

**How does an outdoor orientation programme  
aid transition and adaptation to university for 1<sup>st</sup>  
year students?**



Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the  
degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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January 2019

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the participants whose interviews were inspiring and  
pleasure to conduct

&

Dr Julie Brunton & Prof Jim McKenna for guiding me through the research  
process

## Abstract

Outdoor orientation programmes aid transition to university through adventure experience. The assumption is that transition processes are achieved by helping students develop constructive social support systems as well as providing them with feelings of belonging, trust and connection to a group of peers. These peer relationships provide both critical emotional support and strengthen educational gains (Bell et al., 2014). Programmes vary in length, content, and objectives. Further outcome and evidence-based studies are needed to examine outdoor orientation programme elements to better understand how and what elements provide support for students and increase retention rates (Cortez, 2014). The aims of the research were to investigate how an outdoor orientation programmes encourages transition and adaptation to university for first year students. Additional aims were to investigate the role of outdoor orientation programmes in social integration and personal growth and to develop standardised practice for outdoor orientation programmes. A mixed methods data collection was used to explore student experiences of the outdoor orientation programme. This included semi structured interviews, questionnaires, focus groups and participant observation. Results of the SAUQ questionnaire for stage 1 and 2 indicate that the intervention group had a significant overall better adaptation to university (and each of the 4 individual constructs) than the control group ( $p < 0.05$ ). These benefits of adaptation to university for 1<sup>st</sup> year students were explored through thematic areas of personal and social growth and development and explained through resilience theory and social penetration theory.

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## Chapter 1 - Introduction

*One of the hardest tasks for fresher's is to get to grips with the way University differs from school. It can be a shock when teachers start being really pleased if you answer back, and you don't have to hand in your homework for weeks and weeks. You will also discover that since you can now smoke and snog without getting into trouble, university bike sheds tend to be mainly for bikes.*

*Like anything in life, preparation will help. This means talking to existing students on your course to get a realistic picture of how many rubbish lecturers there will be and how impossible it will be to keep on top of the workload or live on your student loan. Talk to friends and family, too, making sure they feel included in this exciting new step in your life and that they realise how much you will value their support until you meet more interesting people.*

*This will happen more quickly if you learn a few life skills before you start at university, such as being able to boil an egg, read a bank statement and put the right amount of bleach down a toilet.*

*One of the first things you should do when you arrive on campus is to walk around and identify all the buildings relevant to you before you have to find them in the five minutes to spare after realising your alarm failed to go off. Join the campus tour, library tour, even the tourist tour so that not only do you know where lectures are, you can also feel a full part of your new community.*

*You also need to join something - a society, seminar, bus queue - as soon as possible so you can start making friends. It is much harder to join things later in the term, so resist the temptation to appear mysteriously self-contained.*

*In any case, an air of mystery is hard to sustain when you are sharing a bathroom. So don't be intimidated by other people's mysterious personas either - they won't be able to keep them up.*

*However, do make sure you know what is expected of you when it comes to academic work - and what you should be expecting from tutors. Don't forget that they won't yet know how capable you are, so it is up to you to make an impression, and to ask if you don't understand something. No one will think you are stupid. But they might get irritated if they've just sent you an email explaining everything.*

*One of the biggest differences from school is that teachers won't keep nagging you about deadlines, or even tell you how many hours of study you should be doing. Instead, you will have to work all this out for yourself.*

*You will need to learn to prioritise and leave plenty of time for assignments, especially at the beginning so that you can work out where to find things like books.*

*The most important thing is not to rush things, or expect too much from friends - or yourself - too soon. And remember, even if you ignore all advice, nobody is*

*going to give you a detention. (Harriet Swain 'The transition from school to university' Guardian Online 9<sup>th</sup> September 2008)*

The given introductory excerpt is from a student blog aimed at helping people come to terms with being a student. It illustrates a range of changes and challenges that face an incoming new university student. The focus of the blog is significant in that despite the informal language, it identifies the main issues and problems facing a new student. These include a new found independence and self-reliance. This is from a personal, academic, environmental and social perspective. These issues require a new student to go through the process of transition in order to adapt to the new university way of life.

*In the UK only 1 in 12 students, or 8%, leave HE during their first year of study, but surveys undertaken by What Works? Project teams across four institutions found that between 33% (1/3) and 42% (2/5) of students think about withdrawing from HE. (Thomas, 2012)*

The HEFCE report 'What works? Student retention and success' (2012) indicates that successful continuation and success is based on belonging. Belonging is best created through mainstream activities that all students participate in. Enhanced student belonging is achieved through supportive peer relations and meaningful interaction between staff and students. Therefore it would follow that the most successful way to aid the process of transition and improve adaptation would be the development of a scheme which accelerates the key concepts of building peer relations and interactions. The thesis will try and address these fundamental issues. This chapter will set the scene for the thesis. Issues of definition are discussed before the structure of the thesis is outlined.

### 1.1 Information about the University under investigation

The University under investigation opened in the 1960s through the establishment of two teacher training colleges. The two merged in 1980, and in 2012 the institution became a University. The University is relatively small and has three departments: the Institute of Childhood and Education, the School of Social and Health Sciences and the School of Arts and Communication.

Following its inauguration in 2012, the university has admitted many of its students from the surrounding area. These areas include a relatively large number of widening participation postcodes. The university internal student statistics (2014) show the institution has a gender split of 66.3% female and 33.7% male, of these 55.3% are 20 and under, 25.5% 21-24 and 19.2% 25 and older and classed as mature students. Full time students make up 96% of the student body with 4% studying on a part time basis. UK nationals account for 99.3% of the student body, 0.2% EU nationals and 0.5% Non EU nationals. 98% of the students studied at state schools with the remaining 2% from private schools. Undergraduates account for 83% of the student body with 17% post graduates.

