunity' element of unpaid work may be emphasised to make it more appealing (Maynard, 1997).

'Paid for' internship or volunteering. Some students paid to do an unpaid internship, usually internationally, to an organisation acting as a broker offering a placement plus accommodation and support.

> *'It's quite expensive, I think I paid about £1800 for one month of accommodation'* (Zahir)

This kind of 'voluntourism' has become increasingly popular in recent years (Raymond and Hall, 2008)

'Opportunity cost' work. The internship/work is not only unpaid (i.e. neutral cost) but costs the student because they miss out on the money they would have otherwise earned (i.e. taking time off part-time job, still paying for accommodation back home, travel costs, food).

> *'I wasn't getting a wage for a month while I was out there'* (Kaitlyn)

In non-financial terms it might prevent them from doing something else which could be good for their career longer-term (often cited as a reason for NOT doing unpaid work as they need to spend the time revising which was judged to offer greater chance of future financial reward e.g. Harriet, Hassia).

'Over and above' unpaid work. Some students provided free work to organisations as an 'add-on' to university work-based projects (e.g. Violet, Milly):

'I didn't have any marketing experience, so it was essentially an unpaid project but was part of my undergraduate research. It was all about brand awareness, so I went to a lot of their meetings where they plan their events, they used to ask my opinion on things, and I helped them set up the social media for the team which wasn't part of my project initially. I ended up doing more than a normal student would do' (Violet)

Underemployment. This is huge and very grey area of unpaid work, meaning that the worker is paid for a job that requires a lower level of skill than they possess:

'I was like 'I've got this degree and I just keep washing and dressing dead bodies, how have I got here?' (Kayla)

All the graduates in the research (and some of the first destinations of the students on follow-up) were in this position (Kayla, Malik, Rachel). Underemployment is a huge issue for new graduates and there can be a hidden unpaid element to it, as individuals may utilise their higher skills for their own satisfaction or recognition of potential and possible promotion (Scurry & Blenkinsop, 2019). This could alternatively be described as 'over-education' and can be demotivating for the individual (Caspada-Munsech, 2017). Working-class graduates may be more likely to get stuck in such jobs than their middle-class counterparts (Burke, 2015).

Job applications & employability-focused labour. Students reported that, in addition to their studies and part-time working they found this time-consuming and mentally challenging:

'finding a job is a full-time job' (Kayla)

The task of mobilising or 'cashing in' unpaid experience (i.e. converting it into a good job) was an additional task of labour requiring proactivity and urgency. Rachel & Kayla

expressed regret that they missed the 'window of opportunity' and blamed themselves for this.

Travel to unpaid work. Participants sometimes mentioned this travel (unpaid time, no expenses) as an additional consideration which is often overlooked yet can form a barrier not only to geographical mobility but also consequently to social mobility.

'they wasted your time, they didn't turn up for meetings, that kind of thing so I'd go from here to Blackpool back and forth and they had gone out for another meeting and forgot to cancel' (Violet)

Jack reframed the time to travel from home to his internship & London work experiences as 'his own':

'I quite like the travel time though because I optimise it quite well, I'm either reading constantly or writing my own things, writing poetry, stories, things like that so I quite like that because that's my own time, the travel time' (Jack)

Travelling to work is arguably part of work itself as recent tribunal cases have ruled (BBC, 2015b).

Emotional labour, domestics & caring. Although this is not traditionally considered as 'work' it forms part of the portfolio that students must balance. Furthermore, there are a whole range of additional everyday tasks that involve supporting others, making arrangements, administration, etc that create a mental and practical workload for known as 'mothers' load' (Stone, 2005; Ingledue, 2017). Traditionally, domestic labour (housework) and caring responsibilities are considered to be gendered (housewives – Fedici, 1974) and yet this was not always the case; Kevin was a carer for his mum, Jennifer and Malik took responsibility for siblings. This could also include aspects of volunteering that involve caring for others such as paramedic, student helpline, nurse (many of which were undertaken by the participants). Often this type of labour inhibited the undertaking of other, capital-building types. Although the phrase 'emotional labour' has evolved to represent the duties outlined above, this was not the original intention in Hochschild's (1983) definition which related specifically to the managing of emotions in a workplace (e.g. being expected to smile and be friendly). As Wilding, Chae and Jang (2015) warn, this effort can create emotional dissonance and ultimately stress and burnout in employees.

This suggests it could also be contributory factor in the stress and anxiety the participants expressed.

Digital labour.   Some participants regularly contributed time, knowledge and experience to social media and websites. The piecemeal and flexible nature of contributions perhaps made it feel less like real work and enabled participants to fit it in around other commitments:

'it wasn't really that noticeable it was just whenever they asked for something or if I had spare time' (Jack)

Digital labour was particularly common amongst students hoping to gain experience and skills in marketing, media and journalism. In this modern form of marketplace individuals are 'prosumers' - producers and also consumers (Toffler, 1980; Kotler, 1986). Although participants may have positive intentions and outcomes of building networks and helping others this work is often unpaid (Fuchs & Sevignani, 2013). Jacobin (2014) labelled people who undertaken unpaid digital labour 'the voluntariat' and argued they are performing skilled work that directly creates profit for a corporation.

Casual arrangements and the uncertainty of not knowing what exactly their role was appeared to be unsettling for many of the participants as they often described feeling surplus to requirements:

'going to the local hospital I would literally just make cups of tea, go round with my trolley and clean stuff but then all the other volunteers would have done that that day so there'd be nothing to do and then I'd be like 'Hey so what should I do now?' but the nurses were busy so it was probably a strain on their time me following them round and they were like 'ah talk to patients' (Harriet)

For others, not knowing whether there would be any payment or if it would lead to any future opportunities added to anxiety of being in a different environment with its own (often unspoken) rules. It was not necessarily just the lack of money per se, but the expectations and conditions associated with this kind of work that participants described as significant. This understanding of the workplace is something that students and graduates felt unprepared for and relates to concepts of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) and the psychological contract (Rousseau, 1995). Careers education could helpfully

introduce these ideas although practical experiences might be necessary to create true understanding. This will be discussed later, in Chapter Eight and conclusions.

This theme brings together, for the first time, the different types of unpaid work as experienced from the perspective of the individual. Although they are delineated here, it was common for individuals to be managing a combination of the above. It is important to mention that some of them are not always unpaid. The previous chapter identified vulnerability as a common element of being in unpaid work. The findings here show how the environmental context can compound this. The world and systems within which they live frames the experiences and expectations of individuals (McMahon & Patton, 1995). Some of these influences are taken-for-granted, for example, students were surprisingly accepting of unpaid work. However, there was little reference by participants to how their attitudes might have been shaped by this wider context they inhabited, for example, peers, government policy, messages from universities, etc.

Although unpaid work can be confusing, unethical and inequitable few participants expressed a sense of exploitation and there were more positive or neutral comments, in general, than negative. Participants seemed to experience volunteering and work placements more positively than unpaid work and internships in the way they were treated and what they gained from it:

> *'this is actually a real job and they needed someone to do it rather than...whereas my unpaid internships were just ad hoc admin work, I felt a lot of the time just really bored and unmotivated and like I didn't really need to be there'* (Mary)

This research highlights the extent to which students and graduates, particularly the 'middle band' are often juggling an array of different roles and responsibilities (many unpaid) alongside their studies (Evans, Gbadamosi & Richardson, 2014). Boundaries were often blurred between various types of unpaid work in participants' daily lives with varying degrees of success. Those who had significant caring responsibilities or who had a paid job to support themselves often found it the most difficult. Although there was unequal ability to access opportunities, students in the study were highly motivated and self-efficacious in seeking out experiences and carving out time for them.

Whilst many of the forms of unpaid work may be obvious (e.g. unpaid internships, volunteering) there are others which would not traditionally be considered 'work' (e.g. job applications, employability-focused labour). These tasks were identified by participants as significant demands on their time, effort and resources. This complex picture of types of work is symptomatic of the erosion of boundaries between different aspects and stages of life and career.

Being in different worlds

Being in worlds different to their own – literally and metaphorically - was a shared aspect that characterised experiences of unpaid work and career mobility opportunities, in geographically and spatially different worlds, different social structures or different environments of education and work. These different 'fields' often seemed to demand different behaviours and values, also different forms of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1976) were dominant.

Zahir talked extensively about the convergence of British and Asian cultures throughout his life, explaining how his dual identity was perceived by his family and himself:

> *Zahir: my parents always call me the coconut of the family, it's basically the Asian way of saying you're brown on the outside and white on the inside, it's a commonly used phrase in the Asian community*
>
> *Me: is it a compliment or an insult or neither?*
>
> *Zahir: it's an insult if you're older generation… I personally see it as a great compliment, I'm like 'you know that's fine by me I'd rather be two colours than one'*

This was an example of how some participants seemed to become chameleon-like, developing and maintaining social and cultural capital to simultaneously fit in with the habitus' of both their own community (e.g. ethnicity or social class) and the peer group and workplace. It illustrates beautifully how Zahir reframed external messages so that they were congruent with his own developing sense of who he was. It also highlights the role differential opportunities play in shaping social mobilities and the interplay of individual agency with structural dimensions such as family, community, education and globalisation (systems theory framework – McMahon & Patton, 1995).

Social class and mobility

As well as cultural differences, some students were actively traversing class boundaries, usually from a working-class to a middle-class environment (although sometimes vice versa, e.g. Mary). Throughout Ella's interview it was clear that she was constantly seeking opportunities to build cultural capital in the activities she undertook and people she mixed with in order to improve her social status:

> *'my dad's background is very much working class and my mum, her background is perhaps slightly more middle class but through how her life developed I would say that both her and my dad together are working class in that it's hand to mouth with the income and whenever money comes in it goes straight back out there is no savings or anything, I would say the only thing that maybe puts them out of the working class box is that they are homeowners', so **I've already started mobilising myself** to be middle-class in the sense that I've got a university degree for example and moving forward, financially I'm hoping to be in a better situation than they are'* (Ella)

The phrase *'I've already started mobilising myself'* was very interesting in that it demonstrated how she was proactive in exercising individual agency within a social structure she perceived as fluid and meritocratic. However, moving between these different worlds, in a practical sense of mixing with more middle-class people as a result of her grammar school education, contributed to Ella's anxiety:

> **'***I would say that the anxiety could possibly be attributed to that social mobility shift in that my ex-boyfriend, his mum was particularly posh as I would say, she was a very middle-class mum and, for me I never felt good enough for her son'* (Ella)

To those who specifically mentioned class, traditional objective indicators (e.g. post code area, occupation of parents, salary, etc) seemed inaccurate and inappropriate. Participants such as Cathy were irritated and resistant towards being labelled:

> *'I'm supposed to be from a deprived background whatever that means, my parents worked and lived in social housing… I now own my own home, but we live in a so-called deprived area but we both work so what are we? Are we working class, are we middle-class, are we underclass? I don't know, but I find it insulting I also find it very **strange**, because I just don't want to be labelled. We just live where we live!'* (Cathy)

A further significant point in Cathy's quote is the use of the word 'strange' which leads on to a fascinating and unexpected finding about how participants seemed to experience their transitions between different worlds, which I will discuss later in this chapter.

Originally, a demographic question was to ask people how they would define or describe their social class. Most of the UK participants had a clear view on this (interestingly, their perceptions of their own class were much more complex than a quick survey answer and may not have borne any correlation with external classifications and categories – e.g. Ella, Cathy). Participants who originated from outside the UK did not appear to experience social classification and consequent inequalities in the same way as UK students. They may not display trademark class habitus characteristics such as accent, dress, potentially defining education history or family legacy of class identification. However, they may have experienced inequalities of a different nature, for example on the grounds of race or other features such as university attended:

> *me: what you think stopped you from getting through on that?*
>
> *Z: erm… Possibly the calibre, I think possibly the unique name and my CV because when you read the job spec and everything and when I put my uni I had to put 'other'*

As the participant cohort was so diverse, I realised quite early in the interviews that social class is a British preoccupation.

Sarah suggested perceptions of her identity and social status shifted depending upon the context she was in (university or work). Here in the first quote she is positioned as underprivileged whereas her earlier quote (*'white straight female'*) described her privileges:

> *'in the first year of uni I went to all these talks about if you were the first person in your family to go to university and you were from an 'underprivileged' background, I'm not from an underprivileged background but in a university sense I am which is weird'* (Sarah)

Sarah's awareness of and reflection upon this paradox perhaps helped her to make sense of and to challenge these relative labels.

In this sample social class appeared to be malleable and subjective to some participants, or else irrelevant. When it was significant it was a highly emotive topic (Cathy, Ella, Sarah),

generating feelings of indignation at being stereotyped and stresses of spanning classes. This raises a fundamental question about the meaning of the phrase 'social mobility' – does it mean that people move into a different social class and adopt the habitus by displaying new behaviours, for example, the way they dress, talk or other cultural signals (Bourdieu, 1984)? Or does/should it mean that individuals can remain true to their origins and yet still be mobile in the sense that they can still access and be accepted into new social spaces without having to change? Although the latter is becoming more commonplace, for example, TV presenters with regional accents, working-class politicians, more diverse recruitment for civil service fast-stream they may still be the exception rather than the rule. The very concept of 'social mobility' implies a value judgement, that one social class is better and more desirable than another and that people 'should' aspire to move. There is also an inherent elitism as not everyone can possibly be socially mobile, the opportunities are not equal. Surely the aim of society should not just be to facilitate the movement of a chosen few who have particular economic, social, cultural and/or symbolic capitals into a different class but to value and encourage everyone to achieve their potential where they are (e.g. creative people, carers and delivery workers are all vital to modern life).

My interpretation from this research is that social class undoubtedly exists as a constraint, but it is a spectrum rather than discrete categories and the most disadvantaged have less choice and control, the most privileged are similarly confined to their situation and have less opportunity or desire to exercise class mobility. Majors & Machin (2019) argue that society should develop and invest in all talents and in all regions. Their recent research supports the above conclusion that flexibility in social status is more restricted for those at the top and the bottom. For this 'middle band' though, there is more opportunity to inhabit a wider range of mobilities and habitus'. Education and work can offer opportunities through a combination of proactive experience building, qualifications and maybe some luck. This can help individuals to mediate the effects of social structures and the participants of this research have, so far, been very successful in converting their unpaid experiences into graduate jobs (Appendix XI). This focus on positive examples of how students and graduates have overcome structural challenges to achieve success complements 'deficit-focused' research and makes a unique contribution to understanding graduate outcomes and mobilities.

Being geographically im/mobile - local

A notable and probably quite unusual characteristic of the research sample was that all the participants had experienced international travel, many of them for the first time through the good practice initiatives identified in Appendix IV (K4C, Launchpad) which were only possible for some because they were funded. This presented a valuable opportunity to understand the impact of such mobility experiences which were often transformative and not taken-for-granted. The diversity of the sample provided an unusual insight into mobilities of young people with different backgrounds and prior experiences. It is such a significant dimension of the research that it sparked a collaborative piece of research with a colleague who had found some of the same themes in her PhD (Christie, 2018). I will talk here about the aspects which do not overlap (specifically relating to unpaid work rather than graduate migration and mobility in general) and then refer to the research report for further detail (Cunningham & Christie, 2019).

Many participants described themselves as 'well-travelled' or particularly open-minded about living and working internationally.

> *'I have been kind of everywhere at this point I have been to the US several times, apparently I've been to Jamaica and Thailand, I don't remember that but I've been all around Europe and of course Israel, I've been to Jordan, not been to South America very much but other than that a lot of places yeah'* (Imogen)

However, Imogen later made the distinction between travelling with family and independent travel, which was a big step even for her:

> *'that was the first time I'd really travelled by myself… I hadn't even gone on holiday with friends till that point...'* (Imogen on volunteering in Israel and the USA).

Students who identified as middle-class or had parents who were non-British had experienced more geographical mobility:

> *'I've got a Dutch mum who at 18 just decided 'sod it I'm going to Israel', it's inbuilt in the family sort of thing so ideally I'd like to go abroad'* (Brad)

Some of the participants were either from non-UK European countries (Dominika, Justyna) or their parents were (Brad, Ella) and exercised mobility around Europe. *'Never been outside of Europe'* was a phrase commonly used by UK participants (perhaps implying that

they identify with living in Europe) to describe their prior mobility and the opportunity that their unpaid experiences afforded them:

> *'personally, I've never been outside of Europe and I've never been on a long-haul flight so those were the first two things that I was doing'* (Ella)

London featured in most of the interviews and many participants had studied, lived and/or undertaken unpaid work there in the past or intended to in the future. This was particularly noticeable with participants who aspired to a career in media or a graduate management scheme.

> *'Ideally I'd like to move back to London I just miss it for some reason, I don't know, I love Manchester, but I think London is where you should be when you want a career in the media'* (Dominika)

Jack talked about London as an escape from his rural northern town and contrasting in opportunities it offered (discussed in Chapter Five). He was prepared to invest significant time and money to regularly work there, unpaid. The lure of London was that he believed it was an essential first step for a journalism career and held opportunities for building career capitals, fuelled by the 'push' of his own working-class hometown and its limited and contrasting job market.

Interestingly, London was often mentioned even amongst those who didn't intend to move there, as if to justify a decision:

> *'if I had to choose between London or abroad it will be abroad because I've been to London a few times and I do enjoy it for a small period but living there would be, I think, painful'* (Brad)

London and Manchester were positioned almost as binary opposites and yet separate from the rest of the world:

> *'I'd just literally been like Manchester, London, Manchester, London, Manchester, London for quite a while and just to get out and see the big wide world was just amazing* (Harriet)

An aspiration to study or work elsewhere in the short-term but then to return 'home' in the longer term was echoed by several participants, for example Augustus:

'In my mind at the moment it's a temporary move in the sense that it's 5 to 7 years and then I feel I would have got the most I can out of everything London has to offer, and the idea may be to come back to the North and to kind of give back everything I've got' (Augustus)

'Being at home' (including 'near home' or 'coming back home') was a highly significant and dominant theme for many of the participants. Feasibility of opportunities was based on costs of mobility (in time, money and opportunity, which will be discussed later in Chapter Eight, Being & Things). This may be for the same reasons most of the participants had already chosen to attend a local university:

'so it was, financially, would I be able to live away from home? Would I be able to support myself and so that's when it became a choice of local universities and so in the end I chose (current university and two others in the North West of England) cos I could drive, and I'd be able to live at home with the support of my parents' (Ella)

For Ella, the support of her parents refers not only to finance but also emotional and moral support.

Regional migration and loyalty (Ball, 2015) was a strong theme with many participants feeling torn between staying at home and going away. It was clear that mobility decisions were complex and rarely purely logical (Finn, 2015). Geographical mobility can have a direct positive, transactional impact upon career success however binary notions of mobility and fixity fail to capture the highly personalised patterns and hidden narratives (Morley et al., 2018). Regional graduate mobility and migration is particularly important to support the economic objectives of the 'Northern Powerhouse' as discussed earlier. An appreciation that *'there's no place like home'* (Cunningham & Christie, 2019) could benefit the North West economy, communities and families through stability and loyalty. Interestingly, none of the participants who had come to the North West from elsewhere expressed an intention to stay here (which was later borne out in destinations, Appendix XI). Understanding reasons for this may be helpful in attracting and retaining talent from elsewhere. Generational expert Howe (2014) has termed the new generation (Gen Z) the *'Homelanders'* because they are more inclined to stay 'at home' valuing nationalism, localism and their roots. Perhaps there has been a slight change in public attitude towards international mobility recently as concern grows around the carbon footprint and security of air travel.

'Being in the world' is as essential existential of lived human experience (Van Manen, 1990) reflecting Heidegger's assertion that Dasein exists in relation to and is embedded within the everyday world rather than being an objective observer. Later in his writing career, he returned to his simple rural roots, famously working in a cabin in the woods. A fierce criticism of Heidegger is his support of Nazism (Bourdieu, 1991) which is particularly relevant today as politics in the UK and the US have given rise to populist nationalism which has created a divisive and hostile environment. The concept of 'glonacalisation' (Marginson and Rhoades, 2002) challenges the inevitability that national or local focus necessarily negates a global outlook.

Contemporary workplaces are full of structural boundaries and yet students and new graduates, through internships and other forms of unpaid work, are in a unique position to be able to permeate and stretch these boundaries. Despite the pitfalls of early unpaid work experiences, a significant benefit appeared to be the opportunities to transcend sectors and organisations and gain access to valuable opportunity awareness and experience not easily open to people later in their careers. Even negative experiences could be beneficial ('career misery push' Houston & Cunningham, 2018) and relatively low risk.

Spanning different spheres such as education, communities and workplaces provided rich possibilities and resources, not only for the benefit of the students and graduates themselves but also for the places they subsequently applied their skills, knowledge and energy to create novel and insightful solutions. For example, Cathy's voluntary work with her community in the North West was applied to her voluntary placement in Uganda; Zahir's I.T. skills were valuable in a local charity; Molly and Violet's theoretical knowledge of Marketing from their studies were highly beneficial to small businesses they were placed in; Brad's football coaching skills help him in his leadership role; Harriet's people skills developed in a hospital café were taken with her into accountancy consulting. Their transferable skills and knowledge were highly valuable. They were effectively working like honeybees, picking up and cross-pollenating ideas across sectors and countries.

Being a mobile 'free-agent' worker (Williams, 2006) or 'visionary' (Clarke, 2009) may suit some people, at some stages of their lives. Gershon (2017) suggests the workplace environment has unwittingly created a generation of 'passionate quitters' who will happily

throw themselves into less desirable projects for the sake of their CV and yet they can be a liability to organisations if they move on quickly, taking their skills and enthusiasm with them. 'Plodders' (Clarke, 2009) may be valuable to society, providing a stable and dependable workforce. If this research were conducted from an employers' perspective it might reveal that they too can be victims of boundaryless and protean careers, investing in training new graduates only for them to move on.

Despite students being in a prime position, as boundary-spanners, to contribute to solving complex, 'wicked' problems facing the world through collaborative innovation across organisations, sectors and disciplines Mayer et al. (2016) suggest that they are rarely well prepared for this role through their higher education, which often focuses upon specialisation. Schmidt et al. (2012) suggest three pedagogical strategies: *teamwork, problem-based learning and 'scaffolding'* (whereby support is provided initially and then it is decreased as students become more proficient). The three case studies in Appendix IV (K4C, Launchpad and Career Success module) provide examples of effective boundary-spanning training in practice. What seems clear from this research is that students, universities and opportunity providers (including employers) can work together to proactively create opportunities for students to develop appropriate career skills. Such initiatives transferred tacit knowledge about workplace habitus and introduced them to valuable mentors and networks, which may have been especially useful for working-class and non-UK students.

Travelling and working (unpaid) internationally was a valuable way to develop cultural capital and mobility capital as well as social networks. As a British-born Asian in China, Zahir enthusiastically expanded his social network through his internship travels:

> *'when I was there I'd never met so many different people in my entire life, I met Australians, I met Americans, and met Italian, Swiss and I literally have some friends for life now who I communicate with pretty much on an everyday basis or at least weekly… and you get these fascinating people where you just don't get that experience unless you travel a bit and see new cultures'* (Zahir)

However, international travel (particularly volunteering) carries a risk of reinforcing stereotypes and the perceived superiority of their own culture, which will be discussed in Chapter Seven.

Difficulty in transferring learning between different contexts was a common experience, not just in the host country but sometimes on return to the UK. This raises a question of how international placements can best prepare students for the specifics of the UK workplace (and vice versa):

> *'it was a cultural thing that I didn't actually transfer over and that was completely my fault because I should have realised that's not how you act, that's not how you behave on a first shift, I should have known that, so I guess that learning a culture you need to be careful because when you come back home it is not the same thing'* (Imogen)

This illustrates that many workplace expectations are not spoken or written such as cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) and the psychological contract (Rousseau, 1995). For young people, this can create uncertainty and, in this case, shame on getting things wrong. However, this negative experience proved to be a memorable learning experience, equally as valuable as positive ones.

Participants often seemed to experience 'distance' subjectively. Rosie expressed how cultural similarity, proximity to family and purpose of the visit influenced her perception of distance, in that she classed Florida and a Spanish holiday resort as more familiar and closer than India regardless of actual distance. Although she enjoyed the trip she struggled with the unfamiliarity of the food, the culture, the language and being away from home:

> *'I went to Disneyland with my parents, my sister and my nan. But other than that, I have been to Spain but that was a holiday resort, and this was… it was educational… what was scary about it was the fact that I was a fourteen-hour flight away from home. I missed my mum. I missed my family'* (Rosie)

Many who had undertaken such experiences (even ones they described quite negatively) expressed a strong intention to exercise international mobility in their future careers (King & Ruiz-Gelices, 2003). As I had not interviewed them before they undertook this international experience it is not possible to gauge whether this had changed as a result of the opportunity or these participants already had a positive attitude to geographical mobility. However, Ella is an interesting example as she talked about her past (choice of university) as based on being near to home whereas, since undertaking a placement in China, her future could be more mobile:

> '*It definitely opened my mind to wanting to work internationally more, and I think the idea that you can do internships and stuff abroad, I think it did make my world bigger in the sense that travelling to certain places become more achievable'* (Ella)

There was still strong evidence of the 'mobility imperative' amongst this group (Cox, 2008; Cairns, 2014), many of whom felt the desire or the external pressure to gain experience in London or internationally. In exercising geographical mobility (particularly but not exclusively international), students and graduates navigated the physical borders and the journey itself, the cultural barriers (e.g. food, language) and their own 'comfort zone' or psychological boundaries and social and cultural norms. As such, international mobility of the participants conferred potential capital gains ('something to talk about in interviews' and new contacts – social and symbolic capital). Exposure to new and different places enhanced the kind of attributes that may be attractive to employers, such as confidence, creativity, problem-solving and communication. (psychological capitals – Luthans et al., 2004). Even relatively short-term international career mobility opportunities appeared to have transformative potential and build resilience and character. What they talked most about (and had often not expected) was the process of learning about the world, themselves and their future aspirations. It could also help to develop resilience and confidence and establish a favourable 'pre-professional identity' (Jackson, 2016), for example, being 'well-travelled'.

Being in a 'crazy' world

An interesting observation was how frequently participants described experiences as *'bizarre', 'strange', 'weird', 'crazy', 'shocking'* or similar:

> '*so that was quite **strange** because I invested so much, I'd been there every day for six weeks getting this research and then it was just, it was all gone for nothing it was quite **bizarre** and so that was my volunteer work'* (Kayla)

Sarah's experience of volunteering for the university student peer counselling service highlighted the incongruity between her and other people which struck her as *'weird'* yet *'good'*:

> '*It was kind of **weird** because (X) is such a small University it was **weird** thinking that all the people that ring I'm probably going to see at some point... Not in an awkward way but it was **weird** that all this stuff is going on in people's lives and I*

> *live quite a privileged life so to speak so I don't even realise that this stuff is going on in other people's lives which is **weird**… yeah it was good!'* (Sarah)

Perhaps this was just a case of dramatic language being used to make speech interesting, but this happened so often that I myself considered it rather 'uncanny' and thought that it must have significance.

