

Employability: undergraduate perspectives from vocational learners at a university in England

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Abstract

Background, A longstanding relationship is evident between practice occurring in universities and wider society. This connection is commonly manifested by the subsequent occupations of alumni. Contemporary associations between universities and graduate employment encompass notions of employability. Employability is a frequently studied, multifaceted concept. Previous research examples include employability conceptualisations accompanied by the identification of strategies thought to facilitate employability. Other research examples concern evaluations of approaches to employability enhancement. This study is interested in employability from the student perspective. Student understandings and experiences of employability plus contributory factors are explored.

Methods, A variety of methods were used to meet this study's aim. Semi-structured interviews were conducted, participant narratives were retrieved. Placement reflections and mentor feedback documents were examined. Each method was chosen for its ability to capture the student experience.

Findings, This study confirmed a previous perception that employability is a multifaceted concept. This study finds that the multiple elements of employability make it a complex, dynamic and principally relational concept. The relational nature of employability emphasised by this research is demonstrated by the significance of a fit between worker and their work to employability plus employability's social character. Numerous factors were found by this research to be impactful on fit and some were identified as integral to the concept. Experience was also highlighted by this study as being important for employability to the extent that it affects the concept's temporality.

Conclusion, Student understandings of employability illuminated implications for practice within universities and beyond. Learning encompassing work experience and social interaction is stressed as significant to employability by this research. However, given the individual and holistic nature of learning recognised by this study, no one teaching and learning strategy was thought to guarantee employability related success, rather a breadth of approaches is advocated.

Keywords: Employability, Fit, Learning, Experience, Social

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1. Introduction

This introductory chapter will provide insights into contextual information pertaining to this study. Insights relevant to my own institution's employability strategies will be articulated plus recollections of my own employability related experience as a higher education stake holder. Reference will also be made to broader employability related higher education activity. My research will be positioned via introductory insights into current understandings of employability from relevant literature and established perceptions concerning the relationship between universities and employability. Examples of other research concerning employability are offered alongside insights into my own particular steps to understand more including the construction of this study's research questions. The evolution of this study's theoretical framework is recalled. Finally, the structure of this study is articulated.

1.1 Institutional context

As a teacher within higher education, I am affected by the values and the overarching aims of the institution that employs me. The university where I currently work is a relatively small institution. It directly provides an education for 4898 students. Additional educational provision is offered via partnership organisations. The institution originated as a teacher training college. At the time of this study, a varied portfolio of courses ranging from English Literature to Working with Children Young People and Families were offered. Nevertheless, the majority of the courses within my current institution are vocationally based not least teacher training which remains a significant proportion of the university's offer. The predominantly vocational nature of the institution is illustrated in the well-publicised opportunity that students have to participate in a work placement during the course of their degree (University marketing material, 2017). The development of employability skills and applied learning are at the heart of the university's approach to teaching and learning (Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, 2015; Learning Teaching and Academic Experience Strategy, 2022). My role as a senior lecturer is situated within an

institute that focusses on childhood and education. Employability is a theme of our mission statement (2017).

During my time as a new member of staff within the institution I was given responsibility for the leadership of a level 4 Professional Development and Placement module and later a level 5 Professional Development and Placement module. These modules are specific examples of embedding employability into the higher education curricula (Coopers and Lybrand, 1998) because they focus on employability. Given that employability is a significant theme of the Professional Development and Placement modules, the nature of employability and associated practice had relevance for my teaching experience. It was my teaching experience during the delivery of these modules that stimulated a desire for further understanding of employability and associated higher education activity. As a result, the employability concept is a central feature of this study. Its significance is acknowledged via a thorough conceptual exploration in the literature review chapter of this thesis. However, in order to provide some context for practice taking place in the Professional Development and Placement modules and the formulation of my study, preliminary insights into some employability characteristics are provided within this introduction. Employability commonly concerns the capacity to be employable (Trought, 2012). The ability to be employable is generally associated with individual possession of certain resources such as knowledge and skills (Fallows and Steven, 2000; Peeters et al., 2019). An acknowledgement is present in employability literature that employability incorporates a relationship between the individual and the labour market (Forrier and Sels, 2003). Evidence also exists that employability involves some symmetry between the individual and their employment, for example, an individual possessing the capacity to acquire work which provides them with some self-fulfilment (Yorke and Knight, 2006).

I implemented various teaching approaches considered appropriate for employability facilitation during my leadership of the Professional Development and Placement modules. Approaches included the identification of employability skills and the facilitation of their development advocated by Fallows and Steven (2000). Self-appraisal sessions took place which are supported by Dacre-Pool and Sewell (2007) The facilitation of group work on joint tasks occurred which was viewed positively by Riebe et al. (2010). Placement team members would

work with myself and the students in order to identify appropriate work placements. Work placement is considered an important means of developing employability (Seremet, 2016; Yorke and Knight, 2006). In the context of my teaching, work placement lasted several weeks and at the end of that time frame, students received an appraisal of their employability skills by their work placement mentor. Support for work placement application was provided including C.V. building by a member of the careers team. Given that the Professional Development and Placement modules possessed a work placement opportunity, there was an explicit appreciation of experiential learning within them, for example, students were invited to write reflections of their work placements.

1.2 Personal context

I would describe my own history as being predominantly vocational in its nature. I have worked for many years within the helping professions and I have been actively involved in the workplace from the age of fourteen. The only gap in my employment history from a young age has been two episodes of maternity leave. Consequently, I considered myself to have had significant experience of the world of work. The ability to retain employment in an ever-changing labour market is considered an ingredient of employability (Trought, 2012; Forrier and Sels, 2003). This theory suggests that in addition to my teaching skills, I possessed valuable experiential learning pertaining to employability which was of possible worth to the students.

Despite an initial confidence at the start of my involvement in the Professional Development Placement modules, my personal evaluation of leading these modules prompted a need for further understanding. Whilst detailed data was not collected during teaching, trends in engagement were evident. The taught sessions usually contained approximately half of the total class. During these sessions, a minority of students present did not contribute verbally or complete activities that were set. Given work placement is considered significant to employability (Seremet, 2016; Yorke and Knight, 2006), I was particularly interested in students' placement acquisition and preparation. I observed several students overcome significant barriers in obtaining their desired work placement. For example, one student possessed a future goal of working as an

occupational therapist. Consequently, she wanted a placement within that profession. This student experienced major competition from occupational therapy students in accessing time with the occupational therapists. As a result, she divided her 6-week work placement and spent two weeks with an occupational therapy team and 4 weeks in a school for children who have special educational needs. A minority of students were not proactive in arranging work placements and a small proportion of learners appeared reluctant to complete a work placement at all.

A combination of institutional and personal experience influenced the aim of this study. I appreciated employability was of institutional significance and I had experienced some personal involvement in the fulfillment of the institution's employability agenda via the leadership of Professional Development and Placement modules. However, my own teaching evaluations informed me that this was not straightforward. In appreciation of different student reactions, I sought greater understanding. I was curious about the varying responses I observed in the students. I wondered how students perceived employability. I wanted to enhance my appreciation of how Professional Development and Placement modules plus university life connected to students' employability experience in general. This interest necessitated greater understanding of the student perspective. An enhanced comprehension including how students understood employability and how the university fitted with their employability related experience was desired. The combination of my teaching practice and personal reflections formulated my research aim: to explore the student experience of employability within higher education. The rationale underpinning my research aim being that an enhanced comprehension of the student perspective would develop an understanding of employability and how employability may be successfully facilitated for students in higher education, not only via the identification of positive teaching and learning strategies but by the identification of other contributory factors.

1.3 Professional context

My research aim necessitated consideration of higher education practice. Perusal of several texts focusing on a university's purpose confirmed a connection between activities occurring in universities and broader societal

pursuits. Broader societal pursuits usually include the employment of alumni (Maskell and Robinson, 2001; Williams, 2013). A relationship between university activity and graduate employment has been present since the establishment of the United Kingdom's oldest universities, Oxford and Cambridge (Williams, 2013). Longstanding links between universities and work completed outside of them are ongoing. These connections have had an enduring impact on universities. A past example being rapid expansion of redbrick universities during the 1870's linked to the advancement of industrialisation (Williams, 2013). A recent example being evaluation of universities regarding their graduate employment (Office for Students, 2020).

The relationship between university activity and wider society is further evidenced via reflection on social policy. Numerous government documents have encouraged the bond between universities and employability (Dearing, 1997; Browne, 2010; Dept. for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016; Augar, 2019). Rationales supporting the fostering of a relationship between universities and employability include observations of societal change. The contemporary labour market is described as more globally competitive and in need of highly skilled employees (Dearing, 1997; Browne, 2010). Importantly, higher education and therefore universities are identified as a means of creating the necessary highly skilled potential employees. As stated earlier in this introductory chapter, understandings of employability include an appreciation of a relationship and some symmetry between individuals and the labour market (Forrier and Sels, 2003; Yorke and Knight, 2006). Consequently, notions of employability are present in governmental aspirations concerning the preparation of potential workers. The identification of universities as a means of equipping potential workers for the modern labour market has resulted in an associated governmental desire for widening participation in higher education (Augar, 2019). Employers have reinforced government expectations for an increased emphasis on employability within higher education via their expressions of dissatisfaction at the work readiness of graduates (Millar, Biggart and Newton, 2013). However, mass participation in higher education leads to higher costs. The match between highly skilled employees and highly skilled work has been linked to high wages (Dearing, 1997; Browne, 2010). Because of an association between engagement in higher education and high future

earnings, students have been charged with the funding of their higher education. Because employability encompasses a relationship and some match between individual and the labour market (Forrier and Sels, 2003; Yorke and Knight, 2006), justification for student funding of higher education possesses links to employability.

The increased emphasis on employability evident in government documents (Dearing, 1997; Browne, 2010; Dept. for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016; Augar, 2019) has encouraged many universities to embrace activities considered relevant to its facilitation (Coopers and Lybrand, 1998). My institution is not alone. Literature pertaining to higher education demonstrates numerous attempts by universities to embed employability within their curricula. Examples include the creation of specific modules focused on employability (Coopers and Lybrand, 1998), the facilitation of particular employability skills such as teamwork (Riebe et al., 2010). Work placements are supported and provided by many universities (Riebe, et al., 2010; Office for Students, 2020). Nevertheless, Tymon (2013) corroborates my own experience that facilitating employability within higher education is not straightforward.

As already alluded to and explored further in the literature review chapter of this thesis, employability is a complex concept (Romgens, Scoupe and Beasaert, 2020), definitions vary, the concept is multifactorial. Measurements used to illustrate employability related success differ (Forrier and Sels, 2003) adding to the intricacy of the subject. Measurement examples include the number of graduates in employment (HESA, 2015) and graduates possessing a highly skilled and well-paid jobs (Dept. for Business Innovation and Skills, 2016). Accepting that societal change and government policy have led to a relationship between higher education and employability, it is not surprising that universities are subjected to employability related measures of success (Office for Students, 2020). However, the significance to employability of factors external to the university such as the labour market (McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005) indicates connections between universities and employability are complicated. As a result, accurate measurement of employability related achievements by various higher education institutions is challenging. Further factors impacting on the ability of higher education to achieve employability related success were identified by Rae (2007) and Tymon (2013). Rae (2007) studied practical

approaches aimed at linking enterprise and employability. He concluded student responses to employability initiatives were patchy. Tymon (2013) explored student understanding of employability in relation to the individual development of employability skills. He found that although students responded positively to higher education attempts at employability facilitation, student understanding of the employability concept was limited.

Also, in addition to certain knowledge and skills being perceived as attractive to employers and therefore taught in higher education institutions (Fallows and Steven, 2000), there are other requirements considered valuable by employers. These include personal attributes such as adaptability and commitment (Gallopini, 2013). Personal attributes relate to the individual in that sense they could be viewed as in someone's possession, however personal attributes are not always transparent and as such are difficult to assess. They are often linked to an individual's personality (French et al., 2008). Personality is defined by Gross (2001) as

“Those relatively stable and enduring aspects of individuals which distinguish them from other people, making them unique, but which at the same time allow people to be compared with each other” (p.610).

Although some theorists believe that personality is influenced by the environment (Hampson, 1995 cited in Gross, 2001), others claim it is inherent (Cattell, 1943) or developed long before adulthood (Rutter et al., 1997). Bateman and Crant's research (1993) supports the significance of personality to employability. Bateman and Crant studied students' environmental interactions. They argued a person's personality affected environmental encounters including those occurring in the workplace. Bateman and Crant found individuals in possession of a proactive personality were more likely to actively influence their environment, an ability associated with career advancement, success and therefore employability. The work of Bateman and Crant challenges a university's ability to influence employability. Their study suggests it is the very nature of some people which makes them more employable rather than the results of any higher education activity linked to employability facilitation.

1.4 Current understandings of employability and higher education's contribution

Higher education texts (Williams, 2013) and government documents (Dearing, 1997; Browne, 2010; Dept. for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016; Augar, 2019) confirm connections exist between higher education and employability. As a result, numerous strategies have been embraced by universities that are designed to impact positively on employability (Coopers and Lybrand, 1998). However, employability literature also illuminates the intricacy of the relationship between higher education and employability. The concept itself is complex (Romgens, Scoupe and Beausaert, 2020). Measuring the impact of employability facilitation strategies is challenging (Forrier and Sels, 2003) and factors influential on employability exist which are beyond the university's scope, for example, the labour market (Forrier and Sels, 2003) and individual characteristics such as someone's personality (Bateman and Crant, 1993).

The complexity of employability is reflected in the plethora of literature in this field. Many writers have focussed on employability (Romgens, Scoupe and Beausaert, 2020; Peeters, et al., 2019; Small, Shacklock and Marchant, 2018). Several papers have been published reflecting conceptualisations of employability, for example, Yorke and Knight (2006), Hillage and Pollard (1998). Significantly, as recognised by Williams (2018), numerous authors express their employability conceptualisations by means of position papers or, via theoretical studies as illustrated by Romgens, Scoupe and Beausaert (2020), such papers draw on literature and research but they are not empirical studies in their own right.

Evaluations of employability facilitation strategies have been completed. Seremet (2016) and Jackson (2015) found students appreciated work placements in relation to their employability. Cretu and Agheorghiesei (2014) were interested in student and tutor views regarding the value of various work-related competences. They found the ability of students to speak an additional language was considered important. Riebe et al. (2010) studied students' responses to the teaching of teamwork and concluded the teaching of teamwork was thought beneficial to employability.

Various employability stakeholders have been consulted. Jackson (2014) surveyed undergraduates regarding their employability skills. She found undergraduates identified a range of factors as impactful on skills development. The opinions of higher education staff and employers were obtained in a study completed by (Konig and Ribaric (2019). Konig and Ribaric were also interested in views concerning skills development. They found differences in opinion between higher education staff and employers regarding the importance of various employability skills. Tymon (2013) was interested in students' perceptions of employability in relation to skills development and Nilsson (2010) performed a similar study with graduates. Their research was holistic in the sense that they were interested in the understanding of employability as a concept as well as the role of skills development. Tymon concluded students did associate skills development with employability. Nilsson found personal attributes were considered most beneficial to employability by graduates. Various methods have been used to obtain participants' employability related opinions. They include surveys (Jackson, 2014) and interviews (Nilsson, 2010). Having recognised that numerous researchers have been interested in employability, I remain confident there is more to know. My teaching experience plus further reading had stimulated in me puzzlement, curiosity and a desire to make an additional contribution to this area of research. This researcher like previous authors is interested in the employability concept. Importantly, this study is not a purely theoretical exploration of employability, it is empirical and it seeks the perspective of students. Like other employability related researchers, my aspiration for greater understanding is underpinned by a desire to determine positive employability influences. Given the nature of this study, factors identified as beneficial to employability by this research come from the student perspective. Like Tymon's earlier research concerning student understanding (2013), this study is holistic. My research is not limited to one particular employability element such as evaluations of work placement, it aims to broadly capture students' employability related experience within higher education. Employability related experience in the context of this study is experience deemed relevant by students. Importantly, this study recognises that experience occurs over time (Ricoeur, 1984), therefore this study differs from Tymon's in that it takes place over time. My desire for a holistic understanding of students'

employability related experience is underpinned by my developing realisation that employability is multifactorial. My recognition of employability's complex nature enhances my appreciation that many issues may affect students' employability.

The emphasis this study places on the student perspective is also influenced by a belief that they are a major employability stakeholder. It is students who are explicitly charged with the advancement of their employability (Yorke and Knight, 2006; Tomlinson, 2017; Dearing, 1997; Augar, 2019). Importantly, even though students are major employability stakeholders, their views on employability are underrepresented in the literature (Tymon, 2013). As a result, the originality of findings from this research is reinforced by their source.

1.5 The research questions

Reflection on my early research ideas following initial exploration of the literature consolidated my thinking. My reading reinforced the view that employability is a complex concept possessing many dimensions, that a relationship between employability and universities exists but it is complicated. My view that students were important stakeholders was strengthened and a need to understand employability from the student perspective was augmented. As a result, my research aim was confirmed. The research aim: to explore the student experience of employability within higher education influenced the main research question which asks- *What are the student experiences of employability within higher education?* The main research question underpinned the construction of contributory research questions. The close association between the research aim, the main research question and the contributory research questions means all have evolved from my experience and reading.

Having established that employability is a complex concept possessing several dimensions and having recognised that the concept itself creates contributory factors, the first contributory research question concerns the nature of employability. Contributory research question 1 asks;

What is employability and how do students define employability?

Personal observations and reading demonstrated a connection between universities and employability. Perusal of employability literature confirmed

activities within my own institution were not unique. Universities have embarked on numerous strategies linked to employability facilitation (Coopers and Lybrand, 1998) and higher education approaches thought to advance employability are advocated in employability texts (Fallows and Steven, 2000; Trought, 2012). Tymon (2013) reaffirmed an early personal view that employability facilitation is not straightforward and Augar (2019) recognises limitations exist. In acceptance that significant effort within higher education is allocated to employability facilitation and in recognition that this is complicated, contributory research question 2 concerns teaching and learning strategies. Contributory research question 2 asks;

What teaching and learning strategies have universities used that are thought to facilitate employability?

Reflections on my reading and my own teaching suggest attendance at university and engagement in events perceived to facilitate employability does not result in the same outcomes for all (Dept. for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016; Augar, 2019). Indeed, employability places an onus on individual activity (Fallows and Steven, 2000; Peeters et al., 2019). Given the significance of the individual to employability, diversity in students' employability related experience is likely, thus contributory research question 3 asks;

What other contributing factors are present?

Contributory research questions 4 and 5 relate again to the connection between higher education and employability. Research question 4 directly asks;

How do students perceive the link between Higher education and employability?

Contributory research question 5 links to the university's purpose. Professional experience, information in higher education literature (Williams, 2013) and government documents (Dearing, 1997) illustrate universities are affected by societal changes. Government documents connect societal change and employability, for example, changes in the labour market necessitating higher skilled employees (Dearing, 1997; Browne, 2010). Alteration in the labour market has stimulated a governmental desire for a higher education response. Higher education has been charged with upskilling potential employees. As a result, labour market developments have affected higher education practice. This study's final research question recognises that universities offer potential

for learning, but also that the learning taking place in universities may possess employability relevance. Contributory research question 5 states;

How do students connect their assessments of learning with their appraisals of employability related success?

1.6 Developing a theoretical framework

As the researcher and creator of this study, I have made attempts to communicate my positionality. Transparency regarding research ideas has been prioritised. A personal and professional context to this research has been provided. Insights into interpretations of relevant literature and their impact on the study's construction including assembly of the research questions has been offered. This research was born out of my teaching experience including encounters with students. As a result, my subjective understanding has relevance to this study. However, there is a need explore further, critique my experience and enhance understandings via additional viewpoints, most importantly, the students'. Given my involvement, a reflective approach to the study is taken and various stages of the research process were discussed with my supervisors. Some researchers have involved students in employability related studies. Examples include evaluations of attempts at employability facilitation such as work placement (Seremet, 2016) and skills development (Jackson, 2014). In contrast to the work of other employability related researchers, this research is holistic, in that it tries to capture a range of experience. Consequently, several data collection methods were utilised in an attempt to gain a holistic appreciation of student understanding. Significantly, the analysis of this study is primarily inductive, information from students was given priority. Interaction between researcher and the data incorporated both recognition and interpretation of messages within it. An open approach to data analysis was taken via the application of a well-recognised thematic technique (Braun and Clarke, 2012).

In its attempts to prioritise greater understanding from students, this study is interpretive and the use of a theoretical framework is considered a necessity for interpretative studies (Arthur et al., 2012). This study's prioritisation of experiential insights also encourages an acknowledgement that this research is nuanced. Numerous viewpoints are offered, many of which are subtle, for

example, explanations regarding the value of placements, an emphasis on the importance of students' social interactions. Given the subtlety of this study's findings, the use of relevant theory facilitates the establishment of meaning from messages in both data and associated literature. The utilisation of a particular theoretical framework which was created for this study provides this research with another layer of originality.

Having emphasised that this research is interested in and centered on student experience, I reiterate that this study also concerns employability. It is anticipated that a greater appreciation of the student perspective will illuminate further understandings of employability including the connection between employability and higher education plus other contributory factors. Reflections on the scope of this study influenced the creation of its theoretical framework. This study's theoretical framework includes a philosophical dimension. Philosophy priorities enhanced understandings of reality including what it means to be human and how humans appreciate the world around them. The use of a pragmatic philosopher who priorities the value of experience in his quest to understand human development made sense. John Dewey was not only a philosopher, he was an educationalist (Fesmire, 2015). An early appreciation that employability requires learning is evident in this study. For example, the significance of skills development to employability offered an early indicator that learning is important. Hence, Dewey's theories of learning as well as his more general thoughts on human development were identified as being of value. Further reading revealed a perception that employability involved capacity plus the acquisition of resources (Dearing, 1997; Trought, 2012, Fallows and Steven, 2000; Peeters, et al., 2019). A perspective was also apparent that employability involves interaction between the individual and the labour market (Yorke and Knight, 2006). Some writers particularly acknowledge the significance of external factors to employability (Forrier and Sels, 2003). External factors being those factors beyond the scope of the individual such as labour market fluctuations. Considering both the capacity element of employability and the societal dimension, Bourdieu's societal theories including those pertaining to capital (1986) were perceived as relevant to this research. Indeed, Tomlinson's conceptual analysis of employability (2017) effectively

utilised Bourdieu's theories of capital. As a result, the theoretical framework of this research draws on the work of both Dewey and Bourdieu.

1.7 The research structure

Finer details of the research approach and associated rationales are detailed in the methodology chapter. This thesis offers a traditional chapter structure (Murray, 2017). The work begins with an abstract. Subsequent thesis chapters include an introduction, a literature review, a methodology. Following the methodology chapter, there is a chapter which encompasses data, findings, analysis and discussion. Within this larger chapter there are several distinct parts. Firstly, there is an analysis introduction followed by four further sections. Three sections subsequent to the analysis introduction focus on the principal findings of this research. In each of these 3 sections data is presented, analysed and discussed. An analysis summary ends this larger chapter. The conclusion chapter is next. The latter sections of this thesis include comments on originality, the limitations of this study and recommendations for future research are articulated followed by relevant references plus appendices.

Having described the sequence of chapters within this thesis, I now offer additional detail regarding the various chapter's content including some explanatory information concerning approaches taken. In accordance with many other research projects, the initial abstract to this thesis summarises the study. The rationale for this synoptic statement is to give some valuable signposting regarding the various elements of the project and also, stimulate further reader intrigue. Next is the introductory chapter. As stated, this chapter provides background information, it gives context, it begins to position the research in relationship to the work of other researchers. This chapter also provides early insights into this study's construction. The following literature review chapter provides more detail from my reading. The literature review further situates this study amongst current understandings of employability. Within this chapter, literature relevant to this study's research questions is explored in detail. Current understandings of employability are discussed, the relationship between higher education and employability is explored, this exploration expands into considerations of the university's function and a discussion of

higher education strategies thought to facilitate employability. Importantly, the literature review establishes the multifactorial and dynamic nature of the employability concept. A connection between higher education and employability is reaffirmed alongside explanations of how this has occurred. Accepting that a connection between employability and higher education exists, the literature review exemplifies consequential higher education approaches thought to facilitate employability. Significantly, the literature review recognises other factors contribute to employability which are beyond the scope of higher education. Examples include the labour market and a relevance of individual personal characteristics. The literature review encompasses a variety of texts including journal articles, text books and government documents. The various texts draw from a range of disciplines including social policy, education, psychology and philosophy. The methodology chapter articulates methodological applications. Background into the theoretical underpinning of this study is expanded. A rationale for the choice of a collective case study is provided. Choices concerning data collection methods and approaches to data presentation and its analysis are discussed. The next chapter incorporates this study's data, findings, analysis and discussion. As mentioned earlier, this chapter includes 4 sections. The main themes and subthemes resulting from the data analysis are introduced within the first section then explored in detail within 3 distinct parts. Finally, a fourth section offers an analysis summary. The main titles within the data, findings, analysis and discussion chapter reflect the principal findings of the study which include: 1, The characteristics of employability: fit is fundamental to employability and some factors are integral to the concept. 2, The contribution of experience to employability including its temporal nature. 3, Employability is social.

Importantly, this study's findings shine a light on employability from the student perspective. The various dimensions of employability articulated originate from students. Dominant features of the concept include an understanding that employability does involve a relationship between the individual and the labour market. This study's recognition of a relationship between the individual and the labour market includes an appreciation that interactions between individuals and the workplace occur. Interactions between individuals and the workplace may encompass a person's current employment or other work-related

experiences such as work placement. Some perception of fit between the worker and the job they do is fundamental to employability. As a result, factors impacting on fit are cited as important, for example practicalities. Some factors influential on fit are recognised as being of such importance to employability that they viewed as integral to the concept in their own right, for example knowledge. The contribution of experience to employability is articulated including its impact. The social nature of employability is stressed by this study. The relationship between higher education and employability is discussed at various stages of this study's analysis but it is particularly evident in reflections on employability's social nature. Latterly this thesis offers some overall concluding comments and some implications for practice plus future research. An acknowledgement of this study's originality plus limitations is also expressed. Finally, references and appendices are included.

2 Literature review

The main research question for this study asks- What are the student experiences of employability within higher education? This research question links to the research aim which is to explore the student experience of employability within higher education. Importantly, both the main research question and associated aim reflect an underpinning rationale that a greater appreciation of the student perspective will enhance understandings of employability including its relationship with higher education and the identification of other contributory factors. Initial reading consolidated early research ideas and contributed to the formulation of this study's main research question plus contributory research questions. Detailed illumination of current knowledge in the area of this study via a literature review provides additional background and context, the positioning of this research is strengthened in relation to the work of others. A comprehensive literature review plus the presence of a theoretical framework also facilitates effective interpretation of information provided by participants in this study. As a result, the literature review contributes to the establishment of meaning from the data and assists in the identification of original findings.

The aim of this study, its underpinning rationale and research questions influenced the selection of literature identified as pertinent to this literature review. Relevant documents include those which communicate established knowledge of employability as a concept. Literature identifying contributory factors to employability is pertinent. Information pertaining to the relationship between higher education and employability including relevant teaching and learning strategies is also valuable.

The influence of this study's contributory research questions on its literature review is demonstrated via the choice of title for several sections of this chapter. Numerous titles have similar phrasing to the contributory research questions themselves. This literature review asks What is employability? A section is present entitled Teaching and learning strategies used by universities that are thought to facilitate employability. A further section is named Other contributing factors to the concept. Additional section titles include: The links between Higher education (H.E.) and employability and Connections between

assessments of learning and employability appraisals. Higher education texts, peer reviewed papers, work related literature and governmental reports are included in the literature review.

2.1 What is employability?

There are many definitions of employability (McQuaid, Green and Danson, 2005) and employability has been perceived as a slippery and complex concept (Harvey, 2005; Holmes, 2006). Literature reviews performed by Romgens, Scoupe and Beausaert (2020) and Small, Shacklock and Marchant (2018) emphasise employability's complexity. Both literature reviews identified the presence of many employability conceptualisations and illuminated some variations in conceptual understanding. Indeed, Small, Shacklock and Marchant (2018) state "Based on the evidence to date, it is clear there is no single agreed definition of employability" (p.162). In addition to the illumination of different interpretations of employability, Romgens, Scoupe and Beausaert (2020) plus Small, Shacklock and Marchant (2018) highlight employability's multifaceted nature. The research performed by Romgens, Scoupe and Beausaert (2020) plus Small, Shacklock and Marchant (2018) offers valuable insights regarding the intricacy of employability, nevertheless, establishing understandings of employability via examination of literature alone has been criticised. For example, Williams (2018) stated literature reviews are vulnerable to researcher bias.

Forrier and Sels (2003) illustrate how understandings of employability have developed over time. They describe how the term employability is evident in literature from the 1950s and 1960s. Forrier and Sels recount how the term was initially equated to full employment and the economic advantages of a fully employed workforce. In early literature, employability was also associated with government strategies aimed at engaging disadvantaged and unemployed members of society with the labour market. During the 1970s with increasing levels of unemployment rather than employment, the focus relating to employability changed. More attention was placed on an individual's ability to be employable in an ever-changing labour market rather than a society achieving full employment. Forrier and Sel's account regarding the changing nature of employability demonstrates that employability is both dynamic and complex.

Having acknowledged understandings of employability have altered over time, many current notions of employability retain a focus on an individual's capacity to obtain work in a rapidly changing, dynamic and increasingly connected world (Trought, 2012; Peeters, et al., 2019; Augar, 2019). Despite this emphasis on individual capacity in contemporary interpretations of employability, a variation in conceptual understanding which was recognised by Romgens, Scoupe and Beusaert (2020) plus Small, Shacklock and Marchant (2018) is evident. Thijssen (2000) states a connection between the term employability and full employment within a society still exists. Forrier and Sel's (2003) agree with Trought (2012) and Augar (2019), that employability entails an individual's ability to obtain work. However, they stress employability concerns the extended period of time that a person is of working age. Forrier and Sels (2003) also place greater emphasis on the labour market's influence on employability. When discussing employability, Forrier and Sels refer to a person's "chance" (p.106) of gaining employment in the labour market. The use of the term "chance" in relation to the labour market highlights employability includes characteristics of the labour market as well as individual ability.

Yorke and Knight (2004, 2006) refer to employability in terms of a fit between the employee and their occupation. They advocate people obtain employment which is a fit for them and this can be achieved via individual action, for example, the acquisition of relevant skills pertinent to an individual's preferred form of employment. Yorke and Knight (2004, 2006) connect their interpretation of employability with evaluations of success and satisfaction from the employee's perspective, here employability is more than holding on to a job in a changing labour market, it involves feelings of self-fulfillment which are associated with a person's employment. Links between employment and self-satisfaction equate employability with individual development and choice. Yorke and Knight's appreciation that employability incorporates a fit between the person and their work and that this match can result in self-fulfillment provides an additional layer of understanding to the concept. Nevertheless, when discussing the achievement of fit between worker and their work, Yorke and Knight still concentrate on the activities of the individual.

Harvey (2001) corroborates Yorke and Knight's view that employability involves some fit between the individual and their work. Harvey included the views of employers in his attempt to define and measure employability. Employer responses in Harvey's research stressed the need for a fit between the abilities of potential employees and the demands of work available to them. Despite Harvey's valuable insights regarding the views of employers, it is important to recognise that other employability stakeholders exist, they include higher education staff and students (Tymon, 2013).

Reflection on numerous authors' opinions within this literature review supports the viewpoint that understandings of employability vary and that employability is a multifaceted concept (Romgens, Scoupe and Beausaert, 2020; Small, Shacklock and Marchant, 2018). However, despite an acceptance of different employability interpretations, some employability characteristics are frequently mentioned in the literature. The notion that employability involves an individual's ability to obtain and maintain employment in a dynamic labour market is well-recognised (Trought, 2012; Forriers and Sels, 2003; Yorke and Knight, 2006; Peeters, et al., 2019; Augar, 2019). Also, several authors have asserted employability includes a relationship between the individual and the labour market (Forrier and Sels, 2003; Yorke and Knight, 2006; Harvey, 2001).

The relational aspect to employability is emphasised via the employability interpretations of McQuaid and Lindsay (2005) and McQuaid Green and Danson (2005). Employability's relational nature is highlighted because two elements of employability are incorporated into their definitions of the concept. McQuaid Green and Danson (2005) plus McQuaid and Lindsay (2005) identify a supply focussed and a demand focussed aspect of employability. The supply focussed aspect of employability concerns characteristics pertaining to the individual. The demand focussed aspect of employability concerns features of the labour market.

2.2 Employability and the labour market

McQuaid and Lindsay's account of employability (2005) includes specific examples of both supply and demand focussed aspects of the concept. Individual skills acquisition as a strategy for work readiness is identified as supply focussed. A demand focussed example is the dynamic nature of the

labour market and its associated requirements. McQuaid and Lindsay's explicit recognition of both supply and demand aspects of employability corroborates Forrier and Sel's (2003) viewpoint that concentrating solely on the individual ability of potential employees to respond to an everchanging labour market may not fully capture all ingredients of employability. A fit between employee and their occupation is significant to employability (Yorke and Knight, 2006; Harvey, 2001). However, an equal appreciation of the labour market's influence on employability illuminates how difficult establishing a fit between worker and their work can be.

McQuaid and Lindsay (2005) plus McQuaid, Green and Danson (2005) identify some of the challenges, for example, some employers have preferences such as flexibility. Many people in search of employment have additional responsibilities, for example, carer duties, this would limit their ability to be flexible and possibly exclude them from certain employment. McQuaid and Lindsay (2005) also stress that due to fluctuations in the labour market there can be a spatial disparity between available work and those needing employment. They add that many young people in poorer communities which lack employment opportunities are reluctant to travel far or relocate for employment compounding the mismatch. The geographical location of available work is also recognised as impactful on employability by Forrier and Sels (2003). The texts of McQuaid, Green and Danson (2005), McQuaid and Lindsay (2005) plus Forrier and Sels (2003) are comprehensive in that these authors give significant attention to the labour market's role in employability. However, their articles are now several years old. Nevertheless, other authors support the viewpoint that the labour market has an important impact on employability. For example, Small, Shacklock and Marchant (2018) identify demand focussed barriers to employability including the level of competition for jobs and the salaries associated with certain job roles. Additional research has also recognised certain members of the population as being at a disadvantage within the labour market, such members include women and ethnic minorities (Flecker, Meil and Pollert, 1998; Badget, 1994).

Serrano-Pascual (2001) argues for greater attention on the demand focussed aspect of employability. She believes concentrating on the supply focussed aspect apportions blame for an individual's unemployment on that person rather

than highlighting “a lack of opportunity within the labour market” (p.204).

Alternative approaches exist, for example the Canadian government’s Labour Force Development Board acknowledges more explicitly the symbiotic relationship between the individual and the labour market within their employability definition. They state;

“Employability is the relative capacity of an individual to achieve meaningful employment given the interaction of personal circumstances and the labour market” (1994, p.viii).

The Canadian Labour Force Development Board definition, which does emphasise both supply and demand focussed aspects of employability, also illustrates how an understanding of employability as a concept can vary from one country to another. Haasler (2013) recognises these differences. He describes how employability as a concept developed initially within the U.K. as a means of addressing rising unemployment and has now been embraced at a European level including Germany. However, Haasler appreciates that differences exist between Germany and the U.K. in both interpretation of and response to the concept. As in other areas of Europe, employability in Germany is connected to the shift of responsibility for employment from the state to the individual. However, the UK’s focus on equipping the disadvantaged and unemployed with the means to gain employment and the development of high-level skills for the knowledge economy is not prevalent within Germany’s response to the employability issue. Employability within Germany is more associated with the development of a more flexible workforce in response to the dynamic labour market and it is particularly associated with entrepreneurship and self-employment. Fakunle and Higson (2021) examined employability literature from different areas of the world including U.K., Australia and Kenya. Their literature review found the economic aspect of employability which incorporates skilled individuals obtaining well-paid employment was a dominant feature of employability internationally. Nevertheless, Fakunle and Higson did confirm some variation of employability interpretations between countries, for example, ideas regarding employability facilitation. Accounts by Fakunle and Higson (2021) plus Haasler (2013) illuminate further the fluidity of the employability concept. They demonstrate employability can change according to space as well as time (Forrier and Sels, 2003).

2.3 The employability concept and different employability stakeholders

This literature review acknowledges the presence of some variation in employability understandings. Tymon (2013) provided an explanation for different employability interpretations. He stated numerous definitions of employability exist due to the existence of several employability stakeholders. Tymon identifies employers, higher education representatives and students as relevant stakeholders. He appreciates the concept is important to each example but adds that employability interpretations differ because the perspectives of the stakeholders themselves differ. Konig and Ribaric (2019) studied the opinions of two employability stakeholders. The stakeholders involved in their study were employers and higher education staff. Konig and Ribaric analysed participants' views regarding the requirements of potential employees. They found views regarding the necessary attributes of potential employees were similar but opinions regarding the importance of different prerequisites differed. Konig and Ribaric's research supports Tymon's explanation for variation in understandings of employability. However, Konig and Ribaric only focus on one element of employability which is the requirements of potential employees, they did not consider stakeholders' overall appreciation of employability.

Romgens, Scoupe and Beausaert (2020) explored employability perspectives pertaining to the workplace and higher education. Their literature review incorporated research relevant to higher education and workplace learning. Romgens, Scoupe and Beausaert highlighted employability is primarily associated with individual responsibility. Despite their study offering a valuable appreciation of employability from two different perspectives, the research by Romgens, Scoupe and Beausaert concentrated on literature. As a result, they did not have the opportunity to clarify information from different employability stakeholders. Despite limitations in the study by Romgens, Scoupe and Beausaert, their findings have been supported by other researchers. Small, Shacklock and Marchant's literature review (2018) offered a higher education viewpoint on employability. Small, Shacklock and Marchant concluded employability is predominantly associated with individual responsibility

particularly a person's accumulation of relevant resources. Nevertheless, Small, Shacklock and Marchant's findings are also limited to evidence from literature.

Peeters et al. (2019) studied employability in relation to individual resource accumulation. The aim of their study was to produce a conceptual framework regarding this issue. Peeters et al. examined literature and obtained views from participants. The participants in this study were "Academic experts in the field of work and organizational psychology, human resources and/ or organizational studies" (p.84). Peeters et al. concluded a plethora of resources including knowledge and skills were deemed pertinent to employability. They also produced a conceptual framework relevant to employability and resource accumulation. The research by Peeters et al. illuminates the perspective that individual resource accumulation is important to employability. However, despite its ability to confirm a strong association between employability and individual resource accumulation, this research did not include the views of students.

Importantly, as already acknowledged, Tymon (2013) argued that the student perspective of employability was underrepresented in the literature. He completed a study which explored undergraduate students' understanding of employability in relation to individual resource accumulation. Using focus groups and questionnaires to obtain students' opinions, Tymon found students did perceive the development of skills and personal attributes as being beneficial to employability. Also, students in Tymon's study did connect employability with the acquisition of employment. However, employment acquisition was solely connected to obtaining work rather than employment which possessed some match for an individual. Tymon's research provides an important perspective on students' understanding of employability. Given employability involves gaining employment (Trought, 2012) and graduates are often looking for work following the completion of their degrees (Robbins, 1963, Augar, 2019), the student viewpoint is particularly valuable. Nevertheless, despite Tymon providing important insights from students, his research only explores employability in relation to its links with individual resource accumulation.

The employability related value of individual resource accumulation which is dominant in the literature (Peeters et al., 2019; Tymon, 2013) includes an appreciation of knowledge possession. Becker (1993) equates knowledge possession with human capital. Human capital is defined by Becker as a

number of assets an individual can acquire in order to increase their future earnings. An employability link is evident in Becker's human capital theory via his reference to earning money which is often associated with employment (Dearing, 1997). Yorke and Knight (2006) also advocate knowledge accumulation in relation to employability, for example, they recommend the development of students' subject specific knowledge in order to advance a person's employability. A connection between employability and knowledge possession is evident in social policy. Both Dearing (1997) and Augar (2019) link the need for knowledgeable graduates with a labour market that possesses highly skilled job vacancies. Despite some reference to the employability related benefit of knowledge, several texts which connect employability and individual resource accumulation mainly focus on skills acquisition, for example, Trought (2012) recommends the development of a range of skills which will help students obtain and maintain their employment. Fallows and Steven (2000) also link skills acquisition with employability. Higher education is cited within these texts as crucial for skills development (Trought, 2012; Fallows and Steven, 2020). Skills development which has been closely associated with employability and viewed as a catalyst for employment (Miller and Konstantinou, 2020) is also viewed as a mechanism for increasing the fit between potential employee and the needs of the employer (Dearing, 1997).

2.4 The acquisition of knowledge, skills and employability

As illustrated in this literature review, evidence of a connection between knowledge possession and employability is present in higher education texts (Yorke and Knight, 2006) and social policy documents (Dearing, 1997; Augar, 2019). Both Dearing (1997) and Augar (2019) recognise that knowledge can assist a person in their ability to do their job. As a result, they associate an increasingly complex labour market with the need to create well-educated, knowledgeable individuals capable of fulfilling contemporary job roles. Despite some evidence of an appreciation that knowledge possession is pertinent to employability, it is skills enhancement alongside the development of personal attributes that receives significant attention in the literature (Riebe, et al., 2010). There are numerous and varied skills linked to employability (Tymon, 2013). Employability related skills plus personal attributes are often presented like a list

of ingredients. Relevant examples include team working, leadership, positive attitude, communication, problem solving, numeracy, cultural sensitivity, commercial awareness, computer literacy (Trought, 2012). A link between the development of various skills and employability appears positive. The connection between the two suggests there is a clear route to employability. A clear route to employability is evident because the links between skills development and employability indicate a person need only develop the relevant skills and they will be able to establish their employability. However, literature suggests there are many problems associated with skills acquisition and employability.

An immediate problem linked to the skills acquisition and employability is one of language. Holmes (2000) states that the term skill;

“Appears to be used to refer to (denote) some purported tool-like entity possessed by an individual which is used in carrying out performances of particular kinds” (p.202).

Despite his definition Holmes warns that although the word may retain a residual similarity in meaning, it may be used differently in different situations, for example in everyday use or in pedagogical, political settings. Austin (1961) warns against a presumption that a consistent understanding of the word is always present, for example, despite the rhetoric about employers desiring certain skills from their potential workers, their articulation of need is not always expressed through skill requirements (Roizen and Jepson, 1985).

In addition, Tymon (2013), Knight and Yorke (2004) recognise that disagreements exist between employers in what skills are actually desirable from potential employees, not just specific ones for certain jobs but skills identified as generic and valuable for most forms of employment. Many examples exist where a plethora of skills are seen as desirable by an employer (Tymon, 2013; Knight and Yorke, 2004; Holmes, 2000). There is also evidence to suggest that disagreements exist between countries on necessary graduate skills (Little, 2003) and various academics (Barrie, 2007). Other variations in terminology exist when describing the nature of the skills. Phrases range from key skills, generic and soft skills (Knight and Yorke, 2004) to basic and employability skills (Miller, Biggart and Newton, 2013).

A lack of agreement on the necessary skills themselves and the terminology associated with them presents problems for all stakeholders, for example, how do employers determine and articulate what they need from their workforce? How do those individuals seeking work and trying to establish their employability prioritise their areas of development? Holmes (2000) highlights additional complexities associated with skills acquisition and employability. He states a skill can be an instrument used in offering proof of certain capabilities, however, he adds the skill remains invisible unless it is demonstrated. The need to confirm the presence of a skill via performance and assessment is not straightforward according to Holmes. He argues the process is not objective because it “involves interpretation by those who are party to the situation” (2000, p.208). Consequently, Holmes advocates that in order to enhance confirmation of an individual’s skills possession, reflection is needed on what levels of performance are required from jobseekers. Knight and Yorke (2004) plus Forrier and Sels (2003) agree that an individual’s ability to demonstrate the possession of their various skills is crucial for their employability.

2.5 Other contributing factors to the concept

This literature review has confirmed that employability is a multi-factorial concept and some difference in employability interpretations exist (Romgens, Scoupe and Beausaert, 2020; Small, Shacklock and Marchant, 2018). However, despite a variation in understandings of employability, this literature review has highlighted that certain employability characteristics recur. Recurring characteristics include a connection between employability and an individual’s capacity to obtain and maintain their employment (Trought, 2012) plus a perception that employability involves a relationship between the individual and the labour market (Forrier and Sels, 2003; McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005). The inclusion of a relationship between the individual and the labour market in understandings of employability has resulted in some fit between the worker and their work being linked to employability (Yorke and Knight, 2006). Nevertheless, even though some reference to the role of the labour market is made in relation to employability (McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005; Forrier and Sels, 2003), the responsibility for employability is primarily perceived as that of the individual (Romgens, Scoupe and Beausaert, 2020; Small, Shacklock and

Marchant, 2018; Serrano-Pascual, 2001). Individual responsibility for employability is generally associated with the development of pertinent resources (Peeters et al., 2019). The link between employability and individual resource development has influenced a connection between knowledge and skills development and employability (Dearing, 1997; Fallows and Steven, 2000).

The relevance of skills acquisition and the labour market to employability illuminates the existence of additional contributory factors to this concept, for example, reflection on various interpretations of skills identified further differences in employability understanding. Characteristics of the labour market which include various employer requirements such as flexibility (McQuaid, Green and Danson, 2005) highlights practicalities are relevant to employability. The relevance of practicalities to employability is reinforced by Allen and Griffith (1999). They refer to “shock events” (p.535). Shock events are those “which lead an individual to make deliberate judgements about remaining with or leaving their job” (p.535). Shock events can emerge from within or without the workplace and they are often practical, for example, the onset of carer responsibilities or the gaining of a promotion. Shock events are powerful, they can create barriers to employability but also stimulate action that may facilitate employability.

Further perusal of the literature exhibits more contributory factors. In addition to the various skills seen as desirable by employers there is an expressed preference for certain personal attributes (Steurer, Van der Vaart and Rothman, 2022). Personal attributes are associated with personality (Luetsch, 2017). French et al. describe personality as “The overall profile or combination of traits that characterise the unique nature of a person” (2008, p.97). Personal attributes contributing to an individual’s personality, for example, their outlook have been considered inherent (Cattell, 1943) or developed at a very early age (Rutter, 1997), this indicates they cannot easily be taught or changed. Including personal attributes within employability discourse suggests that employability is associated with a certain type of person as well as their capabilities. Recognising the influence of personality on employability also indicates some individuals possess an employability advantage and others a disadvantage because of their nature.

Researchers have explored the effects of personality on work with others. Bateman and Crant (1993) were interested in the impact of the proactive personality on people's environmental interactions. Proactive personality pertains to an individual with a tendency towards proactive behaviour and a propensity to take the initiative in influencing their environment. Using surveys and an analysis tool, Bateman and Crant studied student insights regarding their environmental interactions including those taking place within the workplace. The researchers concluded a proactive personality had a positive impact on students' environmental interactions. Bateman and Grant's research included 3 different student samples and a total of 546 participants. Despite the involvement of many students in their study, the sole use of a survey in order to obtain participants' responses is limited (Drever, 2003). In spite of a possible weakness in Bateman and Grant's study, other researchers have associated elements of a person's personality with employability related success, for example, Van Dyk (2015) identified hardiness as a predictor of work readiness.