Figures from 2014 indicate 86.1% of the undergraduate student body progress from year 1 to year 2. This is below the UK average which currently stands at 91% (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2014). Many of the students who undertake a degree in the sports based curriculum are white working class males, their characteristics in general comprise of being from the local area, state school educated, and being the first generation of their families undertaking a university degree.

The University entry requirement for the sports based subjects was 104 UCAS tariff point (equivalent to BCC/ ACD – A-levels). The University is in direct competition with a local post 1992 university that has a good reputation and excellent facilities for sports based courses. This competing University has been offering unconditional offers of a place to many of its applicants since the rule limiting the maximum number of students was removed by the Government (2015). The university under investigation traditionally picked up some of the students who were not accepted into the competitor university. This is a local issue set in a national picture where between 2015 and 2020 student numbers are expected to fall by 75 thousand shrinking cohorts by 14% due to a decline in the population number of 17 and 18 year olds. These two local and national changes have created a difficult recruitment for the university creating an even greater emphasis on retention to keep the students they do enrol.

## 1.2 Issues of definition

The definitions used throughout the thesis are generally terms which have been standardised over a number of years and have a general consensus of agreement of definition. This should enhance the readability and clarity of the thesis. A number of the key terms are presented and defined below.

### Student profile terminology - based on the University under investigation.

Local student - A student who has not changed their address to attend university.

Mature student - An undergraduate student who is over 21 years old at the start of their course.

Traditional student - An 18 or 19 year old student entering undergraduate study directly after A-levels.

Sport and Physical education (PE) student – A student undertaking a sports degree course in a PE based discipline.

Sport science student – A student undertaking a sports degree course not including PE.

### Student tracking terminology based on HEFCE definitions

Progression - A university's measure of the number or proportion of students who complete the requirements of a stage of their course and continue to the next stage of that course

Non continuation - The number or proportion of students who, having started their studies in a given academic year, do not enrol to the successive academic year despite being expected to do so

Retention - The number or proportion of students who at the end of the academic year are entitled to re-enrol at either the same or subsequent level of study, compared to the number who enrolled at the beginning of that academic year

Programme - For the purpose of this report programme is used when specific reference is made to degree programme

### Other key definitions

Adaptation to university - Psychological adaptation and sociocultural adaptation are inter-related but conceptually and empirically distinct. The former is predicted by personality variables, life changes and social support; the latter, by cultural distance, cultural identity, language ability, and cultural knowledge (Ward & Kennedy, 1993).

Transition to university - Transition is a process that involves the qualitative reorganisation of inner self and of external behaviour. Life changes that are transitional involve a restructuring of the way individuals feel about themselves and about their world, and a reorganisation of their personal competence, role arrangements, and relationships with significant others. Transitions include changes in their physical, psychological and social environments (Cowan, 1991).

Outdoor orientation programme (OOP)- outdoor orientation programs were defined as orientation or pre-orientation experiences for groups of first-year students that use adventure experiences and include at least one overnight in an outdoor setting (Bell, Holmes & Williams, 2010).

### 1.3 Structure of the thesis

The aims of the research are the following:

1. To investigate how an outdoor orientation programmes encourages transition and adaptation to university for first year students.
2. To investigate the role of outdoor orientation programmes in social integration and personal growth.
3. To develop standardised practice for outdoor orientation programmes.

Based on the key research aims there are a number of practical questions which are especially important in this action research project. Throughout the implementation of the programme modifications occurred based on the research findings and process, the questions which informed these modifications included:

- a) Which characteristics are important in positive programme outcome?
- b) Are some elements of the programme unnecessary?
- c) Which characteristics achieve what outcomes?
- d) How do participant characteristics affect programme characteristics that are responsible for achieving the desired outcomes?

The thesis used a mixed methods design including an interpretive phenomenological analysis drawing on the work of Van Manen (1990) and Smith (1990). The interpretive approach was used as a research methodology and as a method. The thesis also uses a general thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), Content analysis (Berelson, 1952; Krippendorff, 2004) and statistical analysis of data generated through a questionnaire.

Chapter two details the literature review of the issues deemed relative to the phenomena under investigation. The literature review draws on peer reviewed research within Higher education and the study of outdoor orientation programmes. The exploration of gaps in the knowledge base provides the rationale for the focus of study, the main research aims and related objectives.

Chapter three describes the philosophical underpinnings of the study and the appropriateness of the research methods for the current research aim.

Chapter four outlines the current study design and the methods conducted, detailing operationalised methodology and practical procedures.



Chapter five presents the findings of the pilot data received from stage 0 of the action research process; the exploration of logistics of delivering successful OOP and the issues experienced by first year students. The overlapping perspectives from interviews, focus groups and an evaluative questionnaire are reported and explored.

Chapter six presents the findings of stage 1 of the action research process; the exploration of the issues of adaptation and transition experienced by students. Key thematic areas are highlighted and explained through the overlapping perspectives from participant observation, interviews and focus groups.

Chapter seven presents the final findings of the action research process; stage 2. This details the impact of the final version of the outdoor orientation programme on transition to university for first year students.