Furthermore, some participants' anecdotes appeared to stir a strong mixture of contrasting and contradictory emotions (as in Sarah's quote above) whereby the participant described in detail all the worst aspects of the experience and then concluded in an overall positive way. Imogen's example of volunteering on ambulances illustrates this:

> *'night shifts were the **craziest** because they were like 11 PM to 7 AM in the morning which is when all the **crazy** things like people had stabbings, I never got to resuscitate anyone, but my friends saved lives, I did see somebody die… and yeah **crazy** things! So that was probably the biggest and the best summer of my life, **it was amazing'*** (Imogen)

There may be a feeling that the experience itself is not the most important thing but having done it and be able to present it in a positive way (e.g. on a CV) is the goal. I have found no research evidence for this phenomenon although I have uncovered an acknowledgement of it in the context of outdoor pursuits *'Type 2 fun is miserable while it's happening, but fun in retrospect'* (Cordes, 2017). This could be an area for future research. Alternatively, it may simply be an upbeat and polite way to signal the end of an interview response.

Imogen's quote also relates to 'time' both as a way of marking experience (11pm to 7am) and temporality offering the opportunity for reflection (*'best summer of my life'*) which also relates to the theme of temporality. Jennifer provided the strongest example of this phenomena (although it is difficult to reduce to a single quote) as she spoke rather negatively about her voluntary placement throughout the interview and yet when I asked at the end if she would recommend it to others she said *'yes, definitely!'*

A possible explanation for this reported experiencing of the world as 'crazy' and uncanny may be revealed through the work of Heidegger (in the interpretation of Withy, 2015) and existential philosophers such as Sartre who followed his line of thought. 'Uncanniness' is the common translation of his *'unheimlichkeit'* or *'unhomeliness'*/not at home with the world which is a sense of unfamiliarity Dasein experiences as a result of being *'thrown'* into

the world. Previously 'taken-for-granted' aspects are seen in a new and curious light. Although disconcerting, this sense of 'uncanniness' is an opportunity which reveals new horizons of possibility or understandings in the process of making sense of the world. This seemed to resonate with many accounts of transformative experiences (Mezirow, 2000). These are *'interesting times'* indeed and perhaps the participants were entirely justified in their regular exclamations about its unsettling nature on learning to be independent adults and face aspects of it for the first time. Perhaps as we grow older and more accustomed to the world we become less easily shocked by injustice or less amazed and awed by new places, people and experiences.

Being in the right place at the right time – unpaid work and serendipity

At least eighteen of the twenty-four participants referred to luck, chance or being in the right place at the right time. Some found their opportunities through the 'luck' of knowing These comments seemed to reflect a sense of determinism and structural or systemic, external locus of control (Rotter, 1990).

> *'because I don't really know what my career is going to be, I've just kind of done random things so … I guess I'm just waiting and seeing now'* (Hassia)

> *'I'm a massive believer that everything happens for a reason, all that rubbish… there's no reason I'd work in x-ray and they'd have a mammogram clinic that afternoon when I was on that bit, like how strange and how strange that I was so so so shy, I didn't ask any questions all week and the one thing I wanted to talk about was that, I don't know what made me ask about that… or randomly speaking to my mums colleague who knew the head of stuff at the (specialist cancer hospital) and how strange, why does that happen? I don't know but it does!'* (Sarah)

Throughout her interview Sarah often acknowledged serendipity as instrumental in her career opportunities, however, she also made many references to how conscientious she was which suggests that she was very modest or unaware about her own efficacy.

Later in her interview Sarah expressed powerfully how the 'luck' experienced by her best friend was facilitated by privilege in reality:

'one of their tasks was to go find another 'old boy' who they could go and work with so he just found somebody who'd already been to Oxford, he was just speaking to people at the boat race, as you do if you go to Oxford (laughs) and one of the people just said 'yeah come down for an interview' and he did and he got that internship (at Canary Wharf)… I mean he got all A*s at A-level and he hasn't got it through chance, he's worked really hard for these things, but that opportunity isn't available to me' (Sarah)

Although many of the participants attributed their experiences to luck, underlying this was often a lot of effort, financial sacrifice or initiative taking. Zahir was highly proactive and hard-working, not only in his degree but also in gaining valuable unpaid work experience. Alongside his studies and volunteering he undertook paid work to save up thousands of pounds to do a commercial internship in China:

'I was very very, very lucky when I got there…had an absolutely amazing time, one of the best experiences of my entire life even though you're working for free (laughs)' (Zahir)

Not only was he 'working for free' but paying for the privilege, however, the luck he describes refers to the quality of the placement once he was there in comparison with some other interns he met who had less useful placements.

Having a positive attitude towards their situation helped some participants make meaning of their circumstances, for example Milly surprisingly identified how she *was "a lot luckier than other people because my mum and dad are divorced"* meaning she received means tested maintenance grant (based solely on her mother's income) which she would not have to repay.

Narratives of luck were subjective (e.g. Milly saying she was lucky her parents were divorced so she got more maintenance grant) and relative (someone who has little may perceive a modest opportunity as very lucky whereas, to a person who has more it may not even register). There may be some post-hoc rationalisation, justifying choices and ignoring or forgetting those events which passed by or turned out to be less fortunate. When overloaded with options it is reassuring to think that the right things will just happen by chance. However, such beliefs may obstruct useful career thinking (Houston & Cunningham, 2018) and cause individuals to miss out on other opportunities. McDonald

(2011) and Skeggs (2004) argue that serendipity is a result of privilege in that 'chance' opportunities are often facilitated by existing social networks.

McMahon and Patton's (1995) systems framework represents 'chance' with bolts of lightning which traverse the boundaries of time, environment and the individual. References to luck, chance or serendipity often arose, unprompted, in interviews when participants described how they accessed unpaid work opportunities and how these led to further opportunities. Being in the right place at the right time, randomly clicking on a weblink or finding an opening with a local employer were common anecdotes. This supports my earlier observation about modesty of this group as 'being in the right place at the right time' usually requires the agency to get themselves to that place. An important role of careers education is to raise awareness of the influence of both planning and chances (which could be positive or negative events) and both structure and agency on career progress. The 'planned happenstance' model of career planning (Mitchell, Levin & Krumboltz, 1999) in practical terms, advocates simultaneous planning and an openness to new opportunities.

> *'Chance plays an important role in everyone's career. No one can predict the future with any accuracy. On any given day, no one knows for sure what people will be met, who will call, or what letters or e-mail messages will arrive. If one day cannot be predicted, what is the likelihood that future plans spanning 2, 5, or even 20 years can be realized with any accuracy?'*   Mitchell et al. (1999)

A very frequent occurrence was that gaining one unpaid work opportunity created a chain of events, leading to another (often better) opportunity. This happened either directly through development of social contacts or through gathering career capitals which then enabled access to further opportunities. This created a snowball effect which enabled accumulation of career capitals. Mary was a good example of this as she could clearly track how her *'boring'* work experience during high school holidays directly led to a sequence of increasingly prestigious and responsible internships then a well-paid placement year and subsequently success in securing a good graduate job:

> *'I think it really helped to start young because every job you apply for will need experience so even if you have a tiny bit of experience that leads to a bit more experience that leads to longer experience, it helps every step'* (Mary)

Mary's interview overall illustrated her conscious awareness of how capitals work and the demonstrated her ability to skilfully hyper-mobilise even a 'tiny bit' of experience for greater gains. Perhaps her chosen discipline of marketing also helped her to market herself in this way.

Accumulation of advantage/career capitals and translation into economic capital (through a good job) was not always automatic and may be time-bound. A coveted (unpaid) internship at the BBC led to other opportunities for Rachel but she was unable to mobilise this potential advantage (in her own opinion):

> *'That opportunity was definitely as a result of being at the BBC, it was a couple of weeks' worth of work but valuable experience in the film and TV industry…yeah it was a good experience and it didn't actually amount to anything and that's probably because of the choices that I made then, you know, I suppose the value in this sort of work is not necessarily that it's long-term because it's so ephemeral, you do it and unless you choose to pick that ball up and run with it, it won't necessarily mean anything anymore than somebody that has a part-time job in a shop, you know, it only means something if you do something with it… And I didn't really'* (Rachel)

Rachel's quote illustrates eloquently that she has a good understanding of the notion of career capital (perhaps in retrospect) as potentially valueless and dependent upon choices, timing, motivation and (as she says elsewhere) networks and tenacity.

Social capital may be context-specific and not transferable, as Imogen discovered:

> *'that was a horrible thing I couldn't find a job when I came back from the US because my contacts were all in the US but now, I don't know anybody, I have nobody here'* (Imogen)

This illustrates how even a well-travelled, high academic achiever, from an affluent family with relevant work experiences can still struggle to gain a foothold in a new environment. She had to work extra hard to begin to build up local cultural and social capital. This seemed to temporarily knock her confidence in herself and what she might achieve.

Even within the same context this capital may be easily lost if people move on. After voluntary work at a wildlife reserve *'about two years on and off doing bits of this and bits of that'* Kayla felt *'really lost'* when her unpaid work did not pay off. *'Groundwork'* is a metaphor (fitting to the job she was doing) which alludes to building career capitals:

> *'the reserve manager became a really good friend and there was gonna be a chance of work at the end of it, however she got made redundant and somebody took over…my contact was completely lost in that place because of staff turnover, within months there was nobody left so I'd sort of done all this **groundwork** for nothing really and I'd done my dissertation there and everything and he just wasn't interested, he just didn't care about what I'd done before'* (Kayla)

Kayla felt that she had made an investment of time and effort which she hoped was a fair exchange for valuable social capital and perhaps a future job offer. Her feelings of frustration and anger at having to start all over again were understandable and yet there had been no guarantee or explicit promise of reward (psychological contract - Rousseau, 1995).

As discussed earlier, participants often seemed to blame themselves for perceived failures and yet, when things were going well, this considered lucky or attributed to help from other people. This combination could be detrimental to self-esteem. The reverse of this, though, would be people who blame others for failures and take all credit for successes which is perhaps not in the best interests of the world either. Bathmaker et al. (2013) suggest that working class students are more likely to attribute their success to luck than their own efforts. Other theories (Rotter, 1954, 1990) suggest that internal or external locus of control is an individual, personality difference between people. Dacre-Pool and Sewell (2007) are more optimistic in suggesting that, through experience and reflection, students can develop the '3 Ss' of self-efficacy, self-esteem and self-confidence to become more employable.

Summary

Participants undertook a wide range of different forms of unpaid work alongside and after their university studies. This transitional phase of their lives was often experienced as 'strange' or 'crazy' and many felt unprepared. They realised that having a degree was necessary yet not sufficient (Tomlinson, 2008). However, they learnt that just having experiences was not enough either, they had to be able to transfer the skills to a new context and to be able to 'hypermobilise' them into the future (Bathmaker et al., 2013). This required confidence, communication skills and an understanding of what was required in different contexts (Kaufmann et al. 2004). Timing was also key with some participants

feeling they had missed the window of opportunity. Whilst failures were often seen as their own responsibility (Rotter, 1954; Shamir, 2008) successes were often attributed to luck rather than their own effort.

Attention in political and social discourse has focused largely upon unpaid internships and their exploitative and unfair nature (e.g. Sutton Trust, 2018). This chapter has revealed and articulated the complexity of the unpaid working lives of students and graduates. Amongst the participants there was a consensus of the value of internships as a short-term opportunity to boost career capitals, yet a sense of unfairness they were not paid for doing real work. This capacity for compromise and delayed gratification (Goleman, 1996) may be key to their success.

Mobility featured strongly in all the participant interviews, in terms of regular commutes to places of work and study, travelling to and from London for opportunities or exposure to international opportunities such as volunteering and internships. Reactions to this exposure were complex and individualised, for some, making the world a bigger place and yet for others reinforcing the desirability of 'home' (Cunningham & Christie, 2019). Attitudes to mobility were influenced by many factors (social ties, money, fear/excitement) and could change over time. This suggests that approaches to researching student and graduate mobility and migration need to acknowledge this fluidity (Brooks & Waters, 2018). The research builds upon the work of Ball (2015) in understanding mobility decisions of graduates, for example, those remaining 'loyal' to the region.

The findings of the research suggest that the concept of the boundaryless career (Dany, 2014; Arthur, 1994) remains a valuable theoretical concept in understanding the unpaid labour market. The theory is adapted in this chapter to reflect the multi-faceted, early-career working patterns of students and graduates. This seems a phenomenon peculiar to this 'middle band' of young people who aspire to successful graduate careers and yet at this stage of their life do not have sufficient career capitals to compete. Responsibilities of adulthood appeared to creep downwards into their 'pre-career' (Jackson, 2016) studenthood - a stage of life previously protected from pressures of the working world - in a vertical as well as horizontal 'boundarylessness' to modern careers. Whereas Arthur's (1994) original vision of boundaryless careers symbolised freedom and agency for the

individual, for the participants it also often represented structural constraint. It seemed that they experienced boundaries, yet they may be flexible, permeable and changing and stretch ever wider and earlier in their lives.

This research contributes to the literature regarding the nature and types of unpaid work (including, but not limited to internships) undertaken by students which is currently under-researched (Swan, 2015; Buzdugan, 2017). It adopts a systemic view of this phenomenon, considering how undertaking unpaid work impacts upon and is affected by other aspects of their life over time (McMahon & Patton, 1995). It also complements research by Ahmed et al. (2017) highlighting the need for ethical and supportive international student placements. Understanding everyday experiences and challenges from the perspective of the student and new graduate is valuable in informing policy and practice of universities, career professionals, employers, parents and the wider community. Ultimately, this benefits individuals yet also enables them to fully contribute to society.

Chapter Seven: Being with Others

In all interviews, participants spoke very frequently about others as an integral part of their experiences. This chapter will discuss the following subthemes about others in relation to unpaid career mobility opportunities:

i. Being supported and connected (parents and mentors)

ii. Being compromised (employers)

iii. Being like everyone else/being different (peers and society)

Parents and mentors were most often described in a nurturing, supportive role (particularly mothers) whereas employers or managers were frequently described in a negative manner. Relationships with peers and siblings were more complex, sometimes viewed as competitors and social comparators yet also people *'in the same boat'*. It is important to note that the categories are simplifications and could overlap.

Being connected and supported - Parents and other family members

Parents can play a key role in reproducing social structures by using their own social capital for the benefit of children according to Bourdieu (1986). This research evidences this and shows the many other ways in which parents may influence young peoples' experiences of unpaid work and mobility.

Many of the opportunities undertaken by the participants were found through word of mouth and people they knew, i.e. social capital. This illustrates that knowing the right people or having family and friends who know people who can provide opportunities (even unpaid) that can give young people a head start in their career. The 'taken-for-grantedness' of this is apparent in Harriet's quote about work-shadowing a GP:

> *'I got that only purely because I know someone who knows someone, which is very often the way'* (Harriet)

For some participants, parents were instrumental in gaining access to career mobility opportunities for them, for example, Mary's dad *'had a friend who worked there and managed to get me in'* for work experience at the British Library after her GCSEs. Holly revealed that most of her voluntary work was thanks to the encouragement or direct intervention of her mum who spearheads a health charity:

> *'my mum would do talks for them so I would go along and help and then I just slotted in and I'd say a lot of things that I've done because of who I know so I guess those were useful… they definitely developed me as a person in gaining confidence… I think my mum has that sort of influence you know, she's very pushy (laughs) which I used to go against when I was younger but then you learn to just listen to your mum in the end'* (Holly)

It is noteworthy that Mary and Holly studied at more prestigious universities and described themselves as 'middle class'. There was clear evidence that the middle class, British students who did not necessarily have their own social capital were able to draw upon the networks of parents and wider community (e.g. parents of children at their private school) to gain work experience that was prestigious (symbolic and cultural capital). This is not surprising and is congruent with the work of Bourdieu & Passeron (1977), Burke (2015), Bathmaker (2015), Coleman (1988) and many others. However, this potential advantage did not mean that they did not have to work hard or make any effort, they still faced tough competition and challenges.

Malik had a wide social network which helped him to find opportunities. The unpaid work he did was fairly untypical, offering his unpaid labour in photography, gardening, retail, car mechanics, food and PC repair not only to enhance his future earning potential and help him decide what to do as a job, but also to learn life skills to help support his family when his dad left. All of these 'opportunities' were gained through his social network and yet he found that they were not so valuable in helping him to secure graduate level employment in his field. This may be because his network contacts (small, Asian family businesses) did not possess dominant social capital so this did not help him into the corporate graduate career to which he aspired.

Parents were often positioned as motivators and role models (Brad, Imogen, Dominika) regarding work ethic, their academic and career achievements and their outlook on

mobility. This supports Bourdieu and Passeron's (1977) notion that parents are instrumental in social reproduction, however, it also demonstrates the positive influences they can have. Imogen and Ella illustrate how this could manifest as either an aspiration to follow in their footsteps or, conversely, learning from their negative experiences:

> *'my mum told me that when she was younger she volunteered on ambulances in Israel which is where I'm from, my entire family is Israeli, and I was like 'ooh that sounds cool let me find out if they still do that'* (Imogen)

A strong work ethic appeared to be a significant driver for many participants who were active in seeking out opportunities. Violet appeared to have inherited this from her parents:

> *"it's only in recent years you talk about the things parents do and actually appreciate what they do… my dad did work experience, voluntary work experience, in transport offices just to get his foot into the door and (my mum) I suppose she was a bit like most parents…. She's a qualified hairdresser but when children came along **you change what you do to fit in around children**"* (Violet)

A particularly touching linguistic turn here was when Violet could have been talking about her mum or herself in the last part of the quote (bold added for emphasis). Fitting around her children whilst being a positive role model for them strongly defined Violet's own working pattern and aspirations too.

> *'I wanted to, the kids to be proud of what I was doing…wanted to show them that it doesn't matter if you left school with minimum GCSEs and a child'* (Violet)

Of all the significant family relationships, mothers were most often cited as providing practical and moral support, which confirms the work of Murphy, Blustein, Bohlig and Platt (2010) about young peoples' transition from college to career. Mothers were mentioned very frequently (fifty-seven times) and almost always in a positive way (more often and more positively than fathers).

> *'my parents have always just done whatever they needed to do to get where they needed to be and so I definitely get that work ethic from them you know my mum with her PhD had gone and worked in Boots the Christmas season like because I think that's what you need to do at the moment'* (Rachel)

They were often positioned as strong and inspirational role models in their work, education and international travel (Imogen, Ella), confidantes and sounding boards, not only for the female participants but also the males.

> *'The person who has helped by far is my mum, she just tells me to stop being pathetic most of the time… she's Dutch so she doesn't mince her words, she is not like typically British polite or anything like that she'll just say it how it is' (Brad)*

Discussing career issues with mothers is an example of Archer's (2007) 'relational reflexivity' which helps individuals make sense of the world and mediates the influences of structure and agency.

> *'I was speaking to my mum one night and I was saying no I just can't do it'* (Ella during a placement in London)

Implicit in all the examples was that their mothers understood why they were putting themselves under the pressures of unpaid work and supported their efforts, helping them to build the emotional resilience to get through.

Some participants positioned a parent as a critical voice or as someone they were very different from (a reverse role model) and the influence of parental expectations was common:

> *'he (Dad) doesn't believe in charity, you know, someone volunteering, he thinks it's taking a paid job from someone… I have argued with him on that'* (Cathy)

This transitional stage of student/graduate life between child and adult is also perhaps characterised by an increasing independence and the 'push-pull' nature of this relationship which was also alluded to by Imogen when talking about her summer international volunteering experience:

> *'I'm very close to them… I love them to pieces and they were always very supportive, they kind of say you can do whatever you want but I always was a bit worried that I wouldn't be able to be enough for them, just self-esteem or whatever, so I guess being able to do that kind of experience made me realise I could do things by myself'* (Imogen)

This suggests a need for independence may be a strong motivator towards mobility opportunities (such as international volunteering and internships) rather than the pressure to gain career capitals.

Sometimes participants perceived their parents as not really understanding their situation regarding career mobility efforts and choices, or not knowing how to support them.

'with the band they didn't really understand why I wanted to cart heavy pieces of equipment round and practise for four hours a week and then play gigs and not get paid for it. Then again with the comic they didn't really understand why I was doing that as well but they're not creative themselves anyway, which is fine it's just they've never said not to do anything and they've never put boundaries or limits or anything like that' (Jack)

This is likely to be especially relevant and increasingly common with the widening participation agenda whereby parents of students who are first in their family to enter higher education are thrown into a complex field about which they know little. The Centre for Education and Youth (Mulcahy & Barrs, 2019) recommends that universities need to engage more with parents as 'partners in progression' as they can support achievement and wellbeing. Of course, this may not be appropriate for all individuals as some students may be care leavers or not have constructive relationships with their parents, so a sensitive approach is vital.

Other family members (siblings, aunties, uncles, grandparents) featured frequently in participants' interviews. Sometimes they were instrumental in linking participants to unpaid (and unadvertised) opportunities, directly or through their own networks.

Some participants had family commitments that made it more difficult for them to undertake unpaid and international opportunities (and indeed many people may be absent from this research because of that fact). For Malik, responsibility for his siblings motivated him to work unpaid in a range of local businesses to learn practical skills, not only to increase his earning potential but also to look after them and save them money (e.g. learning catering, IT and car repair):

*'So I felt a need to somehow provide for the family when my dad wasn't there, maybe that was what pushed me to look out for, to **pick up skills** cos it was more of a **survival instinct** thinking the more I know the more I'll be able to cover'* (Malik)

However, for Jennifer, this family responsibility also served as a motivation to undertake international volunteering and paid jobs:

'I've got a lot of family responsibilities, so I need something outside that… I'm a twin and my brother's got quite severe learning disabilities so I'm his carer as well' (Jennifer)

This demonstrates the commitments some students have which will significantly affect their opportunities and yet may be unknown to university tutors and support services. It is important to view students in a holistic way and to be mindful of their personal circumstances.

Sarah mentioned her sister at various points throughout the interview, here to illustrate her views about the pointless nature of deliberate CV enhancing and to implicitly compare this with her own experience (specific and relevant experiences):

> *'she wants to join the police which she can't get any experience in so she has had to do a lot of box ticking in that she's had to work in an old peoples home, she had to work at a National Trust Park volunteering just to say she's worked with different age ranges it's got absolutely nothing to do with what she wants to do!'* (Sarah)

This quote expressed sibling relationships as being a mirror in which to reflect upon relative success and achievement. Also, it revealed the arbitrary, subjective and contextual nature of what may constitute 'valuable' unpaid work experience.

Other family members such as uncles and aunties also featured as role models or opportunity facilitators, for example, Zahir's memories of his great uncle reassured him in his approach to opportunities and influenced his decision to do an internship in China when his family were against it. Here his uncle is positioned as an inspirational figure who guides Zahir's difficult and unpopular choices and actions:

> *'he's one of the most inspirational men I have ever met in my entire life, he breaks every tradition of Indian culture and customs you can possibly imagine... He travelled from China to England by land and he's had friends of all cultures all sexes all ethnicities religions anything you can possibly imagine and it's just so nice to see someone of that generation with such a brilliantly open mind. Listening to his stories when I was, probably like 16 or something, has really made me think what I'm doing is right even though it's been questioned by a lot of people over the years'* (Zahir)

Malik's uncle's input was more practical in nature, teaching him valuable skills for his career:

> *'my uncle really helped me with the web development side and programming side...I really appreciated that he took the time out to give me the starter skills so just because of his help that's why I am where I am now'* (Malik)

Augustus' auntie is portrayed as both an advisor and a link to a network which provided useful social capital:

> *'my auntie thought that initially would be a great thing for me to put on my CV that I was part of this council, she thought it would be a good opportunity for me to network and other opportunities came as a result of that'* (Augustus)

It may be significant that Zahir, Augustus and Malik are from Asian families where it is more usual for extended families to be involved in decisions.

Children and other dependents are discussed earlier in that social roles affect mobility opportunities. Participants also sometimes identified their partners as key 'others' as an additional responsibility (Cathy) or a moral and practical supporter (Ella, Kevin). When talking about future career plans a few of the female participants said that their decisions on where to work and live would depend upon their partner's mobility (Kayla, Ella).

> *'so when he knows that then I'll look at where I want to be because he's so focused and driven and knows what he wants then I'll work around that'* (Ella)

A picture emerged throughout the participant interviews of family members were constantly looking out for them, knowing what they needed and providing whatever help they were able to. It is important to remember though, this is a sample of individuals who have already made it through education, perhaps in part because of their social support. Equally, there will be those who fell at earlier hurdles for whom this safety net was not in place and those who are forced to depend upon others because of their lack of resources which could put a strain on family relationships.

Other people

Participants often talked about people other than family members who had been instrumental in their experiences of opportunities, either by providing encouragement and suggestions, access to opportunities and/or a strong and genuine relationship forming during the experience which became significant (e.g. *'life-changing'*). These people included friends, people who took on a mentoring or advising role, teachers/tutors and to a lesser extent Careers Advisers.

'I had a mentor there who was the coolest woman alive, she's a paramedic and she taught me all this stuff, she's one of my main inspirations to keep doing this kind of thing because she goes to the gym and she has kids and she does all this stuff and she also helps people so much' (Imogen)

Imogen's mentor, rather than introducing her to the unpaid work opportunity, inspired her and gave her a focus to keep going even when times were tough. Harriet shows how she was identified as having potential and this made a real impact upon her subsequent attitudes (and achievement). It also illustrates how teachers (English teachers were mentioned by three participants) have a pivotal role to make a difference to students even beyond the scope of the subject they teach and in the early stages before university and work.

'Mr M. he was quite a wise guy, he just really helped me out, he was really good, I think it was him that really moulded my work ethic because before I was so lazy (laugh), I got recommended to go to him by an English teacher who really had a thing about like getting to know all the pupils' (Harriet)

This concurs with research by Shury, Vivian, Turner and Downing (2017) who found that 48% of students had spoken to academic staff about career plans (roughly the same % as those speaking to careers professionals) and 40% had spoken to a professional in the field (which could be an unofficial mentor). They also found that 75% of their students said they had asked their family for careers advice and that students were more likely to seek careers support from lecturers or personal tutors than trained careers professionals. Greenbank (2011) also suggested that university students often receive advice from *'people they know rather than people who know'.* Family members will not always be up to date with the labour market and may impart advice based upon their own career experiences, beliefs, anecdotes, cultural norms or news headlines.