Additional researchers have connected personal attributes and employability. Trait emotional intelligence which pertains to an individual's self-understanding (Petrides, Pita and Kokkinaki, 2007) was found to impact on career decision making (Di Fabio and Saklofske, 2014) and self-perceived employability (Di Fabio and Kenny, 2015), self-perceived employability being an individual's evaluation of their capacity to secure work matching their desires and goals (Rothwell and Arnold, 2007). Udayar et al. (2018) concluded trait emotional intelligence activates self-regulatory processes within a person such as increased resilience and optimism during work searches and increased adaptability during career transitions. Goleman (1996) also explored the value of emotional intelligence. Goleman's work supports the findings of Di Fabio and Kenny (2015) plus Udayar et al. (2018). He argues individuals who are emotionally intelligent can harness their emotions and create a positive outlook within themselves. According to Goleman, emotionally intelligent individuals are more empathetic and socially aware. Importantly, Goleman equates emotional intelligence with employability. Significantly, he also maintains emotional intelligence is not fixed and can be learnt.

Di Fabio and Kenny (2015), Udayar et al. (2018) and Goleman (1996) demonstrate how factors relating to positive self-perception have been

associated with favourable employability outcomes. Other authors agree; Bolkan and Goodboy (2011) associated positive self-perception with self-efficacy. Self-efficacy has in itself been recognised as making a significant contribution to employability (Forrier and Sels, 2003; Knight and Yorke, 2004). Self-efficacy involves self-belief (Bandura, 1997). Importantly, self-belief can have a powerful impact on performance (Haidt and Rodin, 1999). Bandura found that in a learning context, self-efficacy affects academic interest, cognitive performance, motivation to learn, emotional management, achievement and growth (1997).

Turner (2014) was interested in connections between self-efficacy and employability. She was also curious about the contribution academic progress made to self-efficacy and therefore employability. Turner examined employability literature which made reference to self-efficacy and her study did link self-efficacy with employability. Turner maintains self-efficacy fosters goal attainment. Given employability is strongly connected with individual responsibility and resource accumulation (Romgens, Scoupe and Beausaert, 2020; Small, Shacklock and Marchant, 2018; Peeters et al., 2019), Turner's finding is important. Turner also concluded academic progress encourages self-efficacy and therefore employability. In relation to her findings, Turner advocates early assessments and associated feedback for higher education students. Turner's work is theoretical and encompasses examination of literature only. In spite of that, her study does corroborate the contribution of knowledge to employability, in this case knowledge validation is linked to the facilitation of self-efficacy, an important employability resource (Forrier and Sels, 2003; Knight and Yorke, 2004).

Importantly, (Goleman (1996) and Bandura (1997) argue self-efficacy can be developed. Goleman believes that emotions can be controlled. Bandura stipulates positive reinforcement, mastery of experience which involves an individual prevailing when challenged plus vicarious mastery of experience i.e., seeing others overcome adversity may contribute to self-efficacy.

The significance of personal attributes to employability and the supposition that they are malleable indicates that human beings can be very adaptable. Adaptability has been perceived as fundamental to employability by Fugate, Kinicki and Ashforth (2004). They argue that employability centres on a

person's ability to make several work-related adjustments. Work-related adjustments include personal adaptability which has links to both Udayar et al.'s and Goleman's advocacy of a positive outlook (2018; 1996). Adjustments in the accumulation of individual resources are also advocated as is the development of a career identity. Despite having a sound theoretical underpinning (Williams, 2016), Fugate, Kinicki and Ashforth (2004) still emphasise individual responsibility in their account of employability.

The establishment of an identity has been perceived as possessing employability value by other authors. Nazar, Van der Heijden (2012) associated identity with an enhanced ability to handle employment unpredictability. Mao and Shen (2020) examined studies focussed on careers in the creative industries. They concluded that Identity should be viewed as an employability resource in its own right. Mao and Shen use the term Identity Capital to communicate their ideas. The word capital is frequently used within this study. It is a word commonly associated with the work of Bourdieu who used the expression capital to explain sociological phenomena (2006). The word capital has been used by other authors who write about employability, most notably Gary Becker, an economist (1993) used the term Human Capital to describe the sum of an individual's knowledge, and attributes that, according to Becker, possess a monetary value. As such, human capital is both marketable and tradable. Mao and Shen's ideas can be connected to those earlier theories of Becker. They advocate Identity Capital is marketable and they encourage positive action by individuals in order to construct identities which are viewed as attractive within a particular labour market. They state;

“Identity capitalization can be understood as consisting of work-related efforts to establish who one is and how one is perceived to secure recognition status and influence” (Mao and Shen, 2020, p.188).

Mao and Shen add that Identity Capital can be acquired via the construction of an identity-based resources portfolio which is transferable to a variety of contexts. Useful resources include finding original solutions to problems and achieving significant recognition with useful contacts. Practices contributing to the display of Identity Capital include the showcasing of a signature style, offering work that perpetuates tradition but also possesses elements of originality, adaptation of self in order to meet existing pre-conditions, for

example, within the creative industries successful women have altered their self-promotion approaches in order to appear modest and reactive (Scharff, 2015). Mao and Shen's study only concerns the creative industries; however, their insights on Identity Capital illuminate the social dimension of employability.

The significance of the social to employability was alluded to by Goleman and other writers including (Forrier and Sels, (2003) plus De Fillippi and Arthur (1994), who found that social connections illuminated employability options. Tymon and Batistic (2017) explored the influence of social networking on perceptions of employability. They found increased social networking and the associated enhanced social capital (Bourdieu, 2006) boosted employability. Identity Capital which has been appreciated by Mau and Shen (2020) links to Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital. The links are evident because cultural capital involves individual adaptability to group expectations (Moore, 2012). Williams (2018) completed a study aimed at establishing a working definition of employability. Williams recognised the significance of capital to employability including cultural capital. Williams used a variety of methods in order to obtain participants' understandings of employability. She utilised questionnaires and interviews. Williams also used an analysis tool in her interpretation of participant responses. Williams's study is comprehensive in that she uses a variety of methods in order establish an employability definition. Nevertheless, Williams's study does not include students and her use of the terms capital and strengths within her research is confusing.

2.6 Models of employability

Employability's multifaceted nature is reflected in the numerous employability models. Each model illustrates the creator's understanding of employability and usually contains several components. A frequently cited example of an employability model is the one created by Hillage and Pollard (1998). A person's capacity to acquire and maintain employment is a significant theme of their work. Several factors determine capacity according to Hillage and Pollard (1998). As a result, they are present within their model. The first factor is Assets. Assets incorporate a person's knowledge, skills and attitudes. Deployment is also integral to the model. Deployment involves utilising Assets and taking positive action, for example, career searches. A further factor is

Presentation which includes the tricky task alluded to earlier in this literature review of being able to demonstrate Asset possession such as skills. Like many other employability conceptualisations, Hillage and Pollard's model was influenced by examination of literature, it also involved the opinions of employability stakeholders, in this case, representatives from the Department of Education and Employment. The model could be perceived as influential because it had governmental involvement, however, Hillage and Pollard's model does not include the views of students.

Yorke and Knight (2006) offer their preferred definition of employability and an associated model. They state employability is;

“A set of achievements, skills, understanding and personal attributes that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves the workplace and the economy” (p.3).

The acronym USEM is used to articulate Yorke and Knight's account of employability. The model incorporates Understanding which includes subject knowledge. Skills, meaning skilful practice. Efficacy beliefs which involve learners' self-evaluations and metacognition. Metacognition is “Subsuming elements of learning how to learn. Of reflection in, on and for practice and a capacity for self-regulation” (p.6). The USEM model of employability prioritises learning and given employability is associated with capacity and ability (Trought, 2012), a link between employability and learning makes sense. Yorke and Knight's model has been well-received in higher education. It was published by the Higher Education Academy (known also as Advance HE): an organisation associated with the promotion of quality in higher education. A positive reception within higher education to Yorke and Knight's model is understandable because their work gives clear routes for the promotion of employability. Despite its advantages, Yorke and Knight's USEM model has been criticised. For example, Williams (2018) acknowledges that Yorke and Knight's conceptualisation is influenced by research with students but, she says insights into their qualitative methods are not clear.

Dacre-Pool and Sewell (2007) stress the emotional aspects of employability via their appraisal of the concept. They recognise employability incorporates

elements of individual choice and determinants of self-satisfaction. Dacre Pool and Sewell's preferred employability definition states;

"Employability is having a set of skills, knowledge, understanding and personal attributes that make a person *more likely* to choose and secure occupations in which they can be satisfied and successful" (p. 280).

The associated model has numerous dimensions. All components are seen as essential in achieving employability. However, they exist in tiers (p.280). Lower tier components include career development, experience, subject knowledge, generic skills and emotional intelligence. The remaining tiers includes "the three S's"- self-efficacy, reflective evaluation skills and self-confidence which are seen as vital in enhancing the effectiveness of the previous tier's components and also in achieving the component encompassing the final tier- self-esteem. For Dacre-Pool and Sewell optimal levels of self-esteem are the key to employability. They maintain "it is through the development of high global self-esteem that employability is achieved" (p.287).

Dacre-Pool and Sewell's account of employability appears holistic, it highlights an emotional domain to employability and given factors such as self-efficacy are associated with employability (Turner, 2014), illuminating an emotional domain makes sense. Nevertheless, emotions within Dacre-Pool and Sewell's model are still perceived as resources to be accumulated, for example, the development of self-esteem. The emotional impact of employability on the individual is not a theme of Dacre-Pool and Sewell's model.

Tomlinson (2017) provides a further conceptualisation of employability. He defines employability as "largely constitutive of the accumulation and deployment of a variety of interactive forms of capital" (p. 339). Tomlinson makes reference to other theories of capital both economic (Becker, 1993) and social (Bourdieu, 1986). In the context of Tomlinson's work, the word capital means "key resources that confer benefits and advantages on graduates" (2017: 339). Like Bourdieu, Tomlinson understands capital to possess several dimensions. For Tomlinson, these dimensions are human, social, cultural, identity and psycho-social. Tomlinson offers a web like illustration to communicate his construction of an employability model (2017, p.340). Importantly, Tomlinson maintains that the relationship between the different

dimensions of capital within the model are both fluid and interactive. Developments in one dimension can facilitate advancements in another, for example, subject knowledge associated with human capital in Tomlinson's model can provide currency within the cultural dimension of capital. Importantly, the various forms of capital are acquired through graduates' formal and informal experience. Other authors support Tomlinson's understanding that capital has employability significance (Tymon and Batistic, 2017; Williams, 2018). Capital has been perceived as a resource (Becker, 1993), therefore, advocacy of its accumulation in relation to employability is understandable. However, capital is also a societal feature, for example, Bourdieu recognises that there are inequalities within society and access to capital is not equal (2006). The impact on employability of capital as a societal feature is less evident within Tomlinson's model.

The existence of employability models reinforces the variety of factors considered pertinent to employability. Factors range from the more emotional emphasis on self-esteem and work life balance appreciated by Dacre-Pool and Sewell (2007) to the more curriculum-based model of Yorke and Knight (2006). Nevertheless, despite their comprehensiveness, the models reinforce dominant perspectives in the literature that employability concerns individual responsibility, capacity and resource accumulation, indeed Romgens, Scoupe and Beusaert state;

“All definitions of employability comedown to an individual's perceived ability to obtain and maintain employment throughout his or her career” (2020, p.2590).

2.7 Citizenship

The existence of various employability models possessing an extensive account of employability enhancing factors can be viewed positively. Like authors who support the skills agenda, the model creators provide employability stakeholders with a guide for positive action. They offer insights into how the different employability factors within their models can be nurtured (Yorke and Knight, 2006; Dacre-Pool and Sewell, 2007; Tomlinson, 2017). Despite this constructive message, it is important to consider alternative perspectives that are more reticent about the considerable efforts necessitated by individuals in order to achieve employability. As mentioned previously Serrano-Pascual

(2001) is more circumspect regarding current interpretations of employability with their onus on individual responsibility. She concludes such an emphasis has entwined employability and citizenship. This connection is significant for writers taking a holistic and developmental view of education which includes notions of citizenship preparation (Dewey, 1916; Doherty, 2011; Newman, 1959). There is within higher education related policy documents both explicit and tacit reference to citizenship. Robbins (1963) and Augar (2019) connect a university's purpose with the development of citizenship. Policy documents focussing on employability mention the benefits of employability to wider society (Dearing, 1997). Advantages are predominantly framed in terms of wealth (Dearing, 1997). Serrano Pascual (2007) argues that the contemporary accent on individual responsibility for gaining employment and producing wealth has highlighted the economic duties of citizenship to the detriment of social and political responsibilities. Nevertheless, the relationship articulated in the literature between employability and an individual's satisfaction with their employment (Yorke and Knight, 2006) does provide scope for more far-reaching benefits, i.e., that citizens will feel generally happier if there are effective matches between employee and occupation. Some authors also suggest that the skills required for effective employment are connected to those required for effective learning (Fallows and Steven, 2000). Effective learning and the creation of thinkers has been associated with an ability to fulfil the social and political responsibilities of citizenship (Dewey, 1916; Newman, 1959).

O'Brien (2000) provides a specific example of how facilitating the development of specific competences associated with employability can also prepare a person for their role in the wider world. O'Brien's example focussed on an all-female liberal arts college in America. Staff within the college recognised a changing role for women in society and they expressed a desire to prepare their students for this evolving role. The preparation involved the identification of certain abilities that were seen as important and the curriculum was based around the explicit need to develop these abilities within their students, effective citizenship being one of them. The language differed as the term ability is used instead of skill, however similarities in approach are evident. Dewey (1916) and Newman's (1959) views pertaining to preparation for citizenship contrast with O'Brien's (2000). Both writers acknowledge the value to society of positive

outcomes from education and the contribution of learning to citizenship but, it is ultimately the general capacity for careful thought which is viewed as most important to citizenship rather than the development of particular abilities.

2.8 The complexities of the concept

Examination of employability understandings within this literature review has highlighted the multifaceted and varying nature of the concept. The perception that employability pertains to individual factors (supply focussed employability) (McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005; McQuaid, Green and Danson, 2005) has been recognised. This literature review has also acknowledged that employability concerns the labour market (demand focussed employability) (McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005; McQuaid, Green and Danson, 2005).

The supply focussed aspect of employability is evident via common connections between employability and individual responsibility (Small, Shacklock and Marchant, 2018). An emphasis on individual responsibility is reinforced via frequent associations between employability and an individual's ability/capacity to obtain and retain employment (Trought, 2012; Peeters, et al., 2019). Links between employability and individual responsibility are further illustrated via connections between employability and individual resource accumulation (Peeters et al, 2019). A well-documented form of resource accumulation is skills development (Trought, 2012; Fallows and Steven, 2000). Advocates of skills development encourage individual acquisition of skills which will meet the demands of the labour market (Trought, 2012; Fallows and Steven, 2000; Dearing, 1997). Superficially, skills development appears a straight forward response to employability. However, closer examination of skills acquisition and employability uncovers complexities in language (Holmes, 2000), variations on views regarding necessary skills (Tymon, 2013) plus skills demonstration is challenging (Holmes, 2000). All of these issues present difficulties for employability stakeholders.

A connection between employability and individual resource accumulation has also led to the identification of additional more subtle and complex requirements from individuals including those in the affective domain. Examples include emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1996; Udayar et al., 2018; Di Fabio and Saklofeske, 2014), self-efficacy (Turner, 2014) and self-esteem (Dacre-Pool

and Sewell, 2007). An emphasis on personal resources in relation to employability has also encouraged links between employability and notions of capital (Tomlinson, 2017; Becker, 1993; Williams, 2018). The plethora of factors which have been identified as having some connection to employability illuminates conceptualisation of employability is tricky. Employability conceptualisation plus its multifactorial nature have encouraged the evolution of employability models.

Advocacy of individual resource accumulation including skills development plus the employability models highlight employability necessitates learning. Subject specific learning and experiential learning are featured in the models of Yorke and Knight (2006) and Dacre-Pool and Sewell (2007). The employability models also illustrate experience is significant to employability, for example experiential learning (Yorke and Knight, 2006; Dacre-Pool and Sewell) and social interactions (Tomlinson, 2017). A concentration on the supply focussed aspect of employability which is evident in the literature (Romgens, Scoupe and Beusaert, 2020) has caused the expression of misgivings by Serrano-Pascual (2001). She is concerned that employability has affected interpretations of citizenship.

Despite greater emphasis being placed on the supply focussed aspect of employability in the literature (Small, Shacklock and Marchant, 2018; Peeters, et al., 2019; Romgens, Scoupe and Beusaert, 2020), references are made to the demand focussed aspect, for example, the demands of the labour market are acknowledged by supporters of resource accumulation (Trought, 2012; Fallows and Steven, 2000). Accepting the relevance of the individual and the labour market to employability stimulates recognition of a relationship between the two. An appreciation of employability involving a relationship between the individual and the labour market is demonstrated in the literature via an articulation that employability involves a fit between individual and their employment (Trought, 2012; Yorke and Knight, 2006). A fit between worker and their work has been associated with job satisfaction (Thijssen, 2000; Yorke and Knight, 2006). Links between employability and job satisfaction reinforce the emotional dimension of employability. The potential for employability to create feelings of self-fulfillment indicates employability has an emotional impact as well as necessitating the development of emotional resources from individuals.

Links between employability and self-fulfillment also suggest employability can contribute to utilitarianism. Utilitarianism may be affected by employability because matches between worker and their work on a grand scale could result in a generally satisfied and fulfilled workforce: this benefits employees, employers and society in general.

Combining a perception that employability encompasses a relationship between the individual and the labour market with an appreciation employability involves individual responsibility (Romgens, Scoupe and Beausaert, 2020) stimulates an understanding that employability will inevitably require individuals to interact with the labour market. Appreciating employability encompasses a relationship between the individual and the labour market in parallel with the perception employability requires individual accumulation of resources (Peeters et al., 2019) highlights employability's potential for empowerment. Employability is empowering because the concept itself can stimulate action in the individual, for example, employability encourages active participation in a social world.

The complexities of employability present numerous challenges to all stakeholders not least the universities that are currently closely associated with employability (Augar, 2019; Office for Students, 2020; Williams, 2013). Challenges for the universities include their ability to facilitate employability. A further challenge for interested parties is how to measure employability related success or failure. Forrier and Sels (2003) provide some insight into how researchers have previously investigated the topic. Studies have hitherto explored the individual characteristics of people searching for work and their ability to gain employment (De Grip, Van Loo and Sanders, 1999 cited in Forrier and Sels, 2003). Other researchers have looked at the impact of training on work transitions (Green et al., 2000 cited in Forrier and Sels, 2003). Career satisfaction has also been researched (Hillage and Pollard, 1998). Forrier and Sels state that approaches towards the exploration of this topic are often influenced by the supply or demand focus to employability of the researcher. Those interested in how individuals navigate their way through contemporary employability demands such as the onus on the individual for employability are likely to consider how individuals "ensure that they maintain, enhance their employability" (2003, p.119). The rationale that graduates are highly skilled and should therefore be in possession of highly skilled jobs (Dearing, 1997) has

influenced ongoing higher education attempts at employability related measurement. Student outcomes including their further study or employment following graduation are examined (Office for Students, 2020). Recently, a new measure has been utilised by the Office for Students which attempts a projection of students' outcomes in relation to their chosen course. Predicted outcomes include their chances of obtaining professional employment (Office for Students, 2021).

This literature review's recognition that employability involves supply and demand focussed aspects (McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005; McQuaid, Green and Danson, 2005) encourages an acceptance that both may impact on a person's employability experiences. An acceptance that demand focussed aspects of employability affect a person's employability experience is significant, it introduces a notion that employability may involve some serendipity, for example, some people may just happen to live in an area where there are more employment opportunities.

2.9 The links between HE and employability

Having established the complexity of the employability concept and in recognition that higher education texts (Trought, 2012; Williamson, 2013; Tymon, 2013) demonstrate a relationship between higher education and employability, it is valuable to explore these links further. As mentioned, one current method used to measure a university's employability contribution is the measurement of graduate employment following students' degree completion (Office for Students, 2020). Higher education evaluations possessing employability elements are a strong indicator that universities and employability are connected. Policy documents produced over a period of time and pertaining to higher education such as Dearing (1997) and Augar (2019) express a desire to reduce the gap between skills shortages within the labour market and the skills acquisition for entrants to the labour market, such ideas have an employability relevance via their connection to a fit between worker and their work. In appreciation of a link between higher education and employability, this literature review investigates how this relationship has evolved. In connection to that quest, insights from literature focusing on a university's purpose are provided plus an account of university development.

2.10 The university's purpose

Discussions regarding activities taking place within a university, an individual's experience of them and their impact feature in a range of texts including higher education literature and government policy (Williams 2013; Maskell and Robinson, 2002; Dearing, 1997). An appreciation of links between events taking place within a particular institution and the future activities of those involved (Dearing, 1997) indicates universities do impact on the world beyond their boundaries. Perceptions by authors such as Williams (2013) that universities have a societal impact has contributed to an ongoing debate regarding their purpose (Flanagan, 2018).

Bell (1970) explored the nature and function of universities. Bell recognised two models reflecting a university's function. These models are named the Classical and the Pragmatic. The Classical model communicates a perspective that universities are concerned with the evolution and transmission of knowledge. In the context of the classical model, knowledge creation and transmission are viewed as good in their own right. The classical model positions universities as separate from the rest of the world. The university is described as acting solely as society's conscience and has no practical function. Conversely, the Pragmatic model sees the university as a resource to society with recognisable links to the external world and fulfilling a practical purpose. A longstanding interpretation of a university's Pragmatic function is the practical application of knowledge gained at university within the workplace (Williams, 2013).

Both models pertaining to a university's function have been evaluated by other authors. Docherty (2011) acknowledged that the Pragmatic model avoids institutions becoming disconnected from the world, isolated and possibly irrelevant. He described this consequence as "atomization" (p.12). However, Docherty also recognised, a deficit of the Pragmatic model is that universities lose their autonomy. Docherty warned how a loss of autonomy results in an institution becoming "an agency, an agency beholden to the thinking and preferences of others" (p.12). Discussions within philosophical texts of models pertaining to a university's function (Docherty, 2011; Bell, 1970) are significant to this research. Confirmation is provided of an understanding that a university's purpose does link to activities beyond the institution. Bell's philosophical perspective also challenges the viewpoint that connections between higher

education and future employment solely result from political intervention (Office for Students, 2020; Maskell and Robinson, 2002).

2.11 Historical insights

Characteristics of Bell's Classical and Pragmatic models concerning a university function are demonstrated in the historical development of universities. The oldest institutions in the United Kingdom, Oxford and Cambridge have been associated with scholarship and knowledge development. However, early students of both institutions, namely priests and clerks of priests disseminated the university's influence to the world outside via their chosen vocations (Collini, 2012; Williams, 2013). Further evidence of a relationship between activity within a university and future paid employment was present in later construction of English universities during the 1870s. The underpinning influence of university development during this time period concerned the value of science and industrialisation (Barnett, 2011). Connections between universities and the external world are again highlighted because this rapid university expansion occurred alongside societal change. There had been a period of enlightenment, knowledge was no longer considered solely God-given and a rationalist scientific understanding of the world was gaining precedence. As a result, the end products of many "red brick" universities created during the end of the 19th century were identifiable professionals including doctors and engineers (Williams, 2013), such professionals possessed the ability to apply specialist knowledge accrued at university to the practices of medicine and industry.

In addition to the historical development of universities featuring characteristics of Bell's Pragmatic model (1970), early literature associates universities with Bell's Classical model. Newman's famous text (1959) (original 1852) provides reflections regarding the particular advantages and purposes of a university education. Newman recognised the developmental nature of education and importantly, he maintained that education involved more than equipping a person with the means to complete a task such as fulfilling their professional responsibilities. Indeed, Newman believed that a university education produced a "better" doctor or lawyer. The idea of "better" is not concerned with more advanced technical skills but a deeper understanding of the world in general. Ownership of this general characteristic was thought by Newman to make a

person more accomplished in their work. Newman maintained an educated individual was more questioning and analytical. More recent texts debating the role of higher education support Newman's views regarding a university's purpose. Barnett (2011) and Collini (2012) argue universities are responsible for the general development of their students including, for example, advancement in learners' appreciation of environmental issues. These contemporary ideas link to Newman's earlier contemplations and connect to Bell's Classical model of a university's function.

Enduring debates concerning a university's purpose are important to this research. These insights from the literature help illuminate factors that have precipitated links between universities and employability. Philosophical debates concerning a university's purpose also link to Dewey's theories of learning which underpin this study. Despite connecting education with future outcomes in the form of citizenship preparation, Dewey (2004) also valued the ability of education to create careful thinkers, this educational capacity was considered by Dewey as being valuable in itself and beneficial to society. Dewey's views regarding the value of education possess links to both Pragmatic and Classical models of a university's purpose (Bell, 1970). Dewey's appreciation of a societal benefit to education centred on Dewey's democratic values and advocacy of societal participation. Societal participation was deemed more effective by Dewey if an individual could think carefully.

Reflections on texts reflecting historical higher education developments and debates on a university's purpose reveal that a longstanding connection is present between universities and elements of employability. Universities have been connected to the outside world via worker preparation for a long period of time. An understanding that universities possess a societal connection stimulates an appreciation that they will inevitably attract the interest of relevant governments.

2.12 Government policy

Having established it is unsurprising governments have an interest in universities, an employability related interest is revealed via a chronology of social policy.

As in the late 19th century, U.K. universities experienced a rapid expansion during the 1960s. These developments were associated with the Robbins report (1963). This report is entitled *The Robbins Report on Higher Education. Report of U.K. Government Committee on Higher Education*. Within this document several aims of higher education are articulated. The first aim mentioned links to earlier insights regarding a university's function. Robbins accepted that universities are involved in effectively equipping their students for the work force. An associated explanation for this activity is provided. The report describes how many students attending university do so with some future employment related aim in mind. Importantly, Robbins claimed that this is nothing new. A further university aim recognised by Robbins concerned individual development. Robbins echoes the earlier views of Newman (1959) regarding a university's purpose. He stated "the aim should be to produce not mere specialists but rather cultivated men and women" (1963, p.6). Further insights stated;

"it is the distinguishing characteristic of a healthy higher education that, even where it is concerned with practical techniques, it imparts on them a plane of generality that makes possible application to many problems" (1963, p.6).

The search for truth and the general enhancement of knowledge is also explicitly mentioned in the Robbins report. Lastly, the report claimed that a university which facilitates democracy and debate will contribute to the evolution of a healthy societal culture. University functions included in the Robbins report necessitate scholarly practice such as knowledge advancement and the questioning of current beliefs which help "cultivate our humanity" according to Docherty (2011, p.21). Here a link is evident to Bell's Classical model of a university's purpose. Nevertheless, recognisable connections to Bell's Pragmatic model are also present. An understanding is communicated that students engage in life beyond the university not just as workers but as citizens. The relationship between citizenship preparation and university attendance has been explored by several authors. As previously mentioned, O' Brien (2000) exemplified institutional attempts at citizenship preparation via a focus on the advancement of particular abilities in students. However, Docherty (2011) maintained during contemporary times when so many individuals engage in higher education, it is difficult to establish a prerequisite for universities to

transmit one particular approach to societal membership. In spite of such reservations, Nussbaum (1998) cited in Docherty (2011) stated an environment which encourages debate and the opportunity to disagree with a prevailing thought has an impact in that it stimulates individuals into “active and independent thinking” (p.24). Alternative consequences have been associated with such environments, for example, one outcome being merely the individual possession of competing ideas or multiple truths. Nussbaum concluded the latter is not inevitable. She advocated universities should be seen as a place which prioritises interaction, participation and debate which will result in the emergence of reflective and engaged citizens. A citizen who adopts a contemplative and interactive approach to societal membership is also important to Dewey. Shared societal participation is a major ingredient of democracy (Dewey, 1916; 2004). Dewey accepted ideas may change but participation and sharing should persist because these are prime features of an ever-expanding democracy (Dewey, 2004).

Having established that the Robbins report (1963) contained several ideas pertaining to a university’s function, an employability related purpose is evident. Universities are explicitly acknowledged within this document as making some contribution to employment preparation. Other ideas within the report showed less distinct employability links, for example, the university’s contribution to an individual’s general development. The Robbins report demonstrates that governmental views impact on universities. Robbins valued higher education involvement and as stated, it was this document that precipitated a sizeable expansion of U.K. universities. The next government document associated with a significant examination of higher education in the U.K. is the Dearing report (1997) (Williams, 2013; Maskell and Robinson, 2002).

The full title of the Dearing report is: *Report of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education. Higher Education and the Learning Society*. Like the Robbins report, aims of higher education are considered and expressed in this document. Aims identified included the encouragement and facilitation of an individual’s development. Individual development includes preparing people for work, their contribution to society and enhancing their personal fulfilment. Within Dearing there is still some recognition that knowledge development and enhanced understanding is good in its own right. Knowledge application for both

the economy and society is valued and the Dearing report anticipates that higher education should be dynamic in meeting the needs of an ever-changing knowledge economy.

Dearing claimed that higher education should “play a major role in shaping a democratic civilised inclusive society” (p.72). Importantly, this report stated that current society has changed dramatically since the time of the Robbins report. There is recognition that the country exists in an increasingly globalised world. Recognition of a globalised world is linked with more competition in business. An appreciation of significant industrial change is expressed. Heavy industries such as coal mining and ship building are perceived as less significant in their contribution to the wealth of the country plus various very high tech and creative industries have emerged and advanced in their importance. The report stated many occupations now require their employees to have degrees. There is acknowledgement that the workforce is in a constant state of flux and that contemporary members will need to be educated and supported in being able to respond to an ever-changing environment. In these articulations, features of employability are identifiable, for example, the capacity of people to respond to an everchanging labour market has links to a fit between worker and their work (Trought, 2012; Yorke and Knight, 2006). Connected to the requirements of future employees, the Dearing report explicitly mentions a need for individual possession of transferable skills. Transferable skills are thought to support an individual in obtaining and maintaining their employment. Once more, a relationship between information within the report and the employability concept is recognisable via the focus on skills development: an important component of the concept (Fallows and Steven, 2000). Dearing argued societal changes such as increased globalisation require increased involvement from the population in higher education (widening participation). The need for individuals to retain their employment in an increasingly competitive international workforce is a dominant theme of the document. Employment retention is associated with longevity; another employability feature (Forrier and Sels, 2003). Page 57 of the Dearing report stated people must “re-equip themselves for a succession of jobs over a working life time.” It is asserted by its authors that the Dearing report is written in the context of a learning society. Edwards (1997) offered insights into the characteristics of a learning society. Within a learning society lifelong learning is

embraced. Connections between employment and lifelong learning reflect the enduring nature of employability appreciated by Forrier and Sels (2003). Importantly, a learning society requires the continual updating of skills and competencies by its citizens. Learning societies associate an educated population with economic competitiveness and effective citizenship. The notion of a learning society has been criticised, it is thought to be an idealistic and nebulous concept which is vulnerable to interpretation and misuse (Hughes and Tight, 1998), one example being policy makers appropriating the concept to support highly applied narrow forms of education.

Despite misgivings regarding a learning society, notions of widening participation in higher education do have the potential for some positive ramifications. Greater involvement of the population in higher education could challenge elitism within the sector (Dearing, 1997). The opportunities for more general individual development identified by Newman (1959), Collini (2012), Robbins (1963) and Dearing (2004) are available to more people. However, widening participation which incorporates more people engaged in higher education leads to additional costs. Recognition of these additional costs meant the Dearing report like the previous Robbins report had a higher education impact. Dearing led to the requirement of students in England to make a financial contribution to their learning. The initial financial contribution post Dearing was £1000 a year. This increased to £3000 a year in 2006. Nevertheless, debate surrounding the funding of higher education and whose responsibility this should primarily belong to continued (Williams, 2013). Increasingly prevalent ideas emerged which centered on a view that, because individual students were the main beneficiary of higher education and this benefit included future wealth associated with graduate employment, they should pay for the opportunity.

The Browne report (2010) as its title *Securing a Sustainable Future for Higher Education Funding and Student Finance* suggests was charged with exploring higher education funding in England again. The benefits of a well-educated society are also communicated in Browne. The report proposes even wider participation in higher education beyond the 45% of 18- to 30-year-olds known to have engaged in the sector at the time of the report (p.2). The benefits of mass participation in higher education for a society mentioned within this report

link to the knowledge economy. Echoes of Dearing (1997) are evident via the perceived need for high level skills in the labour market and continued competition for trade globally. Global competitors include other countries that have also experienced widened participation of their population in higher education. Like Dearing previously, the Browne report stated individuals receive rewards for their higher education involvement and these rewards are associated with wealth: "Graduates go on to higher paid jobs and add to the nation's strength in the knowledge economy" (p.2). Successful students are described as having higher chances of employment, will be higher paid and could respond flexibility within the labour market. An essence of empowerment is present in both Dearing (1997) and Browne (2010) in that making a choice to engage in higher education provides a reward, however, the reward is principally one of financial gain.

Some symmetry can be seen between the reports of Dearing (1997) and Browne (2010). Like Robbins before them both reports are supportive of expansions in higher education. The later reports contain increased references to employability. Significantly, there is an emphasis on an individual's ability to obtain and retain employment and this is associated with both knowledge and skills acquisition. Despite the presence of reflections on higher education's purpose in all reports, the facilitation of positive future outcomes in the form of well-paid employment is much more dominant within the latter documents. Higher education funding is a principal feature of both Dearing (1997) and Browne (2010). The Browne report precipitated a shift in England from joint funding in higher education by student and government to sole investment by the student, this individual funding is supported via the continuation of government backed student loans. These loans existed to meet initial fees of £1000 in 1998 following Dearing to £9000 in 2012 following Browne.

Individual payment for education is justified in both Dearing (1997) and Browne (2010) as an investment, this justification links to Human Capital theory (Becker, 1993). According to Becker, an investment which provides a return in income is capital. Payments for commodities such as training and education enhance the knowledge and skills of the recipient. Because you cannot detach a person from their knowledge and skills, expenditure on knowledge and skills is human capital. Becker supports investment in Human Capital claiming when

it occurs there have been higher skills within the labour market, greater productivity and additional wealth of a nation. A connection between Human Capital theory and employability is evident. Employability is linked with knowledge and skills development (Trought, 2012; Fallows and Steven, 2000). Employability also includes individual responsibility (Romgens, Scoupe and Beusaert, 2020) and capacity (Trought, 2012, Yorke and Knight, 2006). Following Browne, block teaching grants from the government to universities ended in England, the rationale being that because individual students had the most to gain and would reap the benefits of their enhanced Human Capital, they should pay.

The practice of individual investment in higher education, enhanced Human Capital and an increased employability emphasis within higher education appear in social policy terms to be connected. However, this relationship is complex. The contribution higher education makes to the workforce is recognised within the Browne report but it is not completely clear. There is mention of the advanced skills that universities can equip young people with but there is also mention of dissatisfaction from employers about the ability of graduates to fulfil their work-based responsibilities. These acknowledgements possess employability relevance, they involve an understanding that employability includes an interaction between the individual and the labour market, there is also an expressed desire for some symmetry between the two. Becker (1993) himself appreciates that educational contributions to employability are not straightforward. He acknowledges education may simply provide “credentialism,” that the degrees distributed by various higher education institutions offer an indication of the productive nature of their graduates but their productivity may have already been present without university involvement, the university merely identifies it. The ability of the university to reveal those individuals who are most able could also be flawed. As stated in the Dearing report (1997), attendance at a university has been associated with wealth. Regardless of widening participation, the correlation is perceived again in Browne (2010). Despite Dearing’s promotion of individual financial investment in higher education and associated stimulation of widening participation (1997), it appears universities may still have been simply supplying the labour market

with wealthier rather than more capable potential employees at the time of Browne (2010).

Misgivings surrounding higher education and student outcomes are expressed in the government report *Success as a Knowledge Economy, Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice* (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016). 20% of graduates were described within this report as occupying non-professional roles three and a half years post-graduation (HESA, 2011 cited in Dept. for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016). Despite the earlier positive articulations expressed in Dearing (1997) and Browne (2010), high salaries for graduates were not assessed as inevitable (Dept. for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016). Nevertheless, commitment to the acquisition of employment related skills through engagement in higher education is reiterated in this document. There is a suggestion within the paper that it should simply be done better and that universities should be encouraged to perform better. The *Success as a Knowledge Economy, Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice* report introduced the Office for Students, a regulator of higher education in England. This higher education regulator became operational in 2017. It registers and appraises higher education providers, principally universities. Appraisal is achieved via the introduction of the TEF - The Teaching Excellence Framework. Very significantly, teaching quality and positive employment outcomes are connected by TEF. Although a positive employment outcome is not fully described within the report, connections to employability are identifiable because employability is linked to both knowledge possession (Becker, 1993) and being employed (Forrier and Sels, 2003). As a result, plans concerning the Teaching Excellence Framework communicated in this report and subsequently actioned by the government at the time have placed employability at the heart of university activity, namely teaching.

As a result of widening participation, the contemporary higher education sector is a huge industry creating significant amounts of wealth (Augar, 2019). Universities remain principal higher education stakeholders in that they account for 90% of HE provision (Augar, 2019). Consequently, government interest in the sector persists. Ongoing interest is detailed in the Augar report (2019) which is entitled *Independent Panel Report to the Review of Post 18 Education and*

Funding. As indicated in the title, this report is interested in higher education in England because higher education involves those over 18 years of age. The report is also interested in funding. Like previous government documents, Augar (2019) explores the functions of universities. Report discussions make links between a well-educated population and greater general involvement in public affairs, such ideas link to earlier views concerning citizenship (Dewey, 2004). Higher levels of education are associated with better health, both physical and mental. It is also thought to “bring people together from different backgrounds demonstrating the value of diverse voices and connecting learners with lifestyles that differ for their own” (Augar, 2019, p.15). References to Bell’s classical university model (1970) are evident in these additional claims.

Also, like earlier documents, the Augar report provides some characteristics of higher education students. Again, a connection between wealth and university attendance is evident. A significant proportion of students studying at high tariff universities were identified as having previously been in receipt of a private education, an experience indicative of wealth. This information suggests that although participation from less well-off young people within higher education has increased since the 1990s, poorer students’ attendance at the most prestigious institutions and arguably the most well-known and possibly most attractive to employers has remained static. As a result, it is still possible that a consequence of the ongoing connection between higher education and employability is the provision of wealthier graduates to employers.

In addition to its insights regarding a breadth of educational purposes and student characteristics, the Augar report discusses learner outcomes including graduate employment and earnings. Once more, an employability link is recognisable via an interest in graduate employment. The idea of fit between worker and work, a feature of employability (Yorke and Knight, 2006) is also discussed in this document. Articulations of an ongoing mismatch between potential employees and the labour market are expressed. Reference is made to an ongoing and persistent skills shortage within the labour market. Claims made by predecessors Dearing (1997), Browne (2010), Dept. for Business, Innovation and Skills (2016) that the effective teaching of advanced skills within higher education will lead to well-matched, well-paid employment for graduates are challenged. A surplus of graduates is alluded to and a significant minority of

graduates were identified as not being in well-paid jobs. In particular, the study of some subjects at some of the post 1992 universities was found to not result in well paid employment. Augar states;

“A significant minority of graduates concentrated in some institutions and some subjects as well as those with low educational attainment on embarking on degree study, are likely to earn too little to repay any or more than a small part of their loan” (2019, p.91).

Student loans are underwritten by the government and subsidised by the tax payer. Consequently, Augar highlighted continued government financial support of a now hefty higher education sector due to non-repayment of student loans. As a result, Augar (2019) recommended a 3-year £7,500 cap in the individual contribution made students. An extension to loan repayment times was proposed. Shortfalls in funding resulting from the cap in student contributions should be made up by the government according to Augar via the reintroduction of teaching grants for some subjects.

Changes to higher education funding in England following the Augar report were announced in February 2022 (Dept. for Education, 2022). Tuition fees were not reduced but frozen at £9,250 up to and including academic year 2024-2025. Plans to extend the student loan repayment term were also articulated. Students commencing their studies in September 2023 will repay their loans for 40 rather than 30 years. The announcement of these changes included a government acknowledgement that many students do not acquire a well-paid graduate job and many student loans are not being repaid (Dept. for Education, 2022)

Examination of government documents created overtime supports an argument that societal changes affect university activity (Williams, 2013). Insights from numerous government documents also confirm an ongoing political interest in universities. Successive governments have focused on higher education and employability. Even though the term employability is not explicitly mentioned in earlier reports Robbins (1963) and (Dearing (1997), employability characteristics are identifiable in their narratives. All reports expressed an interest in graduate employment and as recognised in this literature review, the ability to be employed is an element of employability (Trought, 2012; Forrier and Sels, 2003). Government documents post Robbins become increasingly

employability focused. They articulate perceptions of labour market change and an associated skills shortage. A need to supply individuals who can meet contemporary labour market demands is expressed (Dearing, 1997; Browne, 2010; Dept. for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016 and Augar, 2019), such ideas concern a fit between worker and their work which is another ingredient of employability (Yorke and Knight, 2006; Trought, 2012). Skills development, a process commonly associated with employability (Fallows and Steven, 2000) is advocated (Dearing, 1997; Browne, 2010; Dept. for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016 and Augar, 2019). Higher education institutions, commonly universities have been charged with equipping potential employees to meet the requirements of a contemporary labour market, most notably via skills development (Dearing, 1997; Browne, 2010; Dept. for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016 and Augar, 2019). Positioning universities in that role has fostered an increased connection between universities and employability. A powerful demonstration of that link is evident via the perceived relationship between teaching quality and student outcomes including employment which is present in the Teaching Excellence Framework (Dept for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016).

A governmental desire for an increased match between the abilities of potential employees and the needs of the labour market (Dearing, 1997; Browne, 2010) alongside a perception universities could facilitate that match connects employability and widening participation in higher education. Employability and widening participation are connected because some fit between workers and their work is an employability characteristic (Trought, 2012; Yorke and Knight, 2006). Widening participation precipitated a massive expansion of the higher education sector. The increased cost of the higher education sector resulting from widening participation led to a shift in responsibility for its funding (Dearing, 1997; Browne, 2010). The justification for a change in funding also connects to employability. A connection between employability and changes in higher education funding is evident because of the perception that students will become highly skilled graduates and graduates are best equipped to fill highly skilled jobs (Dearing, 1997; Browne, 2010). As previously stated, links between highly skilled graduates and highly skilled jobs has characteristics of a fit between worker and their work which is a feature of employability (Trought,

2012; Yorke and Knight, 2006). Significantly, graduate possession of a highly skilled job was also connected to high pay by Dearing (1997). Because graduates were perceived as likely to acquire work which was a fit for them and paid them well, also, because this match resulted from a graduate's former studies, students were considered the most appropriate people to fund higher education (Dearing, 1997; Browne, 2010).

Evaluations of employability related success are evident in government documents, some graduates are in possession of highly skilled, highly paid work (Dept. for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016; Augar, 2019). Attempts to measure employability related success include the Graduate Outcome Surveys (Office for Students, 2020). The Graduate Outcomes Survey measures the number of graduates who are in possession of highly skilled work (Office for Students, 2020). Attempts to evaluate higher education's contribution to employability highlight the relationship between higher education and employability is complex. Government evaluations concerning higher education and employability have focused on economics, for example the number of graduates in a well-paid work (Augar, 2019). An economic emphasis on employability evaluations is understandable considering how higher education is now funded.

Current approaches to higher education funding are supported by Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1993). Nevertheless, Human Capital Theory does not explain away a government's responsibility for making a financial contribution to higher education. Becker himself clearly states a well-educated population has positive ramifications for society as a whole. Significantly, Browne (2010) indicates the state could not afford to pay for mass participation in higher education. The responsibilities of employers to financially invest in the higher education of their future employees is not a major feature of any government document mentioned so far in this literature review. Becker provides a possible explanation for the lack of reference to employer funded higher education. He states an individual's education including the development of their knowledge and skills is connected to that person. Consequently, knowledge and skills move with a person therefore employers would be reluctant to invest in something that could be easily lost.

Measuring employability is also difficult (Forrer and Sels, 2003). An Element of employability measurement is recognisable in Graduate Outcomes Surveys in that the number of highly skilled people in highly skilled work can represent some fit between workers and their work which is an employability characteristic (Trought, 2012; Yorke and Knight, 2006). However, employability is multifaceted (Peeters, et al., 2019). Consequently, the determination of graduate outcomes does not measure all aspects of employability.

As previously suggested in this literature review, the skills acquisition agenda which is a prime feature of social policy can be problematic. Significantly for universities there is a fundamental question concerning whether skills used in one area are useful in another context. Theorists such as Wenger (1998) emphasise the significance of contextual learning. Wenger's Communities of Practice theory (1998) claims that tacit knowledge, particularly unspoken truths about work culture, can only be gained via immersion within that particular context. Sternberg et al. (2000) express similar ideas. Sternberg and colleagues refer to practical intelligence and its value in the workplace. They believe that a significant contribution to practical intelligence is tacit knowledge. Tacit knowledge for Sternberg and team is the routine knowledge acquired through everyday life and this includes an understanding of when to express yourself and when to remain silent. Like Wenger (1998), Sternberg et al. (2000) recognise the domain specific character of practical intelligence and they argue that skills learnt within alternative environments such as the university can be a poor fit when applied to the reality of the workplace.

Despite the identification of difficulties connected to the establishment of a link between higher education and employability, some positive outcomes are evident. Elements of empowerment and choice are present. Prospective students are encouraged to take action in order to determine their future employment. Positive outcomes associated with individual action are evident in government reports (Dearing, 1997; Browne, 2010). However, the rewards identified are mainly economic. Both individuals and society are considered more likely to become wealthier due to widening participation in higher education.

Despite evidence of long-term links between universities and employability, the connection between higher education and employability is more evident in

government documents post Robbins (1963). Documents post Robbins suggest the contemporary symbiosis of higher education and employability is due to societal evolution (Dearing, 1997; Browne, 2010, Dept. for Business, Innovation and Skills, 20016; Augar, 2019). However, examination of government documents also indicates the increased connection between universities and employability is influenced by economics. Employability has been used to justify the funding of a significantly extended higher education sector in England via student loans.

2.13 Regional differences and additional reports

Examination of government documents has confirmed a connection between higher education and employability. Post Dearing (1997) education was a devolved government responsibility within the U.K. Because this study concerns a university in England, there has been a focus on government documents pertaining to Higher education in England. Nevertheless, evidence of a connection between higher education and employability is evident in both Wales and Scotland. Wales's Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills produced a report in 2009 entitled *For our Future: the 21st Century Higher Education Strategy and Plan for Wales*. This document illustrates approaches to higher education in Wales. Like government documents pertaining to higher education in England, there are reflections on the purposes of higher education. Once more, links to Bell's models regarding a university's purpose are evident (1970). Higher education is seen as vital for intellectual development which links to the Classical model of a university's function. Links to the Pragmatic model are recognisable via connections between higher education involvement and the advancement of social participation. An association between engagement in higher education and social participation illuminates a link between engagement in higher education and citizenship preparation. The link between higher education and citizenship preparation is recognisable because social participation is an important ingredient of citizenship according to Dewey (2004).