Chapter eight includes a summary of the main findings of the study and a discussion around what is considered to be the essential nature/structure of the experience and how it can be influenced through OOP. The chapter also includes reflection on the methodology, considers the strengths and limitations of the study, the possible implications of the research and future recommendation

## Chapter 2 - Literature Review

This chapter provides an overview of the relevant literature in the field of higher education and OOP. The focus is upon peer reviewed literature on the topic of outdoor adventurous activity and how it can affect adaptation and transition to university for 1<sup>st</sup> year students.

An internet based search of relevant literature (1968-2016) was conducted. The literature reviewed was post 1968 as this is when the first piece of research was conducted about the processes and development of successful OOP programmes (Bell, Holmes & Williams, 2010). The less contemporary articles were included to comment on how literature, theory and ideas of OOP, adaptation and transition have developed over time.

The review operationalised a systematic search, using Summon indexed publications and Google Scholar. The list of journal titles indexed in Summon overlaps with many of the traditional databases including PsycArticles, PsycINFO, PubMed and Science Direct. The search strategy included the research topic, method and methodology.

The search was conducted using combinations of key words: 'Outdoor orientation programme' or 'Wilderness' or 'transition' and, 'adaptation' or 'retention' or 'university'. Additional terms were later added including 'experience', 'psychological', 'physiological', 'green space', 'attrition', 'persistence', 'satisfaction', 'completion', 'college', 'physical', 'intervention', 'mood', 'inactivity', 'physical education', 'team', 'individual', 'green activity', 'provision', 'schemes'.

The literature review was not restricted to articles retrieved this way, further articles were found through referenced work. Articles were included in the review if they addressed an adaptation and transition in the student population and explored issues of OOP. All articles reviewed were published in English language. The abstracts of yielded articles were reviewed to aid the decision to include or not. The aim was to not produce a systematic review but to produce a literature review through a systematic search.

Transition and adaptation to university has been researched widely from a number of epistemological and ontological positions. Current literature in the field ranges from social, environmental, institutional and personal encompassing a range of psychological issues such as self-esteem, self-efficacy and identity (Barton, Griffin & Pretty, 2012).

## 2.1 Higher education literature

### 2.1.1 Student experience perspective

University is an intricate sub system of society complete with its own set of social, moral and educational processes (Huber, 2005). The early experiences of a first year student shapes whether they feel successful or unsuccessful in university and whether they integrate into the academic community (Huber, 2005).

There are a number of reasons cited for why students leave university. Feelings of isolation and not fitting in are primary reasons for leaving (Thomas, 2012). These students are less engaged with the Higher education institution (HEI) and less engaged with their peers (Thomas, 2012). The theory of student involvement (Astin, 1984) further supports the ideas put forward to create effective retention programmes. Student persistence is often related to levels of student involvement with the university and is further enhanced through meaningful contact with staff and other students. Through this theory Astin (1984) also highlights that involvement may naturally vary for different student groups. These groups include students who commute (non-residential), mature students, international students, students with disabilities and students from disadvantaged backgrounds. These groups often encounter more barriers to engaging with the university and other students, are less likely to form attachments and be less embedded in university life (Patiniotis & Holdsworth, 2005). The university under investigation enrolls a number of students with these characteristics.

The number of students with disabilities and mental health issues enrolling at university is increasing year on year (Wolanin & Steele, 2004). This group have wide ranging physical and mental conditions which can pose a number of different challenges to a university. Students in this group may feel isolated if they are not being able to join in or fully engage. In many cases universities do not provide the same level of support for students as schools and colleges (Hadley, 2007). This may be an issue with knowledge about disabilities (Hamblet, 2014) and the resources to help students with physical or mental issues. Struggling students in some universities are not noticed until they have missed or failed work, which creates a reactive approach to issues rather than a preventative approach (Norvilitis, Sun & Zhang, 2010).

Mature students face a range of possible problems upon entering higher education. One issue is home responsibilities such as children and subsequent issues of childcare (financial and time). This can limit choice of university based on commuting distance (Reay, Ball & David, 2002). This group may also have issues supporting themselves financially through university (Ball et al., 1995). There are also the social issues of being older than the 'traditional' student body which can exacerbate

feelings of not fitting in. Other commitments such as caring for children can limit personal resources available for full engagement in the university experience (Krause, 2005).

The university under investigation has a number of 1<sup>st</sup> generation students from lower socio-economic status. This group face a number of issues and barriers that can hinder progression in higher education. Social class has repercussions in terms of academic and social integration that ultimately affect institutional attachment (Aries & Seider, 2007). In some cases students from this demographic are ill prepared for university (Reay, Crozier & Clayton, 2009). These students are much more likely to attend local post 1992 universities. A larger proportion of these students have part time jobs and are more likely to be non-residential students (Read, Archer & Leathwood, 2003). These characteristics can have a possible detrimental effect on student adaptation to university through time constraints and not full immersing in the university experience (Reay, Crozier & Clayton, 2009)

Transition to university is a significant psychosocial experience for any student regardless of individual factors. This transition involves change to individuals sense of self (Earwalker, 1992) at a time when the role of identity and interaction are particularly important. During this critical initial period a variety of factors could make this an unpleasant experience that may cause students to want to leave their university. There are a number of reasons cited why students leave university. Feelings of isolation and not fitting in are primary reasons for leaving (Thomas, 2012). These students are less engaged with the university and less engaged with their peers (Thomas, 2012). Yorke (2008) states 6 factors of why students leave university:

- 1) Poor quality of student experience
- 2) Inability to cope with demands of higher education
- 3) Unhappiness with social environment
- 4) Wrong choice of course
- 5) Financial difficulties
- 6) Dissatisfaction with what the institution is providing

Gann (2003) also adds the following to the list; lack of confidence, personal difficulties, loneliness and isolation. Thomas (2002) also conducted research in this area and described that it is not usually just one of these given reasons for leaving university but a combination. Students are particularly susceptible to attrition in the first term or just after the Christmas holidays. The literature selected to

highlight the factors of why students leave University may seem dated at two decades old but it has been used on that basis to demonstrate that the issues effecting students seem to be static. This idea of static problems with different cohorts of students facing the same problems year on year provides a basis to develop strategic interventions and management to address these factors.