The power of someone having belief in their abilities is also echoed in this quote from Zahir which illustrates how a mentor in his community volunteering was instrumental in supporting his experiences. Her belief and trust in his abilities gave him the confidence to develop and to progress to more adventurous and risky opportunities (such as a paid internship in Asia):

'H is the woman who sort of basically took me and then has just changed me as a person completely…it was really humbling that she had the trust in me because

when I was doing these events I was 18 or something that's all it was, just the trust and… yeah she's definitely been one of the biggest influences on my life, definitely' (Malik)

In Sarah's case, a personal relationship or even any mutual contact with this significant other was not necessary for them to be influential. Although she had originally aspired to study Medicine, Sarah was inspired to undertake work experience in radiography as a result of being inspired by her idol, Kylie Minogue who had gone through treatment for breast cancer:

'They asked me in my radiotherapy interview 'why do you want to do radiotherapy?'…the honest answer is I'm a massive Kylie fan' so all her cancer stuff swayed me towards that' (Sarah)

The above examples demonstrate that the value of social capital and networks is more than purely transactional as it can also enhance psychological capital and self-belief. It also highlights the importance of supportive mentors for young people who lack the social support at home.

The significance of role models and mentors are reflected in Heidegger's thoughts about 'choosing a hero' (Thomson, 2005) which he suggests is a route to living an authentic life, through modelling a person who is already seen to be doing this (in this case he was referring to Christianity, even though he had renounced it). Inauthenticity lies in choosing *'the anonymous anyone'* as a hero which was evident in participants accounts of comparing themselves to non-specified others ('everyone') and inauthentic social media representations of friends.

Occasionally participants positioned others as thwarting their access to or experience of opportunities. Some examples of these people were employers or colleagues. Often though, participants would proceed explain how they overcame their challenge and it helped them to develop skills or be more determined:

'at first when she was saying "you can't do that", I felt like 'ok whatever' but then I felt maybe towards the middle there that I was being more assertive with her saying "I am only here for a short time can we not just do an extra hour, can we not go and see this person?''' (Jennifer)

Partners were both a source of support and an influence upon geographical mobility which

is often the case for dual-career couples (Ackers, 2003).

> *'we don't know yet {where his job will be} we're hearing in the next few weeks, so when he knows that then I'll look at where I want to be because he's so focused and driven and knows what he wants then I'll work around that'* (Ella)

Careers Advisers

Careers Advisers were rarely mentioned unless prompted, however, there were some positive responses to direct questions. Ella felt the careers service was particularly useful because she studied at a new (lower ranking) university:

> *'I would say that help that they offer is more than enough and it's there if you want it…at a university like [university Y] they recognise themselves without saying it that you need more than just a degree from a place like this and that's evident, I think at other universities all the more senior universities you don't get as much support with careers and development, they think 'you've got a degree go and get out there'* (Ella)

For Kayla, her Careers Adviser was a lifeline in her darkest days, particularly after she had left university and been let down by the organisation she had volunteered for:

> '[She] *was amazing, the amount of times I was in her office crying when I worked at the nursing home, like I said everyone kept dying and I kept going "you need to get me a job!"'* (Kayla)

Dominika was undertaking an internship (paid) based in the university Careers Service at the time of her interview and although she felt it was useful to have access to information and advice from the staff, she echoed the view of the government that employers are more credible than university-based advisers:

> *'they sometimes invite guest speakers which is always good for us to hear from someone else rather than them'* (Dominika)

Another reason that careers support was criticised was the timing as students often only pay attention to the service when they most need it:

> *'I vaguely remember there was stuff at freshers week, I have no interest in careers at freshers week, I'll just literally want to go and find societies to join and make friends and things and in first year I don't think you're really thinking about what job you want… I don't think you even think about it until third year when you're like 'oh okay, now I'm going to leave and desperately need to find a job'* (Sarah)

For some this may be after graduation when only limited help is usually available as services have limited resources so will naturally prioritise current and prospective students.

Generally, the Careers Service was seen by participants as somewhere to go for information and practical help (e.g. CV checking and vacancies) which is the most basic and least skilled function of Careers Advisers and the one most easily performed or augmented by technology, less experienced staff or employers.

University careers services are generally accessed by people on a self-referral basis meaning that those in most need may not seek help. Recent statistics (Winter, 2018) suggest that as many as 40% of final year students are 'still deciding' about their career and yet may avoid seeking professional advice. Another key factor may be lack of resources which means individual interventions are limited in availability. Perhaps the profession has an image problem as *'a bunch of nice ladies in cardigans who sit down for a lovely wee chat about their futures'* - a quote from a careers professional (Neary, Hanson & Cotterill, 2017). Careers Advisers are sometimes represented in a poor light in public discourse, blamed for peoples' decisions or failures (Graduate Fog, 2010).

Careers Advisers, however, can be a critical influence in the career paths of students, informing, encouraging, challenging, providing practical support and being part of the relational reflexive process, spanning boundaries between the worlds of education and work. They can help in opening up 'horizons for action' and '*avoid twin pitfalls of implicit social determinism or of seeing (young) people as completely free agents'* (Hodkinson & Sparkes 1997). Again, this is particularly valuable for those students and graduates with less social capital (contacts) and cultural capital (knowledge about how the workplace works, particularly at graduate level).

University tutors can be an important link between students and opportunities, for example, through a work-focus in the curriculum or raising awareness of specific opportunities. Tutors can be especially useful if they have real-world contacts to call upon and introduce students to. A further function, which was described by Ella, is supporting students whilst they are in the middle of career mobility opportunities (in this case a group placement in China and also her internship in London) where her tutor helped her to reflect

'in situ' on her challenging experiences to turn them around. However, not all academics accept that they have a role in preparing students for the workplace nor have the requisite skills or experience.

For professionals supporting students and graduates, wisdom can also be found in the work of Heidegger (1927) suggesting there are two distinct ways that we may demonstrate solicitude or care for others (*'Fursorge'*). The first is by 'leaping in' to take responsibility for solving problems for the person, which may be well intentioned but risks divesting them of agency. The alternative is 'leaping ahead' to open up a range of possibilities and options for the person, which can be more facilitating and enabling. In higher education a combination of the risk assessment culture and the drive to please consumers has perhaps made it less acceptable to allow students to be 'thrown' into the world. Heidegger argues this 'thrown-ness' (*Geworfenheit*) – the arbitrary context in which Dasein finds themselves – is a natural state of being and the very situation which gives energy to the struggle against it, opening possibilities towards freedom to act authentically.

Relationships were central to participants' accounts and were often instrumental to career mobilities. Although none of them explicitly spoke about social capital, it was evident in terms of the 'weak ties' (Granovetter, 1973) and strong relationships (Coleman, 1988) that facilitated or inhibited their unpaid work and mobilities. However, although non-UK and less privileged students had to work harder to start to build their own (dominant and localised forms of) social capital, many were successful at this which led to jobs with top graduate employers. This success seemed to be a result of them capitalising on strengths in communicating (Gamber & Kleiner, 2001) being optimistic and persistent (psychological capital – Luthans et al., 2004; Tomlinson et al., 2017) and undoubtedly being willing to work unpaid helped. Technology enabled (more) equal access to some opportunities (Gershon, 2017) through emails and social media.

In McMahon and Patton's (1995) model, others span the boundaries between the spheres of the 'individual' and the environment (family, peers, community). Other people can help or hinder opportunities for career mobility. Role-modelling, relational reflexivity and mentoring have been shown in this research to have a hugely influential role to play in helping individuals to cross career boundaries (Ackers & Gill, 2008; Doherty, Patton &

Shield, 2015). Social capital is perhaps the most obvious way in which participants utilised unpaid work. For some this was the *'knowing whom'* of close relatives (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994; McDonald, 2011) an advantage acknowledged honestly by those who benefitted from this. Other times it was aligned with symbolic cultural capital, for example, a 'LinkedIn' recommendation or reference from a prestigious work placement or access to a valuable contact or network which could provide further opportunity.

Being compromised

Compromise was a feature of many participant's accounts, within the unpaid work itself and in how working unpaid compromised other aspects of their lives, hampering mobility choices. This theme links very closely with the 'world' in relation to unpaid work, however, I have included it here when the participants were talking about their relationships to others (the employer) rather than the work itself. At this stage in their lives the power generally lay with employers and opportunity providers to give them the opportunities they needed.

A key question of the research was how participants reconciled the contradictory situation of working unpaid whilst also managing day-to-day living costs on a limited budget and racking up high levels of student tuition debt. Although they voluntarily entered into it and saw the benefits, many expressed a feeling of reluctance or disappointment at employers not paying them. In this statement by Dominika, her side of the 'win-win' is hard to see and is perhaps implied in the form of long-term value:

> *'They are always happy to take work experience because it's free help to them if they've got a big workload and they're always looking for new ideas and creative people so it's a **win-win** situation but yeah just that unpaid part is a bit of a shame yeah'* (Dominika)

The idea of 'free help' might be contested by employers if they spend time and overhead costs to provide this valuable experience.

Dominika also explained that even to get an internship requires prior work experience that is often unpaid:

'it shows you something like if I've been working for free for those 10 or so weeks then they can assume that I will work hard as well when they give me the internship and that should be rewarded in some way' (Dominika)

This quote also echoes Kayla's earlier perception of an unspoken agreement that unpaid work will later be rewarded (i.e. converted into economic capital, directly or through a job).

'we worked Monday to Friday nine till 5 for 5 weeks… I was like 'come on, I'm sure you guys can afford to pay us minimum wage' so I was actually working about 20 to 30 hours a week in a paid job as well as that' (Rachel)

Rachel's interview took a passive-aggressive tone as she was grateful for the opportunity of a prestigious internship and yet resentful about working unpaid and having to take on a paid job. Working 60 – 70 hours a week also implies other sacrifices in her life, such as losing sleep (in a previous quote) which could compromise her health and wellbeing. What is noticeable in the above quotes is the implication that, even though the unpaid work may have been taken on without any offer of money or prospects there was an expectation of equitable treatment. References to *'they'* and *'you guys'* acknowledge the presence of employers against whom the frustration is directed.

A particular form of compromise which was surprisingly common occurred when the participant applied for a paid role and was unsuccessful but instead offered an unpaid 'opportunity' (discussed previously in 'types of unpaid work') or where the role was advertised and pay mentioned only vaguely or not at all and the participants assumed it would be paid but it wasn't:

'I got the impression when I applied at the time to be working for them for the summer that there would be some sort of payment and they said "oh no, you know, it's unpaid" which I really couldn't believe actually (laughs) because there is no way I could have done unpaid placements in London' (Holly)

This was also reported by Malik and Rachel and is highlighted in Chapter Six (types of unpaid work). Such instances could be genuinely innocent oversights, well-intentioned offers on the part of the employer or a deliberate act of miscommunication, however, the interesting outcome in the above case was that the money was made available once the participant challenged the offer.

Unpaid work is likely to be less formal in nature so that contracts or even discussions about expectations might be absent. This opens the door to the 'opportunity not a job' phenomenon (Swan, 2015; Maynard, 1997) observed amongst participants and potential for compromise and disappointment. Many of the students who undertook unpaid work were disappointed when their work was not rewarded, either financially or by further opportunities. Although unpaid work does not hold any legal status and formal contracts are not usual it seemed that there was an informal 'psychological contract' (Rousseau, 1995) on the part of the student.

Underlying many of the interviews it seemed to me that the individuals had expectations of employers and society in general. They were acting in good faith on the assumption that although working hard, getting a degree and doing all the right things would be a short-term compromise and involve sacrifices, this would be worth it in the long term:

> *'You just expect that when you come out the other end that there is just going to be this dream job 'ah well I've worked hard through the years and paid all this money so there will be a job for me, especially if you got a good degree as well. I think you've kind of got this mindset that well, I did well in my A-levels and got to go to whichever university I wanted to go to so now I've done well in my degree surely I should just leave and be like "where's my job?" kind of thing'* (Sarah)

Sarah's quote represents a wider belief amongst many participants in a meritocratic graduate labour market (and wider society) based upon the premise that short-term effort and sacrifice (e.g. investment in education and work experience) will lead to for increased long-term rewards (Mendick, Allen & Harvey, 2015). They held expectations about their value in the workplace based upon the investment of time, effort and money they had invested in their employability. This extended not just to a specific employer but to society (including education and employers collectively) and is symptomatic of the social discourse of meritocracy (Tholen, 2013).

Augustus was the most sceptical about his experience as an intern, his *'first proper 9 to 5 job'* and the compromise it entailed:

> *'my take-away from it was how strange although you work seven, eight hours in a day and you have another 16 in reality once you take your hours when you sleep, the hours when you cook, you do something somewhat social so whether it's yoga or whether it's going to the gym or whatever you are only really left with an hour or*

two in your day, right? So for me it really did feel like serfdom… It really did seem like this neo-slavery type approach where all your hours are taken and you have nothing to do what you want so whether you want to make a conspiracy out of it and be Marxist about it and how the ruling class want to keep subjects class down basically so they don't revolt so you keep them busy with work but regardless I saw that as a big thing so moving forward the idea was I'd work in an organisation where I could work minimal hours and I know it sounds like I'm being lazy when I say that but… Well it does let's be honest, but it's more a case that I can use the hours outside work to do things that I'm really passionate about and to make a difference and make a change' (Augustus)

It seems clear that Augustus' internship experience made an impression upon him that will shape his future career, perhaps not in the way that he or his employer might have expected. His sense of frustration seemed to be directed at 'the ruling classes' however, he did exhibit a belief in an organisation that would be willing to accommodate his desire for flexibility.

Surprisingly, Augustus was unusual in openly criticising internships as exploitative as most others accepted them as 'the norm'. However, some were accepting of this only short-term and others expressed disappointment at not being paid. Only once did I ask the leading question 'do you feel you are being exploited?' as this would be imposing my own ideas onto their experience and could lead them to reappraise the situation that could have a negative impact. In a career guidance context, however, Hooley et al. (2017) suggest that naming the form of oppression is crucial in challenging social injustice. This is something I would change if I conducted the interviews over again. I wondered whether experience of exploitation might be retrospective, reflective and relative in that participants who did express dissatisfaction were mainly graduates rather than students when unpaid work had not led to the positive outcome they had intended. In this way the lived experiences of unpaid work (or at least their retrospective recount) may be viewed through the lens of whether it 'worked out' (i.e. met their expected outcomes). A methodological consideration may be that participants who did feel exploited might not be willing to talk about it, or those who would feel exploited simply do not participate in the work itself or being interviewed by a researcher offering no financial incentive.

Most of the participants who had graduated felt compromised or 'shocked' and 'let down' that their experiences in the labour market were not as they had expected. Some had

initially believed that having a degree would automatically lead to a good job and only realised towards the end of their degree that their advantage was less assured as they had perhaps been led to believe. Kayla's earlier quote (Chapter Six) described how her investment in career capitals at the nature reserve was dependent upon the manager who was then made redundant. She felt very bitter that she had done all the right things and invested time and money into her career during university which had amounted to nothing:

> *'I went and picked a degree that I thought 'this will definitely get me a job, I kind of like it I will grow to like it' and you know I just saw money signs that the end of the degree…I was very naive and I've told everybody this because I really want people to learn from the fact that I was one of those people who thought I've got this certificate now, bring me the jobs, you know and I really did think that the jobs would just pour in and I was quite shocked when actually they didn't and the piece of paper that I'd gained meant nothing without any experience and any, you know any contacts, it was just a piece of paper'* (Kayla)

This emotional quote illustrates how compromised and let down Kayla felt. She reflects upon the realisation of the value of career capitals in addition to her degree. There is an implication of being misled by others to believe a degree would lead directly to a job (by educators and university admissions). These young people had faithfully followed the advice of those in responsible positions, achieving in academia, investing time, effort and money in their education and undertaking unpaid work. They have deferred gratification (time off, holidays) in favour of long-term career success (De Steno, 2009). Once they graduate, they may find this is still not enough (Tomlinson, 2008). Are they not entitled to feel entitled?

Overall, there were mixed reports of relationships with potential employers and opportunity providers, sometimes feeling that there was an imbalance of power for participants who felt they had little to offer. However, there were also some employers who were supportive and instrumental in the participants' transitions, it is important not to generalise that all employers are exploitative and self-serving. Many will value the skills and potential young people offer organisations. As more graduates from non-traditional backgrounds progress within the workplace and others seek out alternative pathways to the traditional graduate management schemes, perhaps they will pave the way for those who follow.

Being like everyone else and being different

Peers are an important part of life at all stages and for young people, starting university, work or an unpaid opportunity means being thrown into a new environment with strangers they may spend more time with than family or friends. At times, the peer group were seen as allies yet other times as competition or objects of social comparison against which to judge their own success or progress. This 'push-pull' effect parallels similar tensions in relationships with family members:

> *'I feel like nowadays it's just the norm like people would think I was silly if I didn't get any work experience or they'd think I wasn't serious about getting a job in the future if I wasn't prepared to work unpaid …I feel like there's social pressure to do it as well from peers because I think everyone's quite competitive amongst themselves, who's got a grad job first, who's got the most experience, you don't wanna be left behind…I know a lot of my friends who graduated even a whole year ago still haven't found anything and they have been applying constantly and it's not because they're not intelligent it's just because the competition is so tough so I'm in a really good position here'* (Mary)

Indeed, many of the participants were in the very real situation of competing against their friends and classmates for internships, graduate jobs and further research opportunities while they were working on team projects, socialising and living together. This is perhaps a symptom of the field of education and its overlap with the labour market in which students receive mixed messages about both collaborating and competing. Whether this is a new phenomenon (*'nowadays'*) is debateable though, as this pressure has perhaps always been felt and, in some ways, maybe the situation has improved.

As well as named individual friends, peers often appeared in interviews either in a generalised and anonymised form (e.g. 'everybody else', 'a lot of people', 'they') or as a referential point of comparison, as Hassia clearly illustrates:

> *'I didn't really know what was going on and I didn't know what I was supposed to be doing and like I think **everyone** just got very caught up in it all, **everyone** suddenly thought like **they** had to be applying for grad jobs and I was like what am I supposed to be doing and you know **we** were doing our dissertations as well and **people** are spending time on all of this instead and then I started thinking should I, am I supposed to be doing this too?'* (Hassia)

Social comparison seemed to influence decisions of the participants. *'Some people'* were a referential point for Harriet to illustrate her compromise of having to choose between gaining experience to improve her chances of getting on a graduate management scheme and getting a high degree classification:

> *'because I've not had any time this year to do any internships that's gonna be a bad disadvantage and also applying to all these grad schemes is really difficult and you're in your third year and you've just got so much work piling up and then applications, I think **some people** might compromise a 'first' to get a grad scheme'* (Harriet)

This eloquently sums up the paradoxical 'Catch 22' situation (Heller, 1961; UKCES, 2015) of students who do not have the time or money to enable them to get the experience but then do not have the experience to get the money (i.e. the job) and the compromises they need to make, compromising their studies and compromising their career choices. You can almost read the anxiety between the lines. This quote also illustrates how, even when unpaid work and internships do not feature in the current life of a conscientious student, their presence may persist in the feeling they 'should' be doing more to keep up with others. Compromising a good degree for the sake of work experience may prevent progression onto further study at master's or PhD level.

Peers were also seen by many as significant, both in supporting and motivating the participants (as below) and as a referential point to justify their situation and decisions:

> *'I think you are a product of your environment and if you surround yourself with other proactive people you're all helping each other out and it's about getting the support… we all worked hard, we all surrounded ourselves with other people who worked hard which was a great motivation'* (Milly)

Being surrounded by peers who have similar circumstances and experiences could also be reassuring, for example, in the case of high levels of student debt for Sarah:

> *'Every single person I know has been through University so we're all in exactly the same boat'* (Sarah)

This normalised her experience and helped her to feel better about it.

Sometimes comparison with peers left participants feeling different or left out:

'I have friends who did apprenticeships and stuff and one of my friends has graduated he's working full-time so they're going to Switzerland for a couple of days and I'm like 'I can't go' but I think it's all about working to a future and if you have goals and stuff in mind then it's just about getting there' (Milly)

This quote illustrates how Milly switched from feeling disappointment to quickly justifying her short-term sacrifice for the sake of long-term goals.

Non-specific others ('people' and 'they') were often positioned in narratives to make a point to illustrate and contextualise the participant's own views and actions:

'I'm not a conservative supporter but this whole idea of Big Society, I do think there should be more community spirit where everybody gets involved and helps each other I think people can be too wrapped up in their own world and they can miss something or someone that needs help but people don't want to take responsibility, they want to take but they don't give back' (Cathy – talking about her community volunteering).

This was a refreshing take on volunteering as a genuinely altruistic act of service by Cathy, rather than a career capital-building activity (Bennett & Einolf, 2017). This was very common amongst the participants with intrinsic enjoyment and value more often cited as the reason for undertaking such work.

Competing and comparing themselves with others also created pressure and 'imposter syndrome' for some participants. Education guru Sir Ken Robinson (2008) suggests that education fundamentally alienates young people by continuously measuring and comparing them against each other which causes isolation and anxiety. Like Wenger (1998) he emphasises that learning is a social activity which works best in collaborative communities. This social comparison of self with other graduates' success is also recognised by Tholen (2013) who suggests this 'alternative view' of a competitive and conflictual graduate labour market is different from the 'conventional view' of other countries' (i.e. the Netherlands) which is more equitable and based upon individual performance. Social comparison (especially through social media) may have contributed to negative self-esteem (Vogel, Rose, Roberts & Eckles, 2014) which in turn could hamper employability (Dacre-Pool & Sewell, 2007). 'What employers want' is a further derivative of this influence on thoughts and actions, often a topic of speculation (e.g. Simkins & Coney, 2019) and yet it is questionable as a concept as it suggests homogenous requirements for different roles

and organisations. This pressure upon graduates to tread the fine line between standing out and fitting in; between collaborating and competing, can be confusing and stressful (as discussed earlier, in Chapter Five).

Cultural competence is potential` benefit of international travel (Ahmed et al., 2017). Participants who had undertaken international placements frequently talked about the differences between 'self' and 'other' which were sometimes described in terms of 'us' and 'them':

> *'they spoke good English but we think they chose not to talk to us… (laughs) Well they did a bit …I think they did struggle a little bit to understand us and we'd say it a bit slower but they just really didn't want to engage with us so I didn't feel comfortable walking round the ward by myself'* (Kaitlyn)

There was also some evidence that learning of cultural competence might be displayed in words but not actions (Fabricius et al., 2017) further entrenching colonial attitudes of white superiority (Easterly, 2006). Rosie told me how her trip to India had made her more aware of low resource settings and appreciative that 'we' have so much more than 'they' do:

> *'We probably waste so much and they don't waste anything, they use everything they have so we just throw things away and they don't. and it's like well if we use less we could send it over there or to Africa. Or to other countries where they need them'* (Rosie)

Later in the interview she described how she couldn't close her suitcase so was *'binning towels'*:

> *'I binned my towels, I just binned everything that I could bin… I would probably have taken a big rucksack and a smaller case cos the weight of my case nearly broke the peoples' back that helped us. I felt really bad, they nearly fell backwards off the bus, ah it was horrible'* (Rosie)

Whilst some participants (e.g. Brad) had enjoyed the chance to experience aspects of new cultures such as food, this was a real challenge for Rosie:

> *'I couldn't eat the food because it made you ill… I went to India and I'm rubbish with spice! …when they made you food, I did have it quite low on spice, but they don't know to wash their hands before eating or before making a meal. They might wash their hands, but they don't have the soap to clean them properly. So, they're making food with dirty hands basically and then you're eating and it just made me poorly. So I lived off jam butties and crisps!'* (Rosie)

Although this may sound like a disrespectful attitude it could indicate a naivety borne out of the fact it was her first time in such a different culture. This suggests that, although participants may say that their beliefs have changed as a result of their travel this may not necessarily extend to their behaviours (Mezirow, 2000). It is important to remember that changes were self-reported so there may be an element of social desirability or post-hoc rationalisation in responses. Reflection and timely, ethical supervision can help to prevent this (Ahmed et al., 2017).

Heidegger (1927) considered Dasein as essentially 'Being-with-Others' (mitsein), not only in relation to significant and specific relationships but also a pervasive presence in our awareness of generalised others 'the-they' or 'das Mann' who serve as a referential influence in our decisions and actions. As Sherman (2009) explains, as human beings we unwittingly compromise our own authenticity as we engage in activities, entertain ideas and even purchase commodities which *'they'* influence. This was clearly represented in the description of 'everyone else' when participants discussed student debt, applying for jobs and undertaking internships and other work experience.

Summary

Discussion of others in relation to themselves occurred very frequently every interview. These relationships could support or challenge the participants in accessing and succeeding in their unpaid work experiences. Theories of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986; DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994) appear to provide only a partial, transactional understanding of the nature and importance of interpersonal relations. Access to and decisions about unpaid work and career mobility are inherently tied up in responsibilities, social comparisons and relationships (Finn, 2015). Other people are links across boundaries and can help individuals mediate between structure and agency.

Warm, supportive and very genuine relationships were the real mobiliser for many participants, not only in a practical way but because they offered something of true value which was belief and trust in the young person which gave them self-confidence and a sense of self-efficacy (Dacre-Pool & Sewell, 2007). Relationships were regularly cited as facilitating and even transformative in the lives of many participants. Meeting a good

mentor also often helped participants to find opportunities and develop skills and confidence. However, this research also suggests that a short-term acceptance of compromise in employment relationships might be a necessity for early career-building activities. Lack of awareness of the unspoken 'psychological contract' (Rousseau, 1995) and 'the rules of the game' (Bathmaker, 2015) are revealed through participant interviews, suggesting that HE careers education and placement support could usefully include such topics.

This research both concurs with and builds upon extant literature contributing a holistic and nuanced understanding of how relationships with others can influence graduate transitions. This relational and emotional aspect of careers and mobility is often overlooked yet important to understand (Kidd, 1998; Finn, 2015) and transactional theories of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) do not adequately account for this. The research also highlights the complex and contradictory dynamics which can exist in relationships with others and how parents, peers, tutors and employers can all support career decision-making and mobility (Shury et al., 2017).

Chapter Eight: Being, Things and Time

Materiality and temporality provide a valuable insight into the participants experiences of unpaid work and mobility. Findings relating to these remaining existentials of lived experience of unpaid work and mobility will be explored together in this chapter. The existential of materiality was introduced in later work of Van Manen (2014) when he introduced this fifth existential to his framework. Temporality is a key feature of lived experience, particularly relevant to a group at a significant period of transition in their lives.

First, this chapter will consider the material aspects of unpaid work and career mobilities which were significant in the participants' accounts. Secondly, the chapter will consider temporal dimensions of unpaid work and career mobilities.