Having established that there are similarities in the understanding of a university's purpose in both England and Wales, similarities pertaining to employability are evident. The Welsh government communicates a desire for

widening participation in higher education. As in England, widening participation is linked with skills development and successful graduate employment (Dept. for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills, 2009). Widening participation, skills development and graduate employment have all been linked to employability by this literature review, consequently, the Welsh government's desire for widening participation demonstrates they are also interested in their higher education system's contribution to employability. The Welsh government also welcomes a national regulator of their higher education system. A recognisable difference between the higher education regulator in Wales and the Office for Students in England is that the higher education regulator in Wales must acknowledge regional differences in employment opportunities (Dept. for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills, 2009). The need to recognise regional differences in employment opportunities within Wales is a significant variation in social policy, it is important because differences in the geographical location of work is a characteristic of employability (Forrier and Sels, 2003). Like documents discussing higher education in England (Browne, 2010; Augar, 2019), the For our Future document demonstrates a requirement that students make a financial contribution to their higher education in Wales. However, there is recognition that this is a burden (Dept. for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills, 2009). Significantly, Wales also provides student grants as well as student loans in order to fund their higher education sector. Grants are means tested but nevertheless, they exist (Dept. for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills, 2009).

The presence of grants in Wales demonstrates an important variation in higher education funding. Despite recognisable links between higher education and employability in Wales, employability is not used as a justification for individual students being responsible for the funding of the sector. The continued financial contribution of the Welsh government to higher education in Wales may represent an ideological difference to the government of England. There may be a belief that the state still has some responsibility for the higher education of its citizens. Alternatively, it could simply be cheaper to provide some financial support to a higher education sector located in a smaller country.

Insights into the relationship between higher education in Scotland and employability are present in the report *A Blueprint for Fairness: Final Report of*

the Commission on Widening Access (Advanced Learning and Science Directorate, 2016). The Blueprint for Fairness document also advocates widening participation in higher education. There is acknowledgement in this document that access to higher education in Scotland is associated with wealth. This appears ironic as the higher education sector in Scotland is “predominantly publicly funded” (2016, p.3). Given that higher education does not necessitate a massive financial burden from students in Scotland, economic explanations for the inequality in engagement in higher education appear limited. Indeed, the document does go on to identify prior educational attainment as a barrier (Advanced Learning and Science Directorate, 2016). Consequently, access programmes aimed at improving learner preparation for higher education are encouraged. Flexibility in the academic prerequisites of learners from poorer backgrounds is also recommended. The Blueprint for Fairness document recognises the benefits of widening participation as being social and economic. Graduates are understood to “live longer and enjoy better employment outcomes” (2016, p.3).

An employability related justification for widening participation in higher education in Scotland is also recognisable in the Blueprint for Fairness document. Reference is made to changes in the labour market and a demand for highly skilled workers (Advanced Learning and Science Directorate, 2016). Once more, the employability characteristic of a fit between worker and their work is identifiable within this rationale for widening participation (Trought, 2012; Yorke and Knight, 2006). Once again, universities are charged with facilitating that fit. Despite the desire for widening participation in Scotland and justification of that desire possessing a link to employability, Scotland remains committed to a primarily public funded higher education sector. The difference between Scotland and England could be due to ideological differences regarding state funding of higher education. The variation may also result from a smaller country with a smaller higher education sector being better equipped to financially support it.

Having established that governments in England and elsewhere have taken an employability related interest in higher education, it is pertinent to consider governmental interest regarding employability in other areas of education.

Employability necessitates learning (Yorke and Knight, 2006) and learning is scaffolded (Dewey, 1933; 1938). Consequently, governmental references to employability occurring in both compulsory and further education possess some relevance to this study. *Review of vocational education: the Wolf report* (Department for Education and Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011) explored vocational education in England pertinent to the ages 14 -19. The report generally supports vocational education as a means of preparing young people for higher education and employment. However, there is recognition within the document that some courses do not adequately achieve these aims. There is also concern about the low number of learners achieving qualifications in maths and English. Expressions of concern regarding the effective preparation of young people for the demands of the labour market echo misgivings articulated in government reports pertaining to higher education (Dept. for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016; Augar, 2019). In response to its concerns, the Wolf report recommends concentration on vocational courses which do demonstrate successful preparation of learners for further study or employment. Importantly, despite the report's explicit focus on vocational learning, Wolf retains a commitment to academic study. She stresses vocational courses must possess a certain percentage of academic content. Learners are also required to repeatedly complete their maths and English qualifications until they are successful. Government League tables will be used in order to encourage a focus by educational establishments on the type of vocational courses advocated by Wolf.

Elements of employability are recognisable in the Wolf report recommendations. Employability is recognisable because some relationship between individuals and the labour market is an ingredient of employability (Forrier and Sels, 2003), consequently, Wolf's advocacy of a match between potential worker and their work concerns employability (Yorke and Knight, 2006; Trought, 2012). The Wolf report has been criticised. Baker (2011) is skeptical about the ability of educational establishments to incentivise young people into repeated attempts at maths and English qualifications. Baker is also reticent about the use of league tables in relation to vocational courses. He suspects the introduction of league tables for vocational courses may simply encourage schools to embrace academic alternatives.

An additional report possessing relevance to young people aged 14-19 is the Leitch review of skills (2006), this document is entitled *Prosperity for All in the Global Economy - World Class Skills*. Leitch was sanctioned by the U.K. government to establish the necessary skills mix to facilitate economic and social prosperity. Leitch identified low levels of literacy, numeracy, skills and productivity within the U.K. workforce. He also recognised these deficits did not compare well with other countries. Consequently, Leitch recommended a general upskilling of workers and potential employees. An investment in level 2, 3 and 4 qualifications was recommended. Level 4 qualifications often pertain to higher education and skills development is associated with employability (Fallows and Steven, 2000). As a result, the Leitch report has some relevance to universities and employability. Significantly, Leitch acknowledged a lack of investment in training by employers. He recommended significant investment in upskilling from employers, individuals and the government. However, the Leitch review has been criticised. Mackney (2007) has misgivings about the report's emphasis on skills development. He recognises a more generally educated population also enhances the workforce. It is also pertinent to recognise that despite Leitch's identification of employers as appropriate investors in level 4 qualifications, higher education in England is still funded via student loans.

Reflections on documents pertaining to the 14-19 age group illustrate that learners do encounter employability related activities prior to commencement of their university studies. Given that learning is scaffolded (Dewey, 1933, 1938), it is likely these prior experiences will impact on student responses to employability related activities occurring in higher education.

2.14 Teaching and learning strategies used by universities that are thought to facilitate employability

This literature review demonstrates that higher education and employability are linked. The extent of this connection is illustrated by the evaluation of an institution's teaching standards and subsequent award of TEFs (Teaching Excellence and Students Outcomes Framework). Teaching standards are linked to employment outcomes (Office for Students, 2020). Consequently, universities are significant employability stakeholders and teaching and learning

strategies have evolved which are thought to facilitate employability (Riebe, et al. (2010).

Coopers and Lybrand (1998) describe how higher education teaching strategies associated with the facilitation of employability usually incorporate modifications to programme content and an alteration in teaching methods. Examples include embedding skills development within a course or creating specific modules which focus on employability. Research completed by Riebe et al. (2010) positively evaluated the embedding of a skill within a programme. Riebe et al. (2010) focussed on the teaching of team work within a higher education programme. Online surveys were used to measure developments in students' understanding of this skill. The researchers concluded learners did possess an enhanced awareness of teamwork having been educated on this skill. Using surveys to measure students' understanding is limited in that surveys do not allow more in-depth discussions and clarifications (Drever, 2003). However, despite possible limitations in Riebe, et al.'s study, other authors have recommended the incorporation of additional skills into academic study. Skills related challenges such as problem solving and team work within taught sessions are advocated by Trought (2012) and Fallows and Steven (2000). Cretu and Agheorghiesei (2014) recommended opportunities to develop language skills which are perceived as attractive to employers.

The Higher Education Academy (known also as Advance HE) provides a comprehensive framework for embedding employability in higher education (Advance HE, N.D.). The framework encompasses factors considered relevant to employability. Factors include knowledge, skills, experience and emotional qualities such as confidence and resilience. Underlying principles and stages of embedding employability are incorporated within the framework. Stages of embedding employability include prioritising action and measuring impact. Several factors within the framework considered pertinent to employability are perceived as relevant by this literature review, for example knowledge (Yorke and Knight, 2006), skills (Fallows and Stevens, 2000), emotional resources (Dacre-Pool and Sewell, 2007). Despite a detailed demonstration of factors pertinent to employability, more practical detail of how to facilitate these various factors would enhance the Higher Education Academy's framework. The framework also recommends evaluating attempts at embedding employability

within higher education. However, this literature review recognises measuring employability is difficult (Forrier and Sels, 2003)

Employability conceptualisations do provide information on how employability can be practically facilitated within higher education. Yorke and Knight's USEM model of employability (2006) is underpinned by a higher education curricula approach. The model incorporates Understanding, Skills, Efficacy beliefs and Metacognition. Having created their model, Yorke and Knight advise how each element can be embedded within higher education. Understanding includes the development of subject knowledge and therefore supports the transfer of knowledge via teaching. Skills development involves developments in and appraisal of capacities beyond the core curriculum, so according to Yorke and Knight, skills development requires workplace experience, consequently, they recommend work placements.

Other employability models also recognise the value of work placements. Work placements are seen by Tomlinson as valuable for the creation of social networks (2017). Dacre-Pool and Sewell (2007) identify work placement as a significant source of experiential learning. Work placements have been found beneficial to employability by other researchers. According to Seremet (2016), work placement develops confidence. Tymon (2013) also found work placement enhanced students' confidence and was highly valued by them in terms of their employability. Work Placement provides contextual experience which is viewed as essential for social and experiential learning by Lave and Wenger (1991). Significantly, work placement is advocated by the higher education regulator (Office for Students, 2020) as a means of employability facilitation.

The efficacy beliefs element of Yorke and Knight's employability model (2006) includes self-knowledge and self-efficacy. As a result, personal development planning is recommended by these authors. Personal development planning is advocated because Yorke and Knight believe such activities require elements of self-awareness. The significance of self-efficacy to employability is evident in Dacre-Pool and Sewell's employability model (2007). Their model differs from Yorke and Knight's because Dacre-Pool and Sewell emphasise employability's emotional domain. Self-efficacy is valued by Dacre-Pool and Sewell as a personal resource pertinent to employability. Because self-efficacy is viewed as

incorporating theories of self (Dacre-Pool and Sewell, 2007), skilled reflection is recommended as a means of advancing self-awareness and self-efficacy.

Developments in metacognition are thought by Yorke and Knight to be encouraged by slower paced learning, for example, extended modules occurring over a period of time and linked to programme outcomes. Slower based learning is perceived by Yorke and Knight as particularly effective in offering developmental opportunities such as enhancing learners' capacity to "Deal with ticklish and interpersonal situations, skills in tackling complex problems, the development of critical thinking" (2006, p.19).

Tomlinson (2017) also provides examples of how his employability model can be incorporated into higher education teaching and learning. Tomlinson's model is resource-based and, for Tomlinson, relevant employability resources are communicated in terms of capital. Practical examples of how capital can be accumulated include skills acquisition strategies. Despite recognition that skills acquisition and employability is complex, Tomlinson still supports skills development. He argues employers are receptive to the language of skills therefore skills development in higher education is encouraged. As a result, Tomlinson supports other authors (Yorke and Knight, 2006; Dacre-Pool and Sewell, 2007; Seremet, 2016; Tymon, 2013) in their advocacy of work placement. Tomlinson recognises the significance of cultural capital to employability. Consequently, universities are encouraged to expand cultural exposure by facilitating a breadth of employment opportunities for their learners. Importantly, Tomlinson understands that learners from less privileged backgrounds lack confidence in navigating social fields (Bathmaker et al., 2013). As a result, Tomlinson stresses that higher education should "expand the realms of the possible" (2017, p.344). Identity capital has been previously recognised within this literature review as possessing employability significance (Mao and Shen, 2020), it is also valued by Tomlinson. He recommends it is fostered through the construction of career narratives. Career narratives can be created via C.V. production, therefore guidance in effective C.V. construction is recommended by Tomlinson. Finally, Tomlinson associates employability with psychological capital and this includes resilience. Tomlinson's employability related regard for psychological capital and resilience influences his

recommendation for careful management of transitions between higher education and the workplace.

Reflections on higher education teaching and learning strategies associated with employability confirms teaching and learning strategies have been used within higher education to facilitate employability. As Coopers and Lybrand (1998) stated, strategies often involve adaptations to the higher education curricula. Evaluations of teaching and learning strategies mainly focus on one particular aspect of employability facilitation. Examples include Work placement (Jackson, 2015), embedding an employability skill (Riebe, et al., 2010). The creators of employability models do make practical recommendations regarding employability facilitation. Their recommendations reflect their employability understandings. However, evaluations regarding the success of their recommendations are limited.

2.15 Connections between assessments of learning and employability appraisals

The ability of education to reveal particular strengths in an individual, and the revelation of these strengths being of value to that person has been understood both philosophically and pedagogically. Dewey advocated that a person should be occupied in activities fitting their interests and talents (Hildebrand, 2008). Sharing appraisals of an individual's learning, such as feedback from formal assignments provides insights into strengths. Also, earlier in this literature review, successful assignment completion was associated with the development of self-efficacy (Turner, 2014). Self-efficacy has been recognised as a valuable employability resource (Yorke and Knight, 2006; Udayar et al., 2018). The ability of successful assignment completion to develop self-efficacy is explained by Bandura's theories of self-efficacy. Bandura cited mastery of experience as a prime component of self-efficacy (1997). Mastery of experience involves completing a challenge with a positive outcome. Successful assignment completion involves positively overcoming challenge therefore a mastery of experience has occurred. Importantly, Bandura stated, the self-efficacy acquired through mastery of experience in one context of a person's life can be transferred to another (Bandura, 1997). As a result, Turner's assertion

that the self-efficacy resulting from successful assignment completion has employability value is understandable.

The perception of a relationship between academic progress in students and employability encourages reflections on the role of the teacher. Teaching has been connected with transformational leadership. Qualities linked to transformational leadership include enthusiasm and inspiration (Robinson, Lloyd and Rowe, 2008). Robinson, Lloyd and Rowe (2008) argued transformational leadership in teachers facilitated motivation, learning and the enhancement of employability in learners. Wang et al. (2020) also linked transformational leadership in teachers with developments in learners' employability. Wang et al. involved 619 undergraduates in their research. Using structural equation modelling, the researchers found positive correlations between transformational leadership in teachers and students' self-efficacy, problem-based learning and employability. Wang et al's findings resulted from statistical evidence. Consequently, their work does not capture the nuanced detail of individual student's experiences (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Nevertheless, transformational leadership in teachers affecting self-efficacy and employability in students does support a perception that academic progress can facilitate employability (Turner, 2014). A relationship between transformational leadership in teachers and students' employability supports the connection between teaching and employability which is recognised in the Teaching Excellence Framework (Office for Students, 2020). However, is it important to consider that employability is complex and multifactorial (Harvey, 2005). It is also very difficult to measure (Forrier and Sels, 2003).

Having established a connection between employability and universities, this literature review has discussed numerous higher education teaching and learning strategies thought to possess an employability related impact. Attempts to evaluate teaching and learning strategies associated with employability have been exemplified. Some insights into teaching and learning strategies associated with employability models have been highlighted. Teaching and learning strategies connected to employability models generally reflect the model creator's understanding of employability, for example, Yorke and Knight's model (2006) prioritised learning therefore, a predominantly higher education curricula approach to employability was advocated. Connections between

assessment of learning and employability appraisals have also been considered.

Having illustrated that there have been attempts to facilitate employability within higher education, it is important to recognise that evaluations of teaching and learning strategies considered beneficial to employability often focus on just one strategy (Wang et al., 2020; Cretu and Agheorghiesei, 2014; Tymon, 2013). Consequently, insights into the benefits of a range of strategies are limited. An acceptance employability is complex (Harvey, 2005) and difficult to measure (Forrier and Sels, 2003) highlights that the effective evaluation of a range of teaching and learning strategies thought to enhance employability is tough. The amount of higher education teaching and learning strategies considered beneficial to employability (Peeters, et al., 2019) reinforces the challenges of their effective evaluation. Furthermore, it is likely that as additional employability studies are completed, more employability characteristics will be identified and more teaching and learning strategies will be viewed as pertinent to employability. An appreciation that developments in the understanding of employability are ongoing suggests research into teaching and learning strategies associated with employability should be ongoing.

Having recognised the need for and challenges of research pertaining to the evaluation of employability related teaching and learning, the nature of employability itself presents additional challenges to the implementation of employability related teaching and learning strategies in higher education. Within the multifactorial understanding of employability evident in the literature, there is a view that employability includes a relationship between the individual and the labour market (McQuaid, Green and Danson, 2005). An appreciation that employability involves a relationship between the individual and the labour market encourages an acceptance that both individual and the labour market contribute to employability (McQuaid, Green and Danson, 2005) Recognising the significance of the individual to employability alongside a view employability necessitates learning (Yorke and Knight, 2006) highlights an individual's unique characteristics (Dewey, 1938) will affect any employability related teaching and learning strategy adopted in higher education. It is possible, strategies which work for one person may not be productive for another. Acknowledging the importance of labour market to employability stimulates an understanding that

features of the labour market will impact on any employability related teaching and learning activity occurring in higher education, for example, some labour market characteristics are beyond a university's control such as the geographical location of work (Forrier and Sels, 2003)

Despite the presence of numerous challenges concerning the identification and evaluation of teaching and learning strategies pertaining to employability, consideration of the connections between assessments of learning and employability appraisals in this literature review highlighted some positive employability related outcomes. Perceptions of academic progress enhance self-efficacy (Turner, 2014) which is perceived as an important employability resource (Udayar et al., 2018; Dacre-Pool and Sewell, 2007).

2.16 Summary

This literature review has examined literature related to the aim of this study, its underpinning rationale and research questions. The employability concept and connections between higher education and employability have been explored. A range of employability literature including texts pertaining to higher education and literature relevant to the workplace provide insights into the nature of employability (Romgens, Scoupe and Beausaert, 2020). This literature review confirms employability is a multifactorial and complex concept (Romgens, Scoupe and Beausaert, 2020; Small, Shacklock and Marchant, 2018). However, ongoing conceptualisations of the concept illustrate some recurring themes. A dominant viewpoint is that employability encompasses an individual's capacity and ability to obtain and maintain their employment (Trought, 2012; Forrier and Sels, 2003; Yorke and Knight, 2006). Because employability is strongly associated with an individual's capacity, several employability models and most employability conceptualisations focus on individual resource accumulation (Peeters, et al., 2019). The concentration on individual resource accumulation within employability literature (Peeters, et al., 2019) can be explained via an acceptance that developments in an individual's resources will enhance their employability related capacity (Tomlinson, 2017).

This literature review also recognises an understanding is evident that employability involves a relationship between the individual and the labour market (Forrier and Sels, 2003; McQuaid, Green and Danson, 2005). As a

result, some form of fit between the individual and the labour market is significant to the concept (Trought, 2012; Yorke and Knight, 2006; Dearing, 1997). Perceptions of fit range from the possession of appropriate knowledge and skills (Fallows and Steven, 2000) to an emotional aspect which links employability and self-fulfillment deriving from work (Yorke and Knight, 2006).

Having established numerous conceptualisations of employability exist, it is important to recognise that many evolve from literature reviews (Romgens, Scoupe and Beausaert, 2020). The ability of literature reviews to build and evaluate theory is well-recognised (Baumeister and Leary, 1997). Nevertheless, this research seeks an understanding of employability via an empirical study. An appreciation of employability which has evolved from an empirical study provides an alternative to the frequent employability conceptualisations which result from literature reviews. Importantly, this empirical study reflects students' experiences. Despite students being important employability stakeholders, their view-point is under represented in employability literature (Tymon, 2013). Consequently, this research provides a valuable insight on the student perspective.

Given that being in employment concerns an element of employability, a long-standing connection between universities and employability is evident. The longstanding link is recognisable because many alumni work (Williams, 2013). The connection between universities and the wider world via graduate employment confirms universities do possess societal links. The presence of links between universities and wider society stimulates government attention. Examination of government documents published over time illuminate an advancement in the connection between higher education and employability, to the extent that employability has been associated with a university's purpose and evaluations of a university's effectiveness (Dept. for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016; Office for Students, 2020). Societal change has been identified in social policy as an explanation for the increased connection between higher education and employability (Dearing, 1997; Browne, 2010). However, this literature review recognises economic factors are influential on the relationship between universities and employability in that employability has been used to rationalise student funding of higher education.

Due to a contemporary close connection between employability and higher education, many universities have implemented teaching and learning strategies associated with employability facilitation. Many teaching and learning strategies are linked to understandings of employability, for example, those communicated in employability models. Evaluative studies concerning employability have taken place e.g., Wang et al. (2020) and Cretu and Agheorghiesei (2014). However, such studies often focus on the effectiveness of one particular approach towards employability enhancement.

This research does possess an evaluative aspect in that it aims to understand factors thought to facilitate employability. Significantly, this study is not just interested in the value of one particular employability facilitating factor, this research is exploratory and asks broadly of the student what they consider is impactful on their employability.

3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

As demonstrated in both the introductory chapter and the literature review of this thesis, this study acknowledges that employability is a significant yet complex issue for contemporary higher education. Higher education texts (Williams, 2013; Maskell and Robinson, 2002) and government documents (Dearing, 1997; Augar, 2019) recognise a close association between employability and higher education practice, there is also some suggestion that a student's engagement with higher education enhances their employability (Dearing, 1997). However, this is not straightforward. This research recognises the complexity of the employability concept. It accepts that numerous factors may influence an individual's employability therefore this study is interested in gaining further understanding of employability from the student perspective.

The literature review of this thesis illustrates the presence of numerous previous research projects linked to the concept of employability and associated higher education practice. Some previous studies have also sought further understanding of student experiences, particularly student responses to certain strategies used within higher education that are thought to facilitate employability. Jackson (2014) looked at student evaluations of employability related skills acquisition including factors perceived as influential on skills development. Jackson found that geographical origin, gender and activities beyond higher education including work were all impactful on students' appraisals of their employability skills. Jackson's study was evaluative in its nature. Importantly, it recognised that there are influential factors beyond practice within the university which impact on students' employability experience. However, the study was very much focussed on employability related skills development rather than broader ideas related to student views such as student perceptions of the employability concept and associated values, for example career planning. Jackson (2015) identified elements of experiential learning taking place during work placements which were seen as especially valuable by students. Significantly, Jackson's study does offer insights into student perceptions of value. However, the study is focused on work placement. Seremet (2016) explored self-assessments of students'

employability potential. Seremet's research was broader in its scope than Jackson's, he asked students generally what they felt had particularly contributed to their employability potential. Seremet found work placement was considered beneficial. However, Seremet's study did not seek student views on the employability concept itself and Seremet's research did not take place over time.

My research supports the view that insights into the student perspective and experience is valuable in achieving further understanding of employability including contributory factors. My initial research ideas appreciate that numerous influential factors exist in relation to employability including those beyond immediate activities taking place within the parameters of the university, for example, the labour market. Nevertheless, like previous studies, the student perspective is greatly valued in achieving an enhanced understanding, therefore the opinions of participants are acquired to accomplish this. My research builds on the work undertaken by others including Jackson (2014), Jackson (2015) and Seremet (2016). Importantly, my study is holistic, it does seek to understand student notions of employability but also my study seeks a broad appreciation of influential factors for employability from the student perspective. Student experience is central to my research; therefore, my study occurs over time.

The main research question is under pinned by my study's aim and it asks, *What are the student experiences of employability within higher education?*

In this chapter I provide insights into my research design. My paradigm will be presented. The underpinning theoretical framework will be articulated. The research approach will be presented. Additional choices and rationales will be expressed, methods used to gather and analyse data will be made explicit. Reflections on ethical considerations are also articulated.

3.2 The research design

Like Thomas and Hodges (2010), my use of the term research design encompasses all aspects of this study's construction. This particular section entitled research design will consider the nature of my research. Characteristics of my study will be articulated and my underlying research assumptions will be introduced. More detail regarding further elements of this study's design will be

provided in the subsequent sections of this methodology chapter. As stated, the aim of this research is to explore the student experience of employability within higher education. The main research question reflects that aim and its asks - *What are the student experiences of employability within higher education?* It is hoped that an enhanced appreciation of employability related experience will develop an understanding of employability including its relationship with higher education plus the identification of other contributory factors.

In the construction of this study's design, several research texts were consulted. Robson (1999) recognised that research projects are often differentiated via use of the terms quantitative and qualitative. According to Robson a quantitative study is predominantly explanatory in nature and qualitative research prioritises exploration and aims "To seek new insights" (p.42). In Robson's reflections on quantitative and qualitative research, he makes a further differentiation between the two. Robson states that in quantitative studies, the researcher is often impersonal and the data is commonly numerical, in qualitative research there is a personal element to the research and the data is usually in words. This study was stimulated by my teaching experience including interactions with students during the delivery of Professional Development and Placement modules, I did have a personal desire to know more and as Robson stated "seek new insights." Given my personal interest and the exploratory nature of my quest, I identified my research as being qualitative.

Creswell (2013) emphasises the subjective nature of qualitative studies and in doing so he advocates qualitative researchers should recognise and communicate the philosophical assumptions that underpin their work. Waring (2017) agrees with Creswell, he acknowledges qualitative studies are influenced "by a series of related assumptions" (p.14). As a result, Waring (2017) also recommends transparency regarding fundamental aspects of qualitative studies which include ontology, epistemology, methodology and methods. Given the need for openness in qualitative studies, my assumptions regarding ontology, epistemology, methodology and methods will be made explicit in this methodology chapter.

Ontology in philosophical terms concerns "nature of being." "It is concerned with what is, with the nature of existence and the structure of reality as such" (Crotty, 1998, p.10). My study's aim and main research question prioritises

student experience. This research is interested in individual insights that will shed more light on the student perspective of employability. An acceptance that students' experiences possess a value for this study demonstrates my appreciation that ontology encompasses "the nature or form of the social world." and that "multiple realities are constructed by individuals" (Waring, 2017, p.16). My appreciation of a social world and individual constructions of reality reflects an understanding that people are "meaning -making beings" who "make sense of their world and act in it through such interpretations" (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018, p.289). Given that my study was underpinned by an ontological viewpoint which prioritises individual understandings taking place in a social world, an epistemological perspective which fitted that appreciation was favoured. Interpretivism, commonly combined with constructivism (Creswell and Creswell, 2018) reflected my intention to, as Creswell and Creswell stated "make sense of (or interpret) the meaning others have about the world" (p.8). The requirement to effectively interpret and find meaning in information acquired during my study motivated the need to create a theoretical framework.

3.3 The theoretical framework

According to Collins and Stockton (2018) underlying theory affects every aspect of a qualitative study. More specifically, the creation and articulation of a theoretical framework is generally considered a necessity for interpretive research (Collins and Stockton, 2018). A theoretical framework offers an additional lens to a study's analytical approach and as a result, provides extra depth to interpretations of data gathered during the research (Collins and Stockton, 2018). When reflecting on the challenges of qualitative research, Collins and Stockton recognise that trying to understand both social interactions and phenomena is difficult. However, they state that a theoretical framework helps the researcher make their interpretations more explicit.

I created a theoretical framework for this study. The theory articulated in the theoretical framework links to aspects of this study's design and underpins my study's analysis. The theoretical framework was influenced by my research aim and priorities. My research aim concerns the desire for an enhanced understanding of the student experience and perspective. Connected to that aim is an aspiration to know more about employability. Exploration of relevant

literature did develop my insights into employability. Reading informed me that both knowledge and skills possessed employability significance (Dearing, 1997; Fallows and Steven, 2000). Accepting that the accumulation of knowledge and skills requires some learning led to an early understanding that learning was of employability importance. In addition to the establishment of a link between employability and learning, an appreciation developed regarding the value to employability of a relationship between the individual and the labour market (Forrier and Sels, 2003; Hillage and Pollard, 1998). From the onset, experience was deemed important to this research project, its importance is demonstrated in the main research question, enhancements in my understanding regarding the significance to employability of a relationship between individuals and labour market reinforced a view that experience is crucial to this study. Examination of social policy documents also revealed employability possesses some connection to student outcomes and student activity beyond their engagement in higher education, most notably in the form of graduate employment (Dearing, 1997; Augar, 2019).

John Dewey (1859-1952) was an educationalist and a philosopher (Fesmire, 2015). Dewey was a prolific writer and communicated numerous ideas pertaining to a variety of topics including ethics, educational philosophy and religious philosophy (Fesmire, 2015). The collected works of John Dewey include thirty-seven volumes. The volumes date from 1882-1953 and were edited by Jo Ann Boydston. Aspects of Dewey's work which I thought possessed links to my research aim and characteristics of employability were incorporated into this study's theoretical framework. Given that Dewey was an educationalist, he was interested in how people learn and developed theories of learning (Campbell, 1996; Dewey, 1933; 1938). Dewey believed experience was fundamental for learning and as a result, Dewey's writing includes significant reflections on the role of experience (Dewey, 1933; 1938). Dewey's insights pertaining to education also encompass deliberations regarding future outcomes for learners, for example, the perception of a link between education and future outcomes is demonstrated via Dewey's views on citizenship (2004).

3.3.1 Knowledge

Knowledge is significant to employability and consequently, it is relevant to this study and its theoretical framework. The accumulation of both knowledge and

skills that are a fit for a person's job is a dominant theme of the employability concept according to both social policy and employability literature (Dearing, 1997; Trought, 2012). Dewey's principal belief was that learning and consequently knowledge was gained through environmental interactions. Dewey emphasised that true knowledge cannot be obtained without experience. Importantly, experience is gained cumulatively, people actively respond, engage with events and as such knowledge builds (Dewey, 1933; 1938). Responses to new information are connected to previous understandings and as such previous experiences. According to Dewey, new information connects to what an individual already knows and it is these connections which are of importance (Campbell, 1996). If new information is assimilated well, in that a new comprehension is built by effective links to what is previously known then knowledge is enhanced. Dewey accepts this is not always the case, for example, not all experience generates significant thought, some, usually the familiar generates an almost instinctive response from individuals (1938; 1922). It is most likely to be novel events which cause people to ponder. Importantly in his recognition of the contribution that experience makes to learning and the development of knowledge, Dewey does not compartmentalise experience (1938). All life experience has potential for knowledge acquisition.

As already articulated, both my research aim and priorities influenced the creation of this study's theoretical framework. An appreciation that employability involved knowledge and learning encouraged the inclusion of Dewey's views on both knowledge and learning. Dewey's theoretical perspective which connects knowledge, learning and experience is applicable to this research which prioritises student experience. Dewey's views concerning knowledge, learning and experience possess relevance to other aspects of my research design. An understanding that experience is cumulative is reflected in this study's time scale. This research occurs over time, it takes place over one academic year. Dewey's theoretical understanding that some experiences particularly resonate for individuals (Hildebrand, 2008) fits with some data collection methods. Some questions within the semi-structured interview explicitly ask students what they believe is important. Participants were also given a choice regarding employability related narratives of significance that they wished to share. Dewey's influential ideas concerning learning and knowledge also compliment

the epistemological perspective of this research which is: knowledge can be achieved via the interpretation of individual accounts (Waring, 2017).

3.3.2 Learning

The concepts of teaching and learning have been linked to employability principally via the connection of higher education to employability (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016). As stated, for Dewey learning primarily evolves from experience. Experience occurs via environmental interactions therefore an individual's active participation in their social world is pivotal. Dewey's work which highlights the contribution to learning of an individual's interaction with the world around them has relevance for this study. Dewey's theory suggests higher education engagement is similar to other aspects of a person's life, in that it presents the opportunity for an environmental interaction which will result in some learning. Importantly, as I have previously indicated, Dewey's views on learning are social constructivist in their nature (Moon, 2010). Each environmental interaction holds the potential for learning. The environmental interactions that take place during engagement with higher education are unique for each individual, responses to events are influenced by what has gone before. For example, not all interactions result in learning and the construction of knowledge. According to Dewey, learning requires certain ingredients: attention, thought and evaluation. Not all events will even capture the attention of all concerned, therefore not all events will be given equal thought and evaluation by everybody. Assimilation of new information is also dependent upon what is already known. The most effective means of advancing learning is scaffolding it (Dewey, 1938). Scaffolding involves making effective connections between what is already known and new information. Dewey's influence on this research is reflected in an acceptance that the past is significant.

3.3.3 Experience

The notion of experience is fundamental to this study. As already articulated, this research is situated within an epistemology of interpretivism and as such individual subjective experience is valued. This appreciation is reflected in the main research question which asks "*What are the student experiences of employability within higher education?*" Having established that employability

requires learning, Dewey's theories of learning which emphasise the role of experience (1938) have been identified as relevant to this research. Importantly, for Dewey, the contribution experience makes to developments in human understanding involves more than individual responses to external stimuli.

Dewey explains that as a human being explores their world from a very young age these series of interactions do not merely produce a behavioural reaction in the individual, these encounters actually construct a person's knowledge and understanding of their world. Importantly understanding is built/constructed depending upon understandings acquired from previous encounters, thus learning involves individual interpretations. Experience is so fundamental to learning that the individual and experience become entwined in the sense that experience causes adaptations in people (Campbell, 1996). Significantly, in his acknowledgement of the contribution experience makes to learning and human development, Dewey does not silo experience. He states that all life experience has potential to influence learning. Recognition of holistic human experience as a tool for learning is evident in the contributory research question of this study which asks- *What other contributing factors are present?* This question is deliberately open, contributory factors in this context are not just limited to those occurring in a formal learning environment.

3.3.4 Behaviour

Having established that experience can influence individual change, this study appreciates learning and associated experience can impact on behaviour. A behavioural response to an environmental interaction is defined by Dewey as an Act. Acts range from instinctive actions to more sophisticated manifestations of behaviour that incorporate thought and invention. "Like any process of adaptation and coordination, acts unfold over time" (Hildebrand, 2008, p.24). This study is interested in student responses to experiences during an academic year, however in recognition of the long-standing cumulative nature of experience there is an understanding that the past is impactful and events that have occurred prior to this one-year period are considered. In his articulation of behavioural manifestations, Dewey uses the terms Habits and Acts (1922). As stated, Acts vary from very automatic and often immediate activity in relation to a stimulus to more thoughtful analytical responses. According to Dewey, a collection of Acts forms Habits- "When there is a cumulative linking of acts that

structures experience there is a habit" (Hildebrand, 2008, p.24). In such examples the sequence of Acts links together so effectively their culmination is often unconscious. Habits are not examples of purely repetitive behaviour. As Acts occur in relation to collected experience and as each experience has some difference the Act will also possess some slight variation. Habits result in dispositions. Dispositions are a propensity for a person to respond to their experiences in a certain way (Hildebrand, 2008), this is partially influenced by reference to previous effective behavioural responses but, dispositions also evolve socially. Importantly, Dewey recognises that human beings exist in a social world (Campbell, 1996). This appreciation is highlighted in Dewey's acceptance that even the most complex discoveries are contextualized in socio cultural spaces. Importantly, Habits which create a person's disposition have a social influence. Habits and dispositions primarily evolve in the formative years and are most influenced by those closest to a person which is generally their family. Despite his appreciation of the value of careful thought, Dewey accepts not all environmental interactions and behavioural responses occur from individual analysis, some reactions result from Habits and dispositions that have evolved socially and historically.

3.3.5 Citizenship

Some social policy concerning a university's function explicitly equates university attendance with citizenship preparation (Robbins, 1963; Augar, 2019), for example, involvement in post 18 education is associated with wider participation in civic affairs (Augar, 2019). Ideas are also present within contemporary social policy which connect employability and citizenship. An effective fit between a person and their employment is frequently advocated. Fit is most commonly associated with the possession of skills and knowledge relevant for a particular job. Universities are identified as key in developing the necessary knowledge and skills which will advance matches between potential employees and available work (Dearing, 1997; Dept. for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016). Significantly, such matches are communicated as possessing wider societal benefits. The most prominent societal advantage articulated is increased prosperity (Dearing, 1997). The view that individual acquisition of employment produces wider societal benefits has increasingly connected employability with citizenship (Serrano-Pascual, 2001). This relationship is

considered so significant that gaining work has become a characteristic of a good citizenship (Serrano-Pascual, 2001). The involvement of universities in a desire for symmetry between knowledge, skills and forms of employment plus the associated perceptions of societal benefits has linked universities with employability related notions of citizenship. Despite articulation of an appreciation that higher education contributes to other aspects of citizenship such as community involvement (Augar, 2019), it is the employment destinations of graduates that are measured in relation to student outcomes (Office for Students, 2020).

Dewey was interested in educational outcomes and citizenship. He agreed with fellow philosopher Locke (1693) that a high-quality education was fundamental in revealing for individuals their own particular strengths. Connected to this capacity of education was Dewey's belief that a harmony between a person's strengths and their employment resulted in individual feelings of self-satisfaction (2004). The satisfaction individuals achieve via their employment in areas of their strengths was viewed by Dewey as beneficial to society as a whole.

Despite some similarities between recent social policy and Dewey's appreciation of the role education can play in preparing individuals for employment, Dewey did not believe that education should be solely focused on employment preparation. He believed this was "too narrow and too classist" (Hildebrand, 2008, p.131). For Dewey, education is seen as a means of facilitating occupation rather than vocation. Occupation is defined by Dewey as types of activity related to social life (2004). Occupation is also fundamental to Dewey's ideas of citizenship. For Dewey, occupation and therefore citizenship encompasses active societal participation. Examples of societal participation include involvement in community projects and political discussions.

Serrano-Pascual (2001) agrees with Dewey's view of citizenship (2001). She has misgivings regarding contemporary perspectives which prioritise someone's employment status with evaluations of their citizenship. Like Dewey, Serrano-Pascual associates citizenship with a range of characteristics pertaining to societal engagement. Relevant examples include making thoughtful decisions, taking an interest in the surrounding world, engaging in voluntary activities.

As already acknowledged, the construction of the theoretical framework for this study was influenced by both my research aim and understanding of employability. Consequently, some of John Dewey's theories were viewed as being of value and possessing relevance to my research, as were the ideas of Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002).

Like Dewey, Bourdieu authored many pieces of work. Early on Bourdieu shared Dewey's interest in philosophy. He was also a prolific social scientist producing many empirical studies that were interested in human experience. Examples of Bourdieu's work include *The Algerians* (1962) plus *Cultural reproduction and social reproduction* (1973). Given the emphasis my study places on experience, Bourdieu's ideas regarding experience were also seen as valuable to my research. Bourdieu's views of experience possess some similarity to Dewey. Bourdieu appreciated individuals interact with their environment and that these environmental encounters occur in a social world (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). However, Bourdieu provides a contrast to the work of Dewey. He places greater emphasis on societal features and their impact on a person's experience, for example, Bourdieu identified societal structures such as rules and systems as being of influence (Webb, Schirato and Danaher, 2002, p.XV). Importantly, such structures can perpetuate inequality (Bourdieu, 1968). Indeed, for Bourdieu, domination, social inequality and oppression are significant features of society (Jenkins, 2002). Bourdieu's societal understanding which highlights societies have characteristics that are impactful on a person's experience brings an additional theoretical perspective to my research. Another similarity Bourdieu has with Dewey is his interest in human behaviour. Despite this shared interest, Bourdieu's behavioural insights possess some variation to those of Dewey. Bourdieu believed wider societal structures were influential on individual behaviour as well as experience. Having established that Bourdieu's societal insights provide further perspectives on individual experience and behavior, Bourdieu's societal reflections are also valuable to my interest in employability. As previously communicated, relevant literature demonstrates employability encompasses a relationship between the individual and the work place (Forrier and Sels, 2003). The significance of a relationship between both the individual and the workplace illuminates the importance of the workplace itself to employability. Bourdieu acknowledges the workplace is an important

aspect of society (Crossley, 2012). Given the workplace is an important component of society, Bourdieu's societal reflections are pertinent.

Employability has also been conceptualised as a resource-based concept (Tomlinson, 2017; Peeters, et al., 2019). Resource accumulation is described by Bourdieu as the accumulation of capital (1984). Capital possession is significant to Bourdieu's societal theories, for example, capital influences a person's position within society such as their employment (Bourdieu, 1984). As a result, Bourdieu's views on capital are of relevance to my research.

3.3.6 Bourdieu and experience

As stated, Bourdieu was interested in human experience. Like Dewey, Bourdieu recognised that environmental factors affect people's experiences. Given Bourdieu's role as a sociologist, his work highlights a sociological viewpoint.

In his reflections of society, Bourdieu articulated that people exist in social spaces/ fields (1984). Connected to the view that people occupy social spaces is an appreciation peoples' environmental interactions within a social world occur in close proximity to others. According to Bourdieu, proximity is influential. Because individuals share a social space, they are more likely to experience similar work and life conditions (Crossley, 2012). Similar life conditions include similar lifestyles. Given that interactions are likely between people occupying a social space and similarities between people are present, it is predictable that people will identify with each other. Bourdieu recognises this is not inevitable but it is probable. The propensity for people to identify with each other is consequential. Group formations are encouraged where people affiliate with others and act collectively. Bourdieu states class distinctions are a result of such group formation (Bourdieu, 1984). The presence of class within a society is significant because class is hierarchical and associated with power (Hage, 2014). Bourdieu's appreciation that class and power are linked is illustrated via his acceptance that classes act to preserve their own interests (Crossley, 2012).

An additional factor in Bourdieu's account of class formation concerns the possession of capital (Hong and Zhao, 2015). Capital is described as "the set of actually usable resources and powers" (Bourdieu, 1984, p.114). It has different forms, the forms of capital include an individual's wealth (economic capital), social connections (social capital), plus their taste language, education and

etiquette (cultural capital) (Bourdieu, 1986; Webb, Schirato and Danaher, 2002). Capital is explicitly described as a form of power. Because class and power are connected, it is not surprising that capital possession links to class. However, the relationship is complex. The links between capital and class connect to my earlier insights regarding Bourdieu's views on class and social space. As previously acknowledged, social spaces affect class formation. Importantly a person's position within social space is impacted by their capital possession, particularly their economic and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984). For example, a person's wealth will influence where they live and as a result, with whom they interact, such interactions will encourage their group affiliations and class determination. Having articulated that capital possession links to class membership, it is important to recognise that access to capital is not equal. For example, people in the upper social classes are more likely to inherit wealth (economic capital) than have to work for it (Crossley, 2012).

Given Bourdieu demonstrated societal features are impactful on experience, for example a person's class membership, Bourdieu also made links between societal characteristics and a person's behaviour.

3.3.7 Bourdieu and behaviour

Bourdieu's acceptance that learning and associated behaviour has a social influence is apparent via his identification of the Habitus. As previously stated, Dewey establishes learning is social (2004) and social learning impacts on behaviour (Dewey, 1922). Bourdieu also recognises environmental interactions including those between people impact on behaviour. He also identifies a durable disposition which people "carry with them shaping their attitudes, behaviours and responses to given situations" (Jenkins, 2002, p.115). Bourdieu uses the term Habitus to communicate this idea. He states, the Habitus "determines a way of doing things, habitual state (especially of the body) and in particular a predisposition, tendency, propensity, inclination" (Bourdieu 1977, p.214). Despite some obvious similarity between Dewey's Habits and dispositions and Bourdieu's Habitus there is an important difference. Dewey's reference to the evolution of disposition is more organic, for Bourdieu the Habitus is a "structure, it is ordered not random" (Maton, 2012, p.50).

Like Dewey, Bourdieu accepts that a person's Habitus is primarily influenced by early close social contacts such as family members. However, the structured nature of Habitus is illuminated via Bourdieu's links between Habitus and class (1990). As communicated earlier, Bourdieu's societal insights illustrate people share proximity, they engage with each other, share connections, similar lifestyles and thus similar experiences. Consequently, similar outlooks are adopted (Crossley, 2012). The adoption of similar outlooks amongst people who identify and connect with each other demonstrates a link between social class and Habitus, i.e., people acting collectively as a group is a characteristic of social class and sharing an outlook involves people possessing a similar disposition. Indeed, Bourdieu attributes class formation to social space, capital and the Habitus (Hong and Zhao, 2015). The influence of social mixing on the Habitus suggests it is dynamic. However, it is important to recognise that Bourdieu primarily equates development of an individual's Habitus with their early years and close family members. Consequently, the Habitus "captures how we carry with us our history, how we bring our history into our present circumstances" (Maton, 2012, p.51). Accepting that the Habitus is structured in that it connects to class illuminates another aspect of societal inequality. If a person's disposition is carried with them during their interactions in a social world and their Habitus is formed during childhood, then the Habitus is influenced by early close relatives, these family members will inevitably have possessed a social class. As a result, early social positioning occurs, this is impactful because difficulties may ensue when a person attempts to climb the social classes, i.e., move from a lower social class to a higher one. Such attempts are likely given class also connects to capital and power. In these situations, a person's propensity to behave in a certain way may act as a disadvantage for them, in that their disposition may be discordant with behavioural expectations of the new social class.

To summarise, the aim of this study is to explore the student experience of employability with higher education. This study's aim is underpinned by a desire for an enhanced appreciation of employability from the student perspective. Both this study's aim and known characteristics of employability influenced the construction of its theoretical framework. Dewey was interested in human experience, he appreciated experience made a fundamental contribution to

learning. Importantly, employability necessitates learning (Fallows and Steven, 2000; Dearing, 1997). As a result, Dewey's theories of learning affected this study's research design and were included in its theoretical framework.

Employability is also perceived as a multifactorial concept which involves a relationship between the individual and the labour market (Hillage and Pollard, 1998; Forrier and Sels, 2003). Significantly, the labour market is a societal feature (Dearing, 1997). Bourdieu was also interested in human experience. As a sociologist he appreciated societal features affect peoples' experiences. Given the relevance of the labour market to employability (Forrier and Sels, 2003), Bourdieu's sociological perspective was viewed as pertinent to this research. Employability also concerns capacity and resource accumulation (Trought, 2012; Peeters et al., 2019). Consequently, Bourdieu's theories of capital were incorporated into this study's theoretical framework.

Having communicated aspects of Dewey and Bourdieu's work which were included in this study's theoretical framework, and having explained the relevance of their theories, figures 1, 2 and 3 illustrate my use of Dewey and Bourdieu's theories during this study's data interpretation. Figure 1 provides short summaries of pertinent theories by Dewey and reference is made to the themes of this study where they were utilised. Figure 2 provides short summaries of pertinent theories by Bourdieu and reference is made to the themes of this study where they were utilised. Figure 3 shows a synthesis of Dewey and Bourdieu's theories, in this illustration there is a reflection of how Dewey and Bourdieu's theories were used together to interpret several themes. Finally, figure 4 highlights theory pertinent to the understanding of employability experiences. Collectively, these 4 figures demonstrate the application, synthesis and relevance of theory to the interpretation of empirical data concerning students' experiences of employability. As a result, this study provides a new model for researchers who are analysing data pertaining to the student perspective on employability.