It has been proposed by Macdonald and Gunn (1997) that student's early experiences of the university environment create a 'script' that can powerfully shape the way in which that individual interacts with their university, peers and staff for the remainder of their time in higher education. It is therefore of great importance that these early experiences following enrolment provide a physical, psychological and social environment that challenge the 'scripts' students tend to create.

Carr, Colthurst, Coyle & Elliott (2013) found that many students expect to experience difficulties such as isolation. Such difficulties may bring students to a position where they may leave university. One in ten students do not continue to year two, particularly those from non-traditional backgrounds (Allen, McKenna & Robinson (2008).

Major change or transition such as leaving home to attend university can be a mental health risk factor and greatly affect experiences of psychological wellbeing (Carr, Colthurst, Coyle & Elliott, 2013). Transition to university is one of the most significant life changes young people may have to make which can cause increased levels of psychological distress (Carr, Colthurst, Coyle & Elliott, 2013).

Gerdes and Mallinckrodt (1994) conducted research into emotional, social and academic adjustment and found that a number of issues that affect students in the transition to university. Firstly they found the transition period can cause individuals to question their relationships, self-worth and direction in life. Secondly that many students have unrealistic expectations of university, these expectations are all encompassing from a social, academic and emotional perspectives.

Student expectations may be created through media coverage, popular culture or internal ideas. Research has found that discrepancies between the perceived ideals and the reality of university life cause disenchantment and a poorer transition and adaptation period (Whiteley, 1982). Gerdes and Mallinckrodt (1994) also found that emotional and social adjustment predicted attrition better than academic adjustment. This is interesting because on the surface the main reason for university attendance is academic success yet this seems to be superseded by the social aspects in importance when it comes to persistence.

Research conducted by Vlamis, Bell and Gass (2011) highlights the fact that students may face problems at university through the loss of support systems when arriving at university. This seems a

logical assessment of the feelings set to be experienced by first year students. The difference between students who are successful and those who are not is the way in which they adapt to new situations, in fact the pre-existing support systems can hinder transition to university.

Wardley and Belanger (2012) investigated student adaptation to university based on their living arrangements and proximity to their home town. The best combination was found to be living on campus without access to prior communities, this was thought to be the result of the new social ties formed within the university community and less opposing priorities which allow the full immersion and embracement of university life. In contrast the worst combination was seen to be living off campus with easy access to home communities.

Increased or high levels of attachment to home communities can lead to withdrawing from the university experience. This is said to be caused by limited opportunities to meet other students in an extracurricular setting. This is thought to be an issue because friendship development at university can aid the transition processes through social events, study groups, sports participation and other club involvement. This issue is particularly pertinent to the university under investigation as it takes a large number of its students from the local surrounding area, therefore providing activities that actively engage students and promote involvement within university life is of great importance and need.

Wolfe and Kay (2011) state that higher levels of academic and social integration improve the transition process and increase the chance of persistence. Students who engage academically, socially and physically are more likely to achieve good adaptation to university life. Peel (2000) suggests that universities should pay more attention to the relational side of student development during the transition to university. This sentiment is echoed by Grayson and Grayson (2003) who noted that many universities pay limited attention to student's social integration placing a heavier focus upon academic integration. Student interaction with academic staff is also seen as key in the transition process. This is thought to increase institutional attachment and belonging and general positive attitudes towards their university.

Bean (1980) believed attrition is a consequence of background variables such as prior academic performance, socio economic status, place of residence, distance from home and size of home town. Bean's (1980) framework has been criticised due to the number and nature of the proposed variables make it difficult to identify and capture significant interactions between personal and institutional variables which therefore limit its usefulness as a tool for organisation change

(Willcoxson, Cotter & Jay, 2011). This is particularly important for the current study as it lays bare the complexity of interacting variables at this critical period.

Another framework provided by Tinto and Pusser (2006) focuses on academic and social integration which provides a clearer aims for increasing retention by investigating the causes of attrition. This is facilitated through both sides of the phenomena, the students and the institution. The framework recommends overt and explicit commitment, expectations, feedback, involvement, support and engagement on behalf of both parties.

Willcoxson, Cotter and Jay (2011) suggest further possible causes of attrition in addition to the ones provided by Bean (1980) and Tinto and Pusser (2006), they are academic and psychological readiness, conflicting work commitments and financial difficulties.

One alternative perspective to be considered was proposed by Brunnsden et al. (2000) who stated that the majority of research into retention and attrition fails to see dropout as a positive for some students. In certain cases university life and the career path it offers are not suitable for every individual and as such the idea that all dropout is negative is one which could be contested, or at the very least acknowledged.

### 2.1.2 University Perspective

Much of the research from an institutional perspective places a focus on retention. Through this research it is possible to explore how universities are addressing issues of retention, much of which is a focus upon the experience of adaptation to university through the process of transition. Issues of student retention are of great importance to universities not just in the UK but worldwide. There are two widely used measures of retention in the UK for full time undergraduates. The first is completion rate which is the number of students who start a degree course and continue to secure their qualification. The second is the continuation rate which is the number of students who are enrolled in second year registration. (Higher Education Statistics Authority, 2015).