Being and Things

The ways in which participants talked about themselves in relation to things can help us to gain valuable insights into the phenomena of unpaid work and mobility. Money is an obvious materiality, other examples were tangible commodities such as food, clothes and holidays which participants talked about having or not having as an indicator of success and sacrifice. Participants also often referred to abstract things as if they were tangible, such as skills, experiences, opportunities, recognition and time (which will be discussed later in chapter). Findings relating to materialities are represented by the subthemes below:

  i.   Being without things
  ii. Being through things
  iii. Being a commodity (objectification of being)

Being without things

Scarcity and deficit were common themes, for example, being short of money and time. Participants also felt at a disadvantage in other ways like lacking sufficient, or the right kind of, career capitals (skills, experience, credibility, prestige). Economic capital is a topic central to the research question, specifically because at a stage in their lives when most

students and graduates have low economic resources they are 'choosing' to work unpaid. In these times of materialism and conspicuous consumption, money and material goods have become an important measure of success and symbol of status to other people. Augustus expresses how this cultural context gives rise to the phenomenon of unpaid internships:

'people's self-worth comes from where they work and how much salary they get as a result. I suppose that unpaid internships do come out of that in a sense that people now feel that in order to get on that social ladder and to become more socially mobile they've got to endure, well, it is actual slavery right? Because they are working for free, so they've got to endure that for the sake of the work experience' (Augustus)

Augustus was the only participant to express unpaid work in such stark terms, most other participants were more accepting of it. Being without money & being 'in debt' was a typical feature of their lived experiences:

'when bills came in it was like a real stress, it was even more stressful than work, like than studying itself…sometimes, you know, you'd just lie awake and you're like 'oh my god I've just got so much to pay for' (Harriet)

Harriet's experiences show how the materialities of her experience had a significant impact upon her physical and mental health (Chapter Five) and yet she was not from a particularly deprived background. It seemed that the 'middle band' of students were most likely to be affected and therefore least able to undertake unpaid work as those with less affluent parents (at the time) were able to access maintenance grants which they would not have to pay back. Affluent parents were better placed to pay off tuition loans immediately and provide financial support for everyday living costs (such as accommodation). Most participants, however, seemed accepting of the need to make financial sacrifices in order to gain valuable experience:

'eventually I found an agency who had some work that they needed to do - a couple of weeks - and that turned into two months and it was unpaid throughout, luckily I had my student flat I could live in although I was paying rent on it and not earning anything and not having even expenses which was quite difficult but it was really, really beneficial in helping me find a placement' (Mary)

Student poverty was highly relevant to this research because being without money meant that some participants were unable or unwilling to undertake some potentially career

enhancing unpaid opportunities. Day-to-day finances (such as travel costs, food and accommodation) were barriers to unpaid work opportunities.

Being unpaid whilst being in debt

I was curious to understand how students and graduates with high levels of debt justified working unpaid (to themselves and perhaps also to significant others such as parents). I also expected participants to express a feeling of being exploited through unpaid work and I was surprised they generally did not. However, there was sometimes a sense of 'cognitive dissonance' (Festinger, 1962) or conflicting feelings:

> *'It's not like you get a load of work and they really exploit you, no, sometimes you can get really good experience, yet it is a shame that it's all unpaid'* (Dominika)

> *'I got into quite a lot of debt, just overdraft debt, so it's not a big deal but it's not ideal'* (Harriet)

This quote seemed very symbolic of the compromise and disquiet experienced by many and the attempt to justify or play down concerns.

Jack was similar to some other participants who expressed a resigned acceptance about being unpaid*:*

> *'it's one of those things… certainly for anything to do with local papers or anything like that I wouldn't expect to get paid for it because it's just the way it goes, it's only once you start moving up, once you've kind of got a more valuable skill set as it were'* (Jack)

He believed that the only way he could be successful in his chosen career would be to spend time in London whenever possible, which he subsidised with other paid work:

> *'I work three days at the internship and then two days back home in a bar so that is my weekly spending money to get here to work this job and then this job because it pays monthly that's getting stockpiled into stay over and travel expenses so I can go to these distant places down south and live there for like a week and bankrupt myself and then come back and do it all again'* (Jack)

Jack and Dominika were both aspiring journalists with limited social capital which meant that unpaid work experience was essential to them. They showed incredible resourcefulness and sacrifice, as did many other participants.

Brad was fairly unusual within the group in his refusal to consider unpaid internships, which provided a useful contrast in the research. He viewed them as something that would benefit others rather than his own goals:

> *'I've never wanted to do an unpaid internship for the simple sort of snobbish reason that I want the money (laughs) … when I'm older yeah I'll happily do stuff for nothing and to benefit myself and someone else but right now, no that's not on my mind at the minute'* (Brad)

Even so, in referring to the wish to get paid as 'snobbish' he acknowledged that his attitude was unusual and perhaps could be considered unreasonable. He had undertaken a paid placement year as part of his degree which was sufficient experience for his career.

Attitudes to debt were central to participants' decisions to undertake unpaid work experiences and they seemed to develop coping strategies such as debt-tolerance and 'cost neutral' working. Many participants seemed tolerant of the level of student debt they had accrued, for example reframing it as *'not debt as such'*.

Some people seemed to view student finance differently than other debts (such as credit cards and overdrafts) or than money in the form of cash. Others seems to have deferred any concern about this debt to a later date:

> *'I have never thought of it as being debt, like I have an overdraft, I think of that as debt'* (Ella)

> *'it would have bothered me more if I'd have left university with £9000 debt because I would have felt a need to pay that back whereas it's like £42,000 so it just doesn't bother me at all because I think 'I'm never gonna pay that back'* (Sarah)

This normalisation of their debt seemed to enable participants to get on with the business of working unpaid which was a key finding.

Some participants justified their student debts as a good investment of economic capital in career capital:

> *'I enjoyed doing it and I know that one day it will **get me where I need to be,** so I don't really think about the money side of things'* (Kayla)

Indeed, the cost of higher education and consequent debts may have some benefits in increasing students' appreciation of and motivation towards it:

'paying for uni I personally think helped because I put in so much more effort, I hated uni in second year, absolutely would have dropped out but I was kind of thinking 'I could actually pay £40,000 for this I need to really work' I always work hard anyway but I need to really work hard because there is no point coming out with a rubbish degree now I've paid all this money, whereas I know a lot of people whose parents supported them through who are very just sort of like 'oh yeah I like the nightlife and stuff' whereas I'm like 'oh… but your degree!' (Sarah)

This question of whether people value things more if they pay for them is interesting and could also apply to funding for international opportunities. This is an important consideration for any future government policy review of student finance and will be discussed in recommendations (Chapter Nine).

Others engaged active strategies to manage their finances and curb their debts by doing paid work alongside their studies, although this did restrict their availability for career-enhancing unpaid work experiences, particularly in later years of study:

'since then the degree has been too hard to do any voluntary work or work experience while I am studying and then in the holidays because I have to financially support myself to a certain extent I've just been doing like bar work or café work' (Harriet)

Such delayed gratification and long-term thinking also served as a positive coping strategy in the short-term (Dacre-Pool & Sewell, 2007; Goleman, 1996).

Typically, participants aimed to work in paid roles when possible in order to subsidise unpaid and paid-for 'opportunities' so there was often an overall 'cost neutral' effect of working. At this stage of their career 'cost neutrality' seemed to be a positive short-term outcome with the implicit expectation of career success long-term as a result of their financial sacrifices.

'I just broke even the whole summer' (Holly)

However, Kaitlyn explained how challenging this was for her during her volunteering placement in Uganda:

'I live in my flat with my friend, so I wasn't getting a wage for a month while I was out there so even though it was funded for the flights and accommodation because obviously you spend your money when you're out there and then I wasn't getting a wage as well… I just saved up before, I'm really skint now (laughs) because we just

came back into uni and then I've been on a placement here so then it's been hard to get shifts in' (Kaitlyn).

Even though this was a fully funded placement Kaitlyn had financial and work commitments at home. This illustrates the inherent inequalities that less affluent students face in their endeavour to gain experience. This could mean a lost opportunity to accrue social, cultural and symbolic capitals (work contacts; skills and behaviours and job titles) which in turn could restrict the capacity to earn economic capital (salary).

Some of the participants who had already graduated envisaged that this financial trade-off might not be so short-term:

> *'In another 10 years I might still be bumming around on a minimum wage paying myself through my PhD'* (Violet)

It is interesting and cause for optimism that Violet was fully aware of the realities of working-life post-graduation and yet still aspired to investing in her education. It would have been interesting to return to the participants sometime after graduation, once their loan repayments had begun, to see if their attitudes had changed and if they still felt their investment was worthwhile.

The effects of government policies are likely to have influenced students' decisions about the financial feasibility of undertaking mobility or work opportunities which are unpaid or even cost money. This may have been felt most acutely by less affluent students, both in the short-term whilst studying and in the longer-term as research suggests poorer students graduate with higher levels of debt to repay. The NUS (2018) report on the poverty commission for students estimated that the average cost of living for students over a 39-week academic year (including tuition fees, outside London) is £23,115. It identified high cost student accommodation; maintenance loans paid termly which makes budgeting difficult and lack of childcare provision as some of the key contributory factors to student poverty. There are many more marginalised groups already identified in society as a result of austerity and benefit cuts so the idea of 'poor students' is nothing new and unlikely to attract much sympathy.

Further research might be useful in the area of student poverty, particularly since the withdrawal of maintenance grants and the implications for career mobility. However, this group occupy a very interesting place in society, many of them, as temporary underdogs with the potential to contribute to the GDP and society of the future so investing in this group could hold wider long-term benefits for society. The Vice President of the National Union of Students implores that the Prime Minster *'would do well to look seriously at the situation faced by society's bread and butter – our young people and learners in education'* (Telegraph, 2017). If universities wish to minimise barriers and widen participation it may be more helpful to offer financial or practical assistance in day-to-day matters such as accommodation, food and cash bursaries rather than reduced fees.

Martin Lewis OBE believes that a generation of young people have been 'miseducated' about how student finance works which has deterred many less affluent students from applying to university. He believes financial management lessons should be part of the school curriculum and has established a charity which has developed and provided free textbooks (Lewis, 2019).

Being short of time

This subtheme is linked to the theme of temporality, but I will discuss here where 'time' was described as a commodity in units of hours, days, weeks and months. Although Rina had undertaken unpaid work whilst at college, she had not done any since starting university, arguably when it would have been most valuable:

> *'I did volunteering 9 to12 on a Saturday morning every week but then I gave that up for a few months because it was just too much time'* (Rina)

Rina helped to illuminate why many students may avoid unpaid work for reasons other than simply financial. The struggle to undertake valuable unpaid work experiences alongside paid work, study and responsibilities led to many feeling short of time (day to day) and under time pressure (longer term), which often caused stress.

> *'I didn't think I had the time to sleep, I didn't have time to eat, I couldn't barely have time to breathe'* (Justyna)

However, many participants were incredibly flexible and resourceful in managing different types of unpaid experience alongside study, paid work and family commitments. Some were quick to point out that they fitted in the activities with relative ease. Jennifer explained how she managed to juggle work and a voluntary placement as well as helping care for her brother:

> *'I've always worked two or three jobs while I've been studying, I'm working as a carer for a lad with learning disabilities and I work in a pub and I've just got this job in mental health. I'll still do them, I'll just do them less'* (Jennifer)

For some participants, the flexible and piecemeal nature of their unpaid labour helped them to manage it within busy lives:

> *'the thing is a lot of them don't impact on your time eight hours a day like a job. The role of a director, I did a lot probably in the first year, I used to write articles for the magazine or for the blog but a lot of it is form filling I suppose so it's quite flexible. Same with being an independent visitor it's generally once a month now … so they all kind of slot in so I can do quite a few, none of them are overly taxing on my time'* (Cathy)

A question I often asked was how they managed to do so much when others did not:

> *'a lot of my friends at uni said 'oh I can't really be bothered doing that', and you say well it took maybe ten hours out of my semester… I met a lot of people who just couldn't be bothered'* (Holly)

Being proactive and versatile came across frequently as characteristics which might increase chances of success. This may also correlate with the concept of 'Protestant work ethic' (Weber, 2001) discussed in Chapter Five perhaps inherited from parents or their culture (Chapter Seven). A 'portfolio' approach to working and studying seemed to be a successful strategy for many students who could not afford (financially or timewise) full-time unpaid internships. Dominika was particularly efficacious in securing short internships in media organisations (a sector notorious for unpaid internships as a route to entry):

> *'every one of them was only for one week, apart from two of them which were two weeks, so it's not a long period of time and I tried to arrange it when we are off uni. I've got another work experience actually in the Easter holidays at a press agency, that's only for a week so yeah I have never done anything long-term'* (Dominika)

I wondered also if there were any differences between the people who found they were short of time and those who seemed to do so much. It may be that some people were more

organised or had social support or it might be related to the activities they undertook and whether they enjoyed them.

There seemed to be a hierarchy of unpaid roles in which the most valuable ones may be less time consuming but require a level of skill or expertise (or simply good contacts) to obtain them. This certainly seemed to be the case for Holly, Harriet and Mary who, because of their social capital (a network of parents – theirs or others connected to their high schools) had access to prestigious and valuable short-term work experiences at an early age.

Being in deficit ('things' other than money)

Many participants perceived a deficit in their general value in the labour market (current and future) which meant that they did not deserve or expect to be paid at this point in their career (Hassia, Ella, Malik, Jack). Most often this was expressed in terms of lacking skills and experience required by graduate employers. As a result, they were accepting (if not positively grateful) of the chance to make up for this:

> *'when you look on the entry requirements for jobs and go on obviously what they're after and what's desirable and what's compulsory for the job role really they expect more experience than what you can get from university you need the practical experience as well'* (Milly)

In Milly's interview the word 'experience' was mentioned forty-three times, which indicates the extent to which the message about the importance of work experience has gained acceptance. The concept of career capitals was not mentioned explicitly by anyone but alluded to here by Augustus.

> *'we had an early module on personal and professional development where the lecturer was basically saying that half of graduates leave university with a 2:1 and you are competing with people so much more and as a result of that kind of approach where I suppose people will take up the unpaid internships and I suppose it's why I took every opportunity I could at you know all the professional stuff I was doing and to kind of* **bridge that gap** *and to have something to show and stand apart'* (Augustus)

This quote also suggests that 'early modules' introducing employability may be welcomed by some students.

'I didn't have any relevant marketing experiences which I was initially going to go into and I wanted to keep my employment history up to date as I progressed through uni that's why it took all the short-term projects, internships and things like that, to link in and develop my employability for later on' (Violet)

As well as lacking skills and experience, for some there seemed a deeper sense of an underlying deficit and disadvantage due to other factors more social and structural in nature such as lack of world travel, valuable social contacts, going to a less prestigious university or being of a non-dominant culture (e.g. race and religion). Investing significant time and money undertaking unpaid work experiences was seen by many as essential to compensate for this deficit.

As well as the personal barriers faced by 'non-traditional' students they may face an additional disadvantage based purely on the university they attend. Zahir felt that he didn't get through the online application process for a global marketing company because of the perceived calibre of his university:

'when I put my uni I had to put 'other' because they didn't have [university Y] listed, they only had the redbrick unis so I think the moment I put 'other' I wasn't really expecting to get it but I thought 'you know maybe they'll overlook it' but I think it's one of those where literally their candidates were, because it was a global thing, they'd be like Harvard, Oxford, Cambridge and if you weren't one of those the chances were pretty limited' (Zahir)

This double disadvantage was described by Sarah who compared her own circumstances with her friend who was more privileged (economic capital) and consequently well-connected (social capital):

'my best friend goes to Oxford University, he went to Grammar School and has had a very privileged life in that sense and he's doing work experience this summer, he's doing exactly the same job as I did at the bank at 16, I got paid £10 an hour so that was nice but it obviously wasn't a lot… he's doing 10 weeks in Canary Wharf and is getting £16,000 and free accommodation' (Sarah)

Ella was very aware of this disadvantage. She chose to attend university Y even though she had the grades to go to a higher-ranking establishment as she wanted to live at home. She believed that the universities themselves recognise this deficit and made more effort to compensate:

> *'I would say at a university like this they recognise themselves without saying it that you need more than just a degree and that's evident'* (Ella)

To Ella, gaining valuable work experience and a first-class degree was the way to bridge the gap. On a deeper level, she articulated her perceived deficit of coming from a working-class background and how she was striving to be middle-class (interestingly, in the biographical questionnaire she described herself as 'middle class' and yet her parents as 'working class'). Ella tackled this deficit by throwing herself into situations that would strengthen her cultural capital (such as the placement in China and extra-curricular Leadership Programme and a placement with a popular fashion retailer in London).

This perception of deficit is congruent with findings of a large longitudinal study of young people (14,000 people over ten years) by the Foundation for Young Australians (FYA, 2018) which states that three quarters of young people do not feel they have enough work experience to gain full-time work.

In contrast, both Sarah and Mary felt that having a 'middle class' upbringing could be a deficit. Mary's parents were successful business people who believed in good education, paying for her to go to private secondary school where she obtained valuable unpaid work experience as a result of social capital (parents with contacts at the British Library) yet Mary experienced the work itself as boring:

> *'I spent a couple of weeks working in the British Library and it turned out it was one of the most boring things and it really cemented my choice that I didn't really want to do HR at all and that I really wanted to do marketing'* (Mary)

This illustrates two important points, firstly how Mary's access to prized social contacts (available through her middle-class network) enabled her to access experience which was intrinsically uninteresting to her and yet highly prestigious. Furthermore, this emphasises a more general point about the value of unpaid work experience in career decision making ('career misery push' – Houston & Cunningham, 2018). However, Mary herself subsequently chose to attend a state sixth form as she felt it would give her extra experience:

> *'…because I felt like it wasn't very well-rounded to have just a privately educated experience, so I spent two years at just my local state school'* (Mary)

This was an interesting perspective and suggested that being exposed purely to an elite habitus could be limiting ('inverted symbolic violence' Burke, 2017). I found this mature and insightful, however, perhaps this kind of cultural integration is much less accessible the other way (e.g. for working class and those with lower levels of dominant social capital to opt for private education).

Sarah had grown up in a council house with little money, later moving to a 'middle-class' area when her mum remarried. Her experience influenced her values towards money and her work ethic, so she views her younger sister's more materially 'privileged' upbringing as a deficit rather than her own:

> *'my sister doesn't even remember any of that and so… she's not spoilt but she expects a lot more than me whereas I expect am going to have to work for things…I see that as unprivileged, you know what I mean. because she hasn't had those privileges in that she's never had to work for money and she's never had that life where you appreciate things'* (Sarah)

This quote challenges the stereotypes about working-class students and working-class people in general (Jones, 2012; Greenbank & Hepworth, 2008) which often highlight a deficit in the skills of working-class students'. This is not to say they do not have skills, just that they differ from the dominant culture of the graduate workplace (Willis, 1978; Bourdieu, 1986).

An important objective of this research was to understand how and why students would undertake unpaid work despite being in debt (long-term) and short of cash (short-term). For this group, the way out of deficit and towards success (and sufficiency) was to build career capitals. This was not *despite* deficit but *because of* it. Deficit proved to be a strong motivator, even for the more affluent participants in the study. The most immediate deficits for these participants at this point in their life were money, time and the consequent sacrifices of other things such as food and holidays. Many were accepting of the need to work unpaid, not only to give them the competitive edge, but for many, even to make the initial sift for graduate careers. Things like time, money, emotions and opportunity costs were invested in this process in order to accumulate virtual 'things' like skills, experiences, contacts, 'LinkedIn' recommendations. Some of these things would turn out to be worthless and others valuable, but it was not always obvious which. Not really

knowing which things (capitals) or how much/many of them would really make the difference meant that time, money and energy was sometimes wasted, which caused resentment and despair. This illustrates that things are not merely benign objects but can exercise agency (Urry, 2000). 'Money talks' and the right kind of capitals can mediate between structure and individual.

It is easy to criticise capitalism as the root of all evils, however economist Adam Smith (cited in School of Life, 2019)suggested that a noble aim of capitalism is to provide a market for people to invest in higher order needs such as learning. In this model higher education and work experience opportunities are surely a good thing to marketize. If people are spending their money on learning (even paying it back in the future) then they are spending less on plastic and electrical consumer goods. This investment is supporting the local economy, providing jobs and raising the 'consciousness' of a generation. Benefits of education extend beyond the individual and institution (Browne, 2010) into society through citizenship, ethics, wisdom, community, openness of mind, cultural awareness, etc.

Being through things

Participants often expressed themselves in relation to materialities. The symbolism of everyday things such as a train journey, a jam butty, smoked salmon from Lidl, three-piece suits and overwhelming smells in a street were essential elements of unpaid work and mobility experiences. They represented meaningful aspects of transition and mobility, of their identity and status in society. The significance of materialities in student mobilities, explored by Brooks and Waters (2018), can be expanded to other dimensions of student and graduate life. The concept of embodied cultural capitals such as skills, knowledge and behaviours (Bourdieu, 1986) explains how individual characteristics can both shape and be shaped by the wider environment.

Clothes

Picking up on subtle clues about the habitus and learning how to fit in to a sector, organisation or role shows a clever ability to recognise and develop cultural capital

(Bourdieu, 1984). For some participants, clothes were a mark of successful transition from student to professional, or from a lower esteem, unpaid job to one with higher status:

> *'I've always strived for that big career, I've always wanted to have a good name for myself and I just want to put a suit on and a briefcase and get the train to work, you know, that was my dream to have that kind of career. I thought… and I think a lot of people thought that they would step out of uni in their robes straight into their suits and they be off to work'* (Kayla)

A significant advantage gained through unpaid work was learning about the cultural capital of dress deemed appropriate to a particular sector or organisation. Learning about this aspect during their time in internships gave Zahir and Mary the unspoken understanding which prepared them better for the assessment centre (not to wear a three-piece suit). This also seemed to give them increased confidence of fitting in to the organisation at the assessment centres (in which they were successful):

> *'I had my assessment centre and there was one guy and you looked at him and you just thought he's not gonna get it because he was so tied up, he had a three-piece suit on and a tie right to the top… It looked like he could barely move in his suit never mind trying to crack a smile and he just looked overly formal, overly prepared and I think, especially for marketing and business roles in a lot of companies now they just want a more relaxed approach'* (Zahir)

> *'at the assessment centre I think a lot of other people hadn't really had agency experience before so they misjudged what it would be like whereas I knew it was not going to be the most formal interview, I wasn't wearing my three-piece suit like some of the other people'* (Mary)

Cutts, Hooley & Yates (2017) describe how students were aware of the need to use clothing and general appearance to impress employers and fit in, even if this compromised their sense of identity. Although this awareness of the importance of context-appropriate clothes served Zahir and Mary well it can also be a hidden way that organisations perpetuate discrimination, for example, 'brown shoes and loud ties' can be seen as inappropriate for some finance careers and yet this key information is not explicitly communicated which disadvantages social groups without privileged insight (Social Mobility Commission, 2016). Explicit advice may also have helped some students as Launchpad (Appendix III) provided workshops with an image consultant who was also a careers adviser. Yates and Hooley (2017) address the tricky issue of whether Careers Advisers should discuss career image with people they support. There may be variations

between disciplines and sectors, for example, business and accounting might expect more formal attire than creative or small enterprises. Learning *'how work works'* includes such subtle cues of habitus and students understanding either how to attune to the culture and expectations of a sector or organisation or (perhaps more importantly) understand how to find a culture that best aligns to their own values and personality.

Food was experienced as a barrier and a challenge to some students on international placements, symbolising familiarity of home and cultural differences (inferiority of 'others') which was discussed in Chapter Seven (Rosie's towels and jam butties).

Skills & experiences

Skills and experiences were often described like as commodities to be exchanged through recruitment processes for a good job (and economic capital). In fact, *'picking up skills'* was a commonly used expression of a utilitarian motivation to undertake unpaid work. Interestingly, Mary describes how an unpaid experience held limited intrinsic value and yet helped her to gain a prestigious placement (which in turn helped her to get a good job). She also describes how it gave her confidence and helped to 'hyper-mobilise' this experience (Bathmaker et al., 2013) by understanding what would be desirable to an employer and 'enhancing' her skills to fit:

> *'I would do all of their boring stuff and then there was nothing else but then when I was searching for placements I felt that I had so much more experience to draw on, when they ask you situation questions like give me an example of a time when you solved a problem, I definitely think that, without my* **work experience** *I wouldn't have been able to answer those questions really so at least I could maybe emphasise some of the small things that I did to make them sound a little bit better and that made me more confident in the process of interviewing'* (Mary)

Work experience here is described as if it is a tangible object. Other prevalent examples included 'dream job' and 'confidence', 'education', 'opportunity' and even 'internship'. Although they may hold subjective and personal meanings to each participant there were also shared understandings. Some of these which relate to the world of work could be described as 'doxa' (Beer, 2012; Bourdieu, 1977/1972) i.e. 'taken-for-granted' things which consequently influence individual's choices (or lack thereof). Bourdieu suggested that doxa can prevent social mobility by entrenching beliefs which will keep people in their place (*ce*

n'est pas pour nous - 'it's not for the likes of us'). 'Employability' is perhaps the most pervasive doxa as what makes a person employable may differ between jobs, sectors and over time, for example, dependent upon rates of unemployment and levels of competition (Stoten, 2018). The proliferation of studies and reports that define and refine it can turn active processes like experience, learning skills and travelling into checklists of abstract commodities with which to furnish CVs – acquisition and achievement rather than a process of development and mastery (Dweck, 1986).

Unpaid work was described by at least nine participants as tangible 'thing' through the metaphor of door or window. This helped them make meaning of their experiences:

> '*it was really useful it's just* **getting your foot in the door'** (Holly)

> '*I thought that my BBC thing would* **open doors** *for me, it inevitably just didn't, in that industry it doesn't matter if you've worked before in a similar role you need to know someone, or you need to be very tenacious*' (Rachel)

The metaphor of unpaid work experiences as a door is that a door can be open or closed and locked. Once a door is opened, going through and beyond it is still a challenge. A door can also suddenly close. What the participants appear to be referring to is career capitals. These participants were intuitively and acutely aware of the mobility currency of their unpaid work experiences and the exclusion associated with not having or successfully translating it. Metaphors can be very useful (Inkson, 2002) as they provide a language and frame of reference that can facilitate discussion in a context people can relate to.

It was generally important to do *relevant* experience, so career decisions need to be made early as commitment to an occupation and even to a company was expected for some top graduate jobs (Highfliers, 2015). Many were juggling a full-time degree with part-time jobs and voluntary work. Long summer holidays were used to do internships many of which were indiscernible from real jobs (Lawton & Potter, 2010). Alongside studying hard for their degree (because classification matters) and gaining all this experience students spent significant amounts of time applying for internships and jobs. Students who just wanted to focus on their degree and decide later were worried they would struggle to find their place in the labour market.

Technology

Technology is a 'thing' which is taken-for-granted in the lives of students and graduates. Although the theme of technology also links with 'other' as a medium of social communication it will be discussed here as a materiality. Technology in the form of computers, television and advances in affordable and fast transport have made international experience more widely accessible. The internet featured regularly in participant interviews as a facilitator of unpaid work experiences: enabling them to find, research, apply for and undertake opportunities as well as to foster connections with people who could help:

> *'I was just emailing hundreds of people, I tried my best to be personal and research their companies and it took me hours and hours... then eventually I found a small agency... who just on the off chance had some work that they needed to do'* (Mary)

> *'I'm gonna apply for a couple of those finance internships... they're advertised on the side of my Facebook which makes me think that they must be looking for a lot of people'* (Harriet)

Technology helped participants with caring responsibilities to exercise mobility, for example, Cathy would not have been able to leave her family to undertake a six-week placement without the internet:

> *'I was still doing things while I was over there* (Uganda) *like ordering shopping from ASDA to be delivered and paying the bills'* (Cathy)

This illustrates the domestic labour she undertook, managing the home virtually whilst volunteering internationally. Although technology may have made such opportunities more accessible it also may also expand the extent of other forms of unpaid labour undertaken by parents and carers like Cathy – domestic and emotional labour.