Figure 1 Use of Dewey's theories during data interpretation

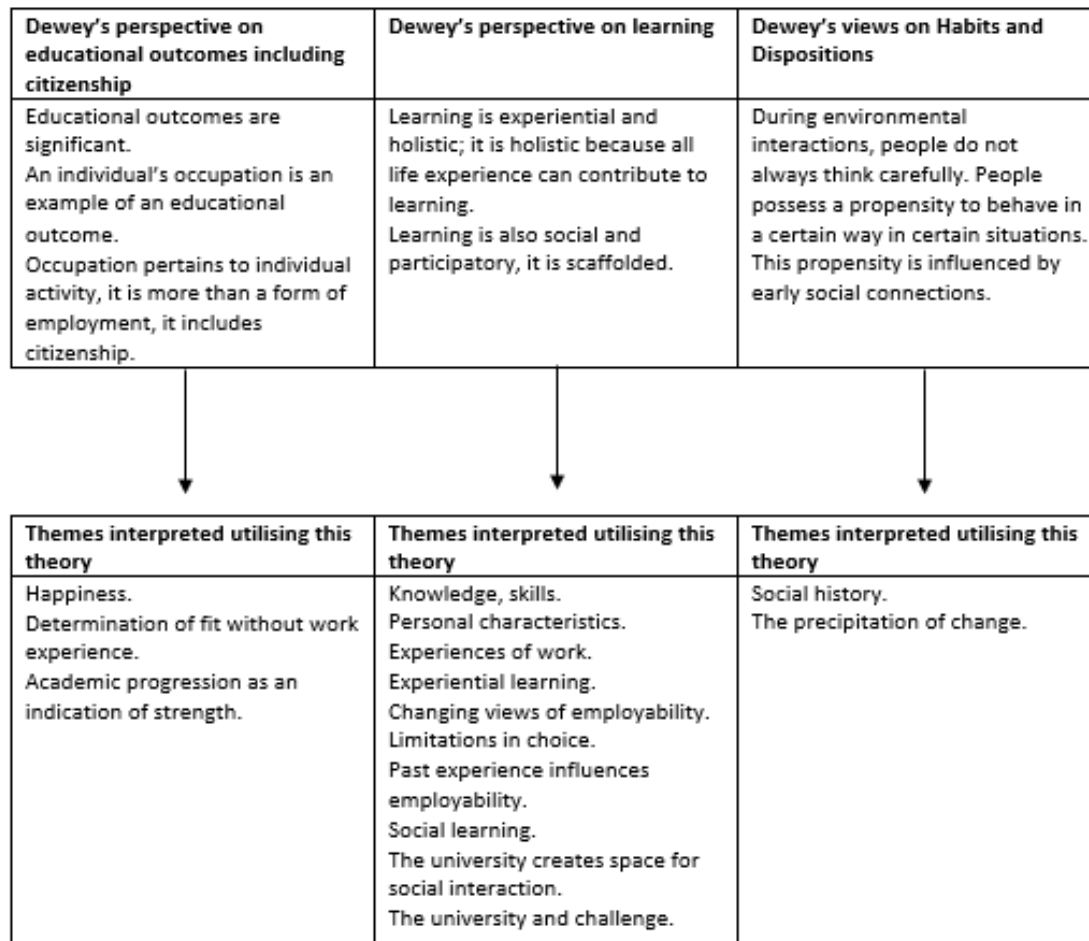


Figure 2 Use of Bourdieu's theories during data interpretation

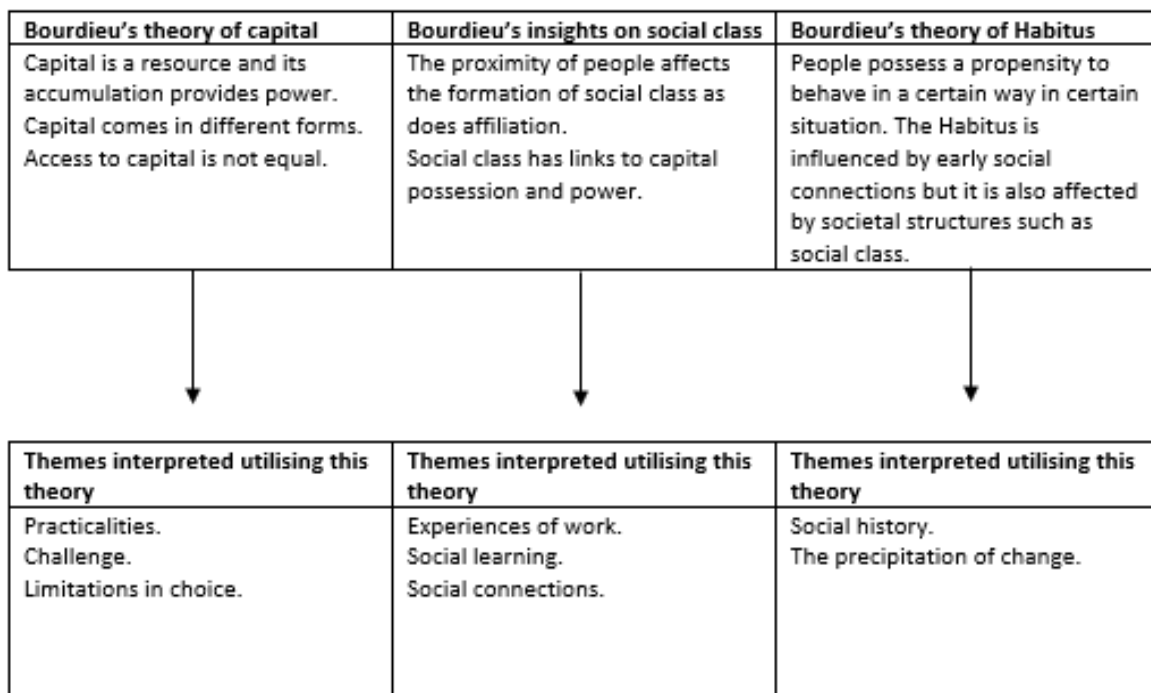
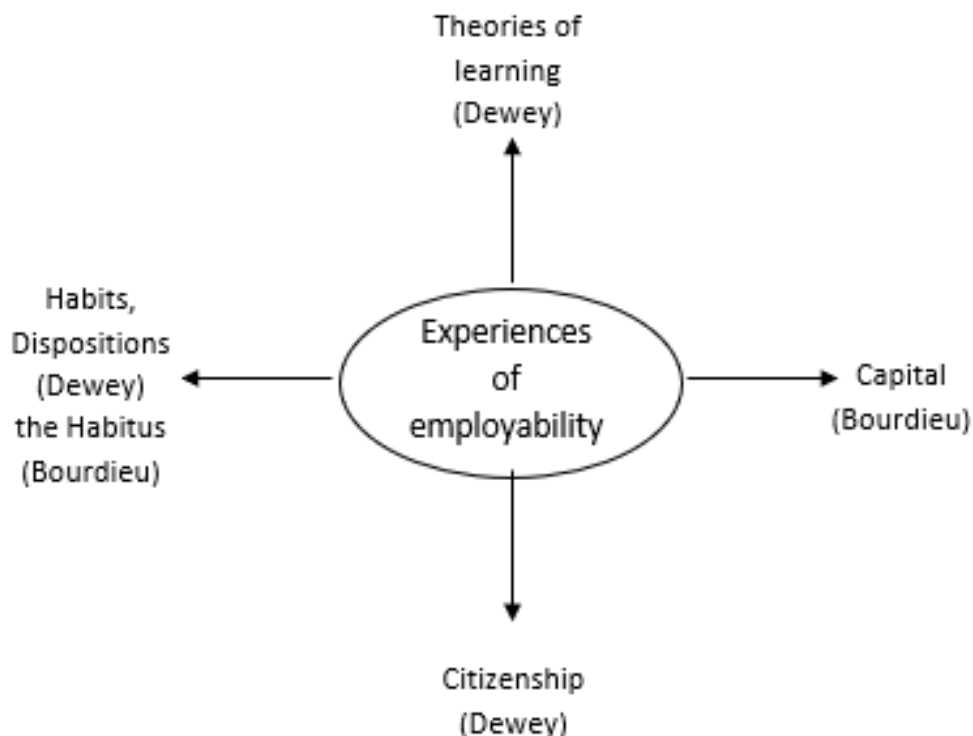


Figure 3 A synthesis of Dewey and Bourdieu's theories and their use in data interpretation

Dewey's perspective on learning	Dewey's perspective on learning	Dewey's views on Habits and Dispositions
Learning is experiential and holistic; it is holistic because all life experience can contribute to learning. Learning is also social and participatory, it is scaffolded.	Learning is experiential and holistic; it is holistic because all life experience can contribute to learning. Learning is also social and participatory, it is scaffolded.	During environmental interactions, people do not always think carefully. People possess a propensity to behave in a certain way in certain situations. This propensity is influenced by early social connections.
Bourdieu's theory of capital	Bourdieu's insights on social class	Bourdieu's theory of Habitus
Capital is a resource and its accumulation provides power. Capital comes in different forms. Access to capital is not equal.	The proximity of people affects the formation of social class as does affiliation. Social class has links to capital possession and power.	People possess a propensity to behave in a certain way in a certain situation. The Habitus is influenced by early social connections but it is also affected by societal structures such as social class.
↓	↓	↓
Themes interpreted using a synthesis of the above theories	Themes interpreted using a synthesis of the above theories	Themes interpreted using a synthesis of the above theories
Limitations in choice.	Experiences of work. Social Learning.	Social history. The precipitation of change.

Figure 4 Theory pertinent to the understanding of employability experiences



3.4 The research approach

Having articulated that this study is qualitative and having recognised my ontological and epistemological understanding influenced my preference for interpretivism which necessitated a theoretical framework, this section of my methodology chapter discusses my research approach. A research approach provides a researcher with particular theory and strategies that support effective progression of a qualitative study (Creswell, 2014). Various research approaches exist and Creswell (2013) identifies five applicable to qualitative studies. They include narrative, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography and case study.

Accepting several research approach options were available to me as a qualitative researcher, certain factors influenced my selection process. Given research approaches facilitate progression of research and the answering of a research question (Creswell, 2014), this study's aim and main research question were relevant to my choice of theoretical approach. My previously shared ontological and epistemological beliefs were also significant to my choice of research approach. Having acknowledged my research aim, research question plus my underlying ontological and epistemological beliefs were all pertinent to the selection of my theoretical approach, I offer more detail regarding my decision making.

Narrative research was initially considered for my study. I had previously studied the use of narrative in an academic context including research and I had found it beneficial. Narrative research is described by Creswell (2013) as a means of understanding lived experience via the analysis of stories. Bruner (1991) and Ricoeur (1984) perceived narrative as a valuable mechanism for individuals to share their understandings of day-to-day occurrences. Ricoeur (1984) highlights how narrative plays a fundamental role in experiential understandings via his acknowledgement that human beings use narrative to sequence time. The tools used to do this are described by Ricoeur as the "aporias" of time (p.8). They include the past, the present and the future. Ricoeur supports the beliefs of Husserl (1964) that humans cannot understand the present without some appreciation of what has occurred previously and what will come next. Considering my research aim concerned students' experiences and my ontological and epistemological understanding valued

individual experience, I viewed narrative research as particularly attractive. However, despite narrative research offering potential to meet my research aim and fitting with my ontological and epistemological beliefs, my own teaching experience and examination of the literature had generated some initial research ideas. Authors such as Riessman (2008) advise against narrative inquirers possessing pre-conceived ideas, therefore, I considered other options.

Another research approach that appeared appropriate for my study was phenomenology. Phenomenological research involves the establishment of “common meaning for several individuals of their lived experience of a concept or a phenomenon” (Creswell, 2013, p.76). In general, phenomenology involves the identification of a particular phenomenon and people who have experienced it. Data is then collected which will capture accounts of “what” people experienced and “how” they experienced it (Moustakas, 1994).

Phenomenological studies are analysed in order to capture the “essence” of participants’ experiences (Creswell, 2013). Given my study included a desire for greater understanding of employability in itself, the phenomenological approach to research seemed appropriate. However, my research possesses context, it was stimulated by my own teaching in a particular environment. My research also focusses on the employability experiences and perspectives of students, more specifically students from my own university rather than a more general viewpoint. As a result, I favoured a research approach which acknowledges context. Case study can facilitate effective understanding of individual experience (Creswell, 2013). Importantly, case study appreciates context, indeed, Yin (2009) cited in Creswell (2013) states case study “involves the study of a case within a real-life contemporary context or setting” (p. 97).

Having recognised that case study provided opportunity to understand students’ experience and having highlighted case study appreciates the significance of context, Eisenhardt’s insights on case study (1989) consolidated my choice of this research approach. Eisenhardt’s writing on case study is famous (Ravenswood, 2011). Consequently, I considered her opinion regarding the application of case study pertinent to my research. Eisenhardt advocated that case study researchers should take an inductive approach to their data analysis; this approach involves ongoing consideration of participants’ data as it is collected. Inductive approaches to data analysis encourage flexibility in the

researcher, for example, reflections on emerging data may alter the researcher's initial research propositions. However, despite an appreciation that case study requires some flexibility in the researcher, Eisenhardt illuminates an important difference between case study and narrative research. She recognises initial research ideas are accepted in case studies (Eisenhardt, 1989). As stated previously, my experience and reading had generated early research ideas, the acceptance of early research ideas in case study reinforced the suitability of this research approach for my study.

Eisenhardt (1989) also supports using a broad range of literature as a means of building theory from case study. She encourages and recognises the importance of ongoing reading. Indeed, synthesis of relevant literature within the case study analysis is advocated. For Eisenhardt, new theory develops via the researcher's careful comparisons between data emerging from their own study and established literature. The opportunity to recognise and embrace a range of literature within this research was attractive. My own experience encouraged initial exploration of literature pertaining to employability and I knew from early on that I was not studying a niche area. A plethora of literature features employability (Peeters, et al., 2019; Romgens, Scoupe and Beausaert, 2020). Examples range from academic texts (Trought, 2012) to social policy (Augar, 2019). Case study offered potential to respond to this reality positively. My hope was combining insights from a range of literature with my theoretical framework and findings from my own study would develop understanding of students' experience and employability.

Having explained my choice of case study, I offer more detail of this research approach and characteristics of my own particular case study. Case studies vary (Yin, 2009). Numerous authors have described case studies, they are often identified via their purpose. For example, Stake (1995) describes intrinsic case studies; here the researcher studies the case for a deeper understanding of the case itself. Case studies can also be instrumental in that they facilitate understanding of something else. Yin (2009) further differentiates case studies by their outcomes, he states case studies can be exploratory and explanatory. My case study is exploratory because it is interested in student experience. My hope that greater understanding of student experiences will lead to further comprehensions of employability means my case study is also instrumental.

Having described my case study as exploratory and instrumental, other factors influenced my case study design. Yin describes cases as “a contemporary phenomenon (the case)” occurring in “its real-world context” (Yin, 2014, p.16). Because my research was interested in student experience, a small group of undergraduate students participating in the Children, Young People and Families cluster of programmes within a university in England appeared appropriate for my case. My ontological understanding that human experience possesses individual characteristics and social influences (Waring, 2017; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018) caused me to anticipate some similarity in experience amongst such a close social group. However, Dewey (1938) and Ricoeur (1984) emphasise that experience occurs over time. As a result, I considered some variation in students’ experiences might be present depending upon the stage of their degree students were at. My anticipation that time may affect students’ experiences was reinforced by Tymon (2013). Tymon explored students’ perspectives on employability in relation to skills development. He found employability possessed greater significance to students in the final year of their studies rather than those students engaged in earlier stages of their degrees.

Even though I viewed one group of students as a relevant case, my anticipation time may affect experience caused me to cluster students together in several smaller groups according to their degree stage. The creation of several smaller groups of students created multiple cases. Because my case study involved several cases, it was collective as well as exploratory and instrumental (Yin, 2014). I planned for my collective case study to include- Case study 1- three first year students. Case study 2 - three second year students. Case study 3 three third year students. The actual case study construction remained collective. All students were involved in a degree that contributed to the cluster of programmes named Children, Young People and Families. This cluster of programmes included The BA (Hons.) Early Childhood Studies, The BA (Hons.) Education Studies, The BA (Hons.) Working with Children, Young people and Families and the BA (Hons.) Child and Family Welfare Studies. Case study 1 initially included four first year students (two students from this case study subsequently left the university). Case study 2 included three second year students. Case study 3 included four third year students. Within the collective

case study, all students except one were female, all except one were full time learners. The students ages varied and their ethnicity.

3.5 Context

This study took place in a relatively small university where direct tuition involves 4898 students. The university offers predominantly vocational courses.

Examples include Journalism, Business and Management. Marketing material produced by the university refers to its employability related success. For example, “95% of our 2017 graduates are in work or further study six months after graduation” (University Marketing Material, 2017). The university also offers work placement provision for all programmes, again this information has been used in its marketing material. University activity such as placement provision demonstrates an employability commitment (Seremet, 2016).

The institution was also my place of work. The decision to conduct my research within my workplace affected my position as a researcher. Reflections on a researcher’s position are encouraged (Jacobson and Mustafa, 2019). Because I was a member of staff conducting research in my own workplace, I was participating in insider research (Unluer, 2012). According to Breen (2007) insider research occurs when some existing affiliation is present between the researcher and their participants. As previously stated in this methodology chapter, the personal nature of qualitative studies is well-known (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018), consequently, insider research is not unheard of. Bonner and Tolhurst (2022) identify several advantages to insider research. Advantages include an enhanced understanding of the research context by the researcher and greater potential for more organic exchanges of information between participants and the researcher. Bonner and Tolhurst (2022) highlight less chance of reticence in participants when they are expressing their opinions to somebody they know. Significantly, it was my own teaching reflections that had stimulated my desire for greater understanding of employability from the student perspective. Consequently, it felt natural for my study to take place where the motivation for further understanding had evolved. Another advantage of insider research was my belief students’ opinions would be more accessible in my own workplace. Despite insider research possessing advantages, disadvantages have been identified. They include researcher bias (De-Lyser,

2001) and a conflict of the teacher/ researcher role (Unluer, 2012), conflicts include researcher influence (Smyth and Holian, 2008). Even though insider research presents challenges, they are not insurmountable (Unluer, 2012). Action did take place which reduced the disadvantages associated with insider research. My study was subject to ethical approval which addresses role conflicts and researcher influence. Researcher bias relates to the validity of this study and there is a section on validity and reliability below (section 3.11).

3.6 Sampling and recruitment

Having articulated that my research occurred in my place of work and that this positioned me as an insider researcher, I provide more detail regarding sampling and recruitment. The belief that student opinions would be more accessible in my own workplace did contribute to my sampling. Because ease of access is associated with convenience sampling (Edgar and Manz, 2017), convenience sampling took place. Gaille (2020) warns convenience sampling is vulnerable to researcher bias and Edgar and Manz (2017) state convenience sampling may weaken a study's validity. Given limitations to convenience sampling have been identified, I reiterate ease of access was not the only reason I chose to conduct my research within my workplace. I was interested in students' experience of employability, therefore any student's perspective on employability possessed value for my work. However, it was my own teaching practice which encouraged my commencement of this study, consequently, I was particularly interested in students who were engaged in the programmes I taught. Furthermore, I believed my contextual knowledge of the Children, Young People and Families programmes offered some advantage to my research. I thought my own understanding of these degrees including their principal aims and objectives was beneficial. Given ease of access was not the only rationale for my sampling, I also describe my sampling as purposive. Purposive sampling is well-connected to case study research (Yin, 2014) and stratified purposive sampling was used to acquire this collective case study's participants.

In recognition that sampling for my study possessed an element of convenience and convenience sampling has been associated researcher bias (Gaille, 2020) plus poor validity (Edgar and Manz, 2017), I restate, the validity and reliability of this research is discussed in section 3.11. I also repeat that the personal nature

of qualitative research is well-known (Creswell, 2013). In acceptance of qualitative research's personal nature (Robson, 1999), I have prioritised transparency and explanations for my methodological choices have been made explicit. Reflexivity also concerns transparency and it is considered a necessity in qualitative studies (Creswell, 2013). Creswell advocates reflexivity involves the sharing of past experiences by researchers and offering insights into how past experiences may affect the researcher's data interpretation. As a result, I highlight some previously presented information about myself and provide some additional detail.

As mentioned in the introductory chapter of this thesis, I have occupied some form of paid employment since the age of fourteen. I have also been a member of the helping professions for many years, first as a nurse and then as a teacher. Also, as already stated, I initially thought my extensive experience of the workplace would support my employability related teaching in the Professional Development and Placement modules of the Children, Young People and Families programmes. Nevertheless, my actual teaching experience informed me employability facilitation was not straight forward. Consequently, I desired greater understanding of this issue. Significantly, the ability to obtain and retain employment is a characteristic of employability (Trought, 2012). Because I have worked since the age of fourteen, I considered myself to be an employability veteran. My own employability experience fostered a belief in me that employability can be a source of joy but also suffering. Consequently, as I embarked on my data analysis, I suspected I would encounter evidence of struggle in relation to employability.

Having discussed sampling, I accept my interest in certain degrees gave my collective case study some particular characteristics. The Children, Young People and Families cluster of degrees are vocational in nature. This group of courses has both theoretical and practical links to the helping professions including the areas of education, health and care. Having said that, particular features of these degrees were reminiscent of others offered by the university in that they refer to practices within the field and have many explicit links to the working environment. I felt there was an obvious employability element evident in their construction. Although the Children, Young People and Families degree cluster contain significant vocational elements, they are not specific training

routes for a particular profession. It is not unusual for a case study to possess particular characteristics, as Yin (2014) states, case studies exist within real world environments. Nevertheless, it is possible that a different collective case study situated elsewhere may produce different findings and as a result, further research is advantageous.

To recruit this study's participants, programme leaders were approached and informed of my study's aims and objectives. Following a discussion with the programme leader, I addressed all year groups of each relevant degree programme. This was achieved by offering a small talk within several lectures that had potential to capture students enrolled on the Children, Young People and Families programmes (374 students in total). The talks outlined my study and the requirements of potential participants, they provided both written and verbal information about the study and requested volunteers. A total of 9 participants were required for the collective case study. All participation was voluntary and I acquired 11 volunteers in total. In recognition of the longitudinal nature of the study and the potential for drop out, I decided to involve all 11 volunteers in the study. I had led modules involving all students apart from one.

3.7 Data collection methods

Case studies generally have several forms of data collection. Often interviews, observations and archival material are used (Eisenhardt, 1989). To meet this study's aim of obtaining an enhanced and holistic understanding regarding the student experience, the opportunity to collect varied forms of data including interviews and documentary evidence was attractive. Data collection methods incorporated interviews, student narratives, [work](#) placement written reflections and placement mentor feedback documents.

3.7.1 Interviews

As expressed earlier, this study appreciates a person's subjective understanding is of value, this acceptance is demonstrated in my study's research aim and research questions. Given, that my study prioritises participants' perspectives, interviews were considered an important means of acquiring their viewpoints. Interviews reveal the meaning and significance of phenomena for participants (Wilkinson and Birmingham, 2003). Having

established that interviews were an important means of gaining people's views, I reflected on the type of interview which would be most suitable for my study. Literature focusing on research interviews informs us that semi-structured interviews are generally thought to require more skill and are more vulnerable to interview bias (Drever, 2003). I acknowledged interview bias was a risk for this project. I was an active stakeholder in this research. My interest in this study encompassed more than my role as the researcher, my teaching commitments connected me to all programmes featured in this research, therefore insights from this study were impactful for me as both teacher and researcher. Nevertheless, despite the challenges associated with semi-structured interviews, this form of interview fits with the inductive approach to research advocated for qualitative studies and therefore relevant to this study. Consequently, it was important that my data collection methods possessed some flexibility. The semi-structured interviews allow greater opportunity to respond to the participants' priorities and their ideas of significance, (for a copy of the semi-structured interview questions see appendix 1).

Some analytical triangulation took place. I was transparent with my supervisors regarding my data analysis, talking through various samples, articulating and rationalising my interpretations.

As advocated by Drever (2003) prompts and probes were utilised. Prompts provided valuable assistance in facilitating participant understanding of the question. Probes were used to encourage further elaboration from the participants. Apart from two first year students in case study 1 who participated in their first research interview then later left the university, all students were interviewed twice in total. Interviews took place at the beginning of the academic year during semester 1 and towards the end of the academic year during semester 2. Completion of two interviews involving a time lapse was once more connected to my endeavors at capturing student experience and a belief that experience accumulated over time (Ricoeur, 1984). Each interview lasted a total of one hour. All interviews were audio taped and transcribed verbatim. The audio tapes offered opportunity to capture every word uttered by the participants, this is important because capturing all words avoids the loss of a potentially pertinent piece of information. Audio recordings also offered repeated opportunities for listening. As qualitative research advocates situation

of the study within the field and proximity between researcher and participant (Robson, 1999), the interviews took place within the university or place of choice for the participant.

3.7.2 Narratives

As stated, this study aims to acquire a holistic understanding of students' employability related experience, this desire is illustrated in the contributory research question which asks students -What other contributing factors are present? regarding their employability. I considered narrative as an effective way of allowing students to communicate to me, what was important to them. As a result, each interview session included the request of one employability related story that the interviewee viewed as significant. The ability of narrative to facilitate the recollection, understanding and expression of a person's experience (Bruner, 1987) was attractive for this study. Storytelling is also considered especially valuable in capturing the emotional responses that occur in relationship to an experience, in this case the participants' employability experience (Chan and Chung, 2004).

3.7.3 Documentary evidence

The incorporation of documentary analysis is a common occurrence in case study research (Yin, 2014). For this research, written work placement reflections concerning case study 1 and 2 were examined and analysed along with placement mentors' feedback documents, (for a blank copy of a placement mentor feedback form see appendix 2).

Several writers recognise that work placements are significant to employability (Yorke and Knight, 2006; Tomlinson, 2017; Seremet, 2016). Also, perusal of previous studies highlighted work placements were valued by students in terms of their employability (Jackson, 2015; Seremet, 2016). As a result, I considered the examination of work placement reflections, and placement mentor feedback documents an important means of retrieving pertinent information for my own research. Analysis of these documents also reflects this study's interest in experience and learning; my research aim concerns student experience and this study equates employability with learning (Dewey, 1938; Lave and Wenger, 1991), I anticipated that documents pertaining to work placement would offer valuable insights regarding both of these issues.

This study also recognises social factors influence employability. An appreciation that social factors are relevant to employability is evident in the theoretical framework of this research which includes the work of Pierre Bourdieu, a sociologist. Given this study appreciates social factors are pertinent to employability, I was confident work placement reflections would illuminate student experiences in a social environment such as the workplace.

Furthermore, the placement mentors' feedback documents provide an additional perspective on participants' employability experience in a social environment. The value of an additional perspective is supported by several authors. Luft and Ingham (1955) maintain that other people observe characteristics in an individual which are invisible to the person themselves, for example, the possession of certain strengths. Hawkins and Shoet (2012) plus Wright and Adam (2015) advocate sharing additional perspectives in the workplace, they perceive such sharing is beneficial because it encourages professional development. Placement mentor feedback documents are routinely shared with students. In recognition that mentor feedback documents are shared and potentially impactful on students' employability, I considered their inclusion in this study valuable. Despite numerous requests, the placement feedback document for one 2nd year student in case study 2 was unobtainable. Sadly, this is not unheard of. At times the placement mentor does not fill in and return the report, a task the university cannot enforce.

Due to a perceived relationship between academic progress and employability related success (Dept. Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016), a contributory research question for this study asks- How do students connect their assessments of learning with their appraisals of employability related success? In relation to a possible connection between students' appraisals of their academic progress and their employability, students' marks were discussed during their semi-structured interviews. Such discussions prioritised student views concerning the impact of their marks and only focused on marks known to the students during the time of discussion. Given that marks were discussed with students, marks profiles for the year of the study were collected and are available to the reader in appendix 3.

3.8 Ethical considerations

Creswell (2013) acknowledges qualitative research that takes up the time of participants and requires accounts of their everyday lives has ethical considerations. Indeed, according to Hatch (2002) careful thought is necessary in order to reduce any risk for research participants. In reflection of an ethical obligation for risk minimisation, ethical approval was sought and obtained from the university. All participants received verbal and written information about the aims of the study and what was required of each participant, (for a copy of the participant information letter see appendix 4). Informed consent was obtained (appendix 5 – copy of the consent form). Confidentiality was maintained in accordance with the university's ethics protocol and data storage complied with the university's procedures. Participants were informed regarding the purpose of the data and its possible future use including publication, they were also informed that their identity would be protected in future publications.

There is recognition within research texts that asymmetries in power exist between researcher and participants. For example, Cohen, Marion and Morrison (2018) describe how the researcher typically sets the agenda and controls timings such as the length of the study and interview time. As already recognised within this methodology chapter, the ethical issue of power and position is significant to this study, my teaching work relates to the courses that participants were studying. I had been module lead for some students. To address this issue, I ensured transparency. I provided details of my project to my head of school and formally sought permission to conduct the study. All participants were volunteers. Importantly students were reassured that the study would not have a detrimental impact on their grades. Students were also given the contact details of my academic supervisor whom they could contact if they had any concerns. All participants were given the right to withdraw. The circumstances under which their data would still be used was communicated in the consent form, this was particularly relevant considering the longitudinal nature of the research project and indeed two students did leave the university. Practical considerations were made. Participants were given some flexibility concerning time and location for interview appointments. During the semi-structured interviews, summative statements were provided by myself reflecting

my understanding of student comments and offering opportunity for participant clarification.

3.9 Presentation of findings

The data for my study is presented as is commonly recommended for case study research in the form of narrative (Yin, 2014; Eisenhardt, 1989). Detailed narrative is thought to build up a chain of evidence which also provides transparency and therefore contributes to the validity to the project (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Narrative information pertaining to my study includes participant quotes which were obtained during the semi-structured interviews. Participant narratives are provided. Information from placement mentor feedback forms is offered and work placement reflections are provided. My original plan was to write up the project in relation to the single cases. The write up of each case would have included presentation of evidence alongside relevant explanations and discussion. This approach fits with case study convention (Yin, 2014). Some reference to cross case information is then generally offered by case study researchers. Arranging and writing up data from a number of case studies plus the offering of information pertaining to the overall collective case sets out “common and singular features and properties of the cases” (Cohen, Marion and Morrison, 2018, p.663). However, once analysis of my collective case study was completed using thematic analysis, I found the same themes were present in all cases. Some change in participant perspective was evident, I had anticipated this may occur as the result of accumulated experience. However, the change was manifested via varying participant responses in semi-structured interview one and two rather than between cases. Time did appear impactful on experience, but it was the time lapse between the semi-structured interviews which linked to the variation, the change of opinion which occurred was evident in all cases. As a result, narrative information pertaining to all three cases which contributed to the collective case study was written up as a whole. Even though the data is written up as a collective case study, original case membership – either case study 1, 2 or 3 is still made explicit and the written information still includes provision of evidence alongside explanation and discussion. Participant responses to the semi-structured interviews and their stories are provided as quotes. Information from mentor

feedback forms is also quoted. To aid clarity and illustrate quotes pertaining to participants' written work placement reflections and quotes concerning participant plans, they are positioned in tables.

At the end of the study and following writing up of the thesis, all contributors will be invited to a gathering where I will inform them of my study's findings: this invitation was initially articulated during recruitment of the participants.

3.10 Analysis

This study possesses a theoretical framework. As a result, the work of Dewey and Bourdieu are influential on data interpretation and the answering of this study's research question. Importantly, my research is interested in gaining further understanding of employability via the student experience therefore my collective case study is instrumental. Given the instrumental nature of my case study, I viewed Eisenhardt's reflections (1989) on instrumental case studies as being important for my research. Eisenhardt stated that consideration of relevant literature contributes to the effective analysis of instrumental case studies. Consequently, both the presence of my theoretical framework and Eisenhardt's' assertions underpinned my approach to data analysis. Having recognised my theoretical framework and this study's literature review influenced my data analysis, I also acknowledge I possessed experience of employability. Given I had established an understanding of employability via my reading and experience, I describe my analysis as having some deductive features. My analysis possesses some deductive features because my own reading and experience caused me to anticipate some of the findings present in the data, for example the significance of knowledge to employability (Yorke and Knight, 2006; Becker, 1993). Nevertheless, despite my prior appreciation of some employability characteristics, like many qualitative studies, the findings of my research are primarily derived from the data itself. As a result, this study's analysis is principally inductive.

When analyzing case study data Stake states that the researcher is looking for "patterns, insights or concepts that seem promising" (1995, p.135). A combination of both thematic analysis and discourse analysis have been associated with qualitative research (Cohen, Marion and Morrison, 2018; Braun and Clarke, 2012). Both approaches offer opportunity for interpretation and the

potential for gaining insights into meaning (Cohen, Marion and Morrison, 2018; Braun and Clarke, 2012).

The flexibility of thematic analysis was seen as particularly pertinent for this research project. Thematic analysis has been described as offering the opportunity for “systemically identifying, organizing and offering insights into patterns of meaning (themes) across a data set” (Braun and Clarke, 2012, p.58). This study is a collective case study and as such analysis of the data in and across the cases was necessary. Thematic analysis does not require the researcher to be “familiar with complex theoretical perspectives on language” (Braun and Clarke, 2012, p.58) as in discourse analysis. Importantly, thematic analysis is considered suitable for analysing responses to interview questions (Drever, 2003). Riessman’s work on narrative methods (2008) also accepts thematic analysis can be both valuable and appropriate in the analysis of narrative.

Data was analysed manually in accordance with the well-documented approach of Braun and Clarke (2006; 2012). Semi-structured interview transcripts were read as a whole, initially for insights into overall messages, the documents were then summarised. Line by line perusal of the transcripts took place, pieces of text that contained information viewed as potentially relevant to the research questions were given initial codes. As in Braun and Clarke’s illustrative examples (2012), codes given were both descriptive and interpretative in nature (see appendix 6 for an initial coding example). Codes were then clustered into sub themes. Following a further review, sub themes were defined, named and linked to principal themes (see appendix 7). Further analysis of principal themes and associated subthemes involved constructs from this study’s theoretical framework and the literature review. Additional documentary evidence including student work placement reflections and mentor feedback forms was approached in the same way. Links between the study’s findings and the research questions are made explicit.

3.11 Validity and reliability

For Yin (2009), Stake (1995) and Patton (1987) triangulation provides a valuable contribution to the validity and reliability of a case study. Stake describes four areas of triangulation; they include data source triangulation,

investigator triangulation, theory triangulation and methodological triangulation. Data source triangulation is articulated as;

“An effort to see if what we are observing and reporting carries the same meaning when found under different circumstances” (Stake, 1995, p.113).

Investigator triangulation takes place when other researchers examine a case study and possibly offer alternative interpretations. Theory triangulation is when a different theoretical perspective is used in the interpretation of a case study. The fourth form of triangulation and perhaps the best known is methodological triangulation which occurs when different methods are used in the production of a case study. Case studies are thought to particularly require triangulation as they do not rely on measurements that many other research projects such as experiments use when claiming the accuracy of their findings.

In this study multiple forms of data collection, commonly referred to as methodological triangulation (Stake, 1995) took place, not only did this achieve the increased depth of understanding that was desired by this research, the methodological triangulation contributed to the validity of the research project. A contribution to validity was made because several methods were used in order to answer the research question (Stake, 1995).

In addition to methodical triangulation, theoretical triangulation occurred. The work of two theorists was used in the construction of this study's theoretical framework. A rationale for their use is detailed earlier in this chapter. A combination of both philosophical and sociological theory has been implemented and as such theoretical triangulation is present (Stake, 1995). The theoretical framework is transparent, its influence has been made explicit throughout the study and in association with other relevant literature, contrasting perspectives were utilised. The existence of both literary and theoretical contrast created scope for a breadth in explanatory perspectives. Some investigator triangulation was achieved via open discussions with my supervisors regarding both data analysis and construction of the theoretical framework.

In conclusion, this chapter has articulated the design of this research project. My underlying research related assumptions have been expressed. The principal theoretical influences have been stated. Methodological choices have been discussed along with their relationship to my underlying assumptions and

learning from the research texts. Data collection methods have been presented. Ethical considerations are examined and reference is made to required ethical practices. Finally claims have been made regarding the validity of the project.

4 Data, Findings, Analysis and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

As reflected in its title, this chapter encompasses presentation of data collected in this study, the study's main findings are presented, analysed and discussed.

This research concerns students' experiences of employability and the whole of this chapter is dedicated to the sharing and interpretation of students' insights.

This is an interpretive study and a theoretical framework was created to assist in the establishment of meaning from students' experiences. During this study's data interpretation, pertinent theory from this study's theoretical framework was reflected upon. Also, as detailed in the methodology chapter of this thesis, this study was influenced by the work of Eisenhardt (1989). Eisenhardt accepted and advocated theory could be built from case study. In her guidance regarding the construction of theory from case study research, Eisenhardt highlights researchers should compare messages from their data with established understandings evident in relevant literature. Consequently, insights from this study's literature review were also considered during this study's data interpretation. Given this study's theoretical framework and its literature review were instrumental in the interpretation of its data, data is presented alongside discussions which include insights from this study's theoretical framework plus its literature review.

The blending of data presentation and discussion contributes to the size of this chapter. Given this chapter's length, a structure was created which aided clarity. The chapter begins with this introduction. This introduction is followed by three separate parts. Each of these analysis sections focus on the main findings of the study. A final section presents a summary to this chapter.

As detailed in the methodology chapter, thematic analysis was used to analyse relevant data. Each case was examined in turn and then the collective case as a whole. Given that themes were the same throughout the collective case study, the data is presented as a collective case study. It was the principal themes and subthemes of the collective case which influenced the construction of three analysis sections reflecting this study's main findings. Each analysis section has

a similar structure, data is presented, explained and interpreted in relation to the principal theme of the section plus associated subthemes.

Like previous explorations of employability, this study attempts an enhanced understanding of the concept. Importantly, greater understanding resulting from this research is in light of student experiences. This study also attempts a more in-depth insight of contributory factors to employability including the university's role. When expressed succinctly, this research defines employability as a multifactorial, complex, dynamic and principally relational concept. Despite its multifactorial nature, this study finds certain dominant themes pertaining to employability. Firstly, fit is fundamental to employability. In the context of this study, fit includes some match between worker and their work. The theme of fit and associated subthemes will be explored in the first analysis section. This first section is entitled: "The characteristics of employability: fit is fundamental and some factors are integral to the concept." As the section title suggests, fit is very important to employability therefore factors that impact on fit are identified and discussed, factors integral to the concept are also considered.

Table 1 – Analysis section 1 Principal theme and subthemes

Principal theme	The characteristics of employability: fit is fundamental to employability; some factors are integral to the concept
	Subthemes
	Factors impactful on fit – Knowledge, skills, practicalities, the social, change, happiness and challenge.
	Factors that are integral to the concept of employability – Knowledge, practicalities, employability is social, change and challenge.

Analysis section 2 of this chapter continues a conceptual exploration of employability. This section's focus recognises the contribution of experience to employability and the impact of experience on employability's temporal nature. Analysis section 2 is named "The contribution of experience to employability including its temporal nature."

Table 2 – Analysis section 2 Principal theme and subthemes

Principal theme – The contribution of experience to employability including its temporal nature
Subthemes
Experiential learning
Changing views of employability
Experience and the determination of employability fit
Being in -employability
Choices are made but there are limits
Additional experiential contributions
Academic progression as an indication of strength
Past experience influences employability

Finally, Analysis section 3 in this cluster of analysis sections is entitled "Employability is social". This section concentrates on the social nature of employability. Reflections are present regarding the university's contribution to employability in each of the three analysis sections. However, section 3 particularly focuses on the role of higher education and its relationship with employability.

Table 3 – Analysis section 3 Principal theme and subthemes

Principal theme – employability is social
Subthemes
Fitting in socially
Social learning
Social history
Social connections
Employability extends via social interactions
The university creates space for social interaction
The university and challenge
The precipitation of change
The university is developmental and it broadens horizons

A synoptic statement is present at the end each analysis section and the chapter summarising the main messages resulting from the analysis.

4.2 Analysis section 1: The characteristics of employability: fit is fundamental to employability and some factors are integral to the concept.

Like other approaches to the exploration of employability, this research asks what employability is and then considers what contributory factors are present. Many authors have previously produced conceptual employability studies. Prior attempts are generally constructed via literature reviews. Recent examples include Small, Shacklock and Marchant (2018), Romgens, Scoupe and Beusaert (2020). Importantly, this study is empirical, as such it articulates an interpretation of student conceptual understandings. The multifactorial and complex nature of employability is confirmed by this research. However, this study finds that fundamental to the multi-dimensional and complex character of the employability concept is the idea that employability incorporates fit. Fit according to this research means some match between the worker and their work. Linked to an appreciation that fit is a principal determinant of employability, various factors have been identified by this study as impactful on fit. Factors impactful on fit according to this study are discussed in this analysis section. This analysis section also expresses this study's appreciation that some employability factors are integral to the concept. Integral to the concept in the context of this research means that some factors have an employability influence beyond the dimension of employability which concerns fit.

The idea of fit between worker and their work connects to the relational aspect of employability. Encompassed within the multi-dimensional understanding of employability evident in relevant literature is a perception that employability does include interaction between the individual and the labour market (Hillage and Pollard, 1998; Forrier and Sels, 2003). Because fit is a dominant theme within the findings of this research, this study emphasises the relational nature of the employability concept.

4.2.1 Employability and fit

In response to a request for definitions of employability students highlighted that employability concerned a fit between worker and their work. See following examples:

“I would say it’s about how well-fitting you are for the job” (case study 2 student).

“It means to employ somebody with the skills and knowledge they have for that job not just any job” (case study 3 student)

“I think it’s about having the tools to find a job that you would like rather than just what you can get” (case study 3 student)

Participant responses possess links to messages in higher education related texts and social policy. Significantly, examples from the literature pertaining to fit most often focus on knowledge and skills (Dearing, 1997, Dept. for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016; Trought, 2012; Becker, 1993; Fallows and Steven, 2000). Messages communicated in the texts exemplified promote individual acquisition of knowledge and skills pertinent to roles within the labour market. Rationales for a person’s embarkation of knowledge and skills development include that it will make them more attractive to the labour market (Dearing, 1997; Becker, 1993), more able to obtain and retain employment (Trought, 2012). Both knowledge and skills have been connected to some fit between worker and their work because they equip a person with the capacity to do their job (Fallows and Steven, 2000). Additional links between knowledge and skills development and fit are evident via references to the idea that highly skilled individuals are more likely to obtain highly skilled jobs (Dearing, 1997; Augar, 2019; Office for Students, 2020). The opportunity for an individual’s employment in an area that has some match for them has been portrayed positively in social policy documents. Positive outcomes associated with employability fit mainly concern financial rewards

In their appreciation of employability primarily involving fit, i.e., some match between worker and their work, participants in this study did identify knowledge as a fit facilitatory factor. Significantly, findings from this study illustrate that students’ notion of employability fit concerns more than knowledge and skills. As revealed via the progression of analysis section 1, multiple factors are considered of relevance to employability fit.

4.2.2 Knowledge

In alignment with relevant literature (Dearing, 1997; Browne, 2010), findings from this study confirm knowledge is a significant employability fit factor.

Knowledge is important in terms of fit facilitation and as detailed later in this chapter, like other important elements of employability, knowledge is integral to the concept.

An important aspect of knowledge being recognised as a means of facilitating a match between worker and their work is the value placed on knowledge judged as relevant for a particular job. One source of this finding was workplace mentor feedback. Feedback forms illustrating mentor opinions prioritised relevant knowledge as an important employability resource.

In total 4 placement mentor feedback forms were available for examination by myself (see appendix 2 for a blank example). These consisted of two case study 1 student mentor feedback forms and two case study 2 student mentor feedback forms.

When asked “Which top 5 skills or knowledge do you think a graduate should have to be successful when entering your sector?” One case study 1 mentor and one case study 2 mentor identified “sector and industry knowledge.” The importance of relevant knowledge to representatives of the workplace is reiterated via advice from both case study 2 mentors. In the form’s section pertaining to mentor advice, they suggested that their student conducts more research into “their particular organisation and structure.” In short, 3 out of 4 mentors demonstrated their perception of a value in relevant knowledge.

Student views associating employability fit with an appreciation of knowledge that is relevant to the workplace paralleled mentor opinion. See quote below:

“It involves general knowledge of what work they will be going into” (case study 1 student).

Additional comments allude to the idea that knowledge for a particular form of employment facilitates a fit between worker and their work:

“I work in a call centre; I do have knowledge about what I am doing” (case study 2 student).

“So, I think in terms of study... having relevant ideas and knowledge to fit properly” (case study 3 student).

“Somebody who knows what they are doing” (case study 3 student).

Participants also identified particular aspects of their university learning that they believed had relevance for practical work within the field. See quotes below:

“Because I am on placement, the protection of children module” (case study 2 student).

“So we were studying diversity and inclusion. Its Ramadam now, so they had Easter and they had the May procession and benedictions and they used to go for mass so I did an activity for the children where they were allowed to learn about Ramadam” (case study 2 student).

The significance of relevant knowledge to employability as determined by this study can be explained in a number of ways. Knowledge possession as a route to employability is well documented in social policy. Elements of employability fit are evident in government documents because they communicate that international changes to the labour market have stimulated a contemporary need for knowledgeable and highly skilled potential employees (Augar, 2019; Department of Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016). Social policy defines graduates as knowledgeable and highly capable, therefore they are considered the most appropriate people to fulfil modern and demanding roles (Dearing, 1997; Department of Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016). The perception that graduates are knowledgeable supports the link between universities and knowledge development (Maskell and Robinson, 2002; Williams, 2013). Because involvement with a higher education institution is thought to encourage knowledge development and subsequently fill jobs which require knowledgeable employees, an employability related rationale is present within social policy as a major justification for degree commencement. Because degree commencement

involves student fees, an employability related rationale also justifies the associated financial commitment students undertake in order to progress their degrees. Importantly, students in this study were engaged in higher education, as a result, they had embarked on their loan agreement. Consequently, it is reasonable to suggest that messages encouraging this activity had resonated for them and resulted in these participants valuing knowledge.

Additionally, information in workplace mentor forms is shared with students. Mentors also interact with students on placement. It is possible that communication between students and workplace mentors reinforced participants' appreciation in the value of relevant knowledge as an important ingredient of employability fit.