The university on which this research thesis is based is underperforming on retention according to HESA figures (2013/14). The HSEA also create benchmark figures for performance based upon a range of measures which take into account issues such as different subject profiles or the different entry qualifications of the students. This allows comparisons to be made between similar HEI. The researched university is performing significantly worse than its benchmark figure. Therefore the university has an excess of preventable attrition against comparative HEI. The university has strategically identified retention as a key issue for improvement.

Most HEIs have not yet been able to translate what we know about student retention into forms of action that have led to substantial gains in completion or continuation rates (Tinto, 2006). Students who engage in formal and informal academic and social experiences are less likely to leave their HEI. Therefore, encouraging these experiences is recommended to facilitate belonging to the institute and peers. Schofield and Dismore (2010) believe that early delivery of these types of intervention is key in developing valued, engaged, dedicated and motivated students, all of which reduce attrition.

### 2.1.3 Retention schemes used within UK higher education

Failure to integrate students into university social and academic systems is a root cause of attrition, overcoming feelings of not belonging to the university community is critical to retention in first year students. Activities which engage and support students through stimulating discovery are thought to be key tool for building involvement and support for students. (Willcoxson, Cotter & Jay, 2011)

What Works Student Retention and Success (Thomas, 2012) describes a number of methods currently being used in UK HEI's to aid retention such as welcome lunches, extended 'freshers week' and social network link up incoming students . Many of these schemes follow a strategy noted by Harvey and Drew (2006) that state a scheme should contain; 'ice breakers', group work, staff involvement and take place over an extended amount of time. Schemes which encourage social integration are unsurprising given that friendships have been found to improve motivation to study, develop confidence, offer academic support, emotional support and develop a sense of belonging.

Thomas, (2012) presented case studies of a variety of orientation programmes taking place at different HEI's. The University of Hull offer a mature student welcome lunch. The university has a higher than national average retention rate of mature students. The University of Newcastle, offer an activity where students are presented a t-shirt and marker pen. They are required to decorate the t-shirts with their interests, they are then told to find students with similar interests. Both retention and progression has increased significantly since the scheme creation with all students 'agreeing' they had formed bonds with their peer. Nottingham Trent University have replaced the traditional 'freshers week' with 'welcome week' this involves over 350 academic, social, sporting and cultural activities. Since its inception in 2006 both retention and student satisfaction have improved year on year.

Jackson (2013) conducted research at the University of Central Lancashire into the use of social network websites to enhance first year university experience. Subjects with a high rate of attrition were targeted. Students with accepted offers to these subjects were invited to a subject Facebook group, the group included information on the city and their chosen course. It also provided



opportunity to interact with other students and therefore facilitate social integration and departmental belonging. Retention figures revealed an improvement in retention in the students who joined the group opposed to those who did not. The students also reported that it helped form friendships and networks. The students also commented that pre-enrolment contact was of significant importance to them.

Leeds Beckett University offer an outdoor orientation programme for a number of their sports based first year undergraduates, research conducted on this scheme has a main focus upon the psychological resilience such an orientation programme can create (Allen, McKenna & Robinson, 2008). Since 2005 the research has involved over 3000 first year students with the findings demonstrating personal growth and adaptability of many of the students. Further benefits of social integration and meeting university staff in a less formal setting were achieved.

## 2.2 Outdoor orientation programmes

The research into university retention schemes is closely aligned to the mainly North American phenomenon of wilderness orientation programmes and outdoor orientation programmes. OOP's benefit students in a number of ways, through enhancement of relationships with peers and academic staff. They have also been found to aid personal growth (Vlamiš, Bell & Gass, 2011).

The benefits of OOP's which aid transition into higher education have also been cited as key components in reducing attrition and increasing retention rates at university (Schofield & Dismore, 2010). OOP's have been shown to be more effective than other types of orientation programme (Bell, 2005) and OOP effectively aids transition to university through social benefits (Lein & Goldenberg, 2012), the theory and empirical research of these claims will be discussed.

Outdoor orientation programmes use adventure experience to aid transition to university. They are usually delivered in small groups of 15 or less and involve camping or staying over for at least one night (Bell, Holmes, & Williams 2010). Transition processes are achieved by helping students develop constructive social support systems as well as providing them with feelings of belonging, trust and connection to a group of peers. OOP participating students develop significantly greater degrees of social support compared to other orientation experiences (Bell, 2005). These peer relationships provide both critical emotional support and strengthen educational gains (Bell et al., 2014). This connection to peers is of particular interest given the implications of the highlighted retention literature.

Many students fear failing socially more than failing academically (Vlamiš, Bell & Gass, 2011) therefore OOP may serve to meet students' needs better than other orientation programmes.

Qualitative research conducted by Wolfe and Kay (2011) found students bonded with other students and made future plans and were 'looking forward to returning to college with support from their new social group'.

Despite the discussed social benefits of OOP for a large proportion of students who live on campus, their room and hall mates provide the greatest social support and social group (Erb, Renshaw, Short & Pollard, 2014). Although if this the case then it may provide students who live away from campus opportunity for extracurricular social group formation. Not only this, but the campus residing students will have the opportunity to widen their social circle and form relationships with course mates. This is supported by Austin et al. (2009) who highlights the sense of community OOP creates through familiarity with course mates.