Many participants perceived the internet as a source of luck or like a fortune teller, guiding their decisions as if it knew what was best for them:

> *'Then on the website it says radiography and one says diagnostic after it and one says therapeutic and one day I just randomly clicked on therapeutic radiography... so I decided that's what I wanted to do'* (Sarah)

Imogen's story shows how technology was both a virtual (google) and a practical tool (computer) in helping her to secure valuable experience:

> *'I just googled something like 'volunteering in (US city)' and I had just found all these volunteering opportunities and one of them was the main teaching hospital actually attached to my university and was very close to my house so I just wandered down there one day… I went to the desk and I'm just like "hey can I volunteer?" and she said "yeah, it's today you have to give your CV in today", so I was like "okay can I borrow your computer"?'* (Imogen)

Although the prospect of a wise and benevolent internet is appealing, algorithms recognise the types of searches people do and present the advertisements which best match (Papadopoulos, 2016). This will work more accurately the more time and effort is spent searching the internet. In this way, although the outcome may have been positive for the participant it seemed to devalue their sense of personal agency and self-efficacy.

> *'every day I was trawling through and getting email updates and things like that and I found it on one of these websites, so I was quite **lucky** really just to have stumbled across it'* (Mary)

This level of effort may be disproportionately high for those with low levels of social and cultural capital and the most prestigious opportunities may still evade them. This relates back to perceptions of 'being in the right place at the right time' and serendipity (Merton & Barber, 2004) discussed in Chapter Six.

Creative students such as aspiring journalists produced work for free to gain experience and develop their reputation (digital labour). This was the experience of Jack, a keen musician and aspiring comic author, as all this business was conducted through online networking:

> *Jack: 'I just came across that going through (Student Union) website so I sent a sample of my work and it kind of went from there…so it worked out quite well, it was just kind of chipping in here and there whenever they asked for something or if I had spare time, it was only in second year when I became the music editor for an online UK wide student magazine that's when I had to put more time into it because I had to get my section up Wednesday every week and then sort through the other reviews and articles so that's when I needed to be more structured with it… I think I did about two or three articles as contributor and then the editor position became available, so I put my application in and it worked out…*
>
> *Me: and how much time was that taking up on a week, on a regular basis?*

> *Jack: maybe about 2 to 3 hours a week, it wasn't that taxing it was only when I had essays on one side and exams on the other that 2 to 3 hours could really be quite a struggle.*

> *Me: and you did this voluntarily?*

> *Jack: yes*

Jack's description sounds like a 'real job' with responsibilities and deadlines. The final line reveals all this work was unpaid. His motivations were twofold, the intrinsic pleasure of creating content and the possibility that it would 'work out' i.e. lead to a better unpaid position and later to a job.

Whilst Dominika was prepared to undertake short-term unpaid internships in publishing, she disagreed with it in principle as some of her work was published online:

> *'if your work is good enough to get published then you should at least get paid some symbolic sum then you can say at the job interview yes I actually got paid for that piece'* (Dominika)

This illustrates the discomfort and compromise that some participants experienced in this situation. Dominika, as an Eastern European who came to live in the UK at sixteen with no family or social network had to work extra hard to build up her own career capitals. Jack, keen to get away from his hometown was prepared to work the extra hours too. Technology, through their unpaid digital labour, provided them a creative outlet as well as a route into their future career.

Internet technology appears to have facilitated boundaryless careers (indeed the theory originated in Silicon Valley) and participants utilised it effectively in order to 'connect, explore and communicate' (University of Manchester, 2013). Technology also helped people to be more flexible in where (e.g. through affordable flights), when and how they worked, which could be a double-edged sword. Not having clearly defined boundaries between their career and different aspects of their lives contributed to stress and overload.

In his later work, Heidegger (1954) considers 'the question of technology' deducing that technology is a means of 'bringing-forth' (revealing truth) and yet, we are currently witnessing how the opposite is true. He states that technology places humans (and nature) in 'standing reserve', waiting to be used for technological operations. This is as observable

now in modern automated processes as it was in the industrial revolution. Technology is instrumental in efficiently sifting hundreds of applicants down to manageable shortlists. Rich experiences must be condensed into key words, phrases and names to match search criteria. Participants had to be digitally literate to understand how to comply with requirements of online selection processes by ticking the right boxes and mentioning the right words (Bradley et al., 2017). However, being persistent and understanding it was *'a numbers game'* (Zahir) was helpful in depersonalising the experience in a more constructive way.

Being a commodity – 'human resources' and the objectification of being

Increasingly, graduates are expected to manage their 'digital identity' ensuring their social media profiles portray them in a professional light (Jackson, 2016) as discussed in Chapter Five. Discourses of self-marketing, creating a personal brand and 'selling yourself' all allude to commodification and depersonalisation of being. A crucial part of this brand-building is accruing and displaying career capitals which will be desirable to employers.

Automated selection systems used for competitive internships and graduate jobs, could be demoralising for applicants:

> *'I know one girl who applied to (big pharma grad scheme) and I applied as well but I got an email back saying we've had over 1000 applications for eight places. She actually got through to the first round which was a Skype interview but she opened the Skype call and there was no one on the other side it was just an automated recording, that's just enough to dishearten you from applying to anything like that again'* (Holly)

Online recruitment also depersonalised corporate graduate employers as faceless entities:

> Milly: *…**they** say you need at least a years' experience…*
>
> Me: *who's 'they'?*
>
> Milly: *'well when you look on the entry requirements for jobs…'*

Many participants experienced a pressure of competing and keeping up with their peers in the activity of jobhunting. In addition to the time commitment of unpaid work and mobility opportunities, the process of applying for jobs online could be very labour intensive and

time consuming, as discussed earlier in the typology of unpaid work (Chapter Six). Zahir acknowledged this situation and was able to make sense of it even turn it into a motivator rather than an obstacle by reframing it:

> *'I've met a lot of people who just say I'm not working for nothing, they see it as wrong morally. Personally, I'm quite big on statistics (laughs) so I look at the UK stats and say okay this many graduates are graduating… Why would they pick me over that person when they've got so much choice? So I need to give myself something to differentiate myself by, it literally comes to something as simple as that. For others, I don't know, maybe they hope they can just pull it off in the assessment centre but the way I see it is that you might not even get to the assessment centre unless you've got those credentials on your CV already'* (Zahir)

His quote echoes the acceptance of the need to 'play the game' (Bathmaker, Ingram & Waller, 2013) enabling him to find purpose and perseverance throughout the time and effort of applying for hundreds of vacancies. This sums up the predicament of many of the participants' compromise of working unpaid and playing the game balanced with the pragmatic imperative to do so.

Participants who had worked for a small company often talked about it informally and warmly in comparison with large corporate organisations.

> *'I worked for a PR company which is just one person so I worked with them for 150 hours [uni placement] and then I couldn't carry on going to the office because of the transport costs but she'd email me work over for a while and then in September this year she offered me a job one day a week'* (Milly)

Despite this many seemed locked on the idea of a 'graduate scheme' and less aware of, or open to, other options available post-graduation (for example, working for a small or medium employer, being self-employed, travelling). Imogen described this with a sense of resignation:

> *'I feel like all we really do here is get our degrees, collect our grades and we leave and we proceed onto a grad scheme and then just fall into that'* (Imogen)

This is perhaps because the large employers have a strong online advertising presence and present a compelling image which cannot easily be matched by smaller companies. Also, in the absence of sufficient quality careers guidance (as argued in Chapter Two) the key messages students receive are through careers fairs and glossy booklets which promote

the brands of large graduate recruiters (Boyd & Boyd, 2020). Graduates were attracted to the prospect of a relatively traditional career path within an organisation rather than a 'boundaryless career' especially in times of economic uncertainty.

In a materialistic and capitalist society, assets are measured and judged in terms of their transactional value. Humans are no exception, particularly in the labour market (also in education and health). The level of 'commodification' in the UK is higher than in many other countries (Esping-Andersen, 1990) as a result of the prevalent political ideology of recent decades. Feminist scholar, Nussbaum (1995, p257) identified *'seven ways to treat a person as a thing'*, many of which resonate with these findings. These include treating a person as a tool for the objectifier's purposes; denial of autonomy and agency; treating a person as interchangeable with other objects that can be bought and sold and denial of experiences and feelings. Perhaps the most interesting was the concept of *'violability',* treating a person as lacking in boundary-integrity. This could especially apply to the boundaries of the individual (rather than the 'career') and what they would be prepared to tolerate, sacrifice and compromise.

Graduates were primed for this commodification through narratives of employability, a conflictual labour market and a climate of competition and relative measurement of attainment (Tholen, 2013). Consequently, they were highly aware of the pressure to build resources, or capitals, which could be exchanged for economic capital through the means of a successful job. (Becker, 1993; Luthans, 2004; Tomlinson et al., 2017). They needed to gain a high degree classification (institutionalised cultural capital - Bourdieu, 1986) but all recognised this alone might not be sufficient to get them a good job. Gaining work-related skills, knowledge and experiences and demonstrating mobility (and by proxy, cultural competence) were recognised marks of distinction against the competition. These requirements were indirectly discriminatory though, as they required resources of time and money which were scarce for many.

Being and Time – temporality and unpaid work

Time was a key feature of the interviews with participants, in terms of the temporality of their experiences (present, past and future). Time also featured heavily as the Greek *'telos'*

in the striving towards dimensions of plans, wishes and ambitions (being towards the future). The following subthemes will now be explored:

i.   Being at a point in time/being in transition (present-focused)
ii. Being transformed (past-focused)
iii. 'Becoming' - being optimistic and perseverant (future-focused)

Time was also often experienced as a commodity (usually scarce) participants had to manage in their everyday working, studying and living (discussed in 'being and things').

Being 'at a point in time' and being in transition

Transition was a key feature of the participants experience as they were at a stage in their lives where they moved from education to a career and many experienced geographical relocations. Many participants identified a 'point' in time which stood out to them as significant, described as opening of a door of opportunity, a turning point or low point. Although frequently a negative experience, this point often marked a turn in attitude, an increased determination or a new direction.

> *'It's always a **stumbling point** at the start of anything, often times through the middle of it as well, but yeah that's probably the hardest part'* (Jack)

> *'the lady who runs the overall organisation secured the funding and **that's the point** I got involved to do the research and obviously analyse it with a view to improving breastfeeding services that's just been snowballing really since then'* (Cathy)

This links to the theme in 'self' relating to the 'point in time' at which they became resourceful and focused. Ella described earlier (in Chapter Five) how the overwhelming environment on her China placement catalysed her hitting a low point. She reflects upon how her tutor and cognitive therapy skills she had learnt earlier helped her to turn this to a positive. In the following quote she alludes to this 'turning point' without using these specific words (which, on a methodological point, illustrates a limitation of NVivo, as only human interpretation would recognise this):

> *'if I had not been able to go to China it would have been a failure and I think there does come a sense of achievement and pride with it when I look back and I think well actually yeah I have done that'.*

This phenomenon of a turning point in the experiences of students and graduates was also observed by Bathmaker (2013). A turning point is also highlighted by Law (2010) as 'an episode in a person's life when a possible change of direction comes into view'. Learning how to reflect on experience and learn from it to make decisions are important meta-cognitive skills for life. Reflection during and after experiences (Schön, 1994) and perhaps even taking part in the research interview, seemed to help participants to make sense of events and to position themselves as agents with some control of their lives.

What was significant about the 'turning points' was that they often involved travel. This illustrates journeys not simply as a matter of physically moving from 'A' to 'B' but also the cognitive and affective processes that constitute this lived experience. This could be an example of what Mezirow (2000) calls a 'disorienting dilemma' which catalyses transformative learning.

Some elements of narrative in the interviews became very familiar, almost predictable. The young protagonist stepping into an unknown world, encountering challenges, meeting mentors, reaching a turning point, being transformed and returning home (or back to university) with prized trophies of skills, experience, wisdom and perhaps job offers:

> *'In my mind at the moment it's a temporary move in the sense that it's 5 to 7 years and then I feel I would have got the most I can out of [employer] and everything that London has to offer and the idea may be to come back to the North and to kind of give back everything I've got'* (Augustus)

This pattern recurs in many stories and particularly in successful movies such as Lord of the Rings and Star Wars (Booker, 2004). Recognition of this template or 'monomyth' was elaborated and popularised by Campbell (1949) as 'The Hero's Journey'. This has a resonant appeal, particularly in the structure of western storytelling and can be a useful structure for qualitative analysis (e.g. Thomson & Downe, 2013). The question is, did the participant interviews follow these patterns because they tap into a collective consciousness about the nature of human existence? Or were they exposed so frequently to this monomyth that they internalised and applied it to their lives? Whitaker and Atkinson (2019) discuss the 'radical critique' of 'the interview society' (Hammersley, 2017; Atkinson & Silverman, 1997) suggesting that interviews should be viewed as a social phenomenon which has a function other than simply stating facts. They explain how people will often undertake 'biographical'

or even 'therapeutic work' drawing upon shared tropes of authenticity, contrast (between self and other) and moral tales. This reinforces the imperative to return to the phenomenon as the focus in research, rather than the stories as an end in themselves.

In career studies, temporality and transition have traditionally been the focus of theories which attempt to define and understand how people experience and manage their work-life (e.g. 'Life Design' Savickas et al., 2009; 'Life Span, Life Space approach' Super, 1980). A 'career' (or job) no longer begins at a clearly defined point. The boundaries between stages of life designated to 'learning' and 'labouring' (Brooks & Waters, 2018; Willis, 1978; Super, 1980) are increasingly blurred and fluid – in terms of time, physical spaces and self-concept. Jackson (2016) argues that universities are not going far enough to prepare students for a lifetime of volatility and change.

A key overall finding of this research is that the notion of 'boundaryless career' (Arthur, 1994) has a temporal dimension, with participants' careers (or 'pre-professional identity' – Jackson, 2016) often beginning at an earlier age and stage, alongside their full-time education. Many activities involved in being work-ready and building this pre-professional career could be viewed as unrecognised forms of unpaid work (described in Chapter Six), the responsibility and cost borne unfairly and disproportionately by students and new graduates (rather than society or industry).

Being transformed

Opportunities such as volunteering and geographical mobility have the potential to transform lives. They provide windows into other worlds and open new horizons of possibility. Participants often reflected upon their experiences as fundamentally changing them in ways they had not expected. Work-based learning (including unpaid work experiences) is an opportunity to learn specific work-related skills which may later help students in the workplace. However, most of the outcomes identified by participants were less tangible or explicit, such as confidence-building, knowing how jobs work, problem-solving and meeting new friends or a partner.

> *'sure it was a year of many unsuccessful moments but I'm really good at jobs now (laughs) I think it's a skill you have to develop and now I can, you know, I've got a*

lot of respect when I go into workplaces and I know how to work hard and I know how to please management and stuff' (Harriet)

'some people think it's wasting my time but I think it's gaining amazing experiences, I met some amazing people, I met my boyfriend for god's sake' (Imogen)

Harriet and Imogen describe how both negative and positive experiences can be transformative. Jennifer supports the idea that reflection upon experiences is valuable in making sense of and applying them:

'coming back and looking at it I feel I learnt a lot... not sure how I'll translate it into practice but I learnt a lot about being in difficult situations and how to handle them (laughs) and a lot about emotional intelligence and how to deal with conflict and things like that and how to manage stress as well' (Jennifer)

Beyond these descriptions were deeper changes such as changes to their personality or perspective on life and taking things for granted less.

'It's made me a different person in a sense of, because it was my first time away on my own without my family it's made me more independent, it's made me appreciate life more. It made me appreciate what I have more. And that's basically what it has done' (Rosie about her India trip with K4C)

'I just feel like I have been able to be a bit more creative, a bit more outgoing, a bit more confident, it's just brought out the side that I can think 'it's gonna be challenging but I'm gonna have a go and see how well I do' now and I feel like it prepares you as well for a bit more responsibility and for adulthood' (Kevin about his Uganda trip with K4C)

These quotes were quite profound and almost poetic in their insight and the repetition of key phrases ('made me appreciate...', a bit more...'). There is no way of knowing but it seems these insights are formed through looking back on their experiences once they arrived home and comparing the different environments and circumstances. If they had been asked during their placements these changes might not have been realised. This reinforces the benefit of reflection on experience as key to learning.

Many of the participants reflected upon the ways in which unpaid work experiences changed their lives. I had expected this might occur during, or as a result of international student volunteering placements yet I also discovered that short term, low level, specific incidents or local work experiences undertaken at an earlier age had often been a significant transformative influence.

'It's one of the most life changing things I've ever done, the thought of how I was before it disgusts me, I was so hung up on like… if you asked me what I wanted to do then I would have said I wanted to become rich… Yeah ever since it's just made me, it's just changed me as a person completely, genuinely' (Zahir on community volunteering)

'I think it was one of the most life defining experiences I've had because I was just like okay… initiative, what can I do?... let's do this, let's do that, so yeah it was awesome!' (Imogen describing how she helped a paramedic deliver a baby)

Imogen's description of being thrown into an emergency situation as an ambulance paramedic, forced her to find resources (her initiative) and she experienced a transformational moment in her life. She later went on to train as a doctor.

This observation is congruent with literature about the benefits of international volunteering and travel. Morgan (2010) believes that travel to a different place can be effective in catalysing change, a link acknowledged through the commonplace phrase 'journey' as both a metaphorical and literal description of learning. This could catalyse the 'disorienting dilemma' suggested by Mezirow (2000) as the first stage of transformative learning. Morgan also suggests that travel may provide more impetus for this transformation when it involves cultural and geographical 'otherness' which was certainly the case for many of the participants. Boyd and Myers (1988) suggest that emotional and social influences play a strong part in this transformation. Similarly, in her ethnographic study of international student experiences Brown (2009) concludes that:

'the international sojourn has the power to effect a growth in intercultural competence, as well as a shift in self-understanding, with long-term implications for personal and professional life. Such change is the result of exposure to diversity and of the geographical and emotional distance from the home environment' (p. 517)

An important question for individuals and universities is whether such transformative experiences might also arise nearer home and in more mundane settings. Many of the participants had highly significant experiences in local organisations such as small enterprises, community work, hospitals and charities.

Houston and Cunningham (2018) suggest that everyday work experiences may provide opportunities for 'career epiphany' - a sudden realisation and clarity about career choice. A catalyst can be 'career misery push' whereby unpleasant, unpaid work experiences give

a realistic, negative preview of work and the student realises it is definitely not what they want to do as a career. This was a very resonant and common experience in this research. Being able to have life-changing experiences through local, short-term and accessible opportunities is important for equality and social mobility as not everyone can afford or practically manage long periods of time away from home (as discussed in earlier chapters). Ackers (2008) argues that shorter spells of international mobility can be valuable for building career capital.

Being future-focused

The participants were at a stage in their lives where the future was a concern, in terms of their career and also where they might live. Many were uncertain and anxious about this, perhaps in part because of pressure from others. However, most were positive and determined about their future.

Being optimistic

An endearing quality throughout the participant interviews was the strong sense of optimism they conveyed. Tied in with this positive attitude towards their future career, for many, were intentions to 'do something worthwhile' and a sense of perseverance in achieving their aims.

> *'I just want to have stories to tell my grandchildren'* (Zahir)

Zahir's quote echoes his earlier anecdotes about the huge positive impact his own grandfather had upon him as a child and beautifully illustrate the temporal and intergenerational dimension of experiences.

The notion of a 'dream job' was frequently alluded to as a desirable goal, even amongst the graduates who had experienced a less-than idyllic start to their graduate careers.

> *'I've just literally kept going with it, applying for jobs you know, I was down and I was very disheartened but I knew that something had to come because I wasn't ready to accept that that was my life… I'm the sort of person that won't settle until I've got what I want, I won't just sit back and exist, I dunno maybe I'll find my dream*

> *job and still be searching for what's next, maybe that's just what sort of person I am'* (Kayla)

Values and work-life balance were frequently cited as important in their future careers:

> *'I just want to do something where I wasn't just working for a big corporation to make them profit, I want to do something that I can say I'm having a positive impact, anything especially taking into consideration human rights and things like that'* (Hassia)

> *'I want the balance between being with my children and obviously working in a job that I want to be in'* (Cathy)

This shows the importance of an approach to graduate career planning which incorporates both agency and structure and both short and longer term. It also suggests that reflection and imagination are essential skills and practices which need to be acknowledged and developed alongside the more pragmatic 'CV writing' support. Career planning needs to happen within a bigger picture of a holistic life (McMahon & Patten, 1995; Savickas et al., 2009).

Resilience of the participants has been discussed earlier (Chapter Five) and along with the optimism and sheer determination displayed by so many of them could be responsible, in part, for their subsequent successful outcomes. These attitudes and consequent behaviours seemed to help them to navigate structural opportunities and challenges. The concept of positive psychological capital (Luthans & Youssef, 2004) may help us understand how students and graduates can make the most of their situation and strive for success (whatever that may mean to them). Hope, efficacy, resilience and optimism (HERO) were demonstrated by the participants, even (or especially) those who had had adverse experiences. The challenge for careers and higher education professionals is *'maintaining the promise without killing the dream'* how to balance hope and optimism with messages of realism in informing students about the labour market (Scurry, Burke, Blenkinsopp & Smart, 2020, p36). Arguably, for many of the participants, 'structure' set provisional parameters for their career success, however, exercising 'agency' was able to mitigate some of these barriers.

'Being and time' is the title of Heidegger's (1927) magnus opus in which he argues that being *is* time. To be human is to exist within the stretch between birth and death, historicity

and temporality underpinning all other dimensions of experience. Participants were readily able to describe their past experiences, present circumstances and how they were mobilising opportunities towards their career aspirations. This challenges the assertion of Greenbank (2008) that working-class students 'lack future-orientation and have a pessimistic outlook on life'.

Being mortal – time as finite, 'being-towards-death'

One quote is particularly memorable, not only for its relevance but for the intense emotion with which it was spoken:

> *'I must say the job was the worst year of my entire life because everyone kept dying at night, I was like 'I've got this degree and I just keep washing and dressing dead bodies, how have I got here?' I think a lot of students get stuck in that and if it wasn't for my determination of applying for everything and trying to do a hundred different things to be able to get just the one job, I'd be in a really low way now, it was only the determination, you know I'd fought so hard to get that degree, I'm gonna get the job'* (Kayla)

This was Kayla's 'turning point' – her period of underemployment, on night shifts, washing dead bodies seemed to bring sharply into focus the existential nature of her career quest. It was the catalyst for change that shook her to the core and forced her to re-evaluate and take action. Similarly, Ella described how, during an unhappy internship at a fashion retailer in London, her grandmother passing away caused her to re-evaluate what she was doing (this is an abridged version of a very personal story). This also illustrates the 'turning point' phenomena discussed earlier in the chapter:

> *'My mum called me at 6am, her mum had passed away…I remember being in Euston station… I just broke down… and it wasn't the nicest trip home, it was a **turning point** I would say'* (Ella)

These sentiments take the findings back, full circle, to the human, embodied nature of career mobility experiences. Heidegger suggests that humans are ultimately 'being-towards-death' in that their actions are framed by the finite nature of their existence. This focuses Dasein on 'projects' which are congruent with authenticity. Certainly, for some participants, being faced with the deaths of others seemed to focus their attention and actions on their career. Mortality can be at least one useful lens through which to view

important life decisions (such as career choices); others might include our gut, caution, courage, our enemy and our parents (School of Life, 2019) which also fit with the existential themes of corporeality and relationality.

Summary

Things, or objects, were central to Heidegger's explanations of the world in their relationship with Dasein. The world presents itself mainly as a useful environment of objects which are 'ready-to-hand', being functional and relational. Our experience of the world precedes our theoretical understandings of it (whereby objects are 'present-at-hand'). In this way, first-hand lived experiences inform knowledge about career capitals. It may be difficult for unpaid workers to step back and consider the job as 'present-at-hand' (for example, to evaluate power relations and motives) as they are absorbed in its 'ready-to-hand'-ness so timely reflection is important.

Discussion about money (or lack of it) occurred regularly in interviews and clothes were significant. As well as the physical, material things that we experience around us there are also many other things we cannot see or touch, but we still refer to using nouns (e.g. debt, employability, experience, work, education). Participants talked about the pressure to pick up' these things and a strong sense of not having enough or the right kind of things.

Forms of capital have been the explicit subject of research for many decades (Bourdieu, 1986; Burke, 2015; Brown & Wond, 2018) which suggests they are not easy to define or understand. No participants mentioned the word 'capital' (except in the context of London, the capital city). It was as if they were 'playing the game' but without the rulebook or vocabulary to make sense of it. It is no wonder that words such as 'bizarre, crazy and strange' were so commonplace. Economic capital (perhaps the most 'tangible' and familiar) was experienced as complex and nuanced (e.g. attitudes to debt and tuition fees, payment for work). Other forms of capital, such as cultural and symbolic were strongly alluded to (e.g. parity of esteem of universities, meritocracy) and taken for granted. This research suggests how deconstructing such concepts and opening them for critical discussion could be a practical tool for action.

Time is the context which frames the systems theory of career development (McMahon & Patton, 1995). Participants' choices and actions were heavily steeped in their understanding of the context at that time. This stage of their lives is fundamentally a time of transition and mobilities.

The participants of this research felt in deficit of money, time, experience, skills, food, contacts and consequently lacking power and agency in other ways. However, through time and with a short-term acceptance of the necessary compromises, most were able to gain traction in career mobility and exercise agency.

Time is an implicit variable in Bourdieu's theory of capitals (1986). People inherit capitals, not only from their past but generations before them. How the participants evaluated, supplemented, mobilised, re-evaluated, refreshed and encashed capitals was a process which unfolded over time and into the future. Their capitals lost value if they missed the right time (or place) to utilise them. Relative influences of structure and agency over time were equally fluid and dynamic, sometimes agency being most influential, other times structure. A chance opportunity or a persistent strategy could make all the difference.

The philosophy of Heidegger (1927) can help us understand that we are not only 'being' we are also in a constant state of 'becoming' or moving towards. Transition, careers and capitals are fluid and mobile so our approaches to them need to be. This qualitative research captures this rich and dynamic experience, complementing the plethora of quantitative statistics and surveys about student and graduate career mobilities.

Chapter Nine: Conclusions

Working for nothing: How do students and graduates utilise unpaid work for career mobilities?