Further interpretation of this study's data offers an additional explanation for the perception that knowledge contributes to a fit between worker and their work. This study finds that knowledge enhances understandings of workplace experiences. The following two tables contain extracts from participants' written reflections of their work placements:

Table 4 - Placement reflections regarding knowledge and workplace understandings (case study 2 students)

Placement reflections Case study 2 students
Written comments made in response to the question- what are the links to course modules/ topics?
<i>“The child protection module helped me understand the roles of the staff members. For example, I know the role of the child protection officer and how they would ensure the safety of the students.”</i>
<i>“Supported staff in class with carrying out observations on the children. This links the pedagogy modules which looked at the EYFS curriculum and the planning of activities to comply with this and meet children’s needs.”</i>

Table 5 - Further reflections regarding knowledge and understandings

Case study 2 student			
Week number and dates	Summary of what I did this week	Significant things I learnt	Links to course/modules/topics
Week 3 April 2018	<i>“The same weekly routine of lessons took place. however, one afternoon, a visitor came into the school to talk about Bhangra. They danced to the drums and then they had chance to play the drums. Most students loved it but some students had to wear ear defenders because the noise was too loud. Some students did not like the change in their routine.”</i>	<i>“I learnt that students’ routine can determine students’ behaviour. If the staff were aware that the routine was changing the students needed prior warning, so they could adapt to the idea.”</i>	<i>“The psychology module allowed me to know how children learn. I could then form understanding that the students learn best in a routine time table.”</i>

The written reflections featured articulate how knowledge acquired during students’ university studies aided an understanding of events occurring during

work placement. Importantly, the enhanced understanding achieved via university acquired knowledge helped individuals do their work.

The symbiosis of knowledge acquired in different areas of a person's life alongside an appreciation that this is important is illuminated in Dewey's social constructivist theories of learning (1938) (Campbell, 1996). Fundamental to Dewey's ideas of learning is a belief that learning is not compartmentalised. As human beings develop, they gather experience. Significantly, experiences from all aspects of an individual's life can be of value. Information from this collective case study corroborates Dewey's theory. Data pertaining to this study illustrates how students used knowledge from one aspect of their lives to illuminate understandings in other areas of their lives. For example, subject related knowledge from a child protection module informed a participant's understanding of a professional's role in the workplace. Utilising knowledge gained from one area in another develops understanding and progresses learning. Such processes support Dewey's social constructivist principles of learning: that it is built/ constructed over time as experiences accumulate. Each new experience provides opportunity for interaction with a person's cognitive structure - the sum of their knowledge and beliefs (Moon, 2010). Environmental interaction provides opportunity for assimilation- where new elements of individual understanding are effectively connected to what the person knows already.

Dewey's theories of learning combined with this study's insights concerning students' transfer of knowledge during workplace experiences supports the view that employability involves learning. Cognitive structures are part of a person therefore, it is natural that as an individual moves from one environment to another, their comprehension of that new experience will be impacted by what they know already. Importantly, the new environmental encounter provides opportunity for further learning.

Insights from this study's data illustrating how students combine theoretical knowledge obtained at university with practical knowledge accrued in experiences such as work placement has relevance for the debate regarding a university's function. Social policy connects universities with knowledge pertinent to the labour market (Dearing, 1997). However, views also exist that universities should prioritise theoretical knowledge construction over applied

learning (Collini, 2012; Williams, 2013). Students in this study appreciated both forms of knowledge and both are used interchangeably during degree progression. Dewey's theories of learning explain why this is so.

In short, there are several explanations for the strong association between knowledge and employability fit revealed in this study. When reflecting on this finding, it is relevant to recognise that participants in this research were students. The view that universities are a source of knowledge (Collini, 2012; Williams, 2013) is well established. Students by their nature have embraced involvement with a university. Consequently, it is predictable that they would perceive knowledge acquisition and utilisation as being of value. Nevertheless, data from this study does demonstrate workplace representatives also value appropriate knowledge. As a result, interaction between workplace representatives and students is likely to strengthen a belief that relevant knowledge is important. This study's data also shows that students applied knowledge generated at the university in the workplace and that this application of knowledge enhanced understandings of the work environment and fostered learning. These latter insights involving workplace mentors and knowledge transfer are important, not only do they provide reasons for why students considered knowledge as being valuable to employability fit, significantly, these explanations go beyond a view that participants in this study were bound to appreciate knowledge in terms of their employability because they were students.

Participant responses regarding the contribution of knowledge to employability fit also demonstrated a connection between knowledge, participation and self-perceptions of social fit in practical settings. A principal finding of this study is that employability is social, hence analysis section 3 of this chapter is devoted to the social nature of employability. Consequently, student insights demonstrating a relationship between knowledge, participation and feelings of social acceptance will be explored in detail within analysis section 3.

4.2.3 Skills

This study establishes that knowledge contributes to employability related fit in the sense that it assists an individual in being able to do the job, it increases understanding of the workplace and it encourages participation which also

advances learning- an employability requisite. Having accepted that knowledge is an important employability fit facilitating factor, it is useful to consider skills. Knowledge and skills are commonly clustered together in employability texts (Dearing, 1997; Augar, 2019; Trought, 2012), therefore, it is pertinent to consider the role of skills in relation to fit. As the following quotes demonstrate, when discussing the nature of employability, students did make an association between employability and skills development, a link was also evident between skills development and symmetry between worker and their work.

“The skills and stuff that they need to work with and general knowledge of what work they would be going into” (case study 1 student).

“Well for me it’s like everything I learn and like build on in all my skills that make me suitable to be employed in certain situations. I tend to build on skills based on what employment I am going into” (case study 1 student).

“I would say employability means for me to employ somebody with the skills and knowledge they have for that job not just any job” (case study 3 student).

“To me it means really having the skills to be able to find a job that I’d like” (case study 3 student).

“According to the skills I have, can they employ me and can I be employed?” (case study 3 student).

Participants in this study did not mention particular skills when making their connection between skills development and employability fit.

This finding was surprising given there are many skills articulated by employers as being of significance (Tymon, 2013). Importantly, participants referred to skills in plural terms. Indeed, the term “skills set” was used by one participant within their definition of employability. See quote below:

“When I think of employability, I think about the skills set that we have” (case study 1 student).

The literature review for this study demonstrated a dominant connection between universities, employability and skills development. This link is prevalent in literature including social policy (Dearing, 1997; Augar, 2019) and

employability texts which discuss skills development (Trought, 2012; Fallows and Steven, 2000). Literature examined during the progression of this study also illustrated that a close association between universities and employability has encouraged teaching methods thought to facilitate employability (Yorke and Knight, 2006). Teaching the development of employability skills is a well-known example (Fallows and Steven, 2000). Consequently, it is likely that all of this study's participants had been involved in some skills development sessions. Indeed, this study's data supports that possibility.

“Now, we have also done a workshop at the university and we think about the skills set that we have. We also think about what employers look for, so what they want us to have as well” (case study 1 student).

“This year we've been doing skills certificates such as signs of safety certificates. I think that is good” (case study 3 student).

Participants prior involvement in skills development sessions indicates that their university education encouraged an appreciation of the need to possess numerous skills in order to facilitate employability fit.

Having articulated participant insights regarding the contribution of skills to employability fit, this study also finds participants associated personal characteristics with the establishment of employability fit. In contrast to the general terms students used when discussing skills and employability fit, personal characteristics were reflected upon more specifically. See the following quotes:

“It could be the characteristics that a person may have, so that may be just that they are outgoing, they are honest, they are trustworthy things like that” (case study 1 student).

“I think sometimes personalities make a difference in different jobs” (case study 1 student).

“It's suitability of both the work place to the person and the employee to the workplace and the visions and values of the work place. You know are you all singing from the same hymn sheet” (case study 1 student).

“Being adaptable and resilient... they want somebody who is going to be able to adapt...roles are changing” (case study 3 student).

The following quote reflects a case study 2 student's recollection of a recruitment event for an educational establishment. During this event she observed prospective teachers delivering a lesson. She described the lessons as being very similar. However, she said:

"I think in my opinion it was personality over lesson, the personality of the teacher, I think that had over ridden the actual lesson itself, and how they performed, their personality outweighed the actual content."

Data extracts from this research regarding the contribution of personal characteristics to employability fit are illuminating. Students' propensity to identify particular characteristics as being important for employability fit indicates personal characteristics are meaningful to them. Identification of particular characteristics plus the case study 2 student's reflections of her recruitment observation appear significant. Participant insights suggest views regarding personal characteristics evolved from varied experiences rather than formally taught sessions.

Excerpts from this study's data regarding personal characteristics encourage further consideration of relevant literature pertaining to skills acquisition. As already illustrated, numerous activities exist within higher education that are associated with skills development as a means of advancing employability (Cretu & Agheorghiesei, 2014; Trought, 2012; Fallows and Steven, 2000). A significant commitment to skills development in higher education is evident (Dearing, 1997; Augar, 2019). As stated, this can explain why participants in this study demonstrated an acceptance that numerous skills are necessary in order to establish employability fit. Despite the presence of an enthusiasm for skills development within higher education, this study's literature review also illustrated that skills development is not straightforward. Different interpretations of relevant skills are evident (Tymon, 2013). Difficulties occur regarding the demonstration of skills possession (Holmes, 2000). Considering that skills development in itself can be difficult, it is reasonable to suggest that the development and demonstration of more nuanced personal characteristics is even more arduous. Indeed, previous authors have discussed the malleability of characteristics equated with an individual's personality. For example, (Rutter et al., 1997) believed personal characteristics are formed early in life and Cattell (1943) maintained that once they are established, personal characteristics are

fixed. However, other authors such as Goleman (1996) state personal characteristics can be adjusted. The belief that personal characteristics are fixed suggests there is little universities can do in in this area of fit facilitation. However, authors such as Goleman suggest there is scope for adjustments in an individual's personal characteristics.

Further analysis of participant responses regarding personal characteristics via the utilisation of this study's theoretical framework provides additional understanding of student views in this area. Students identified personal characteristics as being important to employability fit. Initial reflections on this finding suggest, a university's ability to influence personal characteristics is debatable. However, this research recognises that employability involves learning. This study is also underpinned by Dewey's ideas and social constructivist theories of learning. Dewey states learning occurs via an individual's interactions with their environment, such interactions involve experiences which are scaffolded to construct learning. Constructions of learning involve adjustments in an individual's cognitive structure, such changes are likely to cause changes in outward behaviour. Importantly, Dewey recognises that the human world is social (Campbell, 1996; Hildebrand, 2008). Consequently, it is possible that socially influenced episodes of learning stimulate behavioural changes. The ability of social interactions to stimulate learning and associated behavioral changes shows people can adapt according to their social environments. Indeed, Mao and Shen (2020) recognised that people do adjust their behaviour in response to the social expectations of their workplace. They concluded that adaptability in people is valuable for their employability. The relationship between learning, employability and behavioural change suggests personal characteristics are malleable. Employability and behavioral adaptations will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Having illustrated it is possible for adjustments in a person's behaviour to occur as a result of their learning, Dewey's learning theories plus Mao and Shen's insights from the literature concerning adaptability help explain why students articulated a link between personal characteristics and employability fit. It is possible that students were observing the adaptability of people in the workplace, such adjustments are likely to be subtle and involve more than skills

possession. As a result, students identified characteristics associated with a person's nature as being important for employability fit.

4.2.4 Practicalities

This study finds that some fit between worker and their work is a principal characteristic of employability. Reflection on the contribution both knowledge and skills make to employability fit illuminates the relevance of the university to employability fit facilitation. During degree progression both knowledge and skills are developed. Because both knowledge and skills are seen as a means of advancing employability fit and such activities take place during degree progression, it is reasonable to suggest people engage in higher education in order to advance employability fit. Certainly, this is encouraged in social policy (Dearing, 1997, Augar, 2019). An acceptance that degree progression can advance employability fit stimulates an understanding that practicalities also contribute to employability fit. A link between practicalities and employability fit is evident in this study. The link is recognisable because, according to this study's data, practicalities influence embarkation and progression of degrees.

When considering the contribution of practicalities to employability fit, it is valuable to firstly reflect on the supply and demand focused characteristics of employability as described in relevant literature (Forrier and Sels, 2003). An understanding is evident in the literature that employability encompasses a relationship between the individual and the labour market (Forrier and Sels, 2003). Connected to the appreciation of employability's relational nature is a view that both supply focussed and demand focussed elements of employability possess significance. Supply factors being those pertaining to the individual and demand factors being features of the labour market (Forrier and Sels, 2003). Despite an understanding that both supply and demand factors are relevant to employability, many contemporary ideas concerning employability prioritise supply factors, i.e., the individual. As already discussed, individual skills acquisition is advocated in higher education (Dearing, 1997; Trought, 2012). Various contemporary employability models also concentrate on supply factors through their emphasis on individual accumulation of employability related resources (Dacre-Pool and Sewell, 2007; Yorke and Knight, 2006; Hillage and Pollard, 1998). Despite a current concentration on supply factors pertaining to employability, misgivings exist. For example, Serrano – Pascual (2001) stated

too much focus was being placed on the characteristics of the individual rather than the labour market.

This study's illustration of the contribution practicalities make to employability fit recognises both supply and demand focussed elements of employability are important. The importance of both supply and demand aspects of employability is demonstrated because practicalities identified as impacting on employability fit by this research are supply and demand focussed.

The following quote features the influence of a supply focussed practicality on a student's degree progression. In this example the student is discussing bar work. The bar work offers shifts. The opportunity to access shifts means the student can manage the practicality of time in order to both work and study.

Because this practicality involves the student's time, it is a supply focused employability factor (Forrier and Sels, 2003).

"It's good, I really enjoy it. Because it's in a bar like on an evening...They said, oh can you cover a few shifts? So, I was like, yes, I don't mind. After the third shift, they were like, do you want a contract out of it? I thought yes, I am going to need a job" (case study 1 student).

The next data extract demonstrates the influence of a demand focused practicality. In this example the student chooses the university because of its location. The geographical location of the university is external to the student and beyond her control therefore it is a demand focused practicality (Forrier and Sels, 2003)

"I just looked at modules for Leeds universities. I knew without doubt that I would not travel" (case study 1 student)

Having illustrated that practicalities affect students' decisions concerning degree embarkation and progression, and that both supply and demand related practicalities are relevant, this study found one practicality was particularly impactful on employability fit for participants in this research, it was money. It is not surprising that money is significant to employability. Previous authors have appreciated a connection between money and employability. There is recognition that many people need to work in order to obtain an income (Forrier and Sels, 2003). Social policy associates employability with increased wealth

(Dearing, 1997). Participants in this research described how money funded their student lifestyles. Because money funds student lifestyles it supports degree progression and therefore supports employability fit. Most participants in this research worked. They described how the income from their jobs helped meet varied financial demands associated with their student status. Financial demands included running a car and ensuring they had sufficient income. See quotes below;

In reference to money.... *"it runs my car and I earn money"* (case study 2 student).

"I worked Saturday part time for four years. Then I moved to xxxx because I need a bit more money. I am there now" (case study 1 student).

The previous quotes concerning practicalities demonstrate the significance of practicalities to employability fit, they also show how practicalities influence students' decision making and behaviour, for example, the decision to work and where to study. Earlier discussion within this analysis section introduced an understanding that employability influences people's behaviour. A person's general character was perceived as being of significance to employability fit. This finding was interpreted as a verification of the social nature of learning (Dewey, 2004) and adaptability in people (Mao and Shen, 2020). The impact of employability on behaviour can be exemplified further in relation to practicalities. This study finds that practicalities are important in students' balancing activity. Behaviour pertaining to balance is another example of individual adaptation linked to employability. According to this study, balancing incorporates managing and prioritising different factors relevant to employability fit in order to meet an equilibrium that is satisfactory to the individual. Practicalities are usually involved in this process. The following data extracts illustrate balance. Factors featured in the balancing activity include the employability fit facilitating factor of Knowledge (represented by university attendance) and the employability fit facilitating factor of practicalities (money).

“The plan for now is to stay waitressing at the restaurant because they are quite flexible with the hours like if I say I’ve got some assignments can I have less shifts – they will do it for me” (case study 1 student).

“So, the nursery that I had work at, the one in Leeds. I work at one at home and one here, they asked me to be their deputy manager and their SENCO but they wanted me up to 25 hours a week so I had to say no because of Uni” (case study 2 student).

Another example of balancing is featured in the data extract below. The data concerns a case study 2 student. The learner has part time employment in a field she evaluates as not a sufficient employability fit for her. Nevertheless, the job possesses an element of employability fit because it fulfils an important practicality in that it provides an income. In addition to her current job, the student has also recently obtained employment in an area which is more akin to work she believes is an employability match. Importantly, the new job is not a sufficient fit that nothing more is required of the participant regarding her employability. At this point being a teacher is her goal and the new job is a teaching assistant role. The new job is attractive because it provides relevant learning and knowledge. As a result, the student activates balance. She juggles hours so she can continue with her initial job, continue her degree, complete her work placement and have a second job. Once more, the employability fit facilitating factors of knowledge and practicalities (money) are balanced.

“So, since our last meeting I have started a new job. I have reduced my hours so I can focus on my placement. I’ve recently got a teaching assistant job that is paid so I’ve reduced my hours at the supermarket.”

The presence of balance illustrates an empowering dimension to employability, in the sense that individual action is necessitated to achieve balance. People make choices and exhibit behaviour in response to their desire for work that has some match for them. Importantly, balancing commonly incorporates demand focussed elements of employability such as the type of work available in the labour market (Forrier and Sels, 2003). Balancing also often includes labour market interactions. Consequently, balancing supports the notion that employability is principally a concept which involves a relationship between the individual and the labour market (Forrier and Sels, 2003).

Having suggested that balancing behaviour can be empowering for individuals in the sense that when a person participates in balance, they are active in advancing their employability, the relevance of practicalities to balancing illustrates the ability of practicalities to motivate people. Indeed, data from this study confirms practicalities such as money are motivational:

“I think genuinely I do want to be in the early years so reception or up until year 2 or 3. A part of me is sort of greedy as well. It’s not going to be a lot of money so I do want to go higher and higher up” (case study 2 student).

“Working in the nursery, the girls I worked with. I wanted more. I was working and I was struggling. Even though I was doing so much there were bills and not much money” (case study 3 student).

Despite this study’s finding that employability related practicalities are empowering, they are also found to be limiting. For example, money can be disempowering and as a result it can be an impediment to employability. The following quote provides a case study 3 mature student’s explanation of why she could not progress her degree earlier in life.

“So, from school I had to get a job really due to family circumstances.”

As previously stated, geography is a demand focused employability factor. (McQuaid, Green and Danson, 2005). As illustrated in the previous quote concerning geography, it can be balanced. In the previous example a student chose a university near her home because she did not want to travel. However, geography can also be beyond balance. The quote below features a case study 1 student who was talking about her post graduate options. The course she was interested in was available in three locations. One was in Leeds; one Manchester the other was in London. Only the geographical locations of the Leeds and Manchester were options that could be balanced by the student. Leeds was an option open to balance because it was local. Manchester could be balanced because the student considered driving to Manchester as achievable. Relocation to Manchester was also a choice because the student had relatives that lived there. Had this student’s post graduate course only

been in London, geography would have been beyond balance. Regarding Manchester and London, she states:

“I think depending on what circumstances are like at the time, at this moment I think, I am hoping to be driving by then anyway, so that would be an option. My dad’s fiancé lives in Manchester as well so it’s not like I would be moving there and not know anybody at all. If it was only in London I would not have gone there.”

Given that labour market opportunities are unequally distributed (Serrano Pascual, 2001), a practical decision such as reluctance to travel can be disempowering. The possibility of practicalities being limiting as well as facilitatory in their nature is a reminder of employability’s complexity. Balancing activities may not always result in success. Indeed, this study finds that attempts at balancing employability fit related factors can take their toll. The quotes below concern one case study 1 student and one case study 3 student. Both data extracts illustrate how over time, a job in an area not originally within the student’s chosen field affects their commitment to their degree which was of relevance to their initial employability goals.

“I am working now and it is quite difficult to balance because I have been promoted to bar manager which consequently means I am therefore responsible should a staff member phone in sick. So, if you think last week, I did 54 hours on top of doing my degree” (case study 1 student).

“I think I’ve just had enough. I think I put too much pressure on myself, you know with working as many hours as I did as well as going to uni. and because me and my partner are renting, so it’s a lot. I do it all myself, so I think alongside uni. it was a bit too much and I sort of realised that I just wanted to work all the time” (case study 3 student).

The students’ experience is a further indication of the impact practicalities have on employability. Having acknowledged earlier that money is an important practicality which facilitates degree progression, it important to recognise that as Bourdieu maintained, access to economic capital / money is not equal (Moore, 2012). Some students may not need to work long hours in order to progress their studies because they possess alternative sources of income.

The impact practicalities have on employability, the demand focussed nature of some practicalities plus limitations in the ability to balance practicalities

demonstrates that, according to this study, practicalities have employability significance beyond fit. As a result, and detailed later in this analysis section, practicalities are also described as integral to the concept.

4.2.5 The social

This study's appreciation that social factors are fundamental to employability is demonstrated by the dedication of one analysis section to social factors and employability. This first analysis section which focuses on the finding that some fit between the individual and their work is a major ingredient of employability includes this acknowledgment that social factors facilitate fit. This study finds that workplace mentors value social fit, this is important because mentors offer an insight into the employer's perspective. As appreciated earlier, mentors interact with students. Consequently, it is likely mentor views and associated behavior is impactful on students. Analysis section 3 includes further discussion of social fit and students' reflections on mentor behaviour. This study has already recognised that employability involves learning and that people learn via their interactions in a social world (Dewey, 2004). Social learning will also be discussed in more detail within analysis section 3. However, it is important to state here that social learning helps facilitate employability fit.

4.2.6 Change

Change is another important element of this study's emphasis on how employability incorporates a fit between the individual and their work. Despite some evidence in the literature of an appreciation that employability does incorporate some match between worker and their work (Hillage and Pollard, 1998; Trought, 2012), variations exist regarding the influence of the labour market on the achievement of matches (Forrier and Sels, 2003; Serrano Pascual, 2001). For example, in their evaluations of approaches to employability, the Canadian Labour Force Development Board (1994) place significant emphasis on the role of the labour market. Many other authors concentrate more on the capacity of the individual to obtain work possessing a match for them (Tomlinson, 2017; Yorke and Knight, 2006; Peeters et al., 2019). Differences in emphasis regarding the role of the labour market versus the role of the individual create different employability approaches, for example, a focus on the individual has resulted in numerous conceptualisations of

employability being connected to the identification of various areas of personal development (Tomlinson, 2017; Dacre-Pool and Sewell, 2007). Importantly, priorities for personal development also differ among authors, for example, Dacre-Pool and Sewell (2007) give precedence to the enhancement of self-esteem whereas Yorke and Knight (2006) focus on higher education curricula developments.

Having stressed that relevant literature shows understandings of employability fit are susceptible to change because of different conceptual interpretations, this study also recognises that the dynamic nature of employability fit results from alterations in both labour market and the individual. Concentration on employability fit stimulates an acceptance that interactions between the individual and the labour market occur and are important. Appreciating the importance of labour market interactions fosters an understanding that both labour market and the person themselves have significance to employability fit. In this study's earlier account of practicalities and employability fit, data was analysed which supported the importance of both demand and supply focussed aspects of employability. Significantly, demand focussed labour market characteristics are subject to change (Canadian Labour Force Development Board, 1994). Supply focussed aspects pertaining to the individual also vary (Forrier and Sels, 2003). Changes in supply focussed aspects of employability highlight how people's lives and priorities change, for example carer duties may fluctuate (Forrier and Sels, 2003). Changing priorities are reflected in this study's data. The quote below illustrates a case study 3 student's decision to embark on her degree when the time was right for her to do so:

"The children were grown and there was nothing to do in the house now so I would do something better for myself and for the family"

The quote above which demonstrates priorities for personal development are fluid is important. It is significant because many authors associate employability fit with personal development and the accumulation of personal resources (McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005; Becker, 1993). Having suggested that the accumulation of personal resources (an important employability requisite) is subject to change, this study identifies another factor as being impactful on individual change and employability fit.

According to this research, people change as a result of their learning and this influences employability fit. The quote below refers to a case study 2 student's completion of a reflection module. The quote shows how that episode of learning impacted on her decision-making regarding employability fit. She states:

“Yes, because I always had reservations about becoming a teacher but the reflection has given me more to think about in the sense that I am always learning and I can always change. It is not going to be the same thing every day.”

The next quote concerns a case study 3 student's dissertation. She says how she feels the learning developed during the construction of her dissertation will develop her ideas regarding employability fit.

“I would definitely say because we've started on our research now, once I've done more of my research project... Because I have not decided what I want to do going forward, I think that is going to put in place definite ideas about what I want to do when I finish.”

This research has already recognised that employability incorporates learning and that knowledge is fundamental for employability including its facilitation of employability fit. The ability of learning to stimulate change in people regarding employability fit is significant because knowledge's contribution to employability's dynamic nature is illuminated. Authors such as Hillage and Pollard (1998), Yorke and Knight (2006) recognise employability necessitates learning. As a result, developments in learning such as the ability to perform effective work searches (Hillage and Pollard, 1998) and problem solving (Yorke and Knight) are advocated. Such skills are important but, findings from this study indicate a more general development in the individual including reflection and academic progression make a powerful contribution to employability fit.

Further evidence from this study relevant to a change in people and an impact on employability fit concerns alteration in participant opinion. This research is interested in student experience. Linked to that interest and influential on the design of this study was a belief experience occurred over time (Ricoeur, 1984). Hence the study took place over one academic year. There was also construction of 3 case studies representing different time frames of a degree. Associated with this design was a belief experiences may differ between cases and a variation in opinion may occur. Subsequent data analysis revealed the

same themes and subthemes throughout each case. As a result, this study's analysis is presented and interpreted as a collective case. However, one significant change in viewpoint was identified, it altered over time in that the difference occurred between semi-structured interviews conducted at the beginning and end of the year. Crucially the alteration in participant opinion occurred in all 3 cases. This altered opinion concerned experience. Given that the altered view point concerned experience, it will be discussed in more detail within analysis section 2 which focuses on experience. However, it is important to stress here within this analysis section which concentrates on change and employability fit, that a significant alteration of participant opinion was evident in this research. Recognition of a variation in participant opinion over time within this study supports further this study's appreciation that people do change. Changes in opinion also have particular significance to employability fit. As will be explored further in analysis section 2, employability fit is ultimately determined by individual self-evaluations. This study's acceptance that people do change their minds stimulates an understanding that employability related self-evaluations are likely to alter. Given this study finds that change is significant to employability fit and, as will be articulated later in this analysis section, change pertaining to employability encompasses more than employability fit, this study also recognises change is integral to the concept.

4.2.7 Happiness

A further important feature identified by this study as contributing to the notion that employability involves fit between worker and their work is the issue of happiness. There is some recognition in employability literature that emotions have relevance to employability, for example, Yorke and Knight (2006) acknowledge that having a job which possesses some match to a person is fulfilling. Models such as the one constructed by Dacre-Pool and Sewell (2007) include an emotional dimension, indeed Dacre-Pool and Sewell's model argues self-esteem is the key to employability.

For participants in this study happiness was a significant element of their employability fit. As demonstrated in the following quotes, participants in this study stressed the relevance of happiness to employability fit. The data extracts indicate that, for some people, happiness is the most important issue regarding the determination of employability fit:

“I think at the end of the day you should have a job that you are genuinely happy with. You don’t want to work hard and not be happy with what you’re working as” (case study 2 student).

“the biggest thing about employability is actually enjoying what you do. Money is irrelevant. You could be getting paid a hundred grand but if you are not happy, you wake up miserable each morning, it is not worth getting out of bed for. I would much prefer to get ten grand a year and absolutely love what I do, look forward to going to work, look forward to the next day and every situation that might arise., so for me now it is all about doing what I love” (case study 1 student).

“You don’t live to work you work to live. If you’re unhappy in your job... then happiness without a doubt” (case study 1 student).

This study’s perception of the contribution happiness makes to employability fit does possess some alignment with Yorke and Knight’s assertion that employability involves the acquisition of work which is fulfilling (2006). However, it is important to acknowledge the emphasis students in this study placed on happiness. Happiness appears pivotal in the determination of employability fit according to this study.

Significantly, the emotion of happiness in this study is not regarded by students in the same way Dacre Pool and Sewell view emotions such as self-esteem (2007). In Dacre-Pool and Sewell’s employability conceptualisation, certain emotions including self-esteem are seen as important employability related resources. The development of such resources is thought to advance employability. In contrast, this study finds participants perceived happiness as an outcome of employability fit.

The significance of happiness to employability fit has implications. In addition to Dewey, this study is underpinned theoretically by the ideas of Bourdieu. Bourdieu provides a valuable societal perspective to this research. As stated numerous times, the relational nature of employability which is highlighted by this study’s emphasis on employability fit encourages an acceptance that employability incorporates labour market interactions. Bourdieu argues that society is made up of social spaces/ fields. These are environments where people gather together and interact (Crossley, 2012). They often possess an institutional context, as such the workplace is an example of a field (Webb,

Schirato and Danaher, 2002). Importantly, Bourdieu (1984) also connects capital possession with social spaces. Capital can be economic, cultural and social (Bourdieu, 1986). Consequently, all occupants of social spaces have a variety of capital. According to Bourdieu similarities in capital possession are likely within a particular social space/ field, nevertheless, some individual difference is inevitable. Difference in individual capital possession is particularly probable in the workplace because people possess different roles. The presence of different roles means capital will vary according to those roles, for example, some roles may have more cultural capital because they possess greater institutional value. People are likely to have different economic capital due to different pay grades. Variation of capital possession within the work place is significant because capital links to power. Consequently, power varies within the workplace (Bourdieu, 1984;1990). Bourdieu links the presence of power imbalances with the likelihood of unpleasant experiences including episodes of injustice (Jenkins, 2002).

Reflecting on this study's finding concerning happiness in light of Bourdieu's theories indicates the contribution of happiness to employability fit as revealed in this research is problematic. It may be that the employability fit factor of happiness, so highly valued by participants in this research is not consistently achievable. Bourdieu's societal picture suggests that the workplace can be emotionally challenging. Indeed, findings presented later in this analysis section concerning employability and challenge confirm Bourdieu's insights that the workplace is tough.

This study recognises that the tension resulting from links between employability fit and happiness alongside an acceptance that the workplace is tough is impactful. Individuals are active in their employability. As already demonstrated, individuals balance employability elements particularly practicalities. The presence of balancing activity shows individuals make choices concerning their employability. Further insights into individual choice making will be explored in analysis section 2 of this chapter. For now, it is important to recognise that people make decisions pertinent to their employability. Given that individuals make choices regarding their employability and the desire for happiness is a strong determination of employability fit according to this study, there is potential for poor/ rash decision making by

actual or potential employees. The possibility of individual poor/ rash decision making is supported by this study's appreciation that most people will experience some difficulty at some point in the workplace. An example of rash decision making could be a person deciding to leave a role due to an episode of unhappiness. Endless unrealistic searches for happiness are another possibility linked to this study's finding concerning happiness.

Implications connected to views about happiness and employability fit articulated by this study support higher education strategies associated with the facilitation of emotional intelligence and self-efficacy in students. Emotional intelligence can foster resilience (Goleman, 1996) and it has been linked to the management of employability challenges (Udayar et al., 2018; Di Fabio and Kenny, 2015). Self-efficacy is also known to foster resilience (Bandura, 1997). An example of a higher education strategy linked to the development of emotional intelligence is the teaching of effective reflection (Dacre- Pool and Sewell, 2007). Turner (2014) advocates early academic assessments with prompt feedback to promote self – efficacy.

Dewey's views concerning educational outcomes and citizenship also possess some relevance to this study's finding concerning happiness. Dewey did consider educational outcomes when he was reflecting on the value of a person's education (Dewey, 2004). Dewey identified education as a means of revealing strengths to an individual. He also viewed people being predominantly occupied by activities they were good at as positive. A person being occupied by activities associated with their strengths was viewed favourably by Dewey because he believed such activity encouraged fulfilment in people (2004). Self-fulfilment indicates the presence of emotional satisfaction which can include happiness. Importantly, Dewey's reflections concerning educational outcomes focus on individual occupation not employability. For Dewey, occupation linked to citizenship. Significantly, citizenship can include a person's paid employment but it is not limited to their paid work. According to Dewey, citizenship concerns a person's societal participation. Dewey's ideas on educational outcomes, strength revelation and occupation are important when considering this study's finding concerning happiness and employability fit. Dewey's views are valuable because they suggest people have other routes to happiness beyond their employability.

4.2.8 Challenge

As alluded to in the previous section on happiness, this study finds achieving employability fit is challenging.

A perception is evident in relevant literature that obtaining work which is a fit for an individual is challenging (Serrano- Pascual, 2001). This study appreciates that, in addition to employability involving a relationship between the individual and the workplace, there is an established understanding that employability involves individual capacity and the accumulation of relevant resources (Yorke and Knight, 2006; Tomlinson, 2017). Employability literature which focuses on individual resource accumulation reinforces an understanding that achieving employability fit is difficult. The challenge is recognisable via the large number of resources/ capacities deemed necessary in order to achieve and maintain employability (Yorke and Knight, 2006; Dacre- Pool and Sewell, 2007; Tomlinson, 2017). Social policy documents also reveal difficulty. There is an appreciation that not all graduates are successful in obtaining work that is a match (Dept. for Business, Education and Skills, 2016). Indeed, some graduates from a number of courses delivered at some of the post 92 universities are identified as not achieving high rates of employment (Augar, 2019).

Analysis of data gathered in this study finds a particular challenge associated with the establishment of employability fit involves work searches. The term work searches in the context of this study includes attempts made by individuals to acquire work experience perceived by that person as relevant in advancing their employability fit. Challenging work searches also includes attempts to obtain work which is in itself is viewed by the person concerned as an employability match.

Relevant data extracts demonstrate that both actual and vicarious experiences of work searches contribute to the view that they are challenging. The first of the quotes below reflect a case study 2 student's interaction with others at a job fair where she discovered only some of her peers had acquired jobs that met their match.

"I feel like employability this time. I feel it's a lot harder to get a job than I thought before. More to the process than what I thought before."

The following quotes reflect a case study 3 student's account of a job interview. The job itself was perceived by the student as having potential for an employability related fit. Her semi structured interview responses illustrate how difficult she found the recruitment process.

"I think it was due to lack of sleep. I wasn't feeling particularly healthy and I wasn't really able to articulate skills for them. I wasn't prepared for me having to demonstrate that as a stranger."

Importantly during this student's participation in the recruitment process, she engaged in conversations with other interviewees, gathering insights into the experiences of others. Her conversations reinforced her view that obtaining work that is an employability fit is hard. She recalls;

"I was chatting to another applicant. She said she was just so grateful to get an interview. So, she had a degree and had been working in a primary school as a TA, she said she had been applying for things for such a long time and not getting a response back, so that made me feel like the market is very competitive within this."

The existence of difficulties during work searches and the sharing of those experiences once more reveals the social nature of employability that is emphasised by this study and recognised in more detail within analysis section 3 of this chapter.

This finding which focuses on the challenges of work searches possesses implications for higher education practice. It is important that student groups do not lose hope in achieving their employability goals because they hear stories of struggle. It is also important success stories are shared, particularly those of alumni. This finding also supports activities such as interview preparation that commonly occur in professional development and placements modules. The importance of roles such as the personal tutor is reinforced. Personal tutors can support students with their employability goals, they can also offer encouragement and reassurance when students are met with challenge in their work searches pertaining to employability fit.

The difficulty connected to the search for work possessing some match between the individual and their employment is further illuminated by this study's theoretical framework. As already recognised in this study, Bourdieu's

societal perspective includes his theories of capital (2006). Bourdieu identified various forms of capital including social, cultural and economic. Different forms of capital have been recognised in employability literature as an employability resource and therefore individual possession of such resources has an employability benefit (Tomlinson, 2017; Mao and Shen, 2020). Importantly, capital possession is determined by more than the individual. Capital distribution has a societal influence. Society has structural inequalities, access to capital is associated with class and it is not equal (Bourdieu, 1992; 2006).

The employability relevance of this reality can be observed when considering money/ economic capital. Money has already been identified as an important practicality for employability. As stated, money precipitates balancing activities in individuals during evaluations of their employability. Significantly, Bourdieu maintains that economic capital is not equally distributed among society (Jenkins, 2002). This observation demonstrates a societal impact on the employability related behaviour of an individual who is in search of work. For example, opportunity for relocation to an area possessing work which is a potential match for a person is not purely about that particular person's decision making. Society's structural inequalities ensure that those people lacking economic capital may be discouraged to move or at least experience much more hardship during and following a relocation.

Considering the difficulty of work searches illuminated by this study in parallel with Bourdieu's theories pertaining to structural inequality (Jenkins, 2002), it is plausible that the challenge of individual work searches may involve societal inequalities as well as or rather than any individual deficits. The inclusion of Bourdieu's views regarding unequal distribution of capital in this study's discussion regarding the challenge of work searches also suggests episodes of disappointment may be inevitable. Consequently, students must be supported in work searches and encouraged to persist when they face barriers. Analysis section 3 of this chapter which focuses more specifically on the social nature of employability will explore in more detail both social and cultural capital and their employability impact. This study's data analysis pertaining to the challenge of work searches which is underpinned by its theoretical framework supports Serrano - Pascual's call for transparency regarding societal influences on employability (2001). The challenges of the labour market should be made

more explicit for individuals, this may reduce unnecessary episodes of self-blame resulting from unsuccessful work searches.

Having discussed this study's findings regarding factors that are influential on employability fit – a fit between worker and their work, it is important to emphasise that this study finds some fit between worker and their work is a major aspect of employability from the student perspective. Other authors have recognised that employability involves a relationship between individual and the labour market (Serrano Pascual, 2001; Forrier and Sels, 2003). This study which stresses the element of employability concerning employability fit, supports the view that employability is an interactive concept. Having highlighted the importance to employability of a fit between worker and their work and its associated relational nature, this study also identifies numerous factors as being impactful on employability fit. In themselves, some of these factors have already been linked to employability fit, for example, knowledge and skills (Trought, 2012; Fallows and Steven, 2000; Dearing ,1997). However, this study's collation and associated explanation of factors found influential on employability fit is original.

This study also accepts employability is multifactorial. Some of the elements which make a contribution to employability fit have an influence beyond the aspect of employability which encompasses a fit between worker and their work. As a result, these factors are defined by this study as being integral to the concept. The first factor identified as integral to the concept by this research is knowledge.

4.2.9 Knowledge is integral to employability

Knowledge is recognised as being integral to employability by this study because its possession and validation is viewed by students as a major employability resource. The following quotes illustrate students' appreciation of knowledge as an employability related resource.

When asked about the nature of employability, a case study 1 student stated:

“Employability to me is everything an individual possesses so that may be a certain academic qualification.”

When asked what made the ideal employee, case study 3 students stated:

“It somebody who wants to learn”

“Qualifications skills and knowledge play a big part”

As already stated, previous conceptual analyses of employability and this study appreciate that employability encompasses a relationship between the individual and the workplace (Forrier and Sels, 2003; Serrano- Pascual, 2001). However, many contemporary conceptualisations of employability focus on it being a resource-based concept. Numerous authors stress, employability involves the capacity to be and remain employable (Yorke and Knight, 2006; Tomlinson, 2017; Trought, 2012). The possession of various resources eases that capacity. Because employability is portrayed frequently in relevant literature including higher education texts as a resource-based concept (Peeters et al., 2019) and knowledge is identified by students as being an employability related resource, it is understandable that knowledge possession is important to students.

As previously stated, when discussing the contribution of knowledge to employability fit, students recognised knowledge deemed relevant to a job helped facilitate fit. Consequently, this study cited knowledge as being impactful on employability fit. Students’ quotes focusing on the resource-based value of knowledge reveal students see knowledge as having an employability value which goes beyond the scope of employability fit. Connected to students’ recognition of knowledge’s general employability value was a belief that a diverse range of knowledge was significant to employability. See quotes below;

“Now I am seeing how good it is. learning children, young people and families. It involves the whole family. It involves the whole community, the whole country and everything is included there, being a mother, being a teacher, being a counsellor. I was surprised when I went for my placement, they wanted me to do everything, which I managed to do” (case study 3 student).

“Like I said earlier I like learning about the parts that I’d never really considered before. Recently all the health and safety stuff and the routines. I liked learning about them and especially with like babies because I have not had much experience with babies” (case study 1 student).

The general value of knowledge as an important employability resource is evident in Becker's accounts of human capital (1993). Human capital theory supports employability related activity such as knowledge and skills development in order to make an individual more attractive to the labour market. Becker's insights into human capital link to the idea that employability is a resource-based concept. His views also possess some links to Bourdieu's theories of capital (1984). Both Becker and Bourdieu view capital as a resource. Bourdieu associates a person's education with their cultural capital. He recognises that an individual's possession of cultural capital is valuable in that it adds to their power (1986). Importantly, Bourdieu states that the possession of cultural capital is often demonstrated via symbols. A degree is an example of such a symbol. Becker also articulates how the value of degree possession results from its ability to validate knowledge possession (1993).

Significantly, Becker recognises that indicators of knowledge possession have a broad appeal to the labour market. This view is supported by labour market activity. Many graduates are employed in work that has no obvious connections to their degree subjects (Augar, 2019). The capacity of degrees to symbolise knowledge possession and the indication that specific knowledge possession is not always a requirement for employment provides further explanation of why students in this study perceived knowledge as having a general value for employability. Significantly, views regarding the general contribution that knowledge makes to employability include an appreciation of a diverse range of knowledge.

The perception that knowledge is generally important for employability and that a diverse range of knowledge is valuable provides further links to the ongoing debate concerning a university's purpose. Bell's model concerning a university's function associated universities with the evolution of both classical and pragmatic forms of knowledge (1970). Classical being theoretical knowledge such as subject specific knowledge, pragmatic being the facilitation of learning that can be very obviously applied to the outside world such as skills development. Some authors advocate pragmatic higher education activity (Trought, 2012; Nursing, Midwifery Council, 2021). Others champion more classical approaches (Collini, 2012). This study's earlier discussion regarding students' combination of university obtained knowledge and practice during

work placement supported an employability related value of both classical and pragmatic knowledge. This study's additional insights concerning students' appreciation of a diverse range of knowledge and knowledge being an important employability resource reinforces a view that universities should facilitate both classical and pragmatic forms of knowledge and that both have an employability value.

Dewey's theories of learning provide another explanation for the general employability related value of a breadth in knowledge possession by students. As already articulated, this study associates employability with learning. According to Dewey, learning encompasses an individual's interaction with their environment. Also as previously stated, that environment is social therefore, a person's interaction with their environment is generally communal (Dewey, 2004). The contribution that social participation makes to learning is so important to Dewey that he identifies this process as an ingredient of a well-functioning society. This is because, in Dewey's view, the most effective societies are democratic ones. Democratic societies require the active involvement of their citizens. Democratic societies also necessitate the consideration of opposing opinions and perspectives. As a result, careful thought is viewed by Dewey as fundamentally important for citizenship (2004).

Crucially, careful thinking involves the ability to accrue knowledge and analyse information, such accomplishments have been attributed to the classical model of a university education (Newman, 1959). Despite an established belief that classical elements of a university's function are good in their own right (Collini, 2012; Bell, 1970; Maskell and Robinson, 2002), Dewey's appreciation of the importance of careful thought and the associated abilities of knowledge acquisition and analysis was not limited to a perception this was solely good in its own right. Careful thought which necessitates both knowledge and analysis is important because careful thought facilitates effective societal involvement which in turn develops learning, in short, the three are entwined.

Dewey's association between knowledge, analysis, societal participation and human development suggests an element of inevitability to students' valuing a diverse range of knowledge. Knowledge acquisition which is generally linked to a university's classical function does help them engage in a social world. An employability link is also evident regarding Dewey's connection between careful

thought and societal participation. Dewey identifies certain pursuits as being examples of societal participation. They include volunteering, involvement in politics and significantly for employability -participation in the workplace (2004).

4.2.10 Practicalities are integral to employability

In this analysis section 1, during discussion of employability fit, practicalities were identified as having significant impact on a match between worker and their work. Practical influences on the fit element of employability are most powerfully demonstrated by accounts of students balancing different employability factors, particularly practicalities to fulfil their goal of acquiring work which is a fit for them. The highlighting of balancing behaviour supports this study's appreciation of the relational nature of employability. The relational nature of employability highlights that both supply and demand aspects of employability are important. Recognition that demand focussed factors are impactful on employability is of particular relevance to practicalities because practicalities are commonly demand focussed i.e., they concern a characteristic of the labour market. On occasions demand focussed practicalities may be pivotal to employability and beyond an individual's ability to balance them. This can be demonstrated via the demand focussed practical factor of geography. Serrano- Pascual (2001) warns that the labour market possesses variable geographical characteristics. More labour market opportunities exist in some locations than others. During earlier discussion of practicalities and employability fit, an acknowledgement was made that some people may find relocation more challenging than others. Indeed, it is probable that at times it is impossible for an individual to relocate.

Limitations in students' ability to balance practicalities can be further exemplified via the practicality of money. As previously suggested students do balance paid employment with the progression of their studies. However, for some, income from their paid employment is a fundamental priority. See quote below.

"I do work the other days that I am not at uni. So, I work five days a week and two at the weekend... "I am now renting a house and the job is my way of getting an income" (case study 3 student).

When the practicality of money from a particular job funds essential aspects of a person's life such as food and shelter, the ability of that person to balance

money with other aspects of employability fit is extremely limited if not unachievable. Given the ability of the practicality of money to eclipse other elements of employability fit, the pivotal nature of practicalities is reinforced. Because practicalities are such a determinant of employability and at times the ability to balance them is impossible – this study finds they are integral to the concept.

4.2.11 Employability is social

This analysis section 1 has already stated that social factors facilitate employability fit. Employability necessitates learning. Learning occurs socially via participation in a social world and workplace interactions are often part of that process. The finding regarding employability's social nature is important and will be discussed further in analysis section 3. Analysis section 3 is devoted to employability's social nature. The varied and powerful impact social factors have on employability result in the social dimension of employability being considered by this study as integral to the concept.

4.2.12 Change is integral to employability

It was established in the earlier section concerning change and employability fit that change has an influence on an individual's fit with their work. This study also finds change is integral to the employability concept. The importance of a fit between worker and their work to employability, the significance of both labour market and individual to employability fit and the ability of both to change precipitated the earlier claim that change is impactful on employability fit. However, this study also appreciates understandings of employability are subject to change and as a result this study describes employability as being a dynamic concept. Between the first and second semi-structured interview of this study, students in all 3 cases changed their opinion regarding the contribution of experience to employability. Because this change in understanding concerned experience, it will be discussed further in analysis section 2. The dynamic nature of employability is supported via further reflections on employability conceptualisations in relevant literature. As previously stated, differences exist in authors' opinions regarding the role of the individual and the labour market concerning employability. The literature also reveals understandings of employability alter according to both time and geographical space. Examples of

change include an earlier employability focus on hopes for full employment (Forrier and Sels, 2003). Haasler (2013) illuminates a difference in conceptual interpretation according to country. He exemplifies Germany's link between employability and entrepreneurialism which differs from the U.K. focus on fit and individual capacity. The prevalence of differences which underpin conceptual understandings of employability confirm that employability is a dynamic concept subject to change.