According to Thomas (2012) effective interventions start pre entry, develop peer networks and friendships, place an emphasis on engagement, nurture, belonging and develop confidence. All of which are directly involved within OOP's. Tinto's (1993) student integration model states that effective retention programmes are committed to the development of social and educational communities and are committed to the education of the students, this again fits with the key aim of OOP's creating peer relationships. The model also infers ways in which these targets can be achieved. They include the involvement of both staff and students, programmes are developed over a long term, are developed in collaboration with students and should be continually assessed and altered based on student needs. This is an integral component of the researched universities plan to use OOP's. The OOP will be shaped and influenced directly by student and staff opinion to maximise its effectiveness and create an enjoyable and unforgettable experience.

Outdoor orientation programmes can be particularly important for first generation students, commuting students and may help resolve some of the needs for engaging learning experiences that help vulnerable students transition to university life (Bell et al., 2014). This highlights the importance of structuring retention programmes to include all student groups. These retention programmes can deliver this sense of belonging to the HEI to these groups who are perceived to be less involved, less integrated and subsequently more likely to leave a HEI.

Based on student development theory, outdoor orientation programmes accelerate psychological growth (Vlamiš, Bell & Gass, 2011). The activities on such programmes look to develop social skills such as leadership and self-esteem. They also try to remove status and share power; this could be an important point from which to start developing healthy peer connections and relationships for a young student in transition (Bell et al., 2014).

Another interesting point is that the outdoor orientation programme can create customs, behaviours and incidents shared by the participating members whom they can refer and employ as the basis of further interactions (Bell, Holmes and Williams, 2010). It has been proposed that “the single most powerful source of influence on the undergraduate student's academic and personal development is the peer group” (Astin, 1993 p. 3). This statement may demonstrate why outdoor orientation programmes can be an important tool in enabling a smooth transition to university life. The programme provides an environment which fosters friendship formation. These friendships can provide emotional support (Bell, 2005, 2012) furthermore providing them with feelings of belonging, trust, and connection to a group of peers (Bell, 2005).

Belonging is created through a number of different sources such as peer relations, meaningful interactions with staff and a learning experience that is relevant to their future goals. All of these could be termed engagement. Thomas (2012) states that this sense of belonging is created through engagement, this is best delivered through mainstream activities with an overt academic purpose that all students can participate in. OOP's adhere to these core principles of engaging students and fostering a sense of belonging. What is unclear in the research is whether the experiences of OOP are different between males and females (McKenzie, 2000), this takes on extra significance in this type of research project as male female splits in student cohorts are rarely evenly spread due to gender preferences in certain academic disciplines.

Individual activities are important but the way in which they are used may be even more integral to OOP success (McKenzie, 2000). The sequence of activities and incremental increases in degree of challenge can influence programme effectiveness. Activities should provide challenge, mastery and then success. The success should be achievable for all according to Bandura (1997) who believed this success creates increases in self-efficacy and self-esteem. Similar sentiments are echoed in Paxton and McAvoy's (2000) research into the social psychological benefits of OOP.

In contrast other research has shown that failure can play a key role in teaching that sometimes, sustained effort is required and also how to turn failure into success (Alfi, Assor & Katz, 2004). This finding was echoed in comments from qualitative research conducted by Wolfe and Kay (2011) ‘I wouldn't do it again but I would recommend to others’, this is an indication of a positive experience that was difficult in nature.

Activities should be relatively open ended, promote choice, emphasise intrinsic motivation and offer personal support (McKenzie, 2000). Tasks and activities should be holistic in nature, including requiring mental, emotional and physical resources. Tasks which are straightforward in nature with

clearly defined with concrete beginning and end goals encourage mastery and increase self-concept. They should be operationalised by the learner who should see the activities as interesting and personally challenging.

The role of staff, instructors or service providers could be one of the key factors in the success of outdoor orientation programmes (Khafaji, 2012). Activities need the correct instruction. Good instructors are generally thought to be accepting, encouraging, and knowledgeable. This type of encouragement also requires a skill to push individuals to realise their potential and ultimately succeed (McKenzie, 2000). An effective instructor often facilitates the interaction with the physical environment. Instructors teach participants how to perform the skills that are essential in the physical environment (McKenzie, 2000). Within the social environment instructors often work to facilitate the reorganization of thinking at the core of affective growth in the participants (Khafaji, 2012).

This important role of the programme instructor requires the service providers to have certain key qualities. On the basis of their model, Walsh and Golins (1976) state that instructors must show empathy, be genuine and be willing to confront participants when they are not displaying the required behaviour. This type of programme is also a good way for academic staff to be introduced and interact with students on a more social level which can break down barriers and improve interaction (Thomas, 2012).

The ideal group size for the OOP experience is thought to be between 7 and 15. This number has been theorised to enhance reciprocity as each group member has the opportunity to feel valued and supported, with the potential to help the group and also receive help if required (McKenzie, 2000). This can enable a more 'family' environment which encourages feelings of belonging. There is also few enough members to facilitate independence of group members and enhance personal growth (Allen, McKenna & Hind, 2012). The group size is also large enough for difference of opinion and conflict while being small enough for conflict resolution and a lower chance of the development of cliques.

The potential natural hazards in OOP activities necessitate that groups develop regard for each other's safety and wellbeing. Cooley et al. (2014) believe that through these conditions OOP can create well-functioning group members who when returning to the university setting have greater confidence in group work and a marked improvement in cooperation. These effects were found to be the result of positive group work experiences during the OOP.