This chapter will highlight the main findings of the research, relate them to the research objectives, literature and policy. Conclusions will reflect on the research, consider the potential implications for policy and practice then consider the unique contribution to knowledge in the field. As is congruent with a phenomenological approach (Langdridge, 2007) there are both descriptive and interpretive elements to the findings.

Key findings

How do students and graduates utilise unpaid work to mobilise their career opportunities? This is the over-arching research question which has been addressed through the following sub-questions:

Why do students and graduates undertake unpaid work, internships, volunteering and work experience: What are the participants' motives and what did they hope to gain? Participants usually undertook these experiences because they were aware of the need to boost their chances in a competitive labour market (picking up skills, ticking a box). Many of the group felt this more acutely as they perceived they were already at a disadvantage because of their background or the university they attended. However, this was not the only reason for participation, some of the activities were felt to be intrinsically worthy or enjoyable (particularly volunteering and international travel). Participants motives sometimes changed as they might start with a purist, instrumental intention (Brown et al., 2003) but then find that the experience was intrinsically rewarding. There was also an element of social pressure from peers seen to be doing these activities.

How do they access these unpaid work opportunities - what supports or thwarts their efforts?

Only a couple of participants had middle-class, well-connected parents who were able to facilitate entry into prestigious opportunities. Some students gained access to community volunteering through family members and friends which gave them the experience and social capital to move on to other things. Many opportunities were gained through university initiatives which helped to build career capitals and give 'a foot in the door'. Another common strategy was to intensively target companies by email and social media which was successful for many students. In this way technology helped by making opportunity-providers directly accessible (Gershon, 2017). Other people were a valuable support to all participants, not only as social capital but as mentors, moral support, practical help (e.g. parents providing a home) and advocates. Essentially, being prepared to accept short-term compromise for long-term gain i.e. delayed gratification (Dacre-Pool & Sewell, 2007; Goleman, 1996) facilitated their activities too. The participants' perseverance, optimism and a belief in a meritocratic labour market (Mendick, Allen & Harvey, 2015; Tholen, 2013) motivated them through difficult times.

A major challenge for many of the participants was being short of time and money so having to juggle commitments such as paid work, study and caring responsibilities. This prevented many from undertaking more valuable opportunities. A common obstacle was lack of clarity about the terms of engagement in unpaid work, for example, if the role was paid, time commitment expected, whether it would lead to a more long-term position ('psychological contract' – Rousseau, 1995). This meant that taking up such opportunities was riskier for some students than others (e.g. less affluent or mature students with responsibilities). One participant realised later in her studies that she had missed out on work experience opportunities as she had believed the university would arrange it for her. All of these challenges may be more significant for 'widening participation' students particularly those who are first in their family to go to university, as their parents may be less able to provide economic, social and cultural capital to support and guide them (Shury et. al., 2017; Bradley et. al., 2017).

What are the immediate and longer-term outcomes they gained through the experiences? Are they always positive or might they be negative?

Unpaid work and mobility opportunities are often referred to as 'CV building' (Tomlinson et. al., 2017), however, more often participants highlighted the benefit of having something

to 'talk about in interviews'. Participants often gained outcomes that they had not initially expected, for example, building relationships (and social capital), gaining confidence and learning how to solve problems. Interestingly, although experiences were sometimes described negatively (e.g. causing stress, culture shock, feeling exploited, miscommunication), on reflection, they provided positive outcomes such as valuable learning opportunities (understanding the unwritten rules of the workplace i.e. cultural capital). Experiences were often unexpectedly transformative, changing aspects of their personality, values and outlook on life as well as developing 'soft skills' such as confidence, creativity and communication (Ahmed et al., 2017; Mezirow, 2000).

How might experiences help in establishing their career?

Overall, most of the group were very successful in their early career destinations (Table 5.2), regardless of their background and university of study. This is likely to be attributable, at least in part, to their unpaid work and mobility during university. Another possible explanation is that students who voluntarily participated in the research were in some way atypical of the wider cohort, for example, more proactive (McArdle, Waters, Briscoe & Hall 2007), having higher self-esteem, self- efficacy and self-confidence (Dacre-Pool & Sewell, 2007). Some of the participants tracked the roots of their success back to early work experience (school and college) which led to more valuable opportunities or better-informed career decisions later. Many graduates still took at least a year to settle into their career with underemployment, false starts, further study or time out to travel being common (Burke, 2015).

Key findings - Discussions

This research has built up a picture of how students and graduates exercise agency (responsibility for employability) to mediate structural opportunities and constraints. The participants were a diverse group, many from 'non-traditional' backgrounds compared with historically 'typical' university students. Their implicit goal was to gain career capitals (Bourdieu, 1986; Brown & Wond, 2018) which they could exchange for economic capital (through successful graduate employment) and yet their stories express so much more than this. No participants mentioned the word 'capital' even though they alluded to this concept.

Undertaking unpaid work and mobility opportunities often made individuals feel vulnerable, stepping out of their comfort zone and making sacrifices. For many, their perceived deficit in the labour market spurred them on to span boundaries across education and work, across sectors and continents. Developing confidence and forming relationships were as important as the utilitarian aims of *'picking up skills'* and building networks. Alongside the extrinsic outcomes most participants spoke of intrinsically meaningful encounters through their unpaid work experiences.

The participant interviews illustrated the relevance of the systems theory framework of careers (McMahon & Patton, 1995) in contemporary graduate transitions as they were influenced by many factors – individual (e.g. age, gender, knowledge, skills and abilities) and wider factors (e.g. peers, family, geographical location, employment market, political decisions, etc). Their experiences also took place in the context of time and with interventions of chance. Using Van Manen's existentials of the lifeworld (2014, 1990) to analyse and present the findings enables the phenomenon to be central, rather than the individual, and illustrates that the influences on the participants' experiences interlink and foreground at different times.

This research has demonstrated that unpaid work is much more complex and varied than simply unpaid internships and that opportunities are not equally accessible. It has also explored the types of mobility associated with unpaid work in the overlapping worlds of higher education, work and life. Early student and graduate careers may be characterised by constraints and compromises. A key question was whether the classic concept of boundaryless careers (Arthur, 1994) was relevant to the experiences of the participants. It is interesting to return to the original six criteria proposed by Arthur and Rousseau (1996, p.6) whereby a boundaryless career:

> *'moves across boundaries of separate employers; judgements of marketability is drawn from external sources rather than an employer; external networks or information support the career; the career does not follow or depend upon internal hierarchical structures of an organisation for progression; personal or family reasons lead a person to choose to work outside existing career structures and finally a boundaryless career may be in the interpretation of a 'career actor' who may perceive their career as such regardless of the organisational restraints*.

Whilst some of the above characteristics will typically apply to students and early-career graduates, others over-state the power and choice of the individual to eschew an organisation-focused career (Inkson et al., 2010). The difference for students and graduates is that necessity rather than choice is often the driver. For the participants, boundarylessness (or permeable boundaries between study, home life, mobility and un/paid work) was both a feature of their own agency (proactivity, biographical circumstances, social capital, life stage) and the world around them (opportunity structure, support of others, societal expectations and norms). Through unpaid work and mobility experiences, this group had chances to span boundaries of study and work, sectors, organisations and nations. This would arguably be less possible later in life once they have settled into a career and have more commitments. This 'boundarylessness' extends, not only laterally but vertically, ever earlier into the lives of young people, often meaning they begin to construct their 'pre-professional identity' (Jackson, 2016) even before university. Sullivan and Baruch (2009) argue that scholars appear to have swung too far away from the idea of traditional organisational careers towards ideas of mobile, boundarylessness, protean agency and portfolio careers. However, despite societal changes, many people still follow a structured, fairly predictable trajectory and issues of precarity and inequality make career freedom less appealing. As Brown et al. (2003) point out, few people are independent from their need to earn a living, which in times of a strong economy and plentiful employment may not be an issue, however, when times are harder the freedom to choose becomes more constrained (or bounded).

Rather than dismissing the above definition of 'boundaryless career' as inappropriate to this group, this research has demonstrated how the concept has value when applied more broadly to the pre-professional career development stages and early careers of students and graduates. Perhaps it is more useful to think of their careers as 'boundary-crossing' (Inkson, 2006). Dany's (2014) integrative approach to the boundaryless career appreciates that careers are necessarily bound in time and space and are marked by both individual agency and different levels of structures, which is particularly resonant with this research.

To refine the research question, it is useful to ask, 'how do students and graduates exercise individual agency within structural constraints and enablers through utilising unpaid work?' As I have argued, although there is a proliferation of research evidence that many are

unable to do this, this research aimed to explore both challenges and successes. Success is subjective, a result of very many influences and actions and can take time (years or indeed generations in the case of social mobility). It is impossible to measure the relative contributions that work experiences, education and individual factors such as agency, serendipity and social support have made to the successful outcomes of the students in terms of their career destinations as this is a complex picture. The research concludes that 'success' in terms of career progression and social mobility is possible but not guaranteed for those who undertake unpaid work.

A concern for higher education is the extent to which failure is more likely for those who do not.

> 'If everyone stands on tiptoe, no one sees better'
> But if one does not stand on tiptoe one has no chance of seeing.
> Hirsch (1977, p.5) in Brown, Hesketh & Williams (2003, p.11)

Employers and opportunity providers can play a part in helping students and graduates to fulfil their potential. As such it is also important to consider the inverse of the research question – how does the 'world of work' (e.g. employers and voluntary organisations) utilise students and graduates through unpaid work? They may be engaged positively as 'boundary spanners' and a source of fresh skills (e.g. IT and ideas). Negatively, they may be a 'human resource' but without the inherent rewards of economic capital. Instead social capital (contacts, LinkedIn recommendations, references), cultural capital (learning how work works, picking up skills, knowing what to wear at a job interview) and symbolic capital (impressive voluntary title or unpaid work with a prestigious brand) are the valued currencies (Bourdieu, 1986). These capitals do not hold value per se, yet have potential for conversion, or 'mobilisation' (Bathmaker et al., 2013) into economic capital through subsequent employment. Some of the participants lamented that they had missed the opportunity to make the most of their experiences. As well as having access to higher value capitals, research suggests that middle-class graduates are more able to translate, or hyper-mobilise these capitals quickly into career success (Bradley et al., 2017; Burke, 2015).

This research advocates an approach which recognises both agentic and structural influences upon student and graduate careers. It suggests that unpaid work and mobility

opportunities can help mediate social disadvantages and the factors which can support them in navigating this unfamiliar territory. Some may need extra help, not only in building career capitals but also how to utilise them.

Implications – helping students and graduates utilise unpaid work for career mobility

Structure/Agency

This research has explored, through a holistic, systems approach (McMahon & Patton, 1995; Van Manen, 1990) how different types of capitals and mobilities converge to enable or constrain student and graduate career mobility. The research presents a snapshot in time (2015/2016) and many things have changed in the lives of the participants since their interviews. They have all graduated and moved on to the next phase of their life, getting a job, continuing in studies or other pathways. Many have relocated and had numerous job changes already. They will no longer be the same people that I interviewed in terms of their spatial location, age, career identity or in their view of the world.

There have been significant changes in the world, in the economy, politics and policy as well as public discourse which frame work, study and life in general for the participants and for new cohorts of students and graduates. Being able to apply this knowledge is important – for professional practice and for policy – to respond to changing circumstances in education and the workplace.

> *This is the social challenge that psychologists face. In the years immediately ahead, we must not only extend and deepen our understanding of mental and behavioural phenomena, but we must somehow incorporate our hard-won knowledge more effectively into the vast social changes that we all know are coming.*
> (George Miller, 1969, p1063)

Unpaid work and mobility opportunities can help students and graduates mediate the relationship between structure and agency through building career capitals. University-led initiatives such as career education and guidance, placement support and funded opportunities for mobility can help students to gain skills, experience and confidence which can give them an advantage or partially compensate for disadvantage. Boundarylessness

(or permeable boundaries between work, study and home-life) whilst creating pressure and compromise, can help to facilitate this transition.

Forms of capital

The systems theory framework of careers (McMahon & Patton, 2015) and Van Manen's existentials (1990) remind us that individuals should be considered within the context of their circumstances and significant relationships in order to help them to manage their careers, achieve success (whatever it means to them) and contribute to society. This means being mindful of the home-life and values of students when advising them and involving parents if necessary, particularly of vulnerable young people. Participants talked about the other people in their life as a central aspect of their interviews, however, as careers and educational professionals we rarely take this into consideration when we talk to students about their progress and aspirations. There are clearly implications for how universities, employers and other opportunity providers support and students in preparing them for the future by helping them to build their 'resources and readiness' (Tomlinson et al., 2017).

The research highlights how university initiatives (outlined in Appendix IV) were particularly effective in helping students to develop social capital through professional networks. This role is especially important when working with first generation university students whose peers and parents may have limited access to dominant capitals (e.g. quality work experience contacts). This can be a double disadvantage when 'prestigious' graduate employers are less likely to have a presence at non-elite universities e.g. attending careers fairs on campus, mock interviews, etc. (High Fliers, 2015).

Other people were often cited as being instrumental to access and success in unpaid work, however, social capital was never mentioned explicitly. Employability skills training and graduate career management resources sometimes present an overly corporate, individualistic view of social capital building as collecting network contacts and promoting personal brand (e.g. Rook, 2013; Arruda & Dixson, 2007). As Gershon's (2017) research suggests, this enthusiasm for personal branding is not necessarily matched by employers. It was considered distasteful and inauthentic by many participants, not just in social and health sciences but also amongst Marketing and Business students. Participants instead often talked about building symbiotic and meaningful relationships with mentors and other

people they met through unpaid work and mobility. This is useful feedback for university careers services in raising awareness of the importance of social capital, suggesting the need to understand student views across disciplines and to use appropriate language.

Supporting students in developing digital skills (such as online job-seeking, interviews and managing their online presence) is an increasingly important form of cultural capital and one which presents opportunities for more equality (Gershon, 2017). Technology was an integral aspect of participants' engagement with unpaid work and mobility, in a positive way by connecting them to opportunities and gaining social capital (e.g. through LinkedIn and blanket emailing) and yet also as a negative source of social comparison (e.g. apparent success of peers on social media). Technology blurred the boundaries for some between personal and professional identities, for example through digital labour (turning a hobby into an unpaid job), managing the home whilst on international placement and personal social media platforms (e.g. Facebook) displaying job adverts. It is crucial that graduates leave university with skills of critical thinking and media literacy (Stanford Graduate School of Education, 2016).

Time also emerged as a capital, or commodity, which was unequally distributed with less affluent students or those with family responsibilities being not only short of money but consequently having to balance paid work with unpaid work and studies. Many will have gone from a highly structured educational environment to higher education and workplaces where independence and autonomy are critical survival skills. Learning the *'Knowing-How'* (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994) of being a student or a worker is a skillset developed through a process of socialisation in the workplace but also from parental and community role models. Feeling 'short of time' could also point to a need for students to learn skills of time-management upon entering the world of work.

This research sought to understand the complex relationship many participants had with economic capital (money and debt) in relation to unpaid work. It was evident that most students did not have a clear understanding of the student finance they had taken on. Many had an attitude of denial about the level of debt which, perhaps fortunately, seemed to enable them to cope and to undertake unpaid work. Although most were fairly accepting of the notion of tuition fee debt, they may feel differently once repayments are deducted

from their salaries. The issue of student finance has become increasingly topical and political over the duration of this research, culminating in an independent review of higher education funding. Concerns have been raised about inequity in long-term repayments as more affluent students are able to repay their loans more quickly, so accrue less interest (Ehsan & Kingman, 2019).

Many of the participants believed that investing in their degree would lead to a good job and yet many of the graduates interviewed had been shocked by how difficult this was. Even before they reach university, expectations of students may be raised by marketing and admissions, showcasing the most successful graduates to entice applicants onto a degree course. Marketisation of higher education and open competition for students has made it more difficult for universities to present realistic previews of what it will be like to be a student (a partnership rather than a consumer relationship) and likely outcomes at the end of a degree (no guarantee of a 'dream job' and certainly not immediately). Already there have been cases of universities being sued for fraudulent claims that a degree would enhance career prospects (Independent, 2018) and the National Audit Office (2017) has raised the question of whether students have been mis-sold higher education. Kayla felt strongly that students should be better prepared for adversity on graduating and yet, this is a difficult lesson to teach without instilling a sense of hopelessness in students (Scurry et al., 2020). University marketing literature could helpfully focus, not just on binary extremes and outliers (highly successful or disadvantaged), but also everyday experiences and typical outcomes.

The government white paper '*Success as a Knowledge Economy: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice'* (Dept. for Business Innovation and Skills 2016b) paved the way for a new regulatory body for higher education. In 2018 the Office for Students (OfS) was established with a focus on value for money and positive outcomes for students. The Auger review (2019) recommended a lowering of tuition fees to a maximum of £7,500 which initially appears to be good news for students, offering value for money and lowering student debts. However, this reduced income could also significantly impact universities' resources (Conlon & Halterbeck, 2019) and hamper their capacity to provide extra-curricular support with non-STEM and less affluent students likely to be hit the hardest.

Cultural capital has become increasingly recognised as an important graduate attribute. Decolonising the curriculum has recently become a priority for UK universities in the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement and recent protests. Connecting with people from other cultures, appreciating diversity and an openness to consider different perspectives are valuable skills in working and personal lives which could be developed through international placements. Students and graduates have the potential to influence others in their communities, creating a ripple effect of social change (Collini, 2012). However, a worrying observation in this research was that international mobility seemed to reinforce attitudes of Western superiority (e.g. in healthcare settings) (Ahmed et al., 2017; Easterly, 2006). Universities and placement providers need to challenge unhelpful attitudes and beliefs and to nurture tolerance and intercultural competence (Brown, 2009) before, during and after placements. Investment of time and resources in supporting students in this learning can benefit them, the host country and contribute more widely to positive international relations (Bochner, 1986). This is where social science, arts and humanity subjects can make a valuable contribution to society which complements STEM approaches.

Mobilities

Graduate mobility is a topical issue - a direct result of the UK leaving the EU following the 2016 referendum is that graduates will lose their right to work anywhere in Europe. Polls estimated that around 73% of young people voted to remain in the EU (Fullfact, 2018). Time will tell what the impact will be upon perceived and actual international mobility for students and graduates. Perhaps leaving the European Union could make the rest of the world seem more attractive as an option to bright early-career graduates. Perhaps they will venture further towards countries where they have an advantage of language being less of a barrier (Africa, India, Australasia for example). However, other factors influencing international mobility are concerns over the carbon-footprint of travel and ever-improving communication technology, both of which support the argument for virtual presence and localisation of employment markets. This could potentially benefit the North West region of the UK in retaining talent for the 'northern powerhouse'. The Office for Students (OfS) has recently recognised the recent trend towards regional loyalty (or immobility) of graduates and funded initiatives to support graduates in finding employment locally (OfS,

2019). There is also a growing research focus on regional and local influences on career mobility (Finn, 2015 & 2017; Alexander, 2017 & 2019; Crew, 2019; Cunningham & Christie, 2019) which challenges stereotypical notions of a London-centric early graduate career. Our policy recommendations (Cunningham & Christie, 2019) included better regional transport, stronger messages about the variety and wealth of graduate jobs and impartial and informed guidance about wider mobility opportunities that considers individual circumstances.

This research builds on work highlighting the challenges of transition (Christie, 2016) particularly for students and graduates with less social capital. The participants in the research were a diverse group and, although they had great potential, many felt that they were disadvantaged in the labour market because of their backgrounds. Although the widening participation agenda has been successful in extending access to higher education the challenge for society now is to ensure that working-class and otherwise disadvantaged students are able to progress into successful outcomes. Overall progress in social mobility in the UK has been limited, resulting in the resignation of Alan Milburn and many other members of the Social Mobility Commission. Their 'State of the Nation report' (2019, pg. V) begins with a depressingly a stark message:

> *'social mobility has stagnated over the last four years at virtually all stages from birth to work. Being born privileged in Britain means that you are likely to remain privileged. Being born disadvantaged, however, means that you will have to overcome a series of barriers to ensure that you and your children are not stuck in the same trap'.*

Perhaps one reason for this is comparisons are often made between the top and the bottom of the social strata e.g. how many high court judges attended comprehensive schools (Sutton Trust, 2019) or how an MP grew up on a council estate, where such mobility may be exceptional. However, this research suggests for that the 'middle band' of the population progress could potentially be more positive. Hopefully, a lasting legacy of the 'widening participation' agenda will be that more graduates from ordinary backgrounds will have a defining impact upon social mobility, blazing the trail into influential positions in politics and the labour market, in the UK and globally.

There are encouraging signs that recruitment practices may be changing to reflect the new cadre of graduates. Progressive employers view diversity in the workplace as an asset rather than a problem to be managed, a quota to fill or a law to abide by. In a recent survey 96% of student employers said they were actively prioritising diversity in order to access the best talent and 77% were changing their marketing activities to achieve this (Institute of Student Employers, 2019).Top accountancy recruiters (EY, KPMG, Deloitte & PWC) as well other large companies like Virgin have relaxed their entry qualifications to diversify the workforce (Forbes, 2019). This has not been entirely altruistic as the first company to make the move, accountancy firm Grant Thornton, found that students with lower qualifications were more likely to outperform those with the higher grades. They also removed the requirement for work experience and other interests. It will be interesting to see whether this is successful and what alternative criteria organisations will use to distinguish between candidates. With an aging population overall, societies need to invest in their young people (CIPD, 2018; Telegraph, 2017; Youth Employment UK, 2019). Helping less advantaged students to communicate their unique skills and experiences can build their confidence and 'employability' which in turn harnesses their potential contribution to society and the economy.

Graduate labour market

Through participant interviews a picture emerged of the complex lives of many students and graduates, many of whom were working, volunteering, undertaking unpaid internships and managing a home. This supports the proposition that the 'boundaryless career' (Arthur, 1994) begins well before an individual officially enters the graduate labour market. How can we incorporate these experiences into learning and encourage students to view them as first steps on the career ladder rather than ignoring everything that happens outside the classroom door? The pedagogy around employability needs to incorporate a wider, systems and sociological perspective (Patton & McMahon, 1995; Roberts, 1977) to counterbalance the messages of meritocracy and the power of agency. Building a curriculum and support services which encourage students to recognise and challenge exploitation is important (Hooley et al., 2017; Delauzun, 2020). Unpaid work, underemployment, unemployment, employment rights and the psychological contract

(Rousseau, 1995) need to be discussed more openly as part of the curriculum and in careers education and guidance.

Unpaid internships remain a normalised feature of early graduate careers even though the Taylor Review of Modern Working Practices (2017, p91) recognised they are *'an abuse of power by employers and damaging to social mobility'*. There have long been calls to ban unpaid internships, however, this research has shown that unpaid work exists in many guises so that a blanket ban may not be effective. It can lead to a reduced visibility and access to unpaid internships; rebranding of them (as work experience, for example); hiding them, e.g. university staff turn a blind eye to them and they are not recorded or talked about (Buzdugan, 2017) or making them informal (e.g. going to work with a friend of a parent). Instead of an outright ban the government are promising to crack down on employers through the HMRC on the basis that legitimate work should be paid. At the beginning of this research unpaid internships were openly advertised on the government website 'grad talentpool' and they no longer are, which is a step in the right direction.

A recent large-scale survey by the Sutton Trust about unpaid internships (Cullinane & Montacute, 2018) echoes many of the observations made in this research. It acknowledged unpaid internships are an increasingly integral aspect of the labour market and yet they perpetuate social exclusion and inequality. 70% of internships are unpaid and can cost £800 (Manchester) – £1000 (London) per month. It suggests that 46% of 21-23 year- old graduates have completed one and interns are more likely to be middle-class and funded by parents whereas working-class interns were more likely to also hold a paid job to subsidise their internship. It found that 74% of working-class interns showed signs of social mobility after completing an internship which is a positive finding of this research, however, internships also help to maintain class advantage as many are secured through social capital.

Issues of unpaid and low-quality work more generally are a concern as the UK establishes its own regulations after leaving the European Union. The Taylor Review (Gov.UK, 2017) also implores the government to commit to decent working conditions for everyone, yet momentum has been lost because *'Brexit has ground down what political imagination was left in the Conservative Party'* (Taylor, 2019). The analysis of different types of unpaid work

in this research is highly relevant and topical in other areas of policy such as welfare as unemployed UK citizens are increasingly pressurised to demonstrate 'actively seeking work' to claim benefits (Scullion, Wilding, Jones & Martin (2017). Indeed, some graduates find themselves in this position which requires time, money and skills (e.g. IT literacy).

Degree Apprenticeships are a recent government policy initiative, rebranding and expanding a variation of the traditional apprenticeship (Gov.uk, 2019). Large organisations pay a levy into and can draw down funding for staff who undertake this programme, which combines a degree with a work-based skills portfolio. A positive consequence is that graduate roles can now include funded postgraduate qualifications. A negative consequence of this is organisations may now repackage entry level positions as degree apprenticeships to attract funding (National Centre for Universities and Businesses, 2018). Graduates may now find themselves competing with school and college leavers for these positions, which may be disheartening for them and unfair for the school leavers. Degree apprenticeships also reinforce the notion of education as a handmaiden to industry (Spicker, 2014) rather than a valuable per se. If universities position themselves strongly as employability-enhancement at the expense of the fundamentals of academic learning, enjoyment and general personal development then they stand to lose students who would rather earn than pay.

Volunteers play an increasingly valuable role in our 'Big Society' (Scott, 2011) meaning there are many opportunities for young people to contribute to society whilst gaining experience. Events of recent years such as the rise in the use of foodbanks have highlighted how community volunteers, rather than state agencies, are relied upon to provide services to people in emergency (Beck, 2019). Not only does this camouflage shortages of staff who should be paid to do this work, it also means efforts are not always coordinated (or skilled – as with international volunteering) and puts immense emotional strain upon people who may be ill-equipped for it. This further supports the findings of this research questioning the social acceptance of not paying people for work that is essential.

Planning for the decreasing demand for human workers is at the forefront of policy thinktanks' agenda as more jobs become automated. The concept of 'universal basic income' has recently been piloted in Finland (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2019)

whereby people are automatically and universally entitled to a sum of money which frees them from the necessity to spend time working or undertaking job-seeking activities (although they can work if they wish to). Another policy recommendation is a shorter working week for all which is supported by recent research (Kamerāde et al., 2019). Such issues require a fundamental and philosophical examination of the purpose of work for the individual and society. Universal Basic Income could significantly improve the circumstances and choices of students and graduates like the participants of this research, removing the need for paid work just to pay the bills and freeing more time for career building opportunities such as volunteering.

Effective and timely career guidance can help students to secure their first job after graduating, however, this is not the only support they need. This research has highlighted how students need support in building and mobilising career capitals, reflecting on and learning from opportunities and dealing with stresses. After graduation many will take a while to settle into a career (if they ever do) and still need support. This is now an issue which also impacts upon for universities' reputations due to the longer term 'Graduate Outcomes' survey.