4.2.13 Challenge is integral to employability

This study finds that employability is challenging. Having articulated in the section on challenge and employability fit, that finding work which is a fit for the individual is difficult, this study reveals challenges associated with employability encompass more than difficult work searches, consequently, challenge is integral to the concept. Relevant literature clearly indicates an appreciation that employability is problematic. The relevance of both supply and demand factors to employability create difficulty because, as shown in this study and recognised in some employability literature (Serrano-Pascual, 2001) individual attempts to establish a balance between the supply focussed/ individual factors and demand focussed/ labour market aspects of employability have limitations. The involvement of numerous employability stakeholders adds to the challenge of the concept (Tymon, 2013). Relevant stakeholders include employers, higher education staff, governments, potential employees including students. A plethora of stakeholders and their perspectives adds to the difficulty of employability. For example, many academics have identified multiple dimensions of employability which reinforces the complexity of the concept (Peeters, et al., 2019). Variations in opinion are present among other stakeholders, for example, employers differ in opinion regarding skills acquisition (Yorke and Knight, 2004). Countries also possess diverse opinions in relation to skills (Little, 2003). Data analysis of information gathered in this study regarding work experiences further illuminates why employability is challenging. Participants in this study revealed in addition to the challenge of work searches, workplace experiences can be difficult. Indeed, this study finds experiences of the workplace are challenging in their own right. Because employability incorporates the ability to be employed (Trought, 2012) and interactions with the labour market (Forrier and Sels, 2003), it is highly likely

that employability will encompass an individual being immersed in the workplace at some point, therefore challenge is identified by this research as being integral to the employability concept.

4.2.14 Experiences of work

When considering the challenge of work experiences, it is pertinent to reiterate that fit is fundamental to employability according to this research. Numerous factors have been revealed in this analysis section as impactful on fit. The significance of fit to employability plus the existence of numerous factors affecting fit is impactful. As already illustrated, people activate balancing activity to promote employability fit and, given people are active in the achievement of employability fit, they can make self- evaluations regarding its presence. Indeed, this study argues that self-evaluations of employability also determine employability's temporal nature, this will be explored in more detail within analysis section 2. The presence of employability related evaluations also reveals that people think about their work, they make assessments and judgements. This study finds that such deliberations illuminate the perception that work experiences in themselves can be challenging.

Because the relational nature of employability (Forrier and Sels, 2003) encourages interaction with the labour market, as already acknowledged, employability is highly likely to involve an individual's presence in the workplace at some point. All participants in this research had worked. Work included work experience such as work placement and paid employment. Participant recollections of their work experiences demonstrate the challenges of the work environment. Difficulties identified in the workplace pertained to social interactions. Challenges included a tension between pre-conceived ideas regarding professional conduct and the realities of professional behaviour during social encounters. Additional challenges involved perceptions of injustice. See extracts from semi-structured interviews below:

"I have worked with a number of teachers, before I really looked up to teachers. I realise now that they are not all great" (case study 2 student).

"I know now what I am capable of doing. I know my skills and qualities I know that I am willing to do what my manager tells me to do but I know some people might not be the same as me" (case study 3 student).

Participant narratives collected during the progression of this research also illuminated employability challenge. The extract from the narrative below features disparity between pre-conceived ideas and the realities of behaviour in practice.

“I wasn’t working in that class and this teacher I used to go to school with her a couple of years ago. When I started at placement, she recognised me and I told her about my plans. One day we were working and she said Oh will you go borrow some scissors from next door, I said Oh sure. from that teacher. I went to the classroom and the teacher was sort of perched at the end of the desk and the students were there. I came in because the door was open. I didn’t knock because it was open. I approached the teacher and said could I borrow some scissors. She said it’s all right but appeared unfriendly and the teacher who was working with the SENS children, he told me this always happens. So I got my scissors, walked out and I went back and I said to my mentor is that teacher always likes that. Oh, do you mean her? She did not appear surprised. I was quite shocked, as it was a bit of an eye opener really” (narrative- case study 2 student).

Three further narratives illustrate that perceptions of injustice in the workplace are challenging for participants:

“Can it be about my supermarket work? They don’t really treat their staff well. Like my last shift, I said to the manager, because you can’t just stand up and go to the toilet, you have to flash this light and then they come over. I said I needed the toilet, they said I don’t do toilet breaks you’ll have to wait. I said oh? I needed to go to the toilet. So, I flashed again and I said I need the toilet and she said you can have a break in half an hour. I said I can’t wait that long; I need to go to the toilet. It frustrated me; we get breaks as well but we only get 15 minutes every seven hours. I do seven and because I don’t do eight, I don’t get extra, I just get 15 minutes and you have to be dead on the 15 and the canteen shuts at two o’clock. I got my break at quarter to three so I complained to the manager saying there that you are making people wait” (narrative- case study 2 student).

“I didn’t mind reducing my hours, I’m literally just there for the money. It’s very different working at the supermarket than it is in education. People who work at the supermarket are quite abrupt and are not empathetic. There is this one manager and she treats people differently. People who are at university who want to stay at the super market are still treated badly and that’s changed my idea of employability I guess because I’ve noticed that the other managers don’t do anything about it either” (narrative- case study 2).

“I realise I have to start standing my ground with some managers as well as there are some managers aren’t very nice. When I was working in a previous work place I went to HR. There was a manager, he was mis paying everybody all the time and there were clearly some dodgy deeds going on, even over Christmas everyone got paid like over £100 short, every single employee. It didn’t go very far. It turned out the people above him were just as bad as him to be fair. I’ve realised that sometimes you’ve just got to try and if it doesn’t work maybe just leave, and that’s when I started looking for another job” (narrative - case study 1 student).

Once more, the social nature of employability is revealed in these findings. All workplace difficulties captured by this study’s data analysis concerned social interactions. The relevance of socially constructed learning emphasised by this research via its theoretical framework (Dewey, 1938; Campbell, 1996; Hildebrand, 2008) is also evident in participant recollections of challenge. Participants’ narratives and comments show how they possessed pre-existing views and expectations concerning their workplace. These views were part of their cognitive structures (Moon, 2010). As participants encountered a novel environmental experience, their cognitive structures are met with new information. New information is either assimilated, rejected or ignored. In the work experiences featured, assimilation has caused tension and discomfort because pre-conceptions have been challenged in a negative way.

Findings concerning disappointment in collegiate behaviour demonstrate a need to manage the expectations of novices within the workplace. There will be further analysis of employability related social interactions in analysis section 3 which concentrates on employability’s social nature. In spite of that, the data pertaining to challenge reiterates the importance of effective workplace preparation and ongoing student support. This is a fine balance, mentors and tutors supporting students or new employees do not want to foster disillusionment but it is important that expectations regarding collegiate behaviour are realistic.

In addition to the discomfort associated with disappointing behaviour in colleagues, participant narratives demonstrate that perceptions of injustice were a prime source of employability challenge for those involved in this study. Data also shows, experiences of perceived injustice can stimulate a reconsideration of employment options i.e., have significant impact on employability self-evaluations. Bourdieu’s work has relevance to this finding. As stated, members

of society gather together in social spaces/ fields. It has been established that fields include the workplace. Because fields are essentially fragments of wider society, they possess inequality and power struggles (Bourdieu and Waquant, 1992). Consideration of participant narratives regarding injustice in parallel with Bourdieu's accounts of fields indicates that episodes of injustice in the workplace are inescapable. As a result, it is important this finding is deliberated.

Accepting that this study's theoretical framework predicts individuals will encounter episodes of injustice and accepting that higher education is a major employability stakeholder, it is vital that universities assist in this area. Despite an emphasis in social policy of knowledge and skills development being the main route to employability (Dearing, 1997, Dept. for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016), the effective evolution of knowledge and skills was not seen as being a principal employability challenge by students in this study. Instead, different, more subtle social challenges were identified as problematic. Consequently, more energy must be channelled in to addressing this issue. Further reflections on the value of workplace practice opportunities will take place in analysis section 3 concentrating on the social, here the need for effective support during students' workplace encounters is stressed. Support for university work placements is commonly provided in the form of work placement mentors but a role for well-trained university tutors in offering a safe space for students to consider difficulties encountered in the work environment is also valuable. This may avoid people dismissing potential employability options, seeing themselves as unsuitable when really, they are novices encountering difficulties of field navigation. Once again, the importance of higher education strategies aimed at enhancing self-efficacy and emotional regulation is illuminated, for example, this study has already supported Dacre- Pool and Sewell's advocacy of effective reflection (2007). Significantly, this should be critical reflection. Critical reflection is valuable because it emphasises thoughtful consideration of external, societal factors often beyond an individual's control (Fook and Gardener, 2006). Such careful and analytical reflections may enable measured responses from individuals towards the unavoidable challenges of the workplace.

Employability's complexity is evident in the literature. The link between workplace interaction and employability which is identifiable in some texts (Serrano-Pascual, 2001, Forrier and Sels, 2003) and stressed by this study creates an understanding that workplace experience is an almost inevitable feature of employability. The significance of workplace experience to employability contributes to employability being a challenge. Reflections from participants in this study reveal the extent of that challenge. As a result, this study states challenge is integral to the employability concept.

To summarise analysis section 1. This section of the analysis chapter has explored this study's finding concerning the characteristics of employability. Numerous other researchers and writers have explored/ attempted conceptualisations of employability (Peeters et al., 2019). Commonly, conceptual studies are performed by exploration of relevant literature. This study is empirical, it seeks greater employability understanding from the student perspective. Established literature relevant to employability demonstrates some acceptance that employability encompasses a relationship between the individual and the labour market (Forrier and Sels, 2003; Serrano Pascual, 2001). However, despite recognition within the literature that employability encompasses some fit between worker and their work (Yorke and Knight, 2006), most contemporary conceptualisations of employability focus on the capacity of the individual to acquire and maintain their employment (Trought, 2012; Yorke and Knight, 2006, Tomlinson, 2017). Employability characteristics have influenced practice, for example potential students are encouraged to engage in loan agreements for their higher education (Dearing, 1997). Employability models have evolved identifying resources and capacities considered valuable in advancing a person's ability to find work that has some match for them (Yorke and Knight, 2006, Hillage and Pollard, 1998).

Participants in this study considered a fit between worker and their work to be a crucial aspect of employability and, certain factors were identified by this research as being influential on that match. The significance of fit between worker and their work to students and the relevance of numerous factors to fit stimulates an emphasis by this study on employability's relational nature. Factors found by this study to be impactful on fit include knowledge, skills, practicalities, social factors, change and happiness. Despite the presence in

established literature of an understanding that employability encompasses some fit between worker and their work, this study's emphasis on fit and the collation of factors impactful on fit is novel. Having explored the characteristics of employability from the student perspective, in one sentence this study defines employability as a multifactorial, complex, dynamic and principally relational concept. This research agrees with other authors that employability is difficult and multifactorial (Forrier and Sels, 2003; Tymon, 2013). This study's confirmation of employability's multifactorial nature is illustrated via its identification of several factors being influential on fit and its recognition that numerous factors impactful on fit are also integral to the concept. Those factors perceived by this study as being integral to the concept are defined as such because their employability influence extends beyond their impact on fit. Factors deemed integral to employability by this research include knowledge, practicalities, social factors, change and challenge.

Findings from this study concerning the nature of employability also reveal effects. Effects resulting from employability's nature include, employability necessitates learning. Employability stimulates activity in people such as degree embarkation, balancing behaviour and evaluations. Employability also has an emotional impact on individuals. The significance of knowledge and learning to employability has entwined higher education and employability. The symbiotic relationship between higher education and employability means challenges associated with employability will affect higher education, for example the emotional impact of employability possesses implications for higher education practice.

4.3 Analysis section 2: The contribution of experience to employability including its temporal nature

In the first analysis section of this chapter, the significance to employability of a fit between worker and their work was communicated. Highlighting the importance of employability fit for students emphasises the relational nature of employability. An acceptance that employability is principally a relational concept stimulates an understanding that employability does involve interactions between the individual and the labour market. Other writers have recognised a link between employability and labour market interactions, for

example, Hillage and Pollard (1998) cited a person's ability to perform effective work searches was an important employability resource. This study's earlier exploration of employability's characteristics demonstrated interactions between the individual and the labour market are significant, probable and include more than work searches. According to this study employability is likely to include involvement in the workplace and work experiences at some point.

Earlier insights regarding employability fit expressed in analysis section 1, included a discussion of the contribution knowledge makes to employability fit. During reflections of knowledge's contribution to employability fit, an association between employability and learning was recognised. Insights regarding learning and employability fit showed experiences from different aspects of a student's life helped them understand their work environment. The contribution of experience to learning was reinforced via links to Dewey's theories of learning. Having introduced in analysis section 1 a relationship between employability and learning and also experience and learning, it is important to explore this further within analysis section 2 which focusses specifically on employability and experience. Importantly, students themselves identified experience as being an important learning tool for employability.

4.3.1 Experiential learning

The student comments featured below are in response the semi-structured interview question which asked them to identify their main form of employability related learning. They said:

"It would be placement. I was set on primary school teaching but since being here I've realised I am passionate for special needs" (case study 2 student).

"Obviously the learning on placement, that sort of taught me about the sector and influenced me to develop that a bit further" (case study 2 student).

Students' comments demonstrating an appreciation in the value of work placement as a vehicle for employability related learning confirms the view that experiential learning is important to employability.

As stated, analysis section 1 also revealed how students used experiences from other areas of their lives in order to enhance their comprehension of the work environment. This finding was linked to Dewey's social constructivist principles of learning (Dewey, 1938). The following data extracts concern students' written

reflections of work placement. This data illuminates how experience contributes to the construction of learning (Dewey, 1938). In the examples below, it is experience which identifies and helps fill gaps in understandings.

Table 6 - Student written placement reflections illustrating the contribution of experience to learning

Case study 1 student reflection example	Case study 1 student reflection example
<i>“I also worked closer with a child who had SEN. This was extremely interesting for me as I had very little experience working with SEN. I read independently with the child and helped them complete their work sheets. This was challenging as their work style was very different to what I had experienced in other children. I feel I was still successful in doing this as I managed to keep the child as focussed as possible.”</i>	<i>“Whilst on a home visit to a Roma family I realised I did not know much about the Roma family culture which meant that I would really struggle to work with families of this background.”</i>
Case study 2 student reflection example	Case study 2 student reflection example
<i>Comments concerning a first time visit to a pet shop... “Visited a pet shop where children petted the animals and counted out money to purchase bird seed which was purchased to make bird feeders.”</i>	<i>“I began to notice that life skills sessions were equal in importance to academic abilities. This made the placement different compared to working in main stream schools, as lessons in the main stream schools are focussed on academic abilities.”</i>

Evidence regarding students’ appreciation of work placement and data showing how experience contributes to the scaffolding of learning reinforces the important contribution of experiential learning to employability. Further evidence pertaining to an alteration in students’ views over time augments the understanding that experience and experiential learning is very important for employability.

4.3.2 Changing views of employability

This study is interested in students' experiences and in association with that interest is an understanding that experiences occur over time (Ricoeur, 1984). As already detailed earlier in this chapter, perceptions regarding the impact of time on experience influenced the construction of this research. Despite an initial expectation that time would affect participant experiences, subsequent data analysis did not reveal major variations in findings across the different case studies. As a result, relevant data for this research is presented and analysed as a collective case study. The absence of any major variations in themes across case studies 1, 2 and 3 helps validate all of this study's findings. Validation is enhanced because the findings are confirmed as being important to students in all 3 cases.

Despite no major differences in opinion being demonstrated between case studies 1, 2 and 3, one alteration in participant viewpoint did occur in all 3 cases. This alteration was found to have occurred over time because the change was evident via comparison of participant responses to the first semi-structured interview with those to the second. Importantly, there was a time lapse between semi-structured interview 1 and 2.

The change in participant opinion revealed in the data concerned students' views regarding the significance of experience to employability. Latterly students placed a higher value on the contribution of relevant experience to employability. The following data extracts pertain to 2 case study 2 students' semi-structured interviews. The quotes refer to the students' views regarding factors they believe are most pertinent to employability. The initial quotes concern comments made in the students' first semi-structured interview. The latter quotes feature insights from the second semi-structured interview. Quotes from the second semi-structured interview illustrate greater emphasis on the value of relevant experience to employability:

"Someone who is knowledgeable about the subject area, also has practical experience, integrates the job qualification seamlessly into their practice" (case study 2 student 1st semi structured interview).

"It depends on you as a person, so, if you have the ability to do certain things and if you are confident enough to do it as well" (case study 2 student 1st semi-structured interview).

“Experience, work related experience, big, big thing because if you’ve studied a course that was literally, it could be anything like journalism and you’ve never practically tried it you could hate it. It’s very different learning about something to doing it in practice so that’s like a very big thing” (case study 2 student 2nd semi-structured interview).

“It would be the fact that you do definitely need to have some sort of experience in the sector that you are studying towards to be more aware of what you want to do in the future, for long-term plans. Fair enough that you have a commitment on the side for work that you have to get by with, but you do need experience to be able to have more knowledge of what you want to do in the future” (case study 2 student 2nd semi-structured interview).

The presence of a change in opinion pertaining to experience between semi-structured interview 1 and 2 suggests time has been influential on views regarding experience and employability. The impact of time on opinions regarding experience and employability is confirmed via further extracts from the data. Importantly, it appears to be actual events which caused an alteration in student opinion regarding the contribution of relevant experience to employability. The first quote featured below concerns a student’s recollections of trying to obtain a work placement and the second features another student’s attempt at acquiring work she believes is some match for her:

“When I was applying for placements one of the schools said have you had any experience with children before?” (case study 1 student).

“It was very clear that I did not have enough experience. They were asking for a lot of experience. They are not asking for a degree. They are asking for experience. All the candidates on the day did have degrees. We spent 6 hours together so we did talk a lot about what we’d done previously and what degrees we had. So, I was certainly beyond doubt in terms of experience and I had less” (case study 3 student).

Because events take place in time and events altered viewpoints, the ability of time to affect employability perspectives is supported, the importance of experiential learning is also reinforced.

Having articulated that time and actual events can impact on students’ understanding of employability, it still appears significant that the only major alteration in understandings of employability evolving from participants in this study concerned experience. Importantly, this research required students to

deliberate and articulate their understanding of employability twice. Experience and its contribution to employability being revisited by participants indicates the contribution of experience to employability was particularly noteworthy for them. The connection between employability and learning plus the experiential nature of learning is highlighted in this finding. For Dewey, a pragmatist philosopher, true understanding is not achieved without experience (Fesmire, 2015). As a result, it is possible that changes in perceptions regarding the role of experience were particularly powerful for participants because they had developed through actual events and experience in itself.

The resource-based nature of employability and its relational nature are pertinent to this finding. The resource-based nature of employability is relevant because participants learnt relevant experience was an important employability commodity. The relational nature of employability is highlighted again because of the ability of events to alter understanding. As previously acknowledged, employability's relational nature encourages labour market interactions. Consequently, many employability related events and associated experiences are likely to involve the workplace. An acceptance that experience can alter opinion alongside recognition that many employability related experiences involve the workplace supports the view expressed earlier in analysis section 1 of this chapter, that the workplace itself can stimulate adaptations in people.

4.3.3 Experience and the determination of employability fit

Having reiterated the contribution of experiential learning to employability and having established that students increasingly appreciated relevant experience as an employability resource, it is evident that a value of experience encourages engagement with and immersion in the workplace. This study also finds that some fit between worker and their work is a prime feature of employability. The significance of employability fit also stimulates workplace engagement and experience. This study finds people interact with the workplace in order to determine if a particular form of employment is an employability fit for them.

The quotes below feature insights from a case study 1 and then a case study 2 student. The case study 1 student talks about her placement choice. She describes how she was familiar with early years provision. The case study 1

student says that she wanted a work placement involving the teaching of older children. Her rationale for this desire was to help decide which form of employment she would prefer i.e., which was more of a fit for her. She states:

“I think I mentioned last time, I had already done the voluntary in preschool which was age like two to four. I wanted to... rather than go to the same age... I wanted to go maybe a bit older and experience that and see which one I preferred. I want to go into a primary school rather than like a pre-school or nursery.”

The following case study 2 student describes how her work experience helped narrow down her employability fit. This student also wanted to teach. Importantly, she illustrates how her workplace experience helped advance employability fit. The student’s employability fit is advanced because she now knows the age group she prefers to teach.

“I’ve had a lot more experience with the different age groups. I know what specific age group I want to work with.”

Because people involve themselves in the workplace to determine their employability fit and given the significance of a fit between worker and their work to employability, the ability of employability in itself to encourage engagement with the workplace is highlighted. Because employability fit encompasses several influential factors, it is possible that during an individual’s workplace encounters, at some point, sufficient factors influential on employability fit are positively present that a fit is achieved. Importantly, this study finds fit is fundamental to employability therefore, according to this research, employability is also achieved. The possibility that employability can be achieved during workplace interactions affects its temporal nature. Employability is commonly associated with potential (Yorke and Knight, 2006; Tomlinson, 2017) and as such the future. However, this study finds that employability also exists in the present.

4.3.4 Being in-employability

Being in-employability is a novel term used by this study and it reflects a state of being. The term is used to describe a person being involved in the workplace and sufficient factors influential on fit are positively present for them that they perceive employability fit as being achieved. This research accepts that

employability is multifactorial. A statement used within this study to define employability succinctly is: Employability is a multifactorial, complex, dynamic and principally relational concept. Despite employability having many elements and being subject to change, fundamentally it is a relational concept according to this research. Because employability is relational incorporating interactions between the individual and the labour market, employability fit is crucial to employability. Given that employability fit underpins employability, when a person is immersed in the workplace and they evaluate fit as being present for them, they are in-employability according to this research.

Importantly, this study argues, it is an individual's self-evaluation that determines them being in-employability. The presence of self-evaluation and its significance to employability is supported via data analysis featured in section 1 of this chapter. Discussion of employability fit in analysis section 1 revealed employability fit incorporates balance. Individuals perform balance when evaluating their employability fit. Balance includes prioritising and weighing up different factors influential on employability fit. The existence of balance and attempts by individuals at reaching an equilibrium demonstrates employability fit is achieved via self-evaluations and when a person is satisfied.

Because workplace interactions take place, it is possible that individual satisfaction can be achieved during such interactive episodes. As previously stressed, because this research finds employability fit is core to employability, employability can therefore occur in the present. As a result, a person can be in-employability. Having established that the element of employability concerning fit affects its temporal nature, it is important to stress that employability is multifactorial. As a result, other employability characteristics impact on employability's temporality.

Despite the novelty of an appreciation that a person can evaluate themselves as being in-employability when they are satisfied their current work is a match for them, the association between employability and individual satisfaction is not new. Other authors have talked about employability fit in terms of individual fulfilment (Yorke and Knight, 2006). However, ideas focussing on fulfilment generally concentrate on the person's ability and potential to acquire a satisfying job (Trought, 2012). This emphasis on potential usually links with the advocacy of personal/professional development and individual accumulation of

various employability related resources (Hillage and Pollard, 1998; Tomlinson, 2017; Yorke and Knight, 2006). Potential and strategies aimed at individual development connect employability with a future state of being.

Accepting that employability is a multifactorial concept with capacity to exist in both the present and the future stimulates an understanding that people engage in the workplace for a variety of reasons. As already stated, an individual may want to determine fit. Determination of fit may involve testing out a form of work to see if it holds the possibility of match or is a match. Employability links with ability and potential, therefore, it is logical that people will want to extend both their abilities and potential. Accepting that this study finds experience is so important to employability, people are likely to engage with the workplace for the gathering of experience. The quote below illustrates this point. The case study 3 student advocates longer work placements as a strategy for increasing an individual's accumulation of experience, the student's rationale being that greater experience will advance a person's employability related potential:

"I think the degree should benefit from a longer placement or a placement each year. I think just having range of experience or time in placement might be better for candidates to show employers that they have had lots of different experiences."

Practicalities also connect to workplace interactions. Despite the existence of a present or future domain to employability, practicalities still possess a relevance to work experience. Having demonstrated that employability can encompass actual fit and as a result being in-employability or potential for some match, this research appreciates that balance occurs regardless of employability's temporal state. Because practicalities are significantly associated with balance and often possess demand focussed/ labour market characteristics, they have a relevance. For example, money earned through paid employment can finance a student life style and as such develop their potential. Money may also be such a priority for an individual that despite the absence of other fit factors within their current work, they are satisfied and as a result, they are in-employability.

Despite a temporal variation and a difference in factors precipitating an individual's presence in the workplace, the significance of fit to employability and the presence of factors found by this study to affect fit remain. Knowledge, skills, practicalities, the social, change and happiness all influence employability

fit and all have potential for balance. As a result, it is possible that a person may commence a workplace encounter simply to advance their employability potential but find they are in-employability. Conversely, a person may commence their dream job and find the lived reality is a mismatch resulting in dissatisfaction and the absence of employability. The existence of balance also illuminates a connection between employability and choice. Ultimately, the individual decides if they are in-employability. There is a caveat to this claim.

Analysis section 1 of this chapter contains a section focussed on the integral nature of practicalities to employability. Here, there was recognition that practicalities are often demand focussed and pivotal in their employability impact. As a result, sometimes practicalities are beyond balance. The potential impossibility of balancing a practicality creates a barrier to individual satisfaction and therefore being in-employability. For example, a person can be very dissatisfied with their work but remain in employment for financial reasons. Due to the absence of satisfaction and a failure of balance – this is not being in-employability as defined by this study, this is having a job. See quote below:

“I’ve just done jobs that have got me by really, but then I had to fund my own living and stuff” (case study 1 student).

4.3.5 Choices are made but there are limits

Having established that people make evaluations of their work experiences in relation to their employability and having acknowledged that this involves decision making plus the presence of barriers, this study finds that employability related choices are made but there are limits. Reflections on employability’s temporal nature included an appreciation that employability pertains to both present and future. As demonstrated in accounts regarding workplace experience and balance – individuals make some determination of their employability fit and thus employability. Because employability can pertain to the future, it makes sense that people have plans. The table below features responses to two questions articulated in the semi-structured interview;

Question 1 - What are your employment plans for next year?

Question 2 - Do you have any long-term plans and if so, can you tell me about them? Students in all three case studies representing different stages of their degrees had plans:

Table 7 - Illustrating students' short and long-term plans articulated in their first semi-structured interview

<p>2 Case study 1 participants</p>	<p>Q1, <i>"The plan now is to keep waitressing at ... because they are quite flexible with the hours."</i></p> <p>Q2, <i>"So, when I've finished this course I am doing now. I want to go on to a PGCE for a year and obviously after that be an NQT and then up from there really."</i></p> <p>Q1, <i>"I think I'll carry on doing some bank work. I do go a bit with the flow with jobs if something comes up and it's something, then I think oh yes, I'll go with it. A lot of volunteering stuff coming up as well to narrow down where I want to go after this properly."</i></p> <p>Q2, <i>"I always have long-term plans. Complete the course then go into some kind of work with like supporting families. And then I'd like after quite a bit of experience in that, then I'd like to go back to uni. as a postgrad and do social work, and do social work assistant and work my way into social work and then gradually go up from there."</i></p>
<p>2 Case study 2 participants</p>	<p>Q1, <i>"I am not sure, I'll do my third year at university while working part time. I'll probably just take opportunities that are given to me like that enrich not only my experience but give me experience that will enhance employability in years to come. I will access courses, looking at travel looking at jobs, looking at different options I have after."</i></p> <p>Q2, <i>"I am most interested in criminology and youth crime so I think that I will need a masters and quite a bit of experience working."</i></p> <p>Q1, <i>"At the moment I am just trying to get through this year, after third year I do want to stay on a do a PGCE course."</i></p> <p>Q2, <i>"I think I genuinely want to do early years so reception or up until year 2 or 3. A part of me is sort of greedy as well. It's not going to be a lot of money so I do want to go higher and higher up so it depends."</i></p>
<p>2 Case study 3 participants</p>	<p>Q1, <i>"The PGCE"</i></p> <p>Q2, <i>"I want to be a teacher."</i></p> <p>Q1, <i>"I have already joined up with two agencies and job search websites just to get myself familiar with what's out there and what kind of things I'd be interested in looking for in the future. I can't really afford to have any gaps between finishing university and starting employment so I feel like I really need to use my time now to be ready."</i></p> <p>Q2, <i>"I thought I might really like to go do a masters and if I had a choice that's what I would be doing now. Unfortunately, I just can't afford to do it so I have to go to work instead. Eventually the big goal would be a kind of manager (pastoral care). I would like to work in an educational institution."</i></p>

Plans and choices were dynamic, this is predictable considering the earlier finding that change is integral to employability. Both the labour market and the individual are subject to change. Illustrated in the table below, are answers to the same questions from the same participants. The answers are subject to a

time lapse, these answers are in response to the earlier questions being repeated towards the end of the year. Differences included both refinement and adjustments to previously articulated plans:

Table 8 - Illustrating students' short and long- term plans articulated in their second semi- structured interview

2 Case study 1 participants	<p>Q1, <i>"Next year, I'm not sure at the moment I think I'm going to stick at what I am doing at the minute while I know it's working and its flexible and then I can focus on sort of like my studies a lot more. Well, I've been thinking about placement for next year as well even though I've not done this one yet. one of my friends is going to Camp America for her placement- now I've seen that she's organised it I've got a bit more confidence to try it next year."</i></p> <p>Q2, <i>"For now, it is going to be a teacher."</i></p> <p>Q1, <i>"So, I looked at the best options and I found the step up to social work and then the Front Line one which is based in Manchester and London."</i></p> <p>Q2, <i>"I want to go and be a social worker for numerous years and then be a manager of a social work team."</i></p>
2 Case study 2 participants	<p>Q1, <i>"Probably work part time at both nurseries and maybe do a bit of bank staff for the school I was at placement with because you know they had that vacancy so I might apply for that. So, over the summer I want to nanny abroad in the Mediterranean and I think after that graduate."</i></p> <p>Q2, <i>"Now considering a career in special educational needs. When asked what influenced her long-term plans the student said... the placement."</i></p> <p>Q1, <i>"I do want to definitely go straight into applying for my PGCE. I have already spoken to the school I did my placement with so one day a week I am going to be doing my voluntary work there."</i></p> <p>Q2, <i>"To become a teacher hopefully."</i></p>
2 Case study 3 participants	<p>Q1, <i>"I am hoping to go do my PGCE from September and then go into primary teaching after I have completed that."</i></p> <p>Q2, <i>"Well obviously I do want to be a primary school teacher but iam open to the idea of maybe looking into teaching at colleges and universities if I can."</i></p> <p>Q1, <i>"I would still like to do the same kind of role. I've been actively looking for work, they are asking for experience."</i></p> <p>Q2, <i>"I would really like to start some kind of support in education welfare, pastoral kind of role. That's where I would like to begin. Long term some kind of management in that area would suit me quite well."</i></p>

Student plans provide further support to this study's finding regarding the contribution of several factors to employability fit. Knowledge is demonstrated again as being influential via the desirability of postgraduate study. Experience is highlighted once more as being an important employability resource and as a

means of testing out and further determining employability fit. The pivotal role of practicalities is reiterated via the influence of money on choice making.

4.3.6 Limitations in choice

This study appreciates that employability can be empowering. As demonstrated in this data analysis, people are active in their employability: choices are made, plans are constructed. An association between employability and positive action is illustrated in employability literature. As already recognised, social policy supports degree embarkation (Dearing, 1997; Dept. of Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016). Evidence of other empowerment inducements exist. Employability models focussing on the prospective nature of employability advocate advancement of various capabilities perceived as relevant to increasing a person's employability potential (Dacre-Pool and Sewell, 2007; Yorke and Knight, 2006; Tomlinson, 2017).

Despite this study's recognition of the empowering nature of employability, reservations have already been expressed. Practicalities have already been identified by this research as both facilitatory and a barrier. Additional reflection on individual's choices in light of this study's theoretical framework augments the existence of barriers. Firstly, Dewey's theories of learning reveal restrictions (Cambell, 1996). As stated, people learn through their environmental interactions, this encompasses students' life experience including university interactions and environmental encounters beyond the university. Additionally, Dewey claimed learning is constructed (Hildebrand, 2008), previous understandings affect future learning. The fundamental contribution of experience to learning highlights barriers to choice. Barriers to choice are illuminated because no one person can experience everything, even vicariously. Given that experiential learning is considered important to employability by this research, the identification of limits to experiential learning is significant. The identification of limitations to experiential learning combined with this study's emphasis on self – evaluations of employability fit means people may evaluate that they are in-employability because they are not aware of other employability options. The existence of unknown alternative choices suggests it is possible a different employability option, for example, an alternative form of employment may be better fit for a person but they are simply unaware of it. Contemplation

of this possibility indicates people may settle for less because they do not know about more.

Dewey's social constructivist view of learning (Hildebrand, 2008) provides a reminder that all experiential encounters are affected by what has gone before. Consequently, not one activity possessing potential for empowerment is guaranteed to stimulate positive action in a person.

Bourdieu's societal perspective is also relevant to this study's insights on choice making. As previously stated, Bourdieu viewed society as structured (2006). Power is distributed via capital and access to capital is not equal (Bourdieu and Passaron, 1977; Moore, 2012). Effects of unequal capital distribution have already been recognised in this research. Money is economic capital and it has been cited several times as influential on employability, for example, money was previously identified as being impactful on the challenge of work searches. The following quotes demonstrate how money restricts students' employability choices. The first example reflects a case study 3 student's decision-making regarding post graduate study. She states:

"My husband is supportive and said go and do it but actually looking at our financial circumstances having taken four years to do a degree and having an extra child. I just unfortunately I just can't afford to do it so I have to go to work instead"

The next quote concerns a case study 3 student's deliberations concerning the option of commencing a second job. The second job was perceived as offering experience seen as relevant to the progression of her employability goals. The first job provided a secure contract of hours and a necessary income. The student's comments reflect her dilemma regarding money and how the predicament of money influences her choice

"It was not just because it was not guaranteed hours if I stayed on at ... it would be the fact that they would tax me twice as much because it was two different jobs."

Having demonstrated that students cited money as being influential on their choice making and having identified the unequal distribution of economic capital as being a societal feature (Bourdieu and Passaron, 1977), it is pertinent to add that Bourdieu maintained societal characteristics such as the unequal distribution of capital are not always obvious (Jenkins, 2002).

A lack of transparency regarding unequal capital distribution is relevant to this study. As communicated in analysis section 1, students balance paid employment during their degrees, this activity possesses positive ramifications, it funds a student lifestyle and the student may develop some transferable employability skills (Fallows and Steven, 2000). However, work is also tiring. It is possible, that a tired student whose grades are affected may believe disappointing results are their sole responsibility. Conversely, Bourdieu's societal insights suggest such experiences result more from society's nature and its impact than the student themselves.

Consideration of employability choice making in light of this study's theoretical framework confirms limitations in choice exist and at times they are hidden. An appreciation that some limitations in student choices are not wholly transparent has implications for higher education. Students should be exposed to a wide range of work experience to encourage breadth in their experiential learning. Financial support during degree progression should also be carefully considered.

4.3.7 Determining fit without work experience – Additional experiential contributions

Despite a recognition that experiential learning has its limitations, this study maintains experiences are significant to a person's determination of their employability fit and consequently their employability. In addition to workplace experiences, other forms of experience make an important contribution. Analysis section 3 within this chapter focuses on social factors and employability. Analysis section 3 articulates how employment opportunities possessing potential for employability fit are discovered via social encounters. Higher education events also illuminate for students work opportunities that possess the potential for employability fit. Obvious awareness enhancing chances for students include the option to interact with careers departments and attend jobs fairs. However, this study also recognises that options for employability fit are discovered during students' academic progression.

4.3.8 Academic progression as an indication of strength

Data from this study also illustrated that formal assignment feedback precipitated an increased understanding for students of their strengths. This

enhanced understanding of individual strengths affected students' identification of employment providing the potential for employability fit. As a result, academic progress is found by this study to assist in the achievement of employability fit. The following comments reflect students' connections between academic achievement, strength revelation and employability fit.

The first quote concerns a student's academic outcome in a particular module. Her perceived success highlighted for the student a strength in care. The second quote features a case study 2 student's description of how her friend's tentative ambitions for social work were reinforced via the receipt of module results.

"I would say because I did the best grades for the Violence in the Family. I suppose I am into more of the caring." The case study 2 student adds:

"Yes, I have found that is one of my strengths. I must have shown some empathy. I don't mind doing that piece of work either."

"She scored really highly on safeguarding last year. And that's always something she had in the back of her mind, that she could be a social worker but for a long time she sort of thought it's too unreachable. After she like got that grade back last year she thought that's something she could want to do so she chose her placement to be at a children's centre for a family support worker" (case study 2 student).

Dewey recognised that education is an important mechanism for individual strength revelation (2004). During analysis section 1, a connection was made between Dewey's ideas regarding strength revelation and employability. The employability connection was evident within the discussion focussed on happiness and employability fit. As articulated in this earlier discussion, Dewey believed the ability of education to reveal strengths in people was positive (Dewey, 2004). Strength revelation was perceived as good because Dewey felt this encouraged people to be occupied in activities incorporating their strengths. Individual's being predominantly occupied by activities involving their strengths was viewed positively by Dewey because he felt this promoted individual fulfilment. An association between fulfilment and happiness was made in analysis section 1. An employability link is recognisable in Dewey's account of strength revelation and occupation because, as articulated earlier, Dewey

considered one relevant form of occupation to be paid employment. Consequently, Dewey's views support this study's finding that academic progression revealing strengths in people can contribute to the achievement of employability fit and therefore employability.

Having articulated that Dewey's views of education as a means of strength revelation reinforce this study's findings that academic progress can assist in the determination of employability fit, it is important to stress that degrees featured in this study were vocational. Strength revelations and employability connections were probably transparent due to the vocational nature of these programmes. Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that traditional higher education occurrences such as the receipt of a module mark can have an employability impact.

Also, it is important once more to stress that Dewey's use of the term occupation links to citizenship and citizenship encompasses more than a person's paid employment. Other forms of social participation such as political activism are forms of citizenship according to Dewey (2004). An acceptance that occupation incorporates more than employability has ramifications for higher education. The ability of higher education to reveal strengths pertinent to a person's occupation and therefore activities beyond someone's potential employment indicates the strength revelation capacity of higher education is both positive and wide reaching. Once more, Dewey's insights regarding strength revelation and educational outcomes suggest all is not lost and a university education is not wasted if a graduate does not achieve employability fit and thus employability. This finding is important because, this research indicates people can possess a job and not be in-employability by this study's definition.

Reflection on this study's findings regarding strength revelation and academic progress in parallel with Dewey's theoretical insights indicates graduates who are not in-employability are not necessarily unfulfilled. Dewey's theoretical insights show they may be achieving self-fulfillment via other forms of occupation. Indeed, it is also possible that such occupations are connected to individual strengths and these strengths were revealed during engagement in higher education.

4.3.9 Past experience influences employability

This study finds past experiences contribute to an individual's identification of work which may be an employability fit, thus past experiences also assist in the determination of employability according to this research. This study's data analysis revealed several examples of how historical childhood experiences helped students ascertain work possessing the potential for employability fit. The following quotes are in response to the semi-structured interview question which asked students about influences on their employability plans.

The first data extracts concern a case study 3 student who identifies working in educational support as her employability goal. She then links this goal to her own past, describing how her own lack of support during childhood impacted negatively on her education.

“Just looking at disadvantaged children and how difficult life can be for them and also how I view the education system as being slightly unfair and unequal and having those experiences myself when I was younger. I feel that would be really vocational for me...I feel like if I can work in educational support, I could do something to help these children.”

“I am from a really poor working-class background. Nobody in my family has really benefitted from education and so I think that I probably had that attitude when I was growing up so I never had that support. I was never on time for school. I didn't have help with homework. It just wasn't seen as important I don't think” (case study 3 student).

The next quotes reflect the comments of two case study 2 students. Both students express the retention of an early interest in first caring for children and then teaching children.

“Even when I was at school, I used to baby sit. I was like the neighbourhood baby sitter so I'd baby sit at weekends. I have younger siblings, I have younger cousins that I used to play with and look after when I was younger so it always felt it was very natural for me to be with children, to look after children” (case study 2 student).

“I was teaching martial arts. I was the teacher. I was comfortable because I was highly trained. I was not a very confident person and my instructor was like... why not have a go” (case study 2 student).

The quotes above demonstrate a variety of past experience illuminates potential employability matches for people. The ability of historical experience to

stimulate an employability related interest reiterates the contribution of emotions to employability. This study's emphasis on employability fit alongside the identification of historical events as a means of assisting the determination of employability fit, suggests elements of employability fit and therefore elements of employability can exist in the past.

The presence of factors influential on employability fit within a person's past is pertinent to higher education. As acknowledged in this study's literature review, many teaching strategies are embraced by higher education in order to facilitate students' employability. Curricula focussed examples include modules concentrating on employability encompassing approaches such as skills enhancement and the development of students' abilities to perform work searches (York and Knight, 2006; Hillage and Pollard, 1998). However, this study's finding concerning the contribution of past experiences to employability reinforces earlier insights expressed in this research pertaining to Dewey's theories of learning (1938; Campbell, 1996). Dewey maintained learning was socially constructed and scaffolded. Consequently, the past is significant to any future learning (Dewey, 1938). This study's finding regarding past experience highlights the past affects employability. As a result, this study accepts student responses to higher education teaching strategies thought to facilitate employability will be influenced by what has gone before. Consequently, this study argues, student responses to any higher education teaching strategy aimed at promoting employability are likely to be variable and to an extent unpredictable.

In summary, this analysis section 2 focuses on the contribution of experience to employability. The significance of experiential learning to employability is confirmed in this part of the overall analysis chapter. The importance of experience to students is stressed via insights into how the contribution of relevant experience to employability was increasingly appreciated by students over time. The value of experience to employability was reinforced by the identification of experience as a means of attracting people into the workplace. The significance of experiential learning, the value attributed to experience and the associated likelihood of a desire for work experience stimulates interaction with the workplace. As a result, this study recognises that individual involvement in the workplace at some point is a feature of employability.

An understanding that employability involves participation in the workplace precipitates this study's appreciation that employability's temporality can vary. The crucial contribution of employability fit to employability, the probability that individuals are likely to be in the workplace at some stage, the existence of factors influential on employability fit and the presence of individual self-evaluations regarding employability fit mean employability can exist in the present. In contrast to other literature, this study maintains that a person can be in-employability. The term being in-employability is novel to this study, it refers to a situation when an individual is immersed in the workplace and their form of work has sufficient factors influential on employability fit positively present that they are satisfied. This study also accepts employability can pertain to the future. Links between employability and the future are well-recognised. The association between employability and the future concerns a person's potential. Additionally, this study recognises elements of employability occur in the past. Elements of employability occur in the past because historical experiences help individuals determine their employability. Variation in employability's temporality is impactful. One consequence identified by this research is that people engage in the labour market for different reasons. Another effect is that student responses to employability related teaching and learning strategies are likely to be influenced by the past.

Social encounters and academic progress also assist in the determination of employability fit and therefore employability according to this research. This section's emphasis on experience illuminated the significance of individual choice making to employability. Self-evaluations of employability fit take place. Plans pertaining to employability are constructed. Nevertheless, despite recognition that individuals make choices about their employability, this study accepts there are limitations. As appreciated throughout this research, employability does include the labour market. As a result, demand focussed features of employability i.e., characteristics of the labour market will impact on individual choice making.

4.4 Analysis section 3 Employability is social

Insights regarding the significance of social factors to employability were introduced in analysis section1. Analysis section 1 established a connection

between employability and learning. The association between employability and learning included an acknowledgement that learning is social (Dewey, 1938; 2004). During discussion of the contribution personal characteristics make to employability fit, an initial suggestion was made that people are capable of overall adaptations according to social stimuli within the workplace. Analysis section 1 also explored the challenge of employability and the complexity of employability was articulated, difficulties associated with employability included social interactions within the workplace. Factors deemed integral to employability were identified within analysis section 1 and employability was described as social. Connected to the recognition of employability's social nature was an acknowledgement that employers valued people fitting in socially within the workplace. This analysis section 3 explores in more detail employability's social nature. Firstly, additional reflections on the value of social fit for both students and mentors will be articulated, a connection between fitting in socially and social learning will be made and the impact of social learning on employability will be articulated. Additional social factors and their relationship with employability will also be discussed.

4.4.1 Fitting in socially

This study's data analysis includes examination of work placement mentor feedback forms. The work placement mentor feedback forms provide an additional perspective on students' experience and are an indication of employer opinion. Examination of work placement mentor feedback forms relevant to this study illustrate a value in people fitting in well within the practical setting. The value of fitting in socially was demonstrated by both case study 1 mentors rating team working skills as one of their top 5 most valued graduate skills. In addition to a value being placed on team working skills, students' written placement feedback forms showed mentors exhibited behaviour associated with the facilitation of a social fit for students. Relevant examples included conceptual explanations, inductions and introductions. See the following table:

Table 9 - Student reflections illustrating mentor activity which facilitated social fit

<p>Extract from a case study 1 student's placement reflections (week 1)</p> <p><i>"My first day consisted of an induction which included health and safety procedures and confidentiality contracts. My supervisor explained to me what the particular team was and how it was quite new to Leeds. I then met the team which I was quite nervous about."</i></p>
<p>Further extract from a second case study 1 student's placement reflections (week 1)</p> <p><i>"The first couple of days were spent settling into the school. On the third day I was given a more in- depth tour of the school, so I could see what had changed since I was there."</i></p>
<p>Extract from case study 2 student placement reflections (week 1)</p> <p><i>"I was introduced to the class of post 16 students, who were very welcoming. The staff were very friendly."</i></p>

The value mentors placed on people fitting in and associated behaviour is impactful on students. The following quote demonstrates an emotional response from the student, the feeling of social fit is associated with the student's affection for her work.

"Cos I felt at home straight away there, like really felt like really accepted. I feel like I've made quite good like relationships with the children and the staff and I feel like the six weeks has just gone so fast and obviously that shows it's something you like when it's not dragging" (case study 2 student).

The emotional ramifications of feeling a social fit possess employability significance according to this study. This research associates happiness with employability fit and other relevant literature accepts emotions are impactful on employability (Dacre-Pool and Sewell, 2007; Goleman, 1996).

4.4.2 Social learning

Having acknowledged that social fit has an emotional impact on students and this has relevance to employability, this study also finds that a feeling of social fit affects students' learning. Discussions within analysis section 1 pertaining to knowledge and employability fit and personal characteristics and employability fit incorporated reflections regarding the social nature of learning. Relevant

theoretical insights identify both experience and social factors as being impactful on learning (Dewey, 1933, Dewey, 1938, Dewey, 2004). This study's earlier focus on the contribution of knowledge to employability fit mentioned that this research finds a connection between knowledge, participation and self-perceptions of social fit in practical settings. This connection is explored further within this analysis section 3 which has a particular focus on employability's social nature.

Having illustrated that mentor behaviour can help students feel a sense of social fit within a practical setting, this study also finds knowledge can aid participation which also enhances feelings of social fit. The following excerpt from a student's written work placement reflections shows how knowledge facilitated participation within the setting. Being able to actively participate within the setting also enhanced feelings of fitting in socially. Once again an emotional impact is evident, as the student extends her social fit, she feels confident and comfortable.