The location of the OOP is thought to be of large consequence in the experience of the activities. A remote or harsher environment increases challenge and possible danger, this type of environment requires self-awareness in terms of capabilities to succeed and also a level of self-responsibility for personal safety and that of others. The natural environment also forms rules for activities in terms of natural consequences, these are rules that individuals are unlikely to deem unfair. The location and setting can also be important for other reasons, Bobilya, Akey and Mitchell (2011) state that being close to nature increases spiritual feelings.

A further issue raised by Thompson Coon et al. (2011) was whether the beneficial effects of OOPs are influenced by the natural setting. The key questions of their research investigated whether activity outdoors was more beneficial than activity delivered indoors in a gym style setting. The research found that green activity participants reported feelings of increased wellbeing. In addition, the green schemes also appealed to some people who reported not enjoying 'traditional exercise'. Participants also expressed feelings of escapism from city life and a connection with the natural environment which was also found in a previous study conducted by Paxton and McAvoy (2000).

The timing of the OOP is also thought to be central to its potential effectiveness. Students are particularly susceptible to attrition in the first term or just after the Christmas holidays, this has been attributed to lack of confidence, personal difficulties, loneliness and isolation (Gann, 2003). Other issues such as adapting to the culture of higher education and assignment deadlines with the prospect of examinations can also contribute (Fitzgibbon, 2012). Thomas (1996) also conducted research in this area and highlighted that it is not usually just one of these given reasons for leaving university but a combination.

The OOP for the university under investigation in this research has been scheduled to run in the first week of teaching of the 1<sup>st</sup> year students first term. The OOP is being used directly to maximise its impact in a critical period of the student's higher education experience. The literature selected to highlight the factors causing students to leave university may seem dated (Thomas, 2002) at over two decades old but it has been used to demonstrate that the issues effecting students seem to be static. This idea of a static problem facing universities year on year provides a basis to develop strategic interventions and management.

OOP's in the literature vary in length, content, and objectives. Sibthorp, Paisley, and Gookin (2007) stated that adventure programmes continue to rely on descriptive or anecdotal evidence rather than investigate what elements lead to specific participant development and programme outcomes.

Ewert (1983) wrote about the educational 'black box', this work stated that 'we know something works but we don't know how or why'.

The general consensus is that the personal, social and environmental processes provided by OOP create positive adaptations (Ewert, 1989), yet the unexplained complexity in today's evidence based climate is problematic (Priest & Gass, 2005). Much of the literature places a focus upon the benefits and outcomes rather than how these outcomes are achieved, whilst placing an emphasis on theory rather than empirical research (McKenzie, 2000). McKenzie also goes on to conclude that qualitative research such as interviews, questionnaires and observations are required to examine in depth data which could inductively discover 'new' programme characteristics that may influence outcomes.

Further outcome and evidence-based studies are needed to examine the elements of OOP' to better understand how and what elements support student development (Cortez, 2014). These critiques provide a starting point for the current research project. There is an opportunity to investigate the key aspects of outdoor orientation programmes to determine the most effective 'blueprint'. The current research could provide specific recommendations on programme content which could benefit student transition to university and university retention rates countrywide if similar outdoor orientation programmes are adopted.

## 2.3 Theoretical frameworks

### 2.3.1 Attachment theory

Bowlby (1980) proposed that infants are biologically predisposed to form selective bonds with special figures in their environment. These attachments based on the care and support of these special figures develop differing patterns of cognition, affect and behaviour in the individuals (Ainsworth et al., 1978). These can be thought as psychological organisation that guides beliefs about the individuals attachment figures as a source of security, judgements about self-worth and how best to deal with distress (Duchesne & Larose, 2007). Bowlby (1980) believed that early attachment experiences form an integral part of the individuals psychological organisation or as Bowlby (1980) termed it 'internal working models'. These individual differences may influence the likelihood that individuals will be able to orchestrate experiences in the new environment that allow them to satisfy psychological needs for attachment which can aid security and comfort.

By seeking out positive social relationships and connections early in the university transition process individuals may be able to counteract these possible feelings of isolation and loneliness. The OOP experience may serve to address these individual differences and provide a platform for all students to form attachments. Bowlby (1980) and other attachment theorist would posit the argument that

some individuals with more maladaptive early attachment experiences may have lower self-worth and be less likely to seek out social relationships. The OOP looks to overcome such issues by placing everyone in the same activity and social situations. This may speed up or encourage the development of these social interactions for people who otherwise may avoid such situations. Providing relational security during university transition may offset these heightened attachment concerns that certain students are prone to experiencing (Macdonald & Gunn, 1997). This is especially important in these early transitional stages of becoming a university student.

### 2.3.2 Resilience

Despite the increasing volume of literature surrounding outdoor orientation programmes, application to particular psychological theories and models is both limited and conflicting. Ewert and Yoshino (2011) believe outdoor orientation programmes build resilience. Psychological resilience is a dynamic process of adaptation to significant threat or adversity.

Ewert and Yoshino (2011) therefore believe the key element of outdoor orientation programmes is to be both physically and emotionally challenging. The challenge needs to be achievable in order to be growth inducing rather than debilitating. By overcoming these challenges and resistance students improve self-confidence, mastery and competence and strengthen coping strategies. These improvements to self-esteem, concept and efficacy are then attributed to the success of outdoor orientation programmes influence on the transition to university.

Resilience is thought to be enhanced through social support, self-confidence, mastery, competence and improving coping strategies (Allen, McKenna & Hind, 2012). Research conducted by Crisp (1998) exploring best practice in OOP found that through mastery resilience in participating students is significantly enhanced. The strong link between resilience and adventure is created by exposure to holistic and well-ordered challenges which allow participants to succeed and fail increase adaptability (Linley, 2009).