Building resilience (psychological capital)

A concerning and unexpected aspect of the findings was how frequently and strongly participants spoke of their mental health in relation to the research topic. In 2015, when the interviews were conducted, this issue was barely on the radar of universities or the government and yet it has since become a critical concern. Universities (and indeed academic staff) have witnessed an increased demand for pastoral and mental health support from students (Office for Students, 2019). A recent survey by the Mental Health Foundation (2019) suggests that sixty percent of 18 – 24-year-olds experience stress from the pressure to succeed. These young people have spent formative years under the cloud of austerity and an education system which puts pressure on them to perform and compete at every stage. Ironically, this research shows this pressure, for many students, can have the opposite and unintended effect. It can undermine their confidence and dilute their focus by normalising a 'boundaryless' existence which squeezes study, paid and unpaid work into limited available time leaving many feeling they must choose between a good

degree classification and valuable work experience. Anxiety is perhaps a natural response to this pressure.

Higher education is a time for students to develop their 'career identity' or 'cognitive compass' (Fugate, Kinicki & Ashforth, 2004). At the same time, they need to be critically aware of the different expectations and responsibilities society holds for them, as an individual and as a citizen. Effective partnerships between opportunity providers (educators and employers), helping professions (counsellors, mentors and careers advisers), university tutors and family members are essential in truly placing students 'at the heart of the system'. A danger of multi-agency working is that everybody's responsibility is, in effect, nobody's responsibility and vulnerable individuals can fall between the cracks (Gov.Uk, 2005).

Helping *all* students (not just those who present to support services) to develop informed decision-making skills and coping strategies from the outset might be a useful preventative measure to help students during university, 'career mobility experiences' and life beyond graduation. As building blocks for employability, many students could benefit from more general 'life skills' training, such as rudimentary philosophy (i.e. how to think, set goals, reflect and make decisions) and stress, time and money management as part of the curriculum. This could be particularly beneficial for students whose parents have been unable to equip them with such skills.

However, perhaps it is useful to question, is it the responsibility of a university to provide life skills and mental health support. Ecclestone (2017) denounces this 'therapeutic' ethos of education as damaging and counterproductive as it *'inserts vulnerability and anxiety, children express it and then get more therapeutic intervention'*. Experiencing stress and failure during the formative adult years could perhaps even be necessary to develop coping strategies for the future (World Economic Forum, 2018) whereas avoiding challenging situations or being protected from adversity may foster 'learned helplessness' (Seligman, 1972). Exposure to experiences such as international placements that stretch their capabilities, when properly supported, can have an 'immunising' effect upon students against future stresses, helping them to be self-reliant and resilient. The question for the people who support early career students and graduates is how best to help them to deal

with problems rather than 'mollycoddle' or 'spoon-feed' them. A 'scaffolding' strategy of pedagogy (Schmidt et al., 2012), whereby support is provided initially and then decreased as students become more proficient, could be more explicitly embedded in teaching, pastoral and career focused learning.

The critical role of careers support

Since this research began there have been some developments in careers work with the publication of the Gatsby quality benchmark for careers education (Gatsby, 2013) and the OECD (2018) paper 'Working it out: careers guidance and employer engagement' as well as a growing interest in careers guidance as a catalyst for social justice (Hooley, Sultana & Thomsen, 2017). The exploration period after graduating and trying out a range of jobs is quite natural and yet the pressure and expectation of immediate success is pervasive. New graduates need careers guidance to support informed decisions. The longer term of the graduate outcomes survey (compared with the DLHE) means that universities need to support their graduates into employment for at least the first fifteen months or risk detrimental metrics. Adequate funding, a professional workforce and a proactive approach are crucial for the success of students, graduates and universities themselves.

The field of careers theory has been criticised in the past for failing to provide practical application (a 'serious career theory-practice rift', Savickas & Lent, 1994, p. 270). It is now encouraging to witness a convergence of policy, practice and research in careers education and guidance. The resurgent influence of sociological approaches (Roberts, 2013, 1977; Burke, 2015), the holistic approaches of systems theory (Patton & McMahon, 2006) and 'careers guidance for social justice' (Hooley et al., 2017) are counterbalancing the preoccupation with individual agency that has dominated career thinking in recent decades.

Policy recommendations

Although the primary goal of doctoral research is advancement of knowledge in the field, this is not the end as application is an essential part of the hermeneutic process (Austgard, 2012). Policy considerably influences what education and career professionals' research and practice. In light of the Auger review, the Office for Students and the various

'Excellence Frameworks' (teaching and research), it is clear that accountability, value and impact will be increasingly demanded of academia. This is a challenging yet exciting time to be involved in the fields of careers, higher education and social policy at a time when social justice is at the forefront of discourse. I have some specific suggestions and recommendations which could add practical value in genuinely 'putting students at the heart of the system' as the 2016 White Paper suggests. However, from a systems perspective, much bigger changes need to take place to address issues of social justice (Hooley, 2015; Mignot, 2018).

1. Adequately support students and graduates in careers and mental health

As a priority, mental wellbeing and careers services need to be visible and properly funded in universities. Careers services should be resourced sufficiently to offer a full and proactive service to graduates after they leave rather than focusing attention on proving positive destinations in order to boost DHLE figures. A useful role of government, through the Office for Students (which should also incorporate responsibility for early career graduates) would be to work collaboratively with universities rather than/as well as in a regulatory, monitoring capacity. Careers guidance can lead to satisfaction which can in turn enhance mental wellbeing (Robertson, 2013) which in turn confers benefits in national health and productivity. There has been some progress towards this in lengthening and broadening the scope of the DLHE survey. Also, university W is launching a new initiative in partnership with the NHS

2. Create internships that work – for young people, business and society

Although it is tempting to recommend a ban on unpaid internships, this research has suggested that they can provide short-term valuable experience. A total ban may also mean they operate only 'behind closed doors' making them less accessible for some. I would recommend instead that they are better monitored for accessibility and quality of training through the Education and Skills Funding Agency and recruit through the government 'Grad Talent Pool' website. The cost of developing skills for industry should not be the sole responsibility of the student/graduate as they are advancing the skills agenda of the

country and benefitting future employers and communities. Internships (especially those which last over four weeks) should pay at least the minimum wage. This could either be funded by employers in a similar way to the apprenticeship levy or through taxpayers as society benefits from investing in young talent. Alternatively, central government could support interns through subsidised placements or Universal Basic Income for all, including students and graduates, could alleviate hardship and raise the profile of internships as a valid and esteemed option. Enhancing the quality of internships is also essential, offering a training plan; rotation of roles; a mentor and follow-up post-internship (Sutton Trust, 2018).

3. *Facilitate lifelong learning and career mobility*

The government need to reinvigorate their efforts to create genuine opportunities for social mobility and justice. Labour's vision of an all-age national education service would have relieved some of the pressure upon young people who often feel they have just one shot at success. The national curriculum could helpfully include more general life-skills such as finance and debt management, decision-making, metacognitive skills (philosophy and reflection) and alternatives to the traditional career. Informing young people about employment rights and how to challenge unfair working practices is necessary (e.g. University of Salford 21-days resource). A radical policy shift would promote the value of education as a worthy pursuit in itself rather than a performance goal or measurable and comparable metric yet this looks unlikely in the foreseeable future. Alongside this, I echo Hooley's call (2015) for an all-age, publicly funded career guidance service:

> *'A government which committed to realising a lifelong guidance system would be signalling a new kind of relationship between citizenship, paid work and leisure that would put people at the heart of the economy'* (Hooley, 2015 p11)

4. *Reform student finance*

Linked to this is a need to reform student finance – this research has demonstrated that student debt and poverty place unfair and unequal pressure, not only upon individuals but also on their families. Although in this research participants were not deterred from undertaking career enhancing activities, many also had to spend valuable time earning money to support themselves. Transferring responsibility of the costs of higher education

has not worked as planned and the taxpayer has still footed the bill (and will continue to) for unrecovered debts. The Labour Party (2019) and the Green Party pledged to scrap tuition fees and reintroduce maintenance grants whilst the Conservative and Liberal Democrats stating they will 'review' funding recommendations of the Auger review (which suggested reducing fees to £7,500 per annum). When tuition fees were first introduced they were £1000 per year. Ideally, I would recommend such a nominal fee based upon my experience of working on projects where services are free and consequently not valued (and acknowledging Sarah's point that paying for education can be motivating). However, this would need to be sympathetic to less affluent and 'middle band' students. Perhaps it could be payment in kind, whereby, instead of financial costs, students contribute time to volunteering in the university or community although this would be difficult to monitor. The role of the government, through the Office for Students would be facilitating fair access (continuing the role of the Office for Fair Access now subsumed into the new agency) whilst supporting and working *with* institutions to raise standards and enhance experiences.

5. *Value and promote diversity and mobility in higher education*

Brexit and the UK's hostile environment for immigrants is likely impact upon mobility decisions of students and early career graduates. Proactive policy initiatives need to be implemented to make the UK attractive to student and graduate talent from further afield and to enable them to remain in the UK to find work. Knowledge mobility is valuable in tackling global issues and building international relationships. Widening international mobility opportunities for UK students through reciprocal programmes (like ERASMUS) needs to be encouraged. This is a difficult problem to solve in the current political climate and with the Home Office requiring universities to police the system in a risk-averse manner. Furthermore, there are wider, more systemic issues that need to be resolved around international mobility (immigration policy and freedom of movement).

6. *Subsidise transport for young people*

Inaccessible and expensive transport exacerbates inequalities and creates barriers to opportunity. Whilst Luxembourg recently introduced free public transport for under-twenties (Guardian, 2018), London was revealed as the most expensive public transport network in the world (World Economic Forum, 2019) even though it receives heavier

subsidies than other UK regions. The current young persons' railcard offer can only be used after 10am so is not practical for students or workers. Within the UK (and North West more specifically) subsidised public transport for young people (under twenty-five) could support enhanced career mobility and work experience. This would be initiated by the Department for Transport or devolved to regions, through local combined authorities. Many young people cannot afford to own and insure cars and their early career years could encourage them to form commuting habits which can help contribute to wider societal goals of fewer cars on the roads.

In summary, many of the above policy recommendations require a recognition of the value of students' and graduates' contribution to wider society. They also require a future focus (as urged by Urry, 2016) and crossing the boundaries of disciplines, geographies and government departments.

Unique contributions

A fundamental objective of doctoral research is to make unique contributions to the field of knowledge. This research has sought to understand and communicate student and graduate experiences using in-depth, qualitative and inductive enquiry, underpinned with a theoretical framework and philosophy which contrasts and complements the more usual surveys and metric approaches often employed, e.g. around student experiences or graduate destinations and outcomes. The research is interdisciplinary, drawing upon literature from across social sciences and humanities. A **methodological contribution is the application of interpretive phenomenology**, most commonly used in health studies, nursing and midwifery, to this field of career studies and policy where it could have strong future potential.

The research addresses gaps in extant literature by focusing, not on the most disadvantaged or the exceptionally successful, but on the **everyday experiences of students and graduates in the 'middle band'** of the population.

The research **studies 'unpaid work' in its broadest form** and from the perspective of those who undertake it rather than through externally constructed categories and labels such as internships. It adds to wider research and discourse surrounding such 'opportunities' to

explain how students and graduates experience mobilities through these opportunities and the challenges they face. This provides a more nuanced understanding than a simple transactional view of 'capital and CV building'.

The research builds upon existing literature regarding boundaryless careers, suggesting that **boundaries of 'career' have increasingly permeated education so that stages of a young person's life are less clearly demarcated, with career progression starting even before paid work begins.** Individual psychological boundaries and their violability are explored (Nussbaum, 1995), for example, acceptance of debt and stress in order to exercise social and geographical mobility. It also brings together and builds upon literatures of career capitals (Brown & Wond, 2018) and student mobilities (Brooks & Waters, 2018) through the lens of existentials of the lifeworld (Van Manen, 1990).

Against a backdrop which strongly suggests that social mobility is still very much work in progress, this research highlights examples of participants who have, through unpaid work and higher education initiatives (widening participation, funded international placements) found ways to strengthen and mobilise their capitals and achieve early career success. Even if such stories are still a minority, examining and understanding their support systems and strategies can be helpful to other students and professionals. This **'appreciative inquiry'** approach (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005) contrasts with a general trend in social sciences which can often assume a 'deficit model' approach when considering young people (particularly working class, e.g. Greenbank, 2008).

The research seeks to **bridge high level theory and philosophy with practical strategies** for example, through the development of the '21 days to career success' blog and changing the focus and content of 'employability' conversations in lectures and conferences to reflect a realistic, holistic picture.

Limitations of the research

During my studies I have often wished I could have begun my PhD with all the skills and knowledge that I needed upfront. It would have been reassuring to have been handed a concise research question and a list of tangible objectives to achieve along with deadlines. However, I would have learnt nothing and achieved little. As I have argued in relation to

participants' unpaid work experiences, the process and mastery are at least as valuable as the outcome.

There are many other ways this research could have been conducted, for example, by analysing discourse on student, graduate and employer websites and forums; by interviewing employers about their graduate schemes, by going 'undercover' as an intern to see what it is like, by surveying alumni about their destinations, by analysing labour market statistics, by designing a psychological tool, etc. Whilst all these approaches may prove fruitful and interesting, as most of my work has been based upon a 'client-centred' approach (Rogers, 2003) my strong preference was to conduct research that directly asked the people at the centre of the phenomenon for their opinions.

I could perhaps have taken a more observational or participatory approach (e.g. of students in Uganda on placements, or students undertaking work experiences). The drawback would be that the depth of the data would sacrifice the breadth which I feel is a strength of this research. In keeping with mobilities literature (e.g. Holton & Finn, 2017) it would have been interesting to interview people whilst they were physically mobile (e.g. on their plane journeys, at the airport, etc) and in transit, to get closer to the true experiences such as the conflicting emotions of courage and fear that some described.

As previously mentioned, a potential drawback of the sample is that it was disproportionately made up of people who were already engaged with 'careers and employability' at university, through modules, extra-curricular activities or student services. This may mean that they were generally more proactive and agentic in their career-building experiences. However, my research does not claim to be generalizable to the wider population and rather than being a 'sample bias' it may be a feature of the phenomena being explored.

Although some insights into the barriers to unpaid work were expressed by participants who had undertaken this earlier in their education but more recently been unable to, further research could specifically target those who did not participate in these activities at any time. Understanding the barriers was one objective of the research and what was perhaps lost in not including these individuals was the experiences of either multiple

disadvantages at one end of the scale or lack of necessity to work unpaid at the other. Those who strongly opposed the principle of unpaid working might also have been excluded (although Augustus and Brad represented these opinions).

Given the chance to start again, I could have embarked upon research, which was more creative in its methods, using photographs, pictures, poetry or more contemporary cultural references in the research and/or writing to access and illustrate the phenomena. This is very much in keeping with the spirit of phenomenology. This creativity is particularly appropriate and useful in dissemination of research, e.g. in teaching and conferences.

Suggestions for further research

During the research there were some specific issues I was able to research further, for example, notions of career misery push, dream career and career epiphany (Houston & Cunningham, 2018) and what influences North West students to stay in the region (Cunningham & Christie, 2019). There are some aspects of this research which also warrant further exploration.

Marginson and Rhoades (2002) concept of *'glonacal'* is fascinating and yet literature (rightly) highlights the challenges, particularly for women with children so positive examples are useful (Ackers, 2003). It would be interesting to interview people who successfully manage to forge a career in which they can be present in the global and national arena yet rooted 'at home' locally, maintaining work-life balance.

Looking back, I could perhaps have done fewer interviews as twenty-four presented a vast volume of rich data. My reason for including so many participants was my early reluctance to let go of a quantitative mindset that more is better. Also, there are a few people who didn't figure so strongly in the findings, however there was probably no way of knowing who they would be until after the event. I did not feel it was ethical to just discard their data after they had taken the time to participate. Phenomenology is about 'typical, everyday' experiences not just those that stand out for their uncommonness or sensationalist properties. I would have done some preliminary interviews early on and a minimal literature review, then I would have spaced the interviews out more, allowing for some reflection, analysis and refocusing in between.

A call for an appreciative inquiry approach

When I first started interviewing the participants, I had no way of knowing how successful they would be at utilising unpaid work and mobility opportunities and securing employment which was commensurate with their qualifications, experience and aspirations. They were a diverse group, mainly state educated, working to lower-middle class in the main, many first in their family to go to university, none attended Russell Group universities, mostly female and from a range of disciplines. Against a backdrop of statistics and reports which document the challenges, particularly of BAME, female and WP graduates, this is a testament to the individuals, the people who supported them and the good practice examples. There is a lot we can learn from acknowledging problems and yet also analysing the root causes of success.

> *'The science of psychology has been far more successful on the negative than on the positive side; it has revealed to us much about man's shortcomings, his illnesses, his sins, but little about his potentialities, his virtues, his achievable aspirations, or his full psychological height'* (Maslow 1954, pg. 354).

Social sciences so often seem rooted in 'deficit model' thinking, often focusing upon what is wrong with people and society rather than what is right. However, writers in the 'Positive Psychology' school of thought, such as Seligman (2011), Cooperrider & Whitney (2005), Gladwell (2009) & Hefferon & Boniwell (2011) suggest that identifying the root causes of positive aspects (rather than only negative) can help to provide solutions to address the negatives. This could work, not only as an individual intervention but also as a strategy in research and wider societal discourse (e.g. politics, news, education).

Toffler's classic 'Third Wave' (1980) predicted a move to de-marketisation, de-massification and foregrounding of community and family which has not (yet) materialised. The work of forward-thinking authors (e.g. Lash & Urry, 1987; Urry, 2016) offers some cause for consolation and hope. The impact of technology on future careers is growing. Students and graduates need to develop skills which are 'futureproof' such as communication, interpersonal skills, empathy, creativity, problem-solving, cultural competence, resilience, flexibility. These are the skills that the participants reported having gained through their unpaid work experiences (and not necessarily through their degree education). The

exploration of unpaid work, its many forms, its meaning, its pitfalls, its consequences and its benefits presented in this thesis has a useful application for the workplace of the future.

A significant learning point for me has been the binary, dichotomous and often polemic nature of experiences. Participants often revealed conflicting ideas through their narratives, for example, of belief in individual agency and in luck; of independence and belonging; of being competitive and cooperative; of being mobile and rooted; of being short of money and working unpaid; of being anxious and courageous; despair in the present and hope in the future. Harriet's quote in relation to debt and working unpaid illustrates this eloquently and concisely - *'it's no big deal, but it's not ideal'*. This symbolised the dissonant meanings attached to many experiences of unpaid work and mobilities and the cognitive strategies which helped participants to make sense and cope with events.

Students and graduates face unprecedented levels of choice about where and what to study as well as myriad opportunities to experience work and an ever- changing menu of future career possibilities. In our consumerist society, Schwartz and Ward (2004) suggest the paradox of choice is that we are *'doing better but feeling worse'* (p.86) overwhelmed by the sheer multitude of choices from which brand to choose in the supermarket to how and where to work.

Research and higher education metrics emphasise differences and delineate individuals based upon discrete and arbitrary categories (gender, class, 6-month career destination, salary). Acknowledging the bigger picture and how these experiences link together is a complex issue, yet it is one that policymakers and universities need to understand.

Policy and politics, over the course of the research, have become increasingly polarised and simplistic (left vs. right wing; 'remain or leave' the EU) and the main medium of democratic decision-making is through heated debate rather than discussion. Indeed, progress in research involves (at least in part) critiquing the work of others and arguing an alternative viewpoint. In moving from a Psychology background to lecturing Social Policy I have become more aware of significant dualisms such as the great structure vs. individual agency debate. A way forward is perhaps to consider structure and agency together, not as opposites but as parts of the same picture. A common assumption is that agency is a

positive, enabling force and structure is negative and constraining but this is overly simplistic. As Giddens (1993) suggests, opportunity structure can be enabling and connect people with jobs and communities just as agency can be isolating, unrealistic and misguided. He advocates a middle ground, or third way of approaching politics (Giddens, 1998).

Rather than investing in one side of a debate, one thought, one political ideology, one academic discipline, it is liberating to acknowledge the paradox inherent in experience and to use the tension, or 'play' to further our understanding and actions. Helping students and graduates acknowledge and explore the paradoxes inherent in experiences is arguably a key role of impartial careers education and guidance. Scurry et al. (2020) debate how career professionals can help to build student resilience, balancing messages of optimism with realism (*'maintaining the promise without killing the dream'* p36).

Thomsen's (2019) career competence model articulates five paradoxical dimensions for learning and development (individual and context; horizon of opportunities and limitations; choice and chance; change and stability; adaptability and resistance). In relation to mobilities, professionals might usefully include global, national and local possibilities in the curriculum and guidance. Likewise, rather than assuming all graduates aspire to classic notions of 'success' and upward social mobility via graduate level employment, society should recognise the value of other ways of living (e.g. caring, volunteering, travelling, occupations which are lower pay and/or status).

'Graduate success' is measured by status (through proxies of job title and salary) for various reasons; it is easier to measure than other things (like subjective wellbeing or contribution to society) and also because the level of student loan repayments need to be calculated and recouped. However, not everyone can be (or indeed may want to be) successful in these ways. Many of the participants in the study had a strong sense of altruism and wanted to contribute to their community and society. Women and men in the study had caring responsibilities, not only for children but for parents or siblings. This is a trend which is likely to increase as people live longer and are cared for in the community. How are these dimensions measured, or should they be?

The success of an individual or a society should not be based purely on their net financial worth. Success is highly subjective and can be elusive, even to those who work hard and do all the 'right' things. Happiness and mental wellbeing as well as tangible and material gains are key elements of a holistic view of career success. A world in which boundaries are flexible, changeable, permeable and not always explicit can be disquieting and yet liberating. It is up to us to 'en-courage' young people to challenge themselves and the status quo.

There is a recognition that interdisciplinary conversations can best tackle 'wicked problems' (Churchman, 1967) and fields such as Social Policy and Career Studies encourage such diversity of ideas. Universities and employers, together, need to be imaginative and forward-thinking in preparing students for longer-term careers that contribute to individual, local, national and global priorities - not just first destinations and the practicalities of getting that first job. Burke and Christie (2018) raise a 'call to action' encouraging greater engagement in 'the fertile space between academic researchers and practitioners' to illuminate important issues such as the impact of policy upon individuals. Phenomenological research about student experience (Van Manen, 1990) could be a useful tool in illuminating everyday experiences. Real stories, through qualitative research can beautifully complement big data and surveys, making it more meaningful, relatable and accessible.

Phenomenological enquiry acknowledges that the meaning and experiences of the world are particular to the individuals concerned at the time they were interviewed. The objective of hermeneutic phenomenology is not to 'prove' findings which can be 'generalised' or repeated but to raise questions, to challenge assumptions and to provoke thought. As Smythe (2011) explains, it is quite normal, at the end of a research project, to feel that there is much more to say, different ways to interpret data and perhaps more questions raised than answered. There is never a feeling of having completed the process and tied up loose ends neatly. Such is the nature of human experience in a rapidly changing world.

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Appendices

Appendix I: Biographical note – Positioning myself as the researcher

When I first saw the advertisement for the PhD in 'Employment and Mobilities' I identified with it immediately (even before I knew what it really involved) and as soon as I spoke to my supervisor, Louise Ackers, I knew I wanted to work with her. Employment has always been a key focus in my life, I worked as soon as I was old enough (babysitting, Saturday jobs) and I was heavily involved with a youth organisation about young workers and social justice.

It was no surprise to people who knew me well that I trained to be a Careers Adviser then later an Occupational Psychologist as I held a fundamental interest in work and its relevance to individuals and society. The work of a Careers Adviser is essentially helping people prepare for and navigate changes in their working life and its interrelation with other areas of their life. I also deliver workshops on dealing with change, which is all about mobility of people and circumstances. I am now a part-time Social Policy lecturer at the University of Salford, an Associate Lecturer at Lancaster University Management School I am a Chartered Occupational Psychologist and a freelance training consultant in continuing professional development.

When I applied for my PhD I was working as a Careers Adviser in a sixth form college in a deprived area of Greater Manchester, encouraging/coercing students to go to university, rewriting their personal statements and reassuring them not to worry about the sharp increase in tuition fees. A perk of the job was going to university visit days and I realised I felt very much at home there.

I consider myself a mobile person in many ways. I currently live in my seventeenth home and I have changed jobs many times. I enjoy change and new challenges, actively seeking them out. In 2003 I took a year long career-break backpacked round the world alone. During which I undertook a six week 'voluntouristic' experience, teaching English to agricultural university students in Phnom Penh. Although this was a great experience for me, I left with a sense of deep unease that I had made little positive impact on the students and quite possibly further entrenched a sense that my English language and culture was

superior to theirs. Indeed, the whole year-long trip opened my eyes for the first time (to my deep shame) to the effects of British colonialism and the great expeditions – the things we were never taught at school. Perhaps the most transformational dimension of my trip was my time in India (which I had built up to as my last stop). Eastern attitudes to life and death brought a profound perspective to living.

Returning home to the North West I found I had a renewed sense of appreciation and belonging. Shortly after I met my partner and 'settled down' to having a family (Amelia, aged 11 and Maxwell aged 9). I have recently moved back to my hometown of Stockport and live within a couple of miles of all my brothers, sister (plus nieces and nephews) and mum. I have got involved with the local community and feel 'at home' for the first time since I was 18. Studying mobilities has helped me rediscover Geography and I have a strong interest in the significance of place.

Until this year, I did not have a permanent job for fifteen years, having a 'portfolio career' (Handy, 1989) which has continued alongside my studies. This has offered me a great deal of autonomy and flexibility; however, I have also recently found many of my experiences mirroring those of my research participants – making compromises, feeling exploited, proactively building career capitals yet remaining optimistic with a belief in meritocracy and equity. Like many students and graduates, I've been juggling home, work & study – trying to build experience in a precarious and competitive job market whilst maintaining my sense of what's most important

Working in higher education, I am mindful that students' learning happens within (and about) a much wider context of life events and transitions. As the researcher, the context of my own experience will naturally form a part of the context within I make observations and interpretations so it is important for me to present this background.

Appendix II: Permission to use Systems Theory Framework model

Re: Copyright permission to reproduce your diagram
Wendy Patton <w.patton@qut.edu.au>
Wed 24/06/2020 02:17
Like
Dear Eileen

Thank you for your interest in the STF. Mary and I are always really interested to learn about how it is being used.

We are happy for you to reproduce the figure in your thesis - with appropriate acknowledgement.

all the best

Wendy and Mary

Wendy Patton GAICD
Professor Emeritus
Queensland University of Technology
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http://eprints.qut.edu.au/view/person/Patton,_Wendy.html
CRICOS No 00213J

Chair, Queensland College of Teachers Board

From: Eileen Cunningham <E.A.Cunningham2@salford.ac.uk>
Sent: Wednesday, 24 June 2020 3:43 AM
To: marylmcmahon@uq.edu.au <marylmcmahon@uq.edu.au>; Wendy Patton <w.patton@qut.edu.au>
Subject: Copyright permission to reproduce your diagram

Dear Mary and Wendy.