Table 10 - Student reflections demonstrating a connection between knowledge, participation and self-perceptions of social fit

<p>Extract from case study 1 student placement reflections (week 1 and week 6)</p> <p><i>“Going into this class I was confident as I knew the teacher from when I attended this school and from previous emails when organising the placement.”</i></p> <p><i>“By this point I knew the children in year one and two quite well and felt 100% comfortable to take a small group and work with them by myself.”</i></p>

Insights from the data concerning the ability of knowledge to encourage participation which in turn enhances a feeling of belonging and social fit is significant to this research. The connection is important because in his recognition of learning's experiential and social nature Dewey (1933, 1938, 2004) maintained active participation during any environmental encounter enhances learning. Given that learning requires social interaction and active participation is particularly beneficial for the advancement of learning, active participation during workplace experiences is important to employability. The significance of active participation is evident because employability necessitates learning.

The following data extract illustrates a student's increased participation within the setting. The data also demonstrates an increased perception of social fit associated with the participation. Importantly, learning is also evident. Learning is identifiable because the student is able to provide a more in-depth contribution to the activity of problem solving.

Table 11 - Student reflection illustrating a connection between participation and social fit

Extract from case study 1 student placement reflections (week 6)
<i>"This week was my last week for group formulation (group supervision) which I have taken part in every week. In the first week of group formulation, I did not contribute much as I felt quite nervous but by this week, I am able to contribute to most cases brought forward and give new ideas which have actually been taken on board."</i>

Having made a connection between participation, social fit and learning, further evidence relating to the ability of active participation to enhance learning is present in students' accounts of delegated tasks within their written placement reflections. The reflections show how students were delegated tasks which encouraged active participation and involvement in such tasks advanced learning.

Table 12 - Student reflections illustrating receipt of delegated tasks

Case study 1 student reflection example
<i>"Whilst on a home visit to a Roma family I realised I did not know much about the Roma family culture which meant that I would really struggle to work with families of this background. However, I have been set a project to find out more about gypsy, Roma and traveller family cultures."</i>
Case study 2 student reflection example
<i>"Visited a pets' shop where children petted the animals and counted out money to purchase bird seed which was purchased to make bird feeders. Gained a greater understanding of how to undertake risk assessments for excursions."</i>

Not only do the quotes above illustrate how active participation advances learning, they reinforce the social nature of learning. Learning's social nature is highlighted because it was the mentors or other members of staff who created the tasks.

This study is underpinned by a theoretical framework which accepts learning is social. The theoretical framework is based on the work of a key educational theorist, Dewey (1933, 1938). Later theorists also emphasised the social nature of learning. Lave and Wenger's theories of social learning are of interest to this research because they were particularly focussed on adult learning (1991). Lave and Wenger's combined interest in social and adult learning influenced the development of their ideas regarding Communities of Practice. Communities of Practice occur when groups of people gather together in relation to a joint enterprise and this can include the workplace. Lave and Wenger's arguments pertaining to the development of new entrants within a Community of Practice or more specifically novices within the workplace, possess some similarity to Dewey's theories of learning. According to Lave and Wenger, novices learn primarily via social interaction and environmental participation (1991).

Despite some similarity, Lave and Wenger's Community of Practice theory does provide an additional theoretical insight which has relevance to this study. Lave and Wenger highlight that behavioural expectations of a Community of Practice are vital in facilitating participation and learning for novices. Importantly, Lave and Wenger add that behavioural expectations within Communities of Practice are contextual. They are also communicated both explicitly and tacitly (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Analysis of this study's data has illustrated social fit is valued by employer representatives as well as students. According to this study workplace mentors exhibit behaviour which facilitates the integration of students. Examples include inductions and the sharing of policy information. Importantly, explicit Community of Practice expectations are also evident in the data extracts featuring delegated tasks.

Having recognised that this study supports the capacity of explicitly communicated expectations to foster participation within the workplace, it is important to consider Lave and Wenger's assertions regarding the existence of tacit expectations within the working environment. Lave and Wenger's theories suggest that not all behavioural expectations are clearly communicated to novices. This is impactful because inappropriate responses to behavioural expectations can detrimentally affect learner participation (Lave and Wenger, 1991). This study connects participation and self-evaluations of social fit. As a

result, it is possible that a lack of participation will reduce the potential for social fit.

The presence of tacit expectations within the workplace and the ability of such expectations to have an employability related impact is illuminated further via Bourdieu's societal theories. As previously articulated in this study, Bourdieu recognised people gather together in groups and groups generally form within social spaces including the workplace (1984). Also, as stated previously in this research, people possess different amounts of capital and capital takes different forms. Different forms of capital include social, economic and cultural (Bourdieu, 1984). Significantly, Bourdieu maintained that one form of cultural capital is a person's ability to understand their group's expectations (1986), this is important given Bourdieu agreed with Lave and Wenger that group expectations are often expressed tacitly (1986). A crucial difference between the views of Lave and Wenger and those of Bourdieu regarding the interpretation of tacit group expectations is that Bourdieu believed group expectations are not entirely contextual. According to Bourdieu group expectations are structured because they link to social class.

The implications of a link between social class and group expectations are evident via consideration of Bourdieu's ideas regarding the formation of social class. Social class connects to both social space and capital possession. According to Bourdieu, people gathering together in the same social space are likely to possess similar capital. For example, people living in the same neighbourhood with similar house prices will possess similar economic capital and people occupying the same profession which necessitates a particular professional qualification will have similar cultural capital. The occupation of similar social spaces and the possession of similar capital causes group affiliation which results in social class (Bourdieu, 1984). Importantly, group affiliation encompasses participant interaction and the sharing of similar outlooks. During this process member expectations including tacit ones become more familiar and therefore more transparent (Crossley, 2012). Given that social class develops from group affiliation (Bourdieu, 1984), the ability to understand expectations within a class is part of its evolution. Significantly, because a social class can exist in a multitude of contexts, a person can move to a new group and if the new group still equates with that person's social class,

the tacit expectations of that group are familiar. The new group's expectations remain transparent because they are rooted in the relevant social class. The influence of social class on a person's ability to interpret tacit workplace expectations suggests the process is easier when a person is involved in a job role associated with their social class.

Work placements are commonly arranged by students and, as will be articulated later in this study, social contacts impact on placement choice. Placement experiences evolving from existing social contacts indicate that some social links are already present for the student prior to placement. The presence of established social links suggests that the job may be associated with the student's social class. As a result, it is likely that the subsequent navigation of tacit expectations within those particular workplaces is eased (Bourdieu, 1990). Given that the interpretation of tacit expectations is easier, participation is more likely and self-evaluations of social fit more probable. Theoretical insights from Lave and Wenger (1991) plus Bourdieu (1990) suggest difficulties arise when tacit expectations are unrecognisable. Bourdieu's theories indicate this is more likely to occur when a person opts for a workplace experience beyond their social contacts and external to their social class, in such cases cultural capital is limited.

A variation in the ability to interpret workplace expectations appropriately is impactful on employability. This research highlights that experience is very important for employability. This study's appreciation in the value of experience to employability includes an understanding that people acquire workplace experience in order to determine their employability. The presence of tacit behavioural expectations within the workplace and the connection of such expectations to wider societal structures suggests at times people will face struggles during their attempts at participation and social integration. These struggles impact negatively on employability, firstly because learning is negatively affected and given the contribution of learning to employability, employability is hindered. This study also highlights that people self-evaluate their employability. Consequently, it is possible that work previously considered a potential employability fit for an individual may be dismissed by that person due to difficulties regarding the understanding of behavioural expectations.

Indeed, analysis section 1 of this study highlighted that confusing social encounters are a significant employability challenge.

Bourdieu's views regarding the influence of social class on an individual's ability to interpret tacit workplace expectations also has relevance to employability's relationship with social mobility which is evident in social policy. Government documents link employability with widening participation in higher education and social mobility (Dearing, 1997; Browne, 2010) Employability is portrayed as fostering social mobility. Social mobility is encouraged via employability because graduates are identified as being highly skilled and therefore more able and likely to acquire highly paid jobs. The future possession of enhanced economic capital indicates future membership of a powerful social class for students (Crossley, 2012). Widening participation suggests graduates' possession of high incomes and associated membership of a powerful social class includes those students who were previously members of a less powerful one. However, the existence of a link between the interpretation of group expectations and class membership reveals a barrier to social mobility. Not only does ineffective interpretation of group expectations impact negatively on employability because individuals may spurn some employment opportunities, social mobility is inhibited because ineffective interpretations of workplace expectations are more likely to occur when someone desires work outside of their class.

The presence of tacit workplace expectations and the ability of such expectations to impact negatively on employability and social mobility highlights the value of work placements. Work placements provide valuable opportunities for students to practice the navigation of workplace expectations. Practice attempts are vital because they will make tacit workplace expectations more recognisable for students. Findings from this study indicate that familiarity of tacit expectations within a workplace is likely to reduce social confusion, discomfort, aid participation and facilitate feelings of social fit plus learning for students.

This study appreciates that an individual's social contacts contribute to work placement acquisition, nevertheless, links between effective interpretation of a group's expectations (cultural capital) and class suggest universities must be actively involved in students' work placements. University involvement in

placement acquisition should reduce students' reliance on their own social contacts and this may encourage students to obtain work placements beyond their social class. Strong support from the university while students are participating in the workplace should assist any students in difficulty and help prevent the dismissal of employability options by students. Given challenges are more likely to occur when students are working outside of their social class, effective support during work placement facilitates social mobility. It is also vital universities ensure they possess diversity in their own social contacts. A wide range of social contacts increases the chance that some will be beyond some students' social class. Having reinforced the significance of social learning to employability, this study illuminates additional social factors which possess employability significance.

4.4.3 Social history

An appreciation that employability requires learning has been frequently expressed in this thesis. This study is underpinned by Dewey's theories of learning. Consequently, Dewey's social constructivist principles (1938, 2004) influence this study's acceptance that the past affects subsequent learning and therefore employability. Analysis section 2 also stressed the significance of the past to employability via recognition of the contribution a person's past experience can make to the determination of employability. This study also finds historical figures within a person's life possess employability importance. In the context of this research, historical figures mean people that have been known to the student in their past. The following quotes feature two case study 2 students' reflections of their mother's career progression. The first student states:

“So, my mum was a single mum growing up and she was very, very hard working. She worked her way up to a really powerful job role, earning decent money and that showed me never to rely on anyone else, to always... You need to work hard if you want to succeed and only you can do that. Just pure work ethic, she's really showed me that.”

The second student also describes her mother's career progression and its influence:

"My mum, how she raised me...She pushed me. She's a manager and she influenced me"

A case study 3 student shared how her mum's influenced her plans to be a teacher. She said:

"I wanted to do it for a long time, experiences at school. My mum was a single mum, she worked hard, she showed me it could be done"

The extracts above confirm that history impacts on employability, the quotes also illustrate that the behaviour of close social contacts is influential.

The social nature of learning has already been acknowledged in this study. Data analysis within section 1 of this chapter explored the influence of personal characteristics on employability fit. The significance of personal characteristics to employability fit was explained by a suggestion that students were observing socially stimulated adaptations in people within the workplace. Earlier insights within this analysis section 3 discussed the presence of social learning within the workplace and its contribution to employability.

Despite an appreciation of human adaptability and the potential for learning resulting from everyday social encounters, Dewey identified other influences on people's behaviour. Regardless of the capacity for humans to learn and engage in careful thought during environmental interactions, Dewey believed many behavioural responses are the result of Acts, Habits and Dispositions (1922). An Act is an element of behaviour that has been utilised effectively in the past during a previous environmental encounter (Campbell, 1996). If a similar subsequent encounter occurs, the Act is repeated without much depth of thought by the individual (Fesmire, 2015). A collection of Acts forms a Habit. Habits are not examples of purely repetitive behaviour. Because Acts occur in relation to human experiences and each new experience is unique, Habits are the nature of collective acts. They are synonymous with a person's disposition i.e. their tendency to respond in a certain way to a particular stimulus.

Importantly, Habits evolve historically and they develop primarily from early close social relationships such as family members (Dewey,1922).

Bourdieu's ideas pertaining to behavioural responses possess some symmetry with those of Dewey. Bourdieu uses the term Habitus when referring to behaviour resulting from "a predisposition tendency, propensity, inclination" (Bourdieu,1977, p.214). Like Dewey, Bourdieu accepts a person's Habitus is affected by close social contacts such as family (Bourdieu,1990). However, Bourdieu does not believe that the Habitus develops in the organic way suggested by Dewey (Bourdieu and Wacquant,1992). Habitus is a "*structure, it is ordered not random, the structure comprises of a system of dispositions which generate perceptions, appreciations, practices*" (Maton, 2012, p.50).

Insights from both theorists concerning Habits, Dispositions and Habitus have employability relevance. Dewey's ideas help reinforce the employability significance of close social contacts reflected in this study's data. This study's data reveals early familial influences can be a source of positivity and resilience towards employability despite its challenge. Dewey's theories of Habit demonstrate that the impact of close social contacts is powerful because it can result in an ingrained tendency/ disposition towards employability which can be very motivational. Bourdieu's theories suggest social factors such as societal inequalities impact on Habitus. Therefore, if someone experiences adversity, their Habitus and those of their family members may be negatively affected. Consequently, some students may possess employability related reservations. Data extracts from this study did contain negative recollections of family members' employability.

The following quotes illustrate 2 case study 1 students' comments on historical figures:

"I want to make sure I get a real career and growing up I wasn't that close to my dad growing up but with my mum, my mum was always unemployed quite a lot and it used to be when you went to school and people asked what does your mum do? I used to go really quiet."

"I've seen like my older brother for example, I've seen what can go wrong in terms of his life choices, so seeing that has been a motivational factor, so not being anything disrespectful to my brother because he has turned it around now, but seeing what he went through and seeing what I can do differently is something of a push factor for me really"

Despite the presence of poor employability experiences among family members possessing potential to create negative Dispositions towards employability for the participants, the quotes above illustrate the existence of positive employability attitudes. Indeed, the students appear more determined to establish their employability as a result of family member experiences. The presence of positive rather than negative employability views can be explained by the presence of reflection. The data extracts illustrate how early familial experiences have stimulated careful thought and a desire for change in the participants. Importantly, Dewey connects Habits and Dispositions with the absence of analysis and an inability of humans to think everything through in depth all the time (Fesmire, 2015). Careful thought can challenge Dispositions and Dewey himself was an advocate of reflection (Campbell, 1996). The importance of skilled reflection to employability as advocated by Dacre-Pool and Sewell (2007) is confirmed by this study's finding which illuminates the employability related influence of historical figures. The significance of social history and historical figures highlights once more the presence and significance of student diversity. Responses by students to university strategies thought to facilitate employability will differ. As a result, university approaches offering a breadth of activities thought to encourage employability is supported by this study.

The significance of past positive historical figures to employability also indicates there is potential to influence future employability Dispositions via current social contacts. Cantwell (1999) recognises the impact of past relationships on the Habitus but claims adjustments can occur following the involvement of subsequent social contacts. Allan (2018) appreciated students within schools possessed mindsets but schools could influence change. Duckworth and Ade-Ojo (2016) recognised work itself can alter a person's habitus. The ability of an educational institution and work to impact on an individual's Habitus is relevant to universities. Universities are educational institutions; they also support and facilitate student interactions with the workplace. The ability of the workplace to affect a person's Habitus reinforces the significance of university activity which encourages work experiences for students. Given that universities employ teachers and teaching staff interact with students, it is likely that academic staff

engaged in the teaching of students become important social contacts. An understanding that academic staff are important social contacts for students encourages an appreciation that staff can influence students' Habitus. Indeed, Robinson, Lloyd and Rowe (2008) state inspirational teachers provide a positive employability contribution.

Having recognised that ongoing social contacts affect the Habitus, it is important to recognise that a person's current social contacts could negatively affect their Habitus, for example, encourage a negative Disposition towards employability. An acceptance that current social contacts may stimulate a negative Disposition towards employability has implications for higher-education practice. For example, the need to support students well during their work placements is reinforced. The advantages of staff being in-employability themselves is also highlighted, for example, being an inspirational teacher impacting positively on employability is challenging if that staff member is experiencing dissatisfaction with their own employability.

4.4.4 Social connections

Within this analysis section 3 which stresses the contribution of social factors to employability, the importance of social fit to employability has been discussed in detail, the contribution of social learning to employability has been reinforced. The significance of historical social figures has also been discussed. Data analysis for this study also reveals established social connections have an employability related value for students. As previously stated, students commonly arrange their own work placements, this activity along with similar attempts at gaining work experience support the finding of this research that students' social connections are impactful.

The following data extracts focus on a case study 1 and a case study 2 students' plans for work experience. In the first example, the case study 1 student attempts work placement acquisition beyond her own established social connections. However, this is unsuccessful. She then resorts to approaching an institution where she has some existing social contacts. The value of existing social connections is revealed in that she is successful in acquiring her work placement.

“I was deciding on the schools I wanted to go to. They are all in the town that I lived in. I did not want to go to my primary school because I thought it’s a bit safe. I wanted to try and challenge myself and go somewhere I did not know but then the ones I tried to go to were the ones that already had commitments from people at other places. I emailed my primary school and I said I am a previous student and I need a placement. I need a placement and I’d like to come in and do it here. I thought I’d see how it has changed since I was there and things like that so that’s where I’ve got mine.”

The next quote concerns return visits to a workplace where the case study 2 student has previously completed a work placement. The quote illustrates that in order to successfully agree her return visits, the student has spoken to a social contact acquired during her previous work placement at the school. The student’s comments also demonstrate a perceived value in the experience she will gain from her return visits. Her insights confirm the importance of experience to employability which is highlighted by this study. In this example the student views experience as an important resource which will help her achieve her employability goal of acquiring work which is a fit for her. The quote also indicates that the student believes being known to the setting and having an existing social connection will help her actually gain future employment in that particular workplace.

“I do definitely want to go straight into applying for my PGCE. I have already spoken to the school that I did my placement with so, one day a week I am going to do some voluntary work there as well.”

“Because they are employing as well but I am hoping to see if I can get a job there or not. The staff there are wonderful.”

A further quote by a case study 3 student supports the view that social contacts could lead the acquisition of work which is an employability match:

“I started going on to a bit of thinking into pastoral care jobs. So, I thought that if I could get my foot in the door in a school and get talking to people then I could actually move into that eventually.”

Links between social connections and employability have been articulated in employability literature. Forrier and Sels (2003) appreciate the significance of

social contacts to employability. Employability models advocating individual development of relevant resources acknowledge social contacts possess value. For example, Tomlinson's capital-based model of employability associates social capital with social contacts. Tomlinson champions the establishment of social contacts as a means of enhancing a person's capacity to obtain work (2017). In spite of an emphasis within this study on the relational nature of employability, there is an acceptance that employability is a multifactorial concept which includes a resource-based dimension. Social contacts were seen by participants in this study as an employability resource. The following quote demonstrates this perception. Social contacts were seen by the student as a means of demonstrating her employability credentials:

"Having the supportive network of professionals who know you, that you're reliable, honest hardworking they are the kind of things: those relationships, references" (Case study 3 student).

An understanding supported by this study that social connections have employability significance is paralleled with an appreciation that social connections possess limitations. Nobody knows everyone and in acceptance of Bourdieu's structured view of society (Jenkins, 2002), social connections/social capital are likely to be limited by class. As indicated earlier in this thesis during discussion of cultural capital, challenges occur when a person desires employment beyond their social class. The advantage of university involvement in students' workplace encounters is reiterated. Universities with a range of social connections may broaden opportunities for students.

4.4.5 Employability extends via social interactions

In analysis section 1 of this chapter, the significance of fit between worker and their work was articulated and factors influential on employability fit were explored. Analysis section 2 articulated how people determine their employability fit. Factors relevant to the determination of employability fit include work experience, academic progress and past experience. Having illustrated that experience influences the determination of employability fit, it is possible that an individual can be immersed in the workplace and evaluate that sufficient factors influential on employability fit are positively present that they are satisfied. The fundamental contribution of employability fit to employability means when a person evaluates sufficient factors influential on employability fit

are positively present that they are satisfied, they are in-employability according to this research.

Having reiterated the important contribution experience makes to the determination of employability, this study also finds forms of employment possessing the potential for an individual's employability fit are illuminated socially. Work options offering the potential for employability fit are revealed socially via social interactions. Given the significance of employability fit to employability and the capacity of social interactions to expand possibilities regarding employability fit, this study finds employability extends via social interactions. Students meet, observe and interact during the progression of their studies. During these activities, new employment options with potential for employability fit are identified. See quotes below;

"We were all talking about our placement and what we'd arranged and there were people like, that have got placements in somewhere I'd never even considered. Like for example one of my friends is going to a museum to help out with like schools that come on day visits and things like that so I thought that would be quite interesting so it's just more ideas that I could look into next year" (case study 1 student).

A case study 3 student described how her interaction with teaching staff had influenced a long-term goal of teaching in colleges or universities. She said:

"I am open to the idea of maybe looking into teaching at colleges and universities if I can"

When asked what influenced these plans she stated:

"I think because it is coming to the end of university. I am looking back at things that have happened. It was meeting different tutors in university that had regular jobs like you with your nursing and there was S, she did social work and it was just knowing that you can if you want to, progress to another level."

Having identified social interactions as a means of extending employability, there is a caveat, if social contacts are limited, this is less likely to happen, thus employability can be socially limited. The advantage of diverse student populations connects to this finding alongside a repeated advocacy for breadth in a university's social connections in order to help students.

4.4.6 The university creates space for social interaction

Having advocated that a breadth of social contacts for students and a diverse student population has an employability advantage for students, it is important to specifically acknowledge that the university does create a space for social interaction according to this research. This study recognises that employability necessitates learning therefore Dewey's theories of learning are pertinent to this research. Dewey's insights on human development appreciate that learning results from a person's day to day environmental encounters and that environments are generally social (Campbell, 1996; Hildebrand, 2008). Also, Dewey's holistic appreciation of learning highlights that a person interacts with many environments during the progression of their daily lives (1938). For students, this will inevitably include some involvement with the university. As already recognised, students talk with each other and their tutors during the progression of their studies and this has an employability impact. The data extracts below reinforce this point. The first two quotes illustrate how meeting tutors affected students' learning in that these meetings extended perceptions of employability fit for the participants. The third quote describes how a student's experiential learning options were expanded by a fellow student.

"I feel like this course touched on the possibility of lots of different careers. We have a lot of lecturers that have all done different work, like a social work lecturer that has done teaching. We have lecturers that have done all different roles. It focusses a lot more on other jobs. It gives you a wider perspective on different jobs and it is taught in way that if you went into this job you would carry out the job in this way" (case study 2 student).

"I would say longer term. I would say that within each subject even though you are studying one subject which is so varied with the different modules, you know you can just get that perspective from all the different lecturers who have had very different careers and that can sort of give you an insight into what you can sort of do in years to come. It shows that even within quite a specific subject there are many jobs" (case study 2 student).

"Well, I've been thinking about placement for next year as well even though I've not done one yet. One of my friends is going to Camp America for her placement and I thought about it this year. I did not really think it was possible doing it..... but I think now that I've seen that she organised it and she's done it and she's going I've got a bit more confidence to try it next year. Because it's something that I've wanted to do anyway and now I know that it can fit in as your actual placement then it's really good" (case study 1 student).

Importantly, these social interactions would not have taken place without the university's involvement. Social encounters occurring during work placement have also been identified as possessing employability value by this research, such social encounters facilitate social learning and they can also be attributed to the university because the university encourages work placement. The social opportunities facilitated by the university which provide employability benefits precipitate this study's finding that the university creates space for social interaction.

Having acknowledged that the university creates space for social interaction and learning results from social interaction, it is important to recognise that each learner is unique and according to Dewey, learning is constructed (1933,1938). Because a person's learning is built on what has occurred previously and each learner differs, not one opportunity for a social encounter created by the university has the guarantee of a positive employability impact.

4.4.7 The university and challenge

Having reiterated an appreciation that employability involves learning and learning incorporates environmental encounters, social interaction and it is both holistic and individual in its nature (Dewey,1933, 1938, 2004), this study accepts that students interact with more than one environment during their day to day lives. This study also appreciates different aspects of a person's life intermingle. Social constructivist principles of learning recognise this process (Dewey,1938). Indeed, it is the connection between all the different parts of a person's life which is considered most on impactful on an individual's development (Dewey,1933).

Earlier in this chapter, the intermingling of different environmental encounters and the contribution of this process to learning was demonstrated. Analysis section 1 illustrated how university-acquired knowledge permeated into work placements and enhanced understanding for students within the workplace. Having recognised that the different environmental encounters students have intermingle and affect learning, this study identifies additional aspects of the university experience which impact holistically on students.

Employability has been defined by this study as challenging. Difficulties already articulated in this chapter include obtaining work experience perceived as valuable in the advancement of employability and acquiring work that is in itself a potential employability fit. Perceptions of injustice and social challenges within the workplace were highlighted as particularly difficult for students. Engagement in higher education was also seen as challenging by students. One well recognised challenge within higher education is the completion of academic assignments (Turner, 2014). Module marks were discussed with students in relation to the university's influence on the students' employability (Marks profiles for the year are available in appendix 3). Importantly, only marks known to students at the time of their interviews pertain to their comments.

Participant insights regarding academic feedback on formal assignments linked module marks and associated feedback with feelings of enhanced confidence. See the following quotes:

"I have had really good feedback for my assignments that have been handed in and marked since I last saw you" (case study 3 student).

"Really strong firsts both of them with really encouraging feedback...again really good for my confidence. I felt that they had given me a lot of confidence" (case study 3 student).

"Definitely, the feedback, it gave me the ability to be more confident as well" (case study 2 student)

The connection between module feedback/ marks and confidence supports the view that academic achievement can encourage self-efficacy in students (Turner, 2014)

Despite academic assignment completion being a well-known challenge in higher education, the main higher education challenges highlighted by participants in this research were social. Importantly, some symmetry between higher education challenge and employability challenge is evident in that, employability related challenges were also principally social. One example of a social difficulty pertaining to the university is the presence of academic assignments that necessitate joint working. The following quote refers to a case study 1 student's experience concerning the construction of a joint presentation which involved other learners from different degree programmes. She states:

“That was probably the biggest thing I took because that was really like a different experience. I was really out of my comfort zone. I guess that was most like a challenge you could face in the workplace.”

Other students identified working with others as challenging. See the case study 2 student’s comments below:

“I am the kind of person that you get an assignment and you do it then you can relax. I realise in group work that not everyone takes that approach. That’s not just university, that like the wider world and the profession.”

Another case study 1 student identified working generally with others who take a different approach to their degree as difficult. She states:

“I think for some of them it is the university experience, I want to work towards a future for me and my daughter, like something I am proud of and happy with. Whereas for them they don’t have that responsibility so it is a bit different for them. Like they’re here to enjoy the university experience at the same time”

As the quotes above demonstrate, as in the workplace, working with others particularly those who do not meet a person’s expectations regarding professional behaviour is difficult. Despite the difficulties, data from this study and the literature demonstrate joint working is a common employee requirement, especially in the helping professions (Adams, 2011). As a result, the need to surmount this challenge has employability relevance. Importantly, the quotes above illustrate that students recognised there was some symmetry between the university experience of joint working and workplace expectations. Also, of relevance to this finding is the insight that participants referring to the difficulties of group work did overcome the challenges of joint assignments. Consequently, joint assignments offer valuable practice opportunities for students. Given this study’s appreciation that different environmental interactions blur, it is possible that the learning acquired during joint university work can assist in the successful navigation of social challenges within the workplace. Both are identified by this research as being tough. Consequently, appropriate resource allocation which will effectively facilitate joint working activities within the university is advocated by this research, for example, sufficient academic time to ensure students are adequately supported through major social events such as joint summative assignments.

Another social challenge recognised as significant by participants in this study involved changes in student living conditions. For some students, the commencement of a degree coincided with the start of independent living. The following quotes reflect participant experiences of living away from the family home:

“If I had gone an hour away or like even less, I would have been home every weekend. I would be home all the time. it probably would not have given me chance to be on my own which I think I needed” (case study 2 student).

The next quote from a case study 1 student is in response to the semi – structured interview question which enquired what aspects of their university course they were most happy with. They said:

“Living on campus and actually coming to uni. in the first place, that’s probably the biggest decision that I have made.” The student adds... *“I fit in well. I have made friends.”*

Similar to participant reflections on joint assignment production, difficulties associated with independent living had been surmounted by students.

Data analysis for this study demonstrates that the demands of higher education participation were seen positively by participants, overcoming challenges was linked to enhanced self-belief/ self-efficacy. Students explicitly stated that university engagement had given them more confidence. See following quotes:

“I think it has just really given me the confidence and also the qualifications so employers will look at me now” (case study 3 student).

“A big one for me is confidence. all the knowledge that I have accumulated over the years has made me feel more confident in my practice. It has made me; I know it sounds silly it makes me feel more like a professional” (case study 3 student).

This research has already recognised that emotions such as self-efficacy and self-esteem affect employability (Dacre- Pool and Sewell, 2007). Relevant literature supports this study’s link between the surmounting of challenge and the development of self- efficacy/ self-belief. Bandura (1997) describes mastery of experience as making an important contribution to self- efficacy. Mastery of experience entails the feelings of self-belief which evolve from the successful

navigation of a challenge. Importantly, Bandura states that the feelings of self-belief resulting from the successful navigation of a challenge in one area in a person's life are transferable to another. Bandura's self-efficacy theory has some similarity to Dewey's insights on learning in that experiences from one part of a person's life affect other parts. This study's findings regarding the university and challenge combined with the ideas of Dewey and Bandura suggest that higher education's ability to offer mastery of experience opportunities, often via very familiar activities such as students working together is far reaching.

The following data extracts confirm students' links between higher education engagement and feelings of self-belief.

"I feel really quite strong having done as much as I have done so far and getting good feedback from my assignments" (case study 3 student).

The next quote, reflects a case study 3 student's comments now she is nearing the end of her degree. She states:

"If we go or if I go to start on something. I am ready for it now" (case study 3 student).

Given the powerful emotional and holistic impact that result from the successful navigation of challenge occurring in higher education, it is important that positive outcomes are encouraged. Consequently, in addition to high quality academic input, effective pastoral student support is essential.

4.4.8 The precipitation of change

Having recognised that learning occurring as a result of higher education involvement can precipitate changes in people, for example enhanced confidence and self-belief, it is valuable to reflect on how alterations in a person may influence behavioural changes. Analysis section 1 of this study highlighted that a person's general character was significant to employability fit. This finding was connected to an appreciation that people adapt according to social stimuli. Earlier analysis regarding people's social history and its employability relevance incorporated both Dewey's views of Habits (Campbell, 1996) and Bourdieu's theories of Habitus (1990). The existence of Habits and Habitus indicates important social figures from the past affect current behaviour and this can have

an employability impact. A relevant example is the generation of employability related resilience. Despite an understanding that past social influences can positively impact on employability, this study recognised earlier that historical social figures may create employability barriers. For example, this research finds responding appropriately to workplace expectations has employability significance, yet, it is possible that a person's Disposition/ Habitus may not fit with the cultural expectations of a particular workplace. In such scenarios, navigation of the workplace expectations is more arduous.

Despite an appreciation regarding the employability significance of Habits/Habitus, this study accepts they are malleable. Dewey's theoretical insights and other relevant literature recognise social learning and ongoing social interactions cause attitudinal and behavioural changes (Dewey, 2004; Cantwell, 1999). Data extracts from this study confirms higher education involvement precipitates change in people's behaviour. See quotes below:

"Well, I always used to watch Panorama anyway. I am finding myself more drawn towards topics in papers and on the news. I've got that background on my phone, and I never used to read articles but now I am looking at the ones linked to education" (case study 1 student).

"Personally, I think it's just doing the whole journey of the degree has been really significant for me. I mean my husband says that I am like a changed person at the end of my degree, just in the way I see the world now, how I question things. I don't take things at face value anymore. I try to dig underneath things. I am more involved in politics than I used to be" (case study 3 student).

The data extracts featured above do not provide an explicit declaration from students stating that the university has altered their Habits/ Habitus but the quotes do demonstrate a change of Disposition and associated behavioural change. The change is recognised by the students and the second quote describes the university experience as being transformational.

The ability of the university to stimulate changes in people does have employability relevance. For example, ambivalent Dispositions towards employability may be adjusted. This finding which supports the capacity of the university to stimulate behavioural change has relevance to this study's earlier finding concerning personal characteristics. The contribution of personal

characteristics to employability fit was discussed in analysis section 1. This section acknowledged that personal characteristics were viewed as important to employability fit by students. One explanation for the significance of personal characteristics to employability fit was the presence of a more general adaptability among workers in response to the requirements of their workplace. Such individual adaptations are likely to encompass subtle changes beyond skills possession therefore participants in this study identified personal characteristics as being of significance to employability. The capacity of the university to stimulate individual change supports the idea that the workplace can do the same. Given the university is such an important employability stakeholder, it is also possible that more general adaptations stimulated by university engagement are applicable to employability. University stimulated changes are likely to be pertinent to employability because it is in the university's interest that such changes possess employability relevance, for example, the ability to navigate social challenge within the workplace.

4.4.9 The university is developmental and it broadens horizons

This study is interested in higher education's contribution to employability. An interest in the contribution of higher education to employability is evident in this study's research questions and the literature review. The literature review of this thesis articulated how social policy documents constructed over time illustrate a link between higher education and employability (Dearing, 1997; Augar, 2019). The link within social policy documents pertains to employability fit and the notion that graduates are knowledgeable and highly skilled therefore they are best placed to perform work that necessitates high levels of knowledge and skills (Dearing, 1997). The links between employability and higher education evident within social policy documents are offered as a rationale for the introduction of higher education fees for students (Dearing, 1997; Browne, 2010; Augar, 2019).

Analysis of data from this study supports the presence of a connection between universities and employability. Insights regarding this link are first communicated in analysis section 1 and they concern the contribution of knowledge to employability fit. This study finds that relevant knowledge for a form of employment is thought to facilitate employability fit. Employability fit is facilitated because relevant knowledge helps an individual understand their

work environment and do their job. Knowledge acquired at a university may also be deemed as relevant and can enhance understandings of workplace experiences. General knowledge possession is also highly valued by students because it is viewed as making an individual more attractive to the labour market. Consequently, knowledge is considered an important employability resource. Given the significance of knowledge to employability, this study describes knowledge as being integral to the concept. Analysis section 1 also recognised that employability requires learning. The importance of knowledge and learning to employability highlighted by this study alongside the common perception that universities are a repository of knowledge (Collini, 2012; Maskell and Robinson, 2002) reinforces the significant association between universities and employability that is communicated in government documents (Dearing, 1997; Augar, 2019).

Given the strong connection between employability and higher education which is confirmed by this study, universities are important employability stakeholders and it is unsurprising that numerous higher education teaching strategies have evolved which are thought to develop employability. Examples include, the incorporation of employability skills within the curriculum (Yorke and Knight, 2006; Fallows and Steven, 2000). Career planning skills such as goal identification, self-marketing skills and C.V. construction (Hillage and Pollard, 1998) are also facilitated. During this study's earlier exploration of students' views regarding the contribution of knowledge to employability, participants in this research placed an employability related value on knowledge associated with Bell's classical model of higher education (1970) such as conceptual understanding and more obvious pragmatic learning such as team work training and job interview preparation. Student appreciation regarding a range of knowledge supports the provision of diverse teaching strategies within higher education.

Further evidence of a value in the diversification of teaching strategies is present in the data extract below. In this quote the case study 1 student is responding to a request within her semi-structured interview to identify elements of higher education learning that she believes has an employability value, she includes most of her course.

“I think the majority of the course is valuable. Its building up your general knowledge, isn't it? obviously to me the child protection module was really valuable to me but that's purely because I want to go in to child protection” (case study 1 student).

This study accepts universities are a repository of knowledge and this is crucial to the association between higher education and employability. However, in addition to the ability of universities to transmit knowledge, this study finds universities provide other important contributions to employability.

Mastery of experience contributes to self-efficacy and the self-efficacy developed via mastery of experience in one aspect of a person's life can be transferred to another (Bandura, 1997). This study finds higher education provides important opportunities for mastery of experience. Given the self-efficacy achieved via one aspect of a person's life is transferable to another, the mastery of experience opportunities provided by higher education have an employability value. This research also identifies individual adaptability as being beneficial to employability and the university possesses the ability to stimulate behavioural changes in people. In acceptance that the university has these additional effects on students, it is described by this research as developmental.

This analysis section 3 which has focussed on the social nature of employability has stressed the social nature of learning. Because employability incorporates learning, its social nature is highlighted. The university creates space for social learning, workplace experiences are facilitated by universities and such events provide important practice opportunities regarding the social world of work. The university also facilitates social interactions which can extend employability. Given the university provides significant social opportunities which can extend employability this study finds the university broadens horizons.

In summary, this third and final part of the analysis chapter of this thesis has concentrated on employability's social nature. Several themes identified via this study's data analysis support the finding that employability is social. Self-perceptions of social fit within the workplace have a positive emotional impact and affect learning. Greater participation in the workplace is associated with enhanced feelings of social fit and enhanced participation facilitates learning according to this research. Learning is a requirement for employability according to this study, therefore the connections between participation, social

fit, and learning are important. Other additional social factors impact on employability according to this research. Historical social figures are impactful in that they can create a positive Disposition towards employability in students or the opposite. Social connections are recognised by this study as being significant to employability. Social connections can help students obtain work experience which is a valuable resource. This research also finds that employability extends via social interactions and the university creates space for social interactions. The university is described as challenging by this research and a symmetry between university challenge and challenge within the workplace was identified. Challenges pertaining to both the workplace and the university are principally social. Importantly, this research argues that overcoming challenges within the university has employability relevance. The university can stimulate change in people including behavioural change, this has employability significance given adaptability is viewed by this study as being important to employability. In light of this study's findings regarding the contribution of knowledge to employability plus other employability enhancing factors connected to higher education, the university is described by this research as developmental. Employability's social nature is emphasised by this research, the university is linked to social learning and the stimulation of social interactions, thus this study describes the university as being able to broaden horizons.

4.4.10 Overall analysis summary

This study's analysis chapter has been constructed through the creation of three analysis sections. Each section has presented, explained, interpreted and discussed data. To complete this process, messages from the data, literature and this study's theoretical framework have been utilised. This research like others before it is interested in an enhanced understanding regarding the nature of employability plus other contributory factors. In brief, this study defines employability as a multifactorial, complex, dynamic and principally relational concept.

Analysis section 1 illuminated several employability characteristics. The relational nature of employability is stressed via recognition of the significance of a fit between worker and their work to students' understandings of employability. The multifactorial nature of employability is reflected in the

identification of numerous factors impactful on fit and an appreciation that several factors are also integral to the concept. Alongside an emphasis by this research that some symmetry between worker and their work is fundamental to employability, this study does support the perception often evident in relevant literature that employability incorporates individual capacity plus potential. The relevance of potential to employability highlights a future domain to employability.

Analysis section 2 explores further the contribution of experience to employability reinforcing its relational character. The significance of experience to employability discussed in analysis section 2 illuminates additional insights regarding employability's temporality. The importance of fit to employability is reiterated in this section. The significance of both fit and experience to employability means people are likely to spend time in the workplace in order to advance/ establish their employability. Given people are likely to spend time in the workplace and because fit is crucial to employability and numerous factors influence fit, this study argues, people make self-evaluations of employability fit and this affects employability's temporality. According to this research, a person can be in- employability. The term being in- employability means sufficient factors influential on fit are positively present during someone's immersion within the workplace that the person is satisfied. Importantly, this research recognises fit is fundamental to employability, consequently, employability can occur in the present. This study's association of employability with the present as well as the future differs from other employability conceptualisations which commonly focus on individual potential and therefore the future. An appreciation that self- evaluations of employability fit take place connects to this study's recognition that employability incorporates choice-making. Despite this study's understanding that individual choice-making takes place regarding employability, this study recognises there are limitations. The presence of historical influences on employability related choices highlighted by this research demonstrates elements of employability can also occur in the past.

Analysis section 3 of this chapter focuses on employability's social nature. This study's data analysis supports the view that learning is social. Given this study argues employability necessitates learning, the social nature of employability is highlighted via the contribution learning makes to employability. Other social

factors are also associated with employability by this study. Social history is significant and social connections are important. Indeed, this study finds employability is extended via social interactions. Social interactions inform individuals of previously undiscovered employment opportunities which possess the potential of employability fit for them. Given this study finds employability fit is fundamental to employability, employability extends via social interactions according to this research. The contribution of higher education to employability is articulated throughout this analysis chapter, nevertheless, analysis section 3 provides particular insights into the university's employability contributions.

This research identifies the university as being developmental because of the varied contributions it makes to employability. As stated numerous times, this study finds employability necessitates learning and this research confirms knowledge is a significant employability factor. Because universities are viewed as repositories of knowledge, their link to employability is reinforced. However, this study finds universities make other employability contributions. Universities facilitate self-efficacy, a well recognised employability resource. This study also finds that universities stimulate behavioural change in people, the ability to change is important because, this study highlights a person's ability to adapt within the workplace is valuable to employability. The university's ability to broaden horizons is acknowledged within analysis section 3. The capability of the university to broaden horizons results from its ability to encourage social learning and facilitate social interactions.

5 Conclusion

Numerous researchers have focussed on employability. Employability is not a niche area of research. Prior areas of interest include conceptual studies (Peeters, et al., 2019; Tomlinson, 2017) and exploration of issues connected to employability such as work placement and its impact (Seremet, 2016).

Employability has also attracted government interest and it is featured in various examples of higher education policy documents (Dearing, 1997; Browne, 2010; Dept. for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016; Augar, 2019). The aim of this study was to explore student experience of employability within higher education. The rationale underpinning this study's aim is that an enhanced comprehension of the student perspective will develop understanding of employability. This study's main research question reflects its aim and it asks:

What are the student experiences of employability within higher education?

As the main research question and the thesis title indicate, this study possesses breadth, it is holistic. For example, an interest in contributory factors to students' employability experience is expressed in one contributory research question. In order to meet the aim of the study and address the main research question, a collective case study was constructed. The case study is instrumental in that an increased understanding of employability is desired via exploration of student experience. In order to build theory, this study's data, employability related literature and a theoretical framework were utilised (Eisenhardt, 1989). Initial research ideas included a belief that experience evolves over time (Ricoeur, 1984). As a result, 3 cases were assembled to represent 3 different time frames of a degree. Following thematic analysis of the data, the same themes and sub themes were found within each case study hence the analysis was presented and interpreted as a collective case study. As already acknowledged, the areas of interest for this research are reflected in the research questions which include 5 contributory research questions:

What is employability and how do students define employability?

What teaching and learning strategies have universities used that are thought to facilitate employability?

What other contributing factors are present?

How do students perceive the link between HE and employability?

How do students connect their assessments of learning with their appraisals of employability related success?

This concluding chapter articulates this study's findings in relation to the research questions.

5.1 What is employability and how do students define employability?

Previous employability researchers have recognised the multifaceted and complex nature of employability (Peeters, et al., 2019) and such definitions of employability are supported by this study. When expressed succinctly, this study describes employability as a multifactorial, complex, dynamic and principally relational concept. Importantly, this study is empirical, it involves the student perspective and as such this definition of employability evolves from students' understandings. Having established that the concept is both multifactorial and complex, a fit between worker and their work was fundamental to employability for participants in this research. Evidence of an appreciation that employability incorporates fit is present in employability literature (Forrier and Sels, 2003). Nevertheless, examples from the literature most commonly associate employability related fit with knowledge and skills (Fallows and Steven, 2000; Dearing, 1997). This study corroborates the view that knowledge and skills have employability relevance. Knowledge facilitates fit between worker and their work. The association between knowledge and employability fit is largely connected to a belief that the possession of relevant knowledge helps a person do their job. This study found that knowledge accrued at university did advance understandings in the workplace. According to this research, advanced understandings encourage participation in the workplace which also progresses learning. Participants in this study did make a link between skills development and employability fit, however, personal characteristics were perceived as significant.

The significance of personal characteristics to employability fit was explained by the presence of individual adaptability in the workplace. This study's findings regarding employability fit have effects. The relationship between learning and employability is illuminated. The role of the university as a major employability stakeholder is confirmed. The value of workplace experiences is supported. The social nature of learning (Dewey, 2004) and employability is also revealed via the relevance of a person's character to employability alongside the possibility that individual adaptations occur. The importance of employability fit as determined by this research plus the connection between experiential, social learning and employability emphasise the relational nature of the concept.

Connected to the understanding reached by this study that a fit between worker and their work is a principal feature of employability is the comprehension that several factors beyond knowledge and skills influence fit. The collation of additional factors influential on employability fit is original to this research. Additional factors include practicalities, social factors, change, happiness and challenge. The relevance of practicalities to fit stimulates behaviour in people. People were found by this study to balance employability related practicalities and other factors influential on employability fit in order to advance and establish their employability. Other researchers have acknowledged the relevance of practicalities to employability (Forrier and Sels, 2003). However, an emphasis on balancing activity is novel to this research. Social factors have been associated with employability, for example Tomlinson (2017) cited social capital as an important employability related resource. Social factors are perceived by this research as being of particular importance. Regarding employability fit, as already acknowledged, learning is social and being able to do a job via learning advances fit. Fitting in socially at work has a positive emotional impact and it was viewed favourably by participants in this study. When considering employability fit, people and the labour market are relevant and both change therefore change is of significance to employability fit. An emotional dimension to employability has been previously recognised, for example, Dacre-Pool and Sewell (2007) cite self-esteem as vital for employability. The relationship between happiness and employability fit is highlighted in this research. This finding supports the presence of an emotional aspect to employability (Goleman, 1996). Importantly, happiness was not viewed

by this research as an employability resource like other writers perceive emotions pertaining to employability (Dacre-Pool and Sewell; Goleman, 1996). Happiness was perceived by this research as a possible outcome of employability fit. The complexity of employability has been previously recognised, for example, Tymon (2013) stated the number of employability stakeholders added to the complexity of the concept. The difficulties obtaining work possessing some match for an individual which were demonstrated in this thesis provide further evidence of employability's challenging nature.

In addition to numerous factors being cited by this study as impactful on employability fit, several are also identified as being integral to the concept. Factors are described as integral to the concept because their significance goes beyond employability fit. Integral factors include knowledge, practicalities, employability is social, change and challenge. Knowledge is integral to employability because knowledge possession has significant employability value. Reflecting employability's multifactorial and complex character is a perspective that as well as being a relational concept, employability is also a resource-based phenomenon (Peeters, et al., 2019). Knowledge was viewed by students in this study as an important employability resource. Considering employability is commonly perceived as a resource-based concept, this is important. The ability of universities to validate knowledge via the awarding of their degrees helps students demonstrate their knowledge possession. This adds to the close association between universities and employability. Because practicalities can be pivotal to employability and at times beyond the scope of balance, they are also integral to the concept. The many social factors impacting on employability precipitated this study's recognition of employability's social nature. In addition to fluctuations regarding characteristics of both individual and labour market (Forrier and Sels, 2003), conceptual understandings of employability alter, for example different countries have different interpretations of employability (Haasler, 2013), thus change is integral to employability and this research describes employability as dynamic. Difficulties associated with employability extend beyond the challenge of finding employment possessing some match between the individual and their work. This study recognises that the workplace itself is tough. Given the concept of

employability is complex and the workplace is tough, challenge is viewed by this study as integral to the concept.