I am just finishing writing my PhD thesis and I would like to seek your permission to reproduce your Systems Theory Framework of Careers diagram. My research is about unpaid work and mobility of students and new graduates and I have found your theory so very enlightening and valuable in drawing together aspects of individual and systems level findings. I read about it in Gill Frigerio's chapter in 'Graduate Careers in Context' edited by Fiona Christie and Ciaron Burke a couple of years ago. I have been a Careers Adviser since 1995, a Chartered Occupational Psychologist and I am now a Lecturer in Social Policy and I am a member of the National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling in the UK.

I don't intend to change the diagram in any way nor commercially publish it, but my PhD thesis will be available online through the University of Salford repository. Please let me know if I need to ask publishers or provide any further information or conditions.

Best wishes
Eileen

Appendix III: Ethics application and approval

University of
Salford
MANCHESTER

College Ethics Panel Ethical Approval Form for Post-Graduate Researchers

**Ethical approval must be obtained by all postgraduate research students (PGR) prior to starting
research with human subjects, animals or human tissue**.
A PGR is defined as anyone undertaking a Research rather than a Taught Master's degree, and
includes for example MSc by Research, MRes by Research, MPhil and PhD. The student must discuss
the content of the form with their dissertation supervisor who will advise them about revisions. A
final copy of the summary will then be agreed and the student and supervisor will 'sign it off'.

**The signed Ethical Approval Form and application checklist must be forwarded to your College
Support Office and also an electronic copy MUST be e-mailed to your College Support Office;**

The forms are processed online therefore without the electronic version, the application cannot
progress. Please note that the form must be signed by **both the student and supervisor**.

Please ensure that the electronic version of this form only contains your name and your supervisor's
name on this page, where it has been requested.

All other references to you or anyone else involved in the project must be removed from the
electronic version as the form has to be anonymised before the panel considers it.

Where you have removed your name, you can replace with a suitable marker such as [.....] Or [Xyz],
[Yyz] and so on for other names you have removed too.

You should retain names and contact details on the hardcopies as these will be kept in a separate
file for potential audit purposes.

Please refer to the 'Notes for Guidance' if there is doubt whether ethical approval is required

The form can be completed electronically; the sections can be expanded to the size required.

Name of Student:

Name of Supervisor:

School: Nursing, Midwifery, Social Sciences and Social Work

Course of study: **PhD**

Name of Research Council or other funding organisation (if applicable):

1a. Title of proposed research project

The Graduate Journey: opportunities and obstacles

1b.   Is this Project Purely literature based?

NO (delete as appropriate)

2. Project focus

Graduates' experience of career transition: the interaction of opportunity structures and social factors. The project will focus on the attitudes and experiences of north-west students/graduates from their final year through their first-year post-graduation, particularly 'non-traditional' groups such as students who are the first in their family to access HE and mature students.

It will explore attitudes towards internships, volunteering and other experiences, considering factors which may be perceived as barriers and enablers. Although students and graduates have the freedom of mobility – geographical and social – many do not undertake these opportunities. This research explores attitudes, perceptions and socio-economic factors influencing these choices from the perspective of individuals' real-life experiences.

It will also explore attitudes towards social and geographic mobility as universally desirable aspirations, considering the possible consequences for belonging and identity as well economic costs.

3. Project objectives

To explore the opinions and experience of students regarding potentially career enhancing opportunities such as volunteering, internships and placements abroad;

To understand the lived experience of new graduates through the transition to the labour market, identify the challenges and opportunities they face and factors which support them through the transition;

To understand the attitudes of (some) local students and graduates towards international – and even national – mobility, i.e. what are the motivators and barriers?

To suggest strategies for Higher Education providers, employers, professionals working with students/graduates and the individuals themselves to equip them with a greater understanding of the support students require and how this can best be delivered.

4. Research strategy

Following feedback from the ethics committee, this application is to seek approval for the exploratory stage of the research only at this point. The reason for this is that decisions regarding further design and methodology will arise as a direct result of the provisional findings of this stage.

Interviews with professionals – key informants:-

1. Work experience/placements organisers/lecturers and Career Consultants within each of the universities involved
2. An employer from an organisation providing internships
3. A provider of international volunteer or internship opportunities

NB. This list has been shortened and focused

Focus groups removed from application – no longer to be part of the data collection

Semi-structured exploratory interviews (n=10) with students and recent graduates (from UCLAN, Salford and Lancaster) to identify themes to explore from the perspective of the target population and be able to anticipate practical issues. Participants to be identified from key informants, my professional contact with students and graduates, **NOT** focus groups (see above) and snowballing techniques. Project information and my contact details would be passed on to people to ask if they would like to participate.

Thematic analysis will be undertaken.

5. What is the rationale which led to this project?

My own work experience and professional background has led to my interest in developing this project. As a Careers Adviser and lecturer in Employability at HE institutions (and an auntie of teenagers) I have witnessed the transition of young people throughout formative years of their early career with the conflicting pressures of finance, academic attainment and preparing for employment.

I am particularly interested in the different experiences and expectations of students who may experience obstacles in their career transition, for example, those who have family commitments, or

those who may lack the social contacts or experience which may help them to secure the most lucrative graduate opportunities. I am also interested in exploring individual differences (e.g. self-confidence, locus of control, etc) which may mediate these influences. My hope is that I will be able to identify some strategies and factors which can enable individuals to successfully make the transition, especially those within their own control.

Key reports which have informed my work include: -

AGCAS Student Success (2013) – this survey asked graduates to identify those factors they considered to have the greatest influence on their success in the labour market and to compare the findings with the perspectives of employers.

Alan Milburn (2010) Unleashing Aspiration: The final report on fair access to the professions. Milburn has written reports on social mobility and Higher Education as the Chair of the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission. Interestingly, he has recently been appointed Chancellor of Lancaster University, which is one of the universities I would like to include in my research.

Paul Greenbank (2015) Working Class Students and the Career Decision-Making Process. HECSU. Greenbank is based at Edge Hill University, which is similar to Salford (high proportion of local students, focus on vocational courses) and he has written many papers about social mobility career management of graduates. I am particularly interested in building upon his work, which has value to practitioners as well as academics.

Fiona Christie (2015 – Careers Guidance and Social Mobility in UK Higher Education; adviser perspectives) – Fiona is a Career Consultant at Salford University who is interested in social mobility of graduates. Her paper is a qualitative account of Careers Advisers' perspectives on graduate employment.

6. **If you are going to work within a particular organisation do they have their own procedures for gaining ethical approval**

YES / NO (delete as appropriate) *If YES – what are these and how will you ensure you meet their requirements?*

I work as a lecturer at Lancaster University and UCLAN. I have already received permission to engage with their students.

7. **Are you going to approach individuals to be involved in your research?**
   YES

   If YES – please think about key issues – for example, how you will recruit people? How you will deal with issues of confidentiality / anonymity? Then make notes that cover the key issues linked to your study

   Yes, I will be approaching individuals for the (focus groups, survey and – no longer applicable) interviews. In my profession as a Careers Adviser and Chartered Occupational Psychologist I have had training many times on confidentiality. Issues of confidentiality need to be considered at different stages of the research: -

   RECRUITMENT: I will recruit participants to this initial stage of research by inviting students and graduates with whom I have had contact through my work at the universities (for example, those I teach in the 'Employability' module at Lancaster and students I have helped recruit to 'Launchpad' professional development programme at UCLAN). At Salford University I can access groups of students who are taught by my supervisor or involved in the work of my team (international volunteering). Beyond this I intend to use the technique of 'snowballing' by asking participants and key informants to pass on Project Information Sheets to colleagues. Potential participants will be invited to participate face-to-face or via skype. There is no intention nor need to use the university e-mail system to recruit participants.

   CONFIDENTIALITY: Focus groups – data will be anonymised and confidentiality will be discussed at the beginning of the session with participants being asked to respect confidentiality of other participants and not discuss comments outside of the group. It will be explained clearly to participants that their comments will not be individually attributed but the discussions may be reported on in the thesis. – **no longer applicable**

   Interviews – all interviews will be recorded and will be anonymised. Recordings and additional notes will be kept in a lockable filing cabinet and an encrypted memory stick or password protected laptop. Recordings will be deleted from the voice recorder once downloaded. All data will be deleted and destroyed once the research has been fully completed. NB. I told participants that I would use pseudonyms unless they specifically wanted me to use their own names.

   Because I will be asking participants about their experiences and their future career plans, I am aware that it might uncover needs for further support (for example, Careers Guidance, counselling). Although I am a qualified Careers Adviser and Occupational Psychologist with experience of coaching and basic counselling, it would be inappropriate for me to take on this role. From the outset I will explain my

position and make the boundaries clear. I will use my skills to ensure that I certainly do no harm and that I leave participants in a positive state, however I will also have the firm policy of signposting and referral to the appropriate service at the university. Information about this service will form part of my participant information leaflet.

8. **More specifically, how will you ensure you gain informed consent from anyone involved in the study?**

I will give participants an information sheet and ask them to sign a consent form (see attached). I will ensure this is fully explained and that they understand their right to withdraw at any point, how I will use the data, how it will be made anonymous, where it will be stored and for how long. I will also explain, at this point, my position in the research, i.e. the boundaries and process of referral.

9. **How are you going to address any Data Protection issues?**
See notes for guidance which outline minimum standards for meeting Data Protection issues

I am aware of Data Protection legislation and potential consequences of non-adherence as I have undertaken training in my previous jobs. My research will comply with the policy of the University of Salford in that I will keep IT based data on a password protected laptop securely backed up onto my password protected area of the university F drive. When recording interviews (using paper notes and/or voice recorder) I will use a coded identification system to retain anonymity, the code for which will be retained separately and securely. Once downloaded the voice recordings will be deleted from the voice recorder. All recordings will be deleted from the F: drive on completion of my PhD.

10. **Are there any other ethical issues that need to be considered? For example - research on animals or research involving people under the age of 18.**

No

11. **(a) Does the project involve the use of ionising or other type of "radiation"**
NO

(b) Is the use of radiation in this project over and above what would normally be expected (for example) in diagnostic imaging?
YES / NO

(c) Does the project require the use of hazardous substances?
NO

(d) Does the project carry any risk of injury to the participants?
NO

(e) Does the project require participants to answer questions that may cause disquiet / or upset to them?
Possibly – see attached

If the answer to any of the questions 11(a)-(e) is YES, a risk assessment of the project is required and must be submitted with your application.

12. **How many subjects will be recruited/involved in the study/research? What is the rationale behind this number?**

When ethical approval was given, this was planned as an **exploratory phase** of my doctoral research to include:

- Seven key informants
- Three groups of ten (focus groups) – no longer applicable
- Ten interviewees – increased to 24-30

The rationale behind these numbers are that, based upon my experience of interviewing and conducting focus groups, I believe they should provide adequate information to inform the next phase of the research. Originally further – qualitative - research was planned, however, a decision has been made to focus upon the research as a purely qualitative project as this best fits the research question and objectives.

The rationale for 24-30 participants is to gain a range of participants from the four universities, different disciplines, genders and ethnic groups as well as a range of attitudes and experiences.

13. **Please state which code of ethics has guided your approach (e.g. from Research Council, Professional Body etc).**

British Psychological Society – I am an Associate Fellow of the British Psychological Society and their code of ethics has guided all my work so far. However, I also draw upon the ethics of the Career Development Institute and the Health Care Professions Council who regulate my professions.

Remember that informed consent from research participants is crucial, therefore all documentation must use language that is readily understood by the target audience.

Projects that involve NHS patients, patients' records or NHS staff, will require ethical approval by the appropriate NHS Research Ethics Committee. The University College Ethics Panel will require written confirmation that such approval has been granted. Where a project forms part of a larger, already approved, project, the approving REC should be informed about, and approve, the use of an additional co-researcher.

I certify that the above information is, to the best of my knowledge, accurate and correct. I understand the need to ensure I undertake my research in a manner that reflects good principles of ethical research practice.

Signed by Student   _____

Date   _____

In signing this form, I confirm that I have read this form and associated documentation.

I have discussed and agreed the contents with the student on
(Please insert date of meeting with student)

Signed by Supervisor   _ *H.L. Ackers*
Print Name PROF ACKERS
Date 23/5/2016_____

University of
Salford
MANCHESTER

26 May 2015

Dear Eileen,

RE: ETHICS APPLICATION HSCR 15-33 – The Graduate Journey: opportunities and obstacles

Based on the information you provided, I am pleased to inform you that application HSCR15-33 has been approved.

If there are any changes to the project and/ or its methodology, please inform the Panel as soon as possible by contacting HSresearch@salford.ac.uk

Yours sincerely,

Sue McAndrew
Chair of the Research Ethics Panel

Appendix IV: Good practice examples/case studies

Knowledge for Change ethical student elective placements in Uganda and India. Although this charity had been providing opportunities for global healthcare placements for many years, there are hallmarks of innovation that benefitted a number of this cohort of participants. Firstly, placements had previously been solely for medical professionals (e.g. doctors and midwives) until K4C were granted funding from Health Education England to pilot funded undergraduate placements, not only for medical students but for any students who may go on to work in the NHS. This opened up the field in multiple ways – to undergraduates, to those less affluent and to interdisciplinary teams including Social Policy, Occupational Therapists, Physiotherapists and Speech and Language Therapists as well as trainee nurses and midwives. The benefits to the volunteers included increased cultural competence (definition?), 'CV enhancement' and confidence in addition to new skills. Many described their experience as life changing or at least critical in career decision-making.

Business undergraduate leadership development programme.

This is an extra-curricular programme at a post-92 university which aims to overcome any disadvantages against elite universities and increase access to top graduate jobs for the participants, who apply through a competitive (yet supportive) process. Participants have sessions with industry leaders, a residential teambuilding, live projects, coaching, accreditation through the Chartered Institute of Marketing and a group industry exchange trip to China.

Mandatory 'Career Success' module

This module was commissioned by the Biomedical Science and Chemistry departments of *high-ranking university* and delivered by careers advisors, training staff and visiting industry speakers. It was innovative in its delivery, using problem-based, flipped and blended learning as well as team research projects culminating in presentations. It was repeated and reconfigured for a number of years because the academic team believed it was valuable and it led to better graduate destinations. However, poor module evaluations eventually forced the module to stop as some students felt aggrieved that they were paying for it and having to work for accredited assignments when it was not the subject they had

chosen to study. Some of the research participants reported that their peers realised the value of it only after they had graduated.

> *I'm working as a corporate responsibility assistant; my role basically involves organising fundraisers and getting employees involved with volunteering and I get to work with charities too so it's pretty fun! I want to say a massive thank you for all your help and tell you **that if it hadn't been for that careers module I might not be where I am right now!** I actually did my careers project on corporate responsibility and at the time it was the first I'd heard of it... I never imagined I'd actually get a job in it!! I remember feeling so lost a year ago, having absolutely no idea what I wanted and just knowing I didn't want to pursue science. I guess things just have a way of working themselves out!* (Hassia)

The participants who had taken part in the K4C and Launchpad programmes could be seen to be more proactive an open to experiences than some other students. This could be a limitation of the study as they are not necessarily representative. However, they were not necessarily the 'best', most experienced or most widely travelled students. In fact, a recruitment strategy for both these programmes was to give students a chance who might benefit most from the opportunity and would not have had it otherwise.

The Career Success module was different, it was a mandatory module for Biomedical Science and Biochemistry students. Again, even though they studied at a relatively prestigious university most of them were studying this course because they had failed to attain a place to study Medicine and many were from a 'widening participation' or non-traditional background. This information further helps to contextualise the sample as being 'middle band', not the highest achievers nor the lowest.

Appendix V: Participant information sheet

University of Salford MANCHESTER

Title of the study

Student experiences of unpaid work-related extra-curricular placements

Participant Information:

Are you a final year student or recent graduate?

Have you done any kind of unpaid work-related experience?

Or something which you have paid for yourself?

If so… I would like to hear from you!

You are invited to take part in a study which seeks to explore student experiences of unpaid work-related placements. I am interested in your opinions about activities such as internships, work experience or voluntary work – positive and negative. The placement should have been something you did as an extra, rather than an assessed activity which was a mandatory part of your degree.

Before taking part in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being conducted and what it will involve. Please take your time to read and understand the information presented below and ask questions if anything is not clear to you.

Who will conduct the study?

Eileen Cunningham – Doctoral Researcher, University of Salford, Social Policy Department

What is the purpose of the study?

The objective of this research is to understand the experiences of students as they engage in work related placements. I would like to explore aspects which make the placement valuable (or otherwise) and understand how students make the most of such opportunities. This knowledge could help placement providers and students to enhance future experiences.

Why have you been approached?

We are asking you because you are a student or recent graduate of one of the universities where the research is taking place in and we want to know what you think.

Do I have to participate in this study?

No, your participation is requested on a purely voluntary basis.

What will happen if I take part?

You will be contacted to arrange a face-to-face interview with the researcher. This will usually be at your university and will last up to an hour. The discussion will be confidential and so your personal details will not be discussed with anybody else (unless you disclose anything which may indicate harm to yourself or another person).

There is a small risk that some students may feel anxious or upset when thinking about their experiences. If you feel this applies to you and that it would have detrimental effects, or if you have experienced mental health issues, then it might be better not to take part in this research. You don't even have to explain your decision. For further advice just get in touch

Will I be paid for taking part in this study?

No, your participation is solicited on a voluntary basis and no financial incentives will be provided for taking part in this study.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

1. You can help to influence how the research will progress and the issues which need to be explored.
2. Your opinions and experiences (and those of other participants) will help professionals involved in supporting students on placements to better understand how they can help.
3. You will contribute to a wider body of knowledge on the benefits and outcomes of work-related placements.
4. You may also find that discussing your experiences helps you to clarify things for you (although this is not the purpose of the research).

What if there is a problem?

If you have any issues regarding this study, please contact me or my supervisor Louise Ackers (see below for contact details).

Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?

All information received will remain strictly confidential and no one will have access to it other than me. All the data collected will be kept in a secure environment and will be destroyed at the end of the research (2018 at the latest). You will not be identified in any report or publication unless you have given consent for this.

What will happen if I don't carry on with the study?

If for any reasons you decide to withdraw from this study, you are free to do so without giving any reasons. Your data can be removed from the database at any time until the analysis point after which all data will become anonymised. If you wish to discuss this any further, please contact me at any point.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results will be analysed by qualitative methods (thematic analysis) and a report will be written, to which you may request access. The overall findings of the research may also be published or presented at conferences.

Further information and contact details:

For further information and advice regarding this study please contact: -

Eileen Cunningham e.a.cunningham@edu.salford.ac.uk or

Professor Louise Ackers (supervisor) H.L.Ackers@salford.ac.uk

L530 Allerton Building University of Salford, M6 6PU. Tel. O161 295 5976

NB. If you feel you need further support, information or advice about work placements such as internships or volunteering you can contact Student Services at your university

Appendix VI: Research Participant Consent Form

Title of Project: STUDENT EXPERIENCES OF UNPAID WORK PLACEMENTS – A Qualitative PhD Research Project
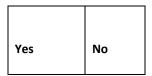
Ethics Ref No: HSCR15-33
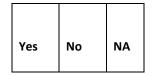
Name of Researcher: Eileen Cunningham

(Delete as appropriate)

> ➢ I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the above study (version 4 Oct 2015) and what my contribution will be.
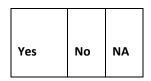
Yes	No

> ➢ I have been given the opportunity to ask questions (face to face, via telephone and e-mail)

Yes	No

> ➢ I agree to take part in the interview

Yes	No	NA

> ➢ I agree to the interview being recorded

Yes	No	NA

	Yes	No

> I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the research at any time **without giving any reason**

	Yes	No

> I understand how the researcher will use my responses, who will see them and how the data will be stored.

	Yes	No

> **I agree to take part in the above study**

Name of participant ………………………………………………………………………

Signature ……………………………………………………………………….

Date ……………………………….

Name of researcher taking consent   Eileen Cunningham

Email address   e.a.cunningham@edu.salford.ac.uk

Appendix VII: Interview 'cover sheet' (biographical type questions)

NAME	
University & Course	
DOB	
Email address	
Postcode	
Phone number	
Gender	
UK or international student?	
Ethnicity	

Living status	
Parental occupations	
Secondary education	Private/state/church school
First in family to go to university?	
Self-defined social class?	
Estimated personal income	
Level of student debt	
Any other relevant information?	

Date of interview …………………………………………….

Venue …………………………………………………………

Appendix VIII: Draft interview schedule – ethical approval
DRAFT THEMES/QUESTIONS FOR SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

Name
E-mail address (non uni)
Mobile
Postcode
University
Course of study & year
Gender
Age (DOB?)
1st generation HE?
Disability?
Ethnicity

EXTRA CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Which of the following activities have you undertaken whilst at university?-

  i. Voluntary work
 ii. International work/study/volunteering
iii. Internship (paid or unpaid?)
 iv. Work placement (e.g. sandwich year)
  v. Part time work

Ask about each

- Name and type of organisation and role
- How it came about (i.e. was it offered to them or were they proactive in seeking it? Did they use contacts or speculative approach?)
- What first motivated them to do it?
- What did they gain from it? (probe)
- What are/were the costs? (for example, financial, time, etc.)
- Why might they (or other people) not have engaged in these activities?

MOBILITY

- How far is the university from your family home?
- Any reasons why you did/did not go to a university near/far from home?
- What made you/how did you choose this university?
- How far have you travelled, other than holidays, i.e. for work placements or volunteering?
- Do you have any plans to live, work or study
- a). elsewhere in the UK?
- b). in another country?
- If no plans, then would you consider it? If not, give reasons
- If yes, then where and for what purpose(s)?
- (Supplementary probing/projection question:- What, do you think, makes people want to gain international experience and what might prevent them from doing this?)

FUTURE CAREER PLANS

- What are your plans after university?
- How confident do you feel of achieving this?
- In what ways has university helped to prepare you for your future working life? (supplementary probing questions e.g. have you accessed Careers support? How has your personal tutor or academic tutors helped?)
- What could help you to be better prepared? (What could you do? What could the university do?)

Can I contact you again in the future (for more detailed interview or repeat survey)?

Contact details:-

Appendix IX: Details of the universities involved

Year - 2015

Factor	W	X	Y
Type (pre/post 92, Russell, ST)	'Plate glass' Robbins 1960s	'Plate glass' Robbins 1960s ST30	Post 92
Total number of undergraduates	14,947 (2014/15)	9205 (2104/15)	21997(2013/14)
Female/males	55%/45%	52/48%	56/54%
White/other ethnic	?	90/10% (UK fee status only and 70 unknown)	75/25%
UK League table positions (The complete university guide 2017)	95/127	9/127	99/127
Average entry tariff	334.5	421.4	332.9
Number of f/t students		9385 (UG)	18019 (UG & PG)
Graduate level employment % after six months	59.2	83.2	62.9
% of full-time entrants from state schools (2013/14)	98.5	90.1	?
% of students from low participation neighbourhood (2013/14)	19.4	9.8	17.3
% of students from low NS-SEC categories (2013/14)	44	25.2	43
% of undergrad students in receipt of Disabled Students Allowance (2013/14)	7.5	132/3301	?

NB. Not all the comparable information is available, for example, the 'widening participation' figures and targets (last four rows) may differ between institutions.

The information closest to the time of the research fieldwork is used as this forms the context. The most recent WP data is for 2013/14 so this year's figures have been used for descriptions of the student population to ensure consistency. Some figures may not add up, for example, the number of males/females and white/other ethic do not equal the total number of undergraduates because the figures include undergraduate and postgrad. This does not matter in this case as it is simply to illustrate the general ratios and no further breakdown of figures is necessary.

University W

Formerly a technical college and is a city campus in the North West of England. Many students are local and from a 'lower participation' neighbourhood.

Employability/destinations? Some vocational course (e.g. nursing and allied professions)

Commitment to WP

Good Business School

My link – K4C participants

University X

Not a Russell group but old uni with excellent international reputation and lower WP rates. Students from further afield.

Also, campus – rural location.

World Class business school

Eminent professors – Alan Milburn and Cary Cooper

My link – Employability module BioMed. Plus, two other students referred by other professional contacts

University Y

'New' university (post '92) in a smaller city in NW.

High local and Asian population (often Asian girls will come here so they can stay living at home with families)

Also has health related courses and a Business School

My link – Undergrad leadership programme plus three participants referred from Careers

Appendix X: Are you a phenomenologist? Questions by Smythe (2011)

This is the content of the email that first introduced me to Hermeneutic Phenomenology and it resonated very strongly.

- *Do you respond more to the opportunity to be creative rather than to follow a clear set of rules?*

- *Are you drawn to beautiful writing, to poetry?*

- *Can you hear what lies behind what people say?*

- *Do you tend to do more listening than talking?*

- *If you are walking, driving or in some other solitary activity do you find yourself lost in thought?*

- *Can you read philosophy without necessarily understanding, but keep on reading because you sense that understanding might come?*

- *Do you enjoy writing in a manner in which you get lost in the writing; the words just flow?*

- *Is there something about the nature of 'being human' that intrigues and delights you?*

- *Are you drawn to tell affirming stories?*

- *Can you 'trust the process'? That is continue on without being sure of where you are going but trusting that you somehow know the way?*

- *Would you be content to finish your study in the humility of knowing there is still much you do not yet understand?*

- *When your findings resonate, and you get the phenomenological nod of "Yes, that's how it is", are you comfortable knowing you have uncovered what people already knew but perhaps had forgotten, or had never quite put into words before?*

(Smythe, 2011, p.37-38)

Appendix XI: The Unknown Citizen W. H. Auden - 1907-1973

He was found by the Bureau of Statistics to be

One against whom there was no official complaint,

And all the reports on his conduct agree

That, in the modern sense of an old-fashioned word, he was a saint,

For in everything he did he served the greater community.

Except for the war till the day he retired

He worked in a factory and never got fired,

But satisfied his employers, Fudge Motors Inc.

Yet he wasn't a scab or odd in his views,

For his union reports that he paid his dues,

(Our report on his union shows it was sound)

And our social psychology workers found

That he was popular with his mates and liked a drink.

The press are convinced that he bought a paper every day

And that his reactions to advertisements were normal in every way.

Policies taken out in his name prove that he was fully insured,

And his health-card shows he was once in hospital but left it cured.

Both producers research and high-grade living declare

He was fully sensible to the advantages of the instalment plan

And had everything necessary to the modern man,

A phonograph, a radio, a car and a frigidaire.

Our researchers into public opinion are content

That he held the proper opinions for the time of year;

When there was peace, he was for peace: when there was war, he went.

He was married and added five children to the population,

Which our eugenist says was the right number for a parent of his generation.

And our teachers report that he never interfered with their education.

Was he free? Was he happy? The question is absurd:

Had anything been wrong, we should certainly have heard.