Employability has been succinctly described earlier in this thesis and this concluding chapter as a multi-factorial, complex, dynamic and principally relational concept. The importance of fit between worker and their work to employability has precipitated this study's view that employability is principally a relational concept. Numerous factors have been cited as influential on employability fit alongside the expression of a recognition that several factors are integral to the concept. This study also demonstrates that the ingredients of employability as identified by this research have effects.

The significance of knowledge to employability is impactful, because this finding relates to debates concerning a university's function. Contemporary debates concerning a university's function include disagreements regarding the prevalence of pursuits pertaining to the transfer of theoretical knowledge or efforts that are focussed on more applied learning (Williams, 2013). This study's insights regarding student appreciation of knowledge's contribution to employability did not differentiate which type of university acquired knowledge is most valued. Students' comments indicate that a variety of knowledge is appreciated. Consequently, a range of higher education teaching activities is advocated by this study.

Practicalities also have effects. As stated, students balance factors that are relevant to employability fit, particularly practicalities. Balancing activity suggests individuals possess some agency regarding their employability and analysis section 2 of this thesis articulates how learners make choices. Importantly, this study is underpinned by a theoretical framework, Bourdieu's societal insights have influenced data interpretations. Societal structures such as inequalities in power resulting from the unequal distribution of capital within society (Jenkins, 2002) limit both balancing activity and choice. This study which emphasises the relational nature of employability accepts individual interactions with the labour market are likely and as a result both supply and demand focussed employability factors are important. Because some practicalities are beyond the scope of balance and often relate to demand focussed labour market characteristics, their employability relevance reveals limitations in individual choice. This study advocates transparency in the labour

market and action to reduce unequal access to capital. For example, effective higher education time tabling for working students and subsidised travel for those needing to commute in relation to their employability. The ability of university acquired learning to enhance workplace understandings for students plus the existence of balancing activity highlighted by this study demonstrates how different aspects of a student's life possess employability relevance. This notion is reinforced further by underpinning theories of this study which include the learning theories of John Dewey (1938). As a result, a holistic higher education approach should be taken towards students. An example includes detailed consideration of different aspects of their lives during university career's guidance sessions. Social factors are found by this study to be of considerable significance to employability, the concept is described as social and again as such, its relational nature is illuminated. Importantly, this study accepts learning is social (Dewey, 2004). Consequently, social interactions need to be encouraged according to this research.

This study appreciates both the individual and the labour market alter. Consequently, change is viewed as integral to employability and this research describes the concept as being dynamic. This study also perceives the labour market as a societal feature. Use of Bourdieu's societal insights plus reflection on the tendency for some practicalities to possess labour market characteristics stimulates this study's assertion that the labour market can present barriers to an individual's employability. Nevertheless, this study recognises that the labour market evolves. As a result, labour market developments should be carefully considered and managed. The emotional aspect of employability illuminates the need for effective support of learners. This study states employability is challenging, data interpretations in light of this study's theoretical framework show students will face difficulties and once more, effective higher education support is recommended.

The presence of an emphasis on employability's relational nature within this research links to an understanding of the contribution experience makes to employability. This study's data revealed a student perspective that valued the contribution of relevant experience to employability. Relevant experience is an important employability resource according to this research. The importance of experience is also illuminated via this study's theoretical framework. Dewey's

theories of learning include an understanding that in addition to being social: effective learning requires experience (1938). Given the relevance of learning to employability, this is important. The significance of employability fit plus the contribution of learning to employability encourage workplace experiences which again reinforce employability's relational nature. The significance and likelihood of workplace interactions/ experience in parallel to the presence of balance, choice and individual employability related evaluations identified by this research affect employability's temporality. This study argues a person can be in- employability. The idea of being in-employability pertains to the present. It results from sufficient factors affecting employability fit being positively present for an individual that they are satisfied. Employability occurring in the present contrasts with its usual connection to the future. Employability is usually connected to the future because it is mainly viewed as a resource- based concept (Peeters, et al., 2019) concerning potential and potential connects to the future.

The presence of employability self-evaluations highlights once more the empowering nature of employability, ultimately the individual decides if they are in-employability. There are caveats to this statement, this study finds that employability can be challenging. Employability difficulties are mainly social according to this research and given that social difficulties are likely, it is important students/ graduates think carefully about their employability decisions. Calm deliberations can avoid dismissing work unnecessarily because the student/ graduate has encountered an employability barrier such as struggling to navigate capital inequalities (Jenkins, 2002). Relevant examples cited by this study include the unequal distribution of economic capital (Moore, 2012) which limits employability related choice. A lack of cultural capital may also be problematic (Bourdieu, 1988), for example, unfamiliar tacit workplace expectations can create confusion and prevent a social fit. Linked to this finding, higher education activity which fosters practice opportunities within the workplace and careful thought is recommended by this research.

Past experience was also found by this study to have employability influence, consequently, elements of employability were also described by this study as existing in the past. The employability significance of past experiences indicates earlier educational establishments are of employability relevance. The

relevance of schools to employability suggests further understanding of employability related activity in schools would be beneficial.

Employability's social nature is a feature of this thesis. The social nature of employability has consequences. Bourdieu's social capital theory has relevance for this study's finding concerning the importance of social connections. Social connections have been equated with social capital (Tomlinson, 2017). This is significant because this research finds that relevant experience is acquired through social connections and employability is extended via social interactions yet, access to social capital is not equal (Moore, 2012). Consequently, university effort should be focussed on extending social connections for learners. The behavioural impact of close social contacts, particularly historical ones is also revealed via this study's data interpretation and use of its theoretical framework. Insights into Habits, Dispositions and Habitus (Dewey, 1922; Bourdieu, 1988) reinforce the interactive, individual, and holistic nature of learning. Learning is constructed as a result of environmental interactions in a social world (Dewey, 1938). Because learning is built and does not always involve deep analysis (Fesmire, 2015), Habits and Habitus can influence responses to current learning opportunities. However, the social and transformational nature of learning linked to higher education engagement by this study suggests the university can facilitate individual adaptability and alteration of established Habits/ Habitus. The employability advantages of social adaptability are recognised in employability literature (Mau and Shen, 2020). Nevertheless, specific advantages have been cited several times in this study. Early in analysis section 1, social adaptability was linked by this research to personal characteristics which were seen by participants as important for employability fit. Fitting in socially was also connected in analysis section 3 of this study to advanced participation and the development of learning. The benefits of appropriate responses by novices to tacit expectations within the workplace/ the possession of cultural capital was explored in relation to the work of Lave and Wenger (1991) and Bourdieu (1986, 1984, 1990) in analysis section 3. Analysis section 3's exploration of effective responses to tacit workplace expectations linked such abilities as a means of progressing social fit and advancing learning within the workplace.

In short, the many ingredients of employability affect student experience. Because universities, students and employability are so closely associated, the impact of employability's nature is significant to universities.

5.2 What teaching and learning strategies have universities used that are thought to facilitate employability?

Higher education literature reflects the existence of many teaching approaches thought to advance students' employability (Cretu and Agheorghiesei, 2014). Yorke and Knight's employability model (2006) focussed primarily on higher education curricula development. Studies have been completed that evaluate the effectiveness of certain teaching strategies linked to employability such as work placement (Tymon, 2013; Serement, 2016). Work placement is perceived favourably by this research, it has been found valuable for students. As articulated in analysis section 1, work placement can advance students' understandings as knowledge acquired at the university is transferred and applied in a practical setting. Analysis section 2 describes how work placements provide important access to relevant experience and as detailed in this analysis section, participants in this research identified relevant experience as an important employability resource. Analysis section 2 also explains how experience assists individuals in the determination of their employability. Work placements provide important experiential insights for students. Importantly, students can evaluate the characteristics of a particular workplace during placements in association with factors influential on fit and this study argues such evaluations assist in the determination of employability. This study also accepts employability is challenging, to the extent that employability is defined as complex concept by this research. A significant difficulty identified by this study concerned workplace experiences. Social difficulties were encountered by participants during engagement in the workplace. Insights into cultural capital and the complexity of both tacit workplace expectations and acceptable responses was discussed in analysis section 3. Well supported work placements provide valuable practice opportunities for students. Practice offers the possibility for learners to acquire resources such as cultural capital that will help them successfully navigate employability challenge.

Analysis of this study's data identified joint working within higher education as challenging for students. However, participants in this research also regarded overcoming such challenges positively. Successful navigation of a challenge provides opportunities for mastery of experience which is connected to the development of self-efficacy. Importantly, self-efficacy achieved via mastery of experience in one area of a person's life can be transferred to another (Bandura, 1997). The facilitation of self-efficacy has employability relevance because self-efficacy is considered an employability resource (Turner, 2014). Indeed, participants in this research did connect feelings of enhanced confidence and self-belief following the successful completion of a higher education challenge. This study also found symmetry between perceptions of higher education challenge and views regarding challenges in the workplace, both involved working with others. The symmetry between challenges within higher education and challenges in the workplace suggests working with others during engagement with the university can provide valuable practice opportunities for the collegiate work that is necessary in the workplace. Given this study found positive outcomes associated with joint working and such outcomes possess employability relevance, this study advocates teaching and learning activities which encourage joint working. However, it is important to stress that activities necessitating joint working were perceived as challenging by students in this study and, although participants in this research evaluated such experiences positively, it is possible that others would not, consequently, adequate support and resources should be allocated to joint working activities within higher education.

This study also highlights a breadth of knowledge is viewed as having employability value by participants in this research. As previously stated, this finding is relevant to contemporary debates concerning a university's function. Once more, this study stresses that theoretical subject specific knowledge associated with Bell's classical model of a university's function (1970) had employability significance for students in this research. Learning associated with pragmatic university activity such as skills facilitation was also valued. This study acknowledges that employability is very relevant to contemporary higher education (Office for Students, 2020). Having accepted that universities are significant employability stakeholders, participant views expressing an

appreciation of a diverse range of knowledge have implications. The views of participants in this research indicate university activity associated with Bell's classical model of a university's function (1970) should not be eclipsed by pragmatic and very obvious employability related approaches. For example, theoretical knowledge transmission in lectures still has employability value alongside skills development according to this research. In brief this study supports varied teaching approaches in order to foster employability. The advocacy of variety is also underpinned by this study's theoretical framework which includes Dewey's theories of learning. According to Dewey, learning is individual, holistic, interactive and socially constructed (Campbell, 1996; Hildebrand, 2008). Consequently, varied teaching approaches are more likely to meet the needs of varied students. Nevertheless, given each student is unique, no one teaching strategy possesses a guarantee of success, students' responses will differ because each student differs.

5.3 What other contributing factors are present?

The link between learning and employability established by this study in itself reveals other contributory factors exist in relation to employability. As stated, learning is holistic and socially constructed (Dewey, 1938). As a result, different aspects of a student's life will impact on their employability, for example who they meet socially. Social interaction was found by this study to extend employability therefore university strategies aimed at encouraging social mixing are supported, this includes traditional university societies and other organised events such as conferences, writing groups and outings. Historical experiences and contacts were also confirmed as influential by this research. Historical experiences can help students identify work that is a potential fit for them and past contacts can affect employability dispositions, for example create a positive approach and foster individual resilience. The significance of history reinforces the view that schools have employability impact. Experiences occurring simultaneously to degree progression are also impactful according to this study, this is demonstrated via students' balancing activities occurring during developments in their academic studies, for example, participation in paid work during higher education engagement.

The relational nature of employability stressed by this study encourages an appreciation that the labour market impacts on employability. Demand focussed practicalities i.e., practicalities that are products of the labour market such as the geographical location of work can rule out certain employability options for a person. As a result, this study supports the views of other authors (Serrano – Pascual, 2001) that fair evolution of labour market characteristics such as the equal geographical distribution of work are actioned. Some of Bourdieu's societal theories underpin this thesis and as such, wider societal features were deemed relevant to employability. Societal inequalities including disparity in capital possession and class were appreciated by Bourdieu (Jenkins, 2002), such inequalities were recognised by this study as impactful on employability, for example, Bourdieu's theories suggest unequal access to economic capital is likely amongst students and this study confirmed that a lack of economic capital affects some students. For example, the financial cost of post graduate study is a barrier for some potential learners. Student employment can be empowering in that it can facilitate degree progression, an important employability requisite, but this study has also shown paid employment is essential for some students and this can take its toll. Insights from this research showing some students had to work indicates higher education fee introduction which has entwined universities with employability does not remove an inequality of access to economic capital. Consequently, additional financial support for students should be considered.

Recent changes regarding student fees in England do not demonstrate a significant shift from student loans (Dept. for Education, 2022). This research does accept that employability involves the development of an individual's capacity to obtain work that is a match for them. As a result, the involvement of individuals in loan agreements in order to obtain and validate knowledge: an important employability resource makes sense. However, this research emphasises the relational nature of employability, that employability does incorporate a relationship between the workplace and the individual, consequently, this research advocates consideration of additional financial contributions by employers to higher education. Importantly, given the general value of knowledge to employability identified by this study, a general contribution is advocated rather than specific funding for certain courses.

5.4 How do students perceive the link between HE and employability?

The close association between higher education and employability recognised by participants in this study primarily concerns the significance of knowledge to employability. Knowledge is an important employability resource for students and the university is seen as a repository of knowledge hence the connection. Also, this study appreciates that, according to Becker (1993), universities are viewed as a mechanism for validating and demonstrating individual knowledge possession. Importantly, the confirmation of knowledge possession makes a person more attractive to the labour market.

The university was also seen by students as a source of self-efficacy. Participants did not explicitly state “The university provides me with self-efficacy” but, overcoming university related challenges such as degree progression and successful transition into independent living were identified by the students as providing them with more confidence, greater self-belief and a feeling of preparedness, these are ingredients of self-efficacy and therefore possess employability relevance. Self-efficacy has employability relevance because it is perceived as an employability resource (Yorke and Knight, 2006; Dacre-Pool and Sewell, 2007).

Similarities in challenges within the workplace and within higher education were evident in this research and these similarities were recognised by students. Principal challenges in both areas were social. This research accepts the successful navigation of challenges in higher- education are examples of mastery of experience. Mastery of experience contributes to self-efficacy and the self-efficacy achieved from mastery of experience in one area of a person's life can be transferred to another (Bandura, 1997). Consequently, chances for mastery of experience occurring in higher education have an employability value. Given that challenges identified in this study were mainly social, the benefits of opportunities for students to socially interact during their engagement with higher education are reinforced. The benefits are reinforced because the university can provide students with chance to practice the successful navigation of social challenges. Consequently, this study strongly supports social activities taking place in higher education such as students living and working together. Importantly, higher education activities involving

students living and working together are very familiar, as a result, their contribution to self-efficacy may be under appreciated. This study stresses the benefits of students successfully navigating social challenges linked to joint living and working but, this study advocates even the most everyday activities such as students commencing independent living should be well- supported.

5.5 How do students connect their assessments of learning with their appraisals of employability related success?

Students did discuss marks acquired during the year of this study (marks profiles for the year are in appendix 3) However, student comments only concerned marks that were known to them at the time of their semi-structured interviews. The connections between assessments of learning and employability were principally associated by this study with the capacity of marks to stimulate self-efficacy. Successful assignment completion has been previously considered an example of mastery of experience and therefore contributing to self-efficacy (Turner, 2014). The ability of marks to facilitate self-efficacy has employability relevance because, as previously stated, self-efficacy is an employability resource (York and Knight, 2006; Dacre- Pool and Sewell, 2007). Marks were also recognised as having the ability to reveal individual strengths. The ability of module marks to reveal strengths in students did have an employability relevance for participants in this research. Strength revelation has an employability relevance because many of the taught modules in each degree featured in this study possessed an obvious workplace connection. For example, data analysis demonstrated that one participant's friend, having received a high mark for a safeguarding module was encouraged to consider a career in social work. Given the significance of employability fit to employability as determined by this study, strength revelation is important. An academic strength in an area which has a recognisable link to a workplace illuminates that area of work as a possible employability option.

In summary the multifactorial nature of employability recognised in employability literature was confirmed in this study. Importantly, this study's employability conceptualisation evolved from students' views and experiences. Employability ingredients as determined by students have impact. They ensure the involvement of certain factors. They affect students' behaviour and

employability's temporality. Employability necessitates learning and all that learning encompasses, consequently, for students, higher education has significant employability impact. This study finds employability does possess a resource-based domain which focuses on potential. Nevertheless, employability is principally relational and interactive therefore both individual and labour market have significance. Given the relevance of both learning, individual and labour market to employability, experience has considerable employability value.

5.6 Originality

This research possesses four key elements of originality. Novel aspects of this study include its theoretical framework, its empirical nature, its focus on student experience and this study's findings. As well as being original, this study is impactful, as its findings contribute to practice and academia.

The theoretical framework - As repeatedly stated throughout this thesis, the aim of this study was to explore the student experience of employability within higher education. In order to effectively interpret students' insights into their experiences, this research necessitated a theoretical framework. The theoretical framework which was created for this research was influenced by this study's aim and established understandings of employability. Current conceptualisations of employability include an appreciation that employability involves an individual's capacity to obtain and maintain employment (Trought, 2012). Employability's association with an individual's capacity to obtain and maintain employment has encouraged links between employability and resource accumulation (Peeters, et al., 2019). Given employability encompasses resource accumulation such as skills acquisition, employability necessitates learning. Employability has also been connected to a relationship between the individual and the labour market (McQuaid and Lyndsay, 2005). Both Dewey and Bourdieu were interested in human experience, therefore their work is relevant to this research. Recognition that employability requires learning motivated the inclusion of Dewey's theories of learning within this study's theoretical framework. An understanding employability includes a relationship between the individual and the labour market encouraged the inclusion of some of Bourdieu's societal theories. Consequently, this study's

theoretical framework is a new synthesis of Dewey and Bourdieu's theories. Whilst other researchers have utilised a combination of Dewey and Bourdieu's work in their studies, they have done so in different contexts. E.g., Junior, Anderhag and Wickman (2022) used Dewey and Bourdieu to enhance their reflections on teaching practice. Lindh (2017) used Dewey and Bourdieu in her research concerning the contribution of various forms of reflection to entrepreneurialism. Despite some previous utilisation of Dewey and Bourdieu, these theorists have not been used together for the interpretation of students' employability experience, as in this study. Consequently, this synthesis and the application of it to student experience make a novel contribution to the field. Importantly, figures 1, 2, 3 and 4, when combined, illustrate the use of Dewey and Bourdieu in this study's data interpretation. The overlaps between the two theorists are evident and the relevance of their theories to student experiences of employability is demonstrated. As a result, the amalgamation of these figures provides a model for researchers to use during their analysis of empirical data concerning the student perspective on employability.

This study's empirical nature - The introductory chapter and the literature review of this thesis acknowledge there have been numerous empirical studies pertaining to employability. Different empirical studies have involved different stakeholders. Employers, academics and students have been consulted regarding their opinions on employability (Konig and Ribaric, 2019; Cretu and Agheorghiesei, 2014; Tymon, 2013). Nevertheless, despite students being major employability stakeholders who are charged with the development of their employability (Dearing, 1997), the student perspective of employability is not dominant within published literature (Tymon, 2013). Furthermore, many empirical studies pertaining to employability involve evaluations of particular employability facilitation strategies, for example, work placement (Jackson, 2015) and skills development (Riebe, et al., 2010). Empirical studies reflecting students' general employability experiences are not prevalent (Tymon, 2013). This research did seek a comprehensive insight into students' employability experiences, consequently, this study's holistic approach is original. The enhanced appreciation of students' employability experience achieved by this research has developed understanding of employability, for example, enabling this study to provide a new conceptualisation of employability.

Key findings - When expressed succinctly this research describes employability as a multifactorial, complex, dynamic and principally relational concept. The multifactorial and complex nature of employability is well-recognised (Holmes, 2006; Small, Shacklock and Marchant, 2018). However, the principally relational nature of employability is not well-recognised. Despite an appreciation that employability does encompass the labour market (McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005), most academic and political attention is focussed on an individual's capacity to be employable (Serrano-Pascual, 2001) and the individual accumulation of resources (Peeters, et al., 2019). The relational aspect of employability is emphasised by this study because a fit between worker and their work is considered fundamental to employability by this research. A connection between employability and a fit between worker and their work has been previously recognised (Yorke and Knight, 2006). However, this study not only stresses the importance of a fit between worker and their work to employability, it identifies numerous factors which contribute to fit. They include knowledge, skills, practicalities, the social, change, happiness and challenge. Some of the factors cited as influential on a fit between worker and their work by this study have been viewed as significant to employability by other researchers and writers. For example, knowledge has been perceived as pertinent to employability (Yorke and Knight, 2006; Becker, 1993). Skills have been viewed as relevant to the development of a match between potential employees and the needs of the labour market (Dearing, 1997; Fallows and Steven, 2000). None-the-less, some findings concerning factors influential on a fit between worker and their work are original to this study. For example, practicalities are perceived as pivotal to a fit between worker and their work. The significance of practicalities to employability fit is demonstrated via insights into the balancing activity of individuals. Happiness is also identified as an important outcome of employability fit. This study's collation of factors contributing to employability fit is unique. Prior conceptualisations of employability exist but, many are expressed in position papers as recognised by Williams (2018) and theoretical studies as illustrated by Romgens, Scoupe and Beausaert, (2020), such conceptualisations draw on literature and previously published research, but they are not empirical studies in their own right.

Another novel finding of this study concerns the contribution of experience to employability. Other researchers have perceived experience as a resource which can be accumulated by individuals in order to advance their employability (Yorke and Knight, 2006; Tomlinson, 2017). However, this study argues experience makes several important contributions to employability. Experience facilitates learning (Dewey, 1938) and because employability necessitates learning, this is valuable. This research also highlights experience affects employability's temporality. This study emphasises a fit between worker and their work is fundamental to employability. This research also finds people embrace experience within the workplace in order to determine if a form of employment is a match for them. Because interactions with the workplace take place and because a fit between worker and their work is fundamental to employability, employability's temporal nature is affected. Employability is generally associated with the future. It is linked to the future because employability is primarily perceived to involve individual capacity, the accumulation of resources (Trought, 2012; Yorke and Knight, 2006; Peeters, et al., 2019) and potential. However, this study's finding that a fit between worker and their work is fundamental to employability combined with its recognition interactions between individuals and the workplace take place means a person can be in-employability. I have created the term in-employability and I use this term to reflect a new concept which involves a state of being. A person is in-employability when they are engaged in an interaction with the workplace and sufficient factors influential on fit are positively present that they are satisfied. Given a person can be in-employability and being in-employability takes place in the present, this study finds employability occurs in the present as well as the future. Accepting this research also finds past experience affects employability, elements of employability occur in the past.

This study also finds employability is social. Other authors have recognised social factors affect employability, for example social capital is thought to influence employability (Tomlinson, 2017; Tymon and Batistic, 2017). Nevertheless, this study stresses social factors are impactful on employability to the extent that the concept itself is described as social. This study supports the view that social connections facilitate employability (Tomlinson, 2017; Tymon and Batistic, 2017). Importantly, this study adds that learning is social and this

affects employability. This research also finds that challenges associated with employability are principally social, for example working with others was perceived as difficult by students.

Finally, regarding findings, this research was interested in higher education's contribution to employability and this study accepts employability is associated with a university's purpose (Augar, 2019). Many teaching and learning strategies are associated with employability facilitation (Coopers and Lybrand, 1998). This study's findings support work placement and the transfer of subject specific knowledge as a means of fostering employability. Yorke and Knight (2006) recognised the accumulation of subject specific knowledge is beneficial to employability and the value of work placements to employability has been previously recognised (Jackson, 2015). Nevertheless, this study stresses a variety of teaching and learning strategies is most advantageous for students' employability. Effective support for students during work placement is encouraged by this study's findings and this is unsurprising, however, given this study agrees with other authors that the development of self-efficacy has positive ramifications for employability (Dacre-Pool and Sewell, 2007; Turner, 2014), support for students experiencing other challenges during their higher education experience was found beneficial to employability by this research, an example cited in this study was the need for effective pastoral care during students' transition into independent living.

Original contributions to practice

This study's novel findings have practical implications. Findings from this research have already affected teaching practice in one university. Insights into the social challenges of the workplace have been shared with students alongside Bourdieu's account of capital and the advantages of work placement. A colleague with a philosophical background has provided insights to students on critical thinking, guidance on the presentation of an argument has been offered in response to the social challenges of employability which were highlighted by this research. Given this study has already impacted on teaching within one higher education institution, there is potential for it to affect teaching in others.

Original contributions to academia

This study's original findings and theoretical contributions impact on academia in several ways. Firstly, an increased understanding of employability from the student perspective has been achieved. Findings from this research illustrating a fit between worker and their work is fundamental to employability emphasise the relational aspect of employability. As a result, further employability related research on interactions between individuals, the labour market and the workplace is encouraged.

Secondly, this study's findings regarding the significance of experience to employability are impactful. As stated, this study illustrates that experience influences employability's temporality. The impact of experience on employability's temporality encouraged an appreciation employability encompasses a state of being. An understanding employability includes a state of being led to the development of new a concept which is captured via the term in-employability. The understanding that a person can be in-employability has positive ramifications because being in-employability is linked to self-satisfaction by this research. Employability's association with a state of being motivates more research on experiences of employability.

Finally, as previously stated, a combination of figures 1, 2, 3, and 4 in section 3.3.7 of this thesis provides a synthesis of Dewey and Bourdieu's theories plus a new model applicable to the analysis of empirical data regarding the student perspective on employability.

5.7 The limitations of this study

This study utilised an exploratory, instrumental and collective case study in order to achieve its research aims. As a result, the collective case study did possess certain characteristics. All participants were full time learners apart from 1 case study 1 student who withdrew from the degree shortly after its start. The 4 degrees pertinent to this research were all vocational in that they pertained to the helping professions. Findings, particularly those connected to the value of subject specific knowledge may differ for other students engaged in

courses that are not obviously vocational. Data collected for this research was retrieved prior to the Covid 19 pandemic, consequently, findings associated with employability's social nature may be different now. Students have interacted differently in lectures / taught sessions in that much interaction has been online, this alteration may precipitate changes in any data collected now. Indeed, given that employability involves learning and learning concerns environmental interactions, experiences are very likely to have altered.

5.8 Recommendations for future research

Employability fascinates people, such fascination is demonstrated by the plethora of employability related research (Peeters, et al., 2019). This study's appreciation that employability is a dynamic concept encourages an understanding that ongoing research into its nature is required and beneficial. Numerous literature reviews have been completed in relation to employability. Empirical studies gaining experiential understandings of employability are recommended by this researcher. This research showed characteristics of employability impact on relevant stakeholders. The primary focus of this thesis was students. Because of the relationship between students and universities, implications for universities were also articulated. Examples of other employability stakeholders include higher education staff, other educational establishments such as schools and employers. Focus on alternative stakeholder perspectives would add further depth to employability understandings. An appreciation that the Covid 19 pandemic is likely to have affected students' experiences and that this has employability relevance motivates a view that further study, post pandemic is advantageous. Insights from students engaged in study that does not have an obvious vocational link may also provide an additional layer of understanding regarding impactful employability factors for students.

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List of Abbreviations

C.V.	Curriculum Vitae
Dept.	Department
H.E.	Higher Education
P.G.C.E.	Post Graduate Certificate in Education
T.A.	Teaching Assistant
T.E.F.	Teaching Excellence Framework
U.K.	United Kingdom
Uni.	University
U.S.E.M.	Understanding Skills Efficacy beliefs Metacognition

Appendix 1: Semi structured interview questions

Semi structured interview question	Relevant contributory research question
<p>I have mentioned that employability is commonly seen as a good fit between the knowledge and skills of an employee and the job they do. This can lead to a feeling of satisfaction for both the employee and the employer. Does the term employability have any other meanings for you?</p>	<p>Research question 1. What is employability and how do students define employability?</p>
<p>What did you study prior to your present study at the University of xxx</p>	<p>Research question 4, What other contributing factors are present? Research question 6, How do students connect their assessments of learning with their appraisal of employability related success?</p>
<p>What aspects of your previous study did you find most valuable and why? Example prompt <i>“Did you have any employment plans while engaged in your previous study?”</i></p>	<p>Research question 4, What other contributing factors are present? Research question 6, How do students connect their assessments of learning with their appraisal of employability related success?</p>
<p>Why did you choose your current course? Example prompt <i>“Was the idea of being able to be employed important to you? How much was this a factor?”</i></p>	<p>Research question 2, What teaching and learning strategies have universities used that are thought to facilitate employability? Research question 3, What teaching and learning strategies within HE are perceived by students to be important in advancing their employability? Research question 4, What other contributing factors are present? Research question 5, How do students perceive the link between HE and employability? Research question 6, How do students connect their assessments of learning with their appraisal of employability related success?</p>
<p>What aspects of your choice are you most happy with? Example prompt <i>“How might this relate to employment?”</i></p>	<p>Research question 2, What teaching and learning strategies have universities used that are thought to facilitate employability? Research question 3, What teaching and learning strategies within HE are perceived by students to be important in advancing their employability? Research question 4, What other contributing factors are present? Research question 5, How do students perceive the link between HE and employability? Research question 6, How do students connect their assessments of learning with their appraisal of employability related success?</p>

Have you previously participated in paid or unpaid employment?	Research question 4 , What other contributing factors are present?
What elements of your prior study do you feel are most useful for your current learning and why?	Research question 4 , What other contributing factors are present? Research question 6 , How do students connect their assessments of learning with their appraisal of employability related success?
What elements of your prior work experience were particularly memorable and why?	Research question 4 , What other contributing factors are present?
Can you tell me about any activities experienced during your time at university so far that you feel have been particularly relevant to employment?	Research question 2 , What teaching and learning strategies have universities used that are thought to facilitate employability? Research question 3 , What teaching and learning strategies within HE are perceived by students to be important in advancing their employability? Research question 4 , What other contributing factors are present? Research question 6 , How do students connect their assessments of learning with their appraisal of employability related success?
What aspects of your current learning do you feel are most valuable and why?	Research question 6 , How do students connect their assessments of learning with their appraisal of employability related success?
Are you working now, how does this fit with your university experience?	Research question 4 , What other contributing factors are present? Research question 5 , How do students perceive the link between HE and employability? Research question 6 , How do students connect their assessments of learning with their appraisal of employability related success?
What in your view makes the ideal employee?	Research question 1 . What is employability and how do students define employability? Research question 4 , What other contributing factors are present? Research question 5 , How do students perceive the link between HE and employability?
What are your employment related plans for next year?	Research question 3 , What teaching and learning strategies within HE are perceived by students to be important in advancing their employability? Research question 4 , What other contributing factors are present? Research question 5 , How do students perceive the link between HE and employability?

<p>Do you have any long-term employment related plans and if so can you tell me about them?</p>	<p>Research question 3, What teaching and learning strategies within HE are perceived by students to be important in advancing their employability? Research question 4, What other contributing factors are present? Research question 5, How do students perceive the link between HE and employability? Research question 6, How do students connect their assessments of learning with their appraisal of employability related success?</p>
<p>What influences your employment related plans?</p>	<p>Research question 3, What teaching and learning strategies within HE are perceived by students to be important in advancing their employability? Research question 4, What other contributing factors are present? Research question 5, How do students perceive the link between HE and employability? Research question 6, How do students connect their assessments of learning with their appraisal of employability related success?</p>
<p>What do you think is the university's influence on your short and long-term career plans</p>	<p>Research question 2, What teaching and learning strategies have universities used that are thought to facilitate employability? Research question 5, How do students perceive the link between HE and employability? Research question 6, How do students connect their assessments of learning with their appraisal of employability related success?</p>
<p>Has your university experience altered your thoughts /feelings about employment and if so can you tell me about this?</p>	<p>Research question 2, What teaching and learning strategies have universities used that are thought to facilitate employability? Research question 5, How do students perceive the link between HE and employability? Research question 6, How do students connect their assessments of learning with their appraisal of employability related success?</p>

<p>Can you tell me about an issue that is important for you and has influenced your thoughts about work?</p>	<p>Research question 1. What is employability and how do students define employability? Research question 2, What teaching and learning strategies have universities used that are thought to facilitate employability? Research question 3, What teaching and learning strategies within HE are perceived by students to be important in advancing their employability? Research question 4, What other contributing factors are present? Research question 5, How do students perceive the link between HE and employability? Research question 6, How do students connect their assessments of learning with their appraisal of employability related success?</p>
<p>Can you tell me about an issue that is important for you and has influenced your actions related to work?</p>	<p>Research question 1. What is employability and how do students define employability? Research question 2, What teaching and learning strategies have universities used that are thought to facilitate employability? Research question 3, What teaching and learning strategies within HE are perceived by students to be important in advancing their employability? Research question 4, What other contributing factors are present? Research question 5, How do students perceive the link between HE and employability? Research question 6, How do students connect their assessments of learning with their appraisal of employability related success?</p>
<p>Have you an employment related story of significance to you that you are willing to share</p>	<p>Research question 4, What other contributing factors are present?</p>
<p>In summary: What in your experience are factors which you think most influence your employability? E.g., is it what you have learnt in more formal classes at university, is it experiences you've had outside class, and/ or is it experiences you have had in your life that are not necessarily university-related e.g., significant other people?</p>	<p>Research question 1. What is employability and how do students define employability Research question 2, What teaching and learning strategies have universities used that are thought to facilitate employability? Research question 3, What teaching and learning strategies within HE are perceived by students to be important in advancing their employability? Research question 4, What other contributing factors are present? Research question 5, How do students perceive the link between HE and employability? Research question 6, How do students connect their assessments of learning with their appraisal of employability related success?</p>

Appendix 2: A blank university work placement mentor feedback sheet

Employer Placement Feedback Report

Student:

Employer:

1. Overall Performance:

Please mark how the student performed against the criteria listed below. **Please tick**

	Did not meet Expectations	Approached Expectations	Met Expectations	Exceeded Expectations
Performance at Interview				
Prior knowledge of organisation & sector				
Achieving your placement objectives				
Overall performance on placement				

How could the student have improved his/her performance at interview and prior knowledge of organisation & sector in order to exceed your expectations?

Are there any other comments, advice or specific feedback you would like to give the student based on the above? This will help them develop and learn from their placement experience.

2. Graduate Skills to develop

[include rationale for our skills?]

What are the top 5 skills or areas of knowledge most important for graduates entering your profession or industry? **Please tick**

Communications skills	
Organisation & Self-management	
Initiative & Leadership	
Planning & Research	
Sector Awareness	
Digital & Information Literacy	
Problem Solving	
Willingness to learn	
Confidence	
Resilience	
Other: (please give details	

Which of these skills or areas of knowledge did the student demonstrate? **Please tick**

Communications skills	
Organisation & Self-management	
Initiative & Leadership	
Planning & Research	
Sector Awareness	
Digital & Information Literacy	
Problem Solving	
Willingness to learn	
Confidence	
Resilience	
Other: (please give details	

Which specific skills or areas of knowledge does the student need to develop further before he/she graduates? **Please tick**

Communications skills	
Organisation & Self-management	
Initiative & Leadership	
Planning & Research	
Sector Awareness	
Digital & Information Literacy	
Problem Solving	
Willingness to learn	
Confidence	
Resilience	
Other: (please give details	

Would you recommend him/her to another organisation? Please give reasons.

Yes/No

If you had a suitable vacancy within your organisation would you recruit this student?

Yes/No

If No, what areas of development could the student focus on to become a potential employee within your organisation?

3. Employability Skills

Based on the student's performance during placement, please mark (where you can) how the student performed against the employability skills listed below.

Please tick

Skills	Not met expectations	Approached expectations	Met expectations	Exceeded expectations	Not applicable
Communication skills					
Organisation & Self-management					
Initiative & Leadership					
Planning & Research					
Sector Awareness					
Digital & Information Literacy					
Problem Solving					
Willingness to learn					
Confidence					
Resilience					
Other: (please give details)					

Is there any advice or specific feedback you would like to give the student?

4. University Placement Programme

Were you contacted by the student's placement tutor during the placement?

Yes/No

Were you satisfied with the contact you received from the Placement Team at the University of xxx in the lead up to the placement?

Yes/No

Any other comments:

Please comment on how well you feel the placement programme is managed.

Are you interested in offering student placements in the future?

Yes/No

Would you like to be contacted by the Graduate Employment Manager to discuss your graduate and part time recruitment needs?

Yes/No

Please let us know if you would like more information or would like to take part in any of our initiatives below. **Please tick**

Employer Challenges (one day challenges for students to work on and present findings)	
Professional Mentoring (Virtual Board)	
Guest Speaking to students	
Final year individual negotiated research project (6-month projects)	
Employer Advisory Group (Virtual Board –meets annually)	
Joining the <i>university</i> Business Network (free network)	

Your Name:

Position in Organisation:

Date:

We like to share any feedback you give with our students, if you would prefer your comments not to be passed on please indicate here:

Yes/No

Thank you for your time completing this evaluation. Employer feedback helps us to ensure that our placement programme continues to be a valuable and positive experience for our students and employers. Please get in touch if you have any additional comments or issues that you would like to raise with us.

Appendix 3: Table showing participants' modular marks for the year of this study

*Participants' names are pseudonyms

Name	*Sally case study 1 student
mark	module
67	1
79	2
51	3
70	4
63	5
81	6
pass	(Programme assessment)

(Two case study 1 students left the university)

Name	*Angela case study 1 student
mark	module
72	1
74	2
62	3
73	4
75	5
64	6
Pass	(Programme assessment)

Name	*Lily case study 2 student
mark	module
73	1
79	2
72	3
70	4
70	5
78	6
Name	*Emily case study 2 student
mark	module
68	1
68	2
67	3
72	4
70	5
67	6
Name	*Racheal case study 2 student
68	1
74	2
66	3
70	4
62	5
66	6

Name	*Kathy case study 3 student
mark	module
55	1
53	2
62	3
60	4
52	Research project (equivalent of 2 modules)
Name	*Tabitha case study 3 student
70	1
60	2
60	3
70	4
40	research project (equivalent of 2 modules)
Name	*Jenny case study 3 student
75	1
75	2
72	3
78	4
75	research project (equivalent of 2 modules)
Name	*Tanya case study 3 student
71	1
76	2
70	3
73	4
71	research project (equivalent of 2 modules)

Appendix 4: Participant information letter

Title of study : A holistic case study of contributory factors to the student experience of employability.

Researcher

Sarah Flanagan

Primary supervisor

Professor

Dear student,

Thank you for taking the time to read my letter. I am employed as a senior lecturer by the University of xxx. To fulfil my role, I teach a number of courses at the university. I also continue to develop my own knowledge through research. I am currently completing a PhD study with the University; this study is supervised by two senior academics at the university.

Background information.

My PhD is a piece of research that focuses on the issue of employability. Employability is an increasingly significant topic within the field of higher education. There are many definitions of employability but it is commonly seen as a perceived fit between an individual and their form of employment which often results in a feeling of satisfaction for both the employee and the employer. Universities are viewed as important stakeholders in the facilitation of the knowledge and skills that are associated with employability related success. I am interested in the approaches that universities use to facilitate employability related knowledge and skills, and your views on these.

The purpose of my project

My research is about the employability related experience of students at different stages of their degree. This includes the student response to the employability related strategies provided by the university, the student's on-going career plans and their evaluations of progress both academic and work related. My research is holistic in its nature so it is also interested in other factors that may influence an individual's employability such as social networks and significant events. The potential benefits gained from an enhanced understanding of students' employability related experiences include the opportunity to identify factors that facilitate employability related success and possibly reduce barriers. This can be beneficial for both the students and the university.

Why do I want you to take part?

To gain these valuable insights the study requires 9 participants in total, 3 from the first year of their degree. 3 from the second year and 3 from the third. Study participants need to be studying an undergraduate degree at the University within a relevant year group. Participation in the research is entirely voluntary.

What will happen to your information?

The information provided by participants will be gathered in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998) and treated confidentially unless information reveals that an individual is at risk of harm. Information used for the purpose of the study and written up as a thesis plus associated subsequent publications will be anonymised. All information will be stored securely. Hard copy information will be stored in a locked cupboard within my office. All electronic data will be anonymised and stored on password protected databases. Data will be destroyed five years from completion of the research.

What will your participation involve?

Participation in the study will involve one semi-structured interview at the beginning of the year and one towards the end of the year. It is anticipated that the interview will take no longer than one hour each. They will be audio recorded and transcribed. The semi-structured interviews will also include the request of a work related story from the student. You do not have to talk about something or answer a particular question if you do not want to. For those students in the first or second year of their degree a copy of their placement module reflective report and the placement employer feedback document will be requested as data to contribute to my understanding of your own work in relation to employability. As I am interested in a possible relationship between progresses in academic study and perceived employability-related progress I will also collect the participants' module grades (with your permission) associated with that particular year. Your grades will not be affected whether you choose to take part in the study or not. Information will be collected over a one year period.

If you would like to participate

If you would like to participate in the research project please sign the attached consent form and return it to me (my workplace address is detailed above).

What if I change my mind?

You are able to withdraw from the research project at any time through a telephone call or visit to me informing me of your decision to end involvement in the research.

Anonymised data from participants involved in the study for over three months will still be used in the results.

Further information and contacts

I am happy to meet with you prior to your active involvement in the research to answer any questions. It is anticipated that this is a low risk project however you also have opportunity to share any concerns with my primary supervisor

Yours sincerely

Sarah Flanagan

Appendix 5: Consent form for the study

A holistic case study of contributory factors to the student experience of employability.

Do you agree	yes	no
I have read and understood the attached participant information letter		
I understand that data used in the construction of the PhD study and any subsequent publications will be anonymised		
I understand that data collected will be stored securely for five years following the study's completion and then destroyed		
I would like to volunteer for involvement in the research project through participation in the case study and I am happy for the researcher to subsequently contact me about my involvement		
As a case study participant I agree to being interviewed twice in a year.		
As a case study participant in the first or the second year of my degree I agree for the researcher to have a copy and examine my employer feedback forms from placement. (Any analysis from this document used in the study will be anonymised).		
As a case study participant in the first or the second year of my degree I agree for the researcher to have a copy and examine my reflective reports related to placement. (Any analysis from this document used in the study will be anonymised).		
I agree for my marks profile(the module marks I obtained during the year of the study) to be collected by the researcher and used in the study's analysis (I understand that this information will be reported anonymously in the findings)		
I understand that I can withdraw from the project at any time		
I understand that withdrawal from the study prior to 3 months will result in my information not being used in the research. Withdrawal following 3 months will result in my data still being used in its anonymous form		

Participant's name

Participants signature

.....

Appendix 6: An example of initial coding from a semi structured interview transcript.

Rachel (case study 2) second semi -structured interview

My first question, have your views on employability changed at all since our last meeting?

R – Yes they have because I've made the area that I want to work in more specific so because I've just finished my placement I know what I want to do now.

S – and the placement was very specific in that was it? So that kind of really influenced your views on what you want to do.

R – Yes, because I knew I did want to work in the Early Years sector but I didn't know in what specific area or what age group I wanted to teach so now I've had a lot more experience with the different age groups I know which specific age group I want to work with.

S – I see, and was that very much associated with your placement? Once you were there did you get chance to do different

R – different things. It made me a lot more confident.

S – Was that something you requested or was it just given to you?

R – It was just given.

S – Oh, that's interesting, isn't it? So for you it sounds as though that placement opportunity and offering you those snapshots of experience really influenced the specific nature of your employability. So is there anything within that that you think is required of you or you need to do employability related that's made you, sort of formed those decisions?

R – Because, I think in the Early Years it's mostly 0 – 5 but I was working with Year 2 which is the seven year old age range and I know I'm definitely going to have to do my PGCE to get there to become an actual teacher so it would give me the opportunity to work in not only just the Year 2 but different age groups at the school as well.

S – I see. So from that you know now that you need to

R – What I need to do

S – to get a certain qualification, yes, I'm with you.

So, number two is, what aspect of your study since our last meeting have you found most valuable and why?

R – So I wrote about this in my reflection log from my placement. So we were studying diversity and inclusion and I was working in a Catholic school so the children, obviously because it's Ramadan now, so as it's a Catholic school they're more focussed on Jesus and Mary so in the month of May they had the Easter and they had the May procession and benedictions and they used to go to church for mass so I did do an activity with the children where they were allowed to learn about Ramadan and it was an eye opener because they didn't know anything.

S – That's really interesting isn't it.

R – So it just showed how you need to, regardless of it being a Catholic school the children should be aware of other religions and cultures because the only children who actually knew about it were the children from a Muslim background. It did make the other ones feel left out so it did bring a reaction out of me.

Table showing codes within the text

	Employability fit
	Experience helps determine employability
	People make choices
	Learning is empowering
	Wider viewpoints
	Plans
	Knowledge
	Applying theory to practice

Appendix 7: Tables showing principal themes, subthemes and codes.

Table 1 Illustrating principal theme, subthemes and codes for analysis section 1

Principal theme – fit is fundamental to employability; some factors are integral to the concept
Subthemes
Factors impactful on fit- knowledge skills, practicalities, the social, change, happiness and challenge.
Factors that are integral to the concept of employability – knowledge, practicalities, employability is social, change and challenge.
Codes
<i>employability fit, social mobility, ambition, knowledge and learning are relevant to employability, application of theory to practice, skills, personality is significant, personal characteristics/ personal values, practicalities, money is important, geography is important, part time work, social learning, social disappointments, changing opinions, emotions are relevant, happiness, rewards in practice, searching for work is a challenge, work is difficult, perceptions of injustice.</i>

Table 2 Illustrating principal theme, subthemes and codes for analysis section 2

Principal theme- The contribution of experience to employability including its temporal nature
Subthemes
<p>Experiential learning, Changing views of employability, Experience and the determination of employability fit, Being in employability, Choices are made but there are limits, Additional experiential contributions, Academic progression as an indicator of strength, Past experience influences employability,</p>
Codes
<p><i>experiences are important to employability</i>, experience drives learning, experiential learning, experience becomes increasingly valuable, people spend time in the workplace, experience helps determine employability, work placement is valuable, work experience is valuable, <i>experience impacts on employability</i>, <i>experience and learning</i>, interest in a subject, plans, people make choices, the past is important, history, learning is scaffolded, subject content drives learning, academic progress reveals strengths, strength revelation.</p>

Table 3 Illustrating principal theme, subthemes and codes for analysis section 3

Principal theme- employability is social
Subthemes
<p>Fitting in socially,</p> <p>Social learning,</p> <p>Social history</p> <p>Social connections</p> <p>Employability extends via social interactions</p> <p>The university creates space for social interaction</p> <p>The university and challenge</p> <p>The precipitation of change</p> <p>The university broadens horizons and it is developmental</p>
Codes
<p>People learn from each other, role modelling, teachers, people learn socially, the past, family, past contacts, fitting in is important, social matters are difficult in the workplace, the university is difficult, people approach work differently, people adapt, interacting, networking, knowing people, chatting informally, wider viewpoints, the university stimulates growth, people change the university is challenging, learning is empowering, the university is empowering.</p>

*Deductive codes are in italics, I describe some codes as deductive because, as a result of my reading and experience, I anticipated that they may be in the data, the other codes, I describe as inductive.