Allen, McKenna and Robinson (2008) investigated student resilience through a first year OOP experience found that immediately after the OOP resilience increased significantly for the intervention group compared to a control group. After a period of 3 months follow up tests were completed which highlighted that by this time resilience scores had fallen back to pre OOP levels. The effects could therefore be viewed as short term, yet even if this is the case the heightened student resilience at this key time of student drop out should not be underestimated as an important tool for universities to utilise.

Further to this Allen, McKenna and Robinson (2008) conducted qualitative research alongside the follow up resilience testing, the overwhelming opinion among students was that the OOP experience was integral to effective transition to university including meaningful peer relationship and staff interaction development. In contrast to the short term benefits of OOP found by Allen , McKenna and Robinson (2008) long term effects of OOP over a period of 17 years were discovered by Gass, Garvey and Sugarman (2003), these benefits included peer relationships, self-esteem, self-efficacy and a positive retrospective perception on OOP's influence on their time during higher education.

### 2.3.3 Adherence theory

Another way to view the combined issues of retention and outdoor orientation programmes could be through adherence theory (Sirur et al., 2009). Typically adherence theory is applied in a clinical, medical or health setting yet its underlying principles may go some way to help us to understand how and why outdoor orientation programmes are successful in increasing student retention. Traditionally research into retention focusses on how to stop students from leaving whereas an application of adherence theory may promote a culture of 'how do we influence the student experience to get students to continue'.

### 2.3.4 Social penetration theory

Altman and Taylor (1973) social penetration theory describes the stages of friendship. As relationships develop, interactions penetrate deeper and deeper into private and personal matters. This exposes vulnerabilities, so trust has to be developed along the way. Penetration goes through a number of stages.

1. Orientation stage. Small talk and simple conversations following standards of social desirability and norms of appropriateness with acquaintances.

2. Exploratory affective stage. People begin to reveal themselves, expressing personal attitudes about moderate topics such as government and education. This may not be the whole truth as a guard is still up. This is the stage of casual friendship, and many relationships do not go past this stage.

3. Affective stage. In this stage people start to talk about private and personal matters. Criticism and arguments may arise. There may be a range of physical interactions in this stage. Which in an intimate relationship may involve touching and kissing. This stage is deeper meaningful friendships and beginnings of intimate relationships



4. Stable stage. The relationship now reaches a plateau in which personal things are shared and each can predict the emotional reactions of the other person. This could be described as 'best friend' or lifelong friends and long term intimate relationships i.e. marriage.

5. Depenetration. This stage is optional as not all relationships and friendships deteriorate. In cases when the relationship starts to break down and costs exceed benefits, then there is a withdrawal of disclosure which leads to termination of the relationship.

This theory is applicable to the current research as the OOP provides a clear platform to accelerate through the stages of friendship. The activities are designed to encourage interaction and trust, places people in a situation where they are spending more intimate time together at i.e. night time in small groups. Some of the activities require physical contact and touch in order to succeed. All of these elements of the OOP mean that the theory would suggest more friendships will be formed and deeper friendships would be created on this type trip.

#### 2.3.5 Social Cognitive theory

Current study findings could also be explained using Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986). The application of social cognitive theory to OOP's is fitting since this type of programme looks to address behavioural, cognitive, social and environmental factors. Importantly, and distinctively, social cognitive theory accounts for the interplay between these factors. Viewing OOP's through this theoretical lens will also inform understanding of the dynamic interplay between personal resilience, exposure to experiential learning and experiences of social integration to understand their role in overall adherence. The project may also provide practical guidelines for delivery of OOP to help the researched university meet its' goals for student retention and adherence.

Social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986) proposes that behaviour is affected by different influences including environmental and personal factors, and aspects of the behaviour itself. There are many barriers which cause people to leave university which were discussed earlier within the literature review. Social cognitive theory infers that a person must believe in their ability to perform a behaviour (self-efficacy) and must perceive a benefit to the behaviour. A person must place value on the outcomes of the behaviour.

Therefore, interventions to improve retention such as an outdoor orientation programme should address each factor relevant to the individual and contain elements of benefits, outcomes and consequences. By viewing outdoor orientation programmes through this theory the dynamic interplay between resilience, experiential learning, social integration and ultimately the required behaviour of adherence may be explained. The application of social cognitive theory could unify the

various approaches to research in this area. The goal would then be to investigate the various individual elements that may influence the outcome behaviour. These include the programme content, how it is delivered, where it is delivered and how they influence behavioural, social and cognitive factors in the student group.

### 2.3 Review of research questions aims

The literature review provides a platform for the current research project. Student adaptation and transition are a key issue for many universities and highlighted as a strategic issue for the researched university. The University will try to utilise the perceived strengths and benefits of OOP's to try and meet the goal of improving student experience. The aims of the research are the following:

- 1 To investigate how an outdoor orientation programme aids transition and adaptation to university for first year students and improve experience for first year university students.
- 2 To investigate the role of OOP's in social integration and personal growth.
- 3 To develop standardised practice for outdoor orientation programmes.

Based on the key research aims there are a number of practical questions which are especially important in this action research project and will be changed through each stage of the research process, they include:

- a) Which characteristics are important in positive programme outcome?
- b) Are some elements unnecessary?
- c) Which characteristics achieve what outcomes?
- d) How do participant characteristics affect programme characteristics that are responsible for achieving the desired outcomes?

Research informed changes will be implemented throughout the duration of the project which by its completion should provide an OOP which will benefit both the institution and its future student bodies.

### Chapter 3 - Methodology

The investigation of the outcomes of an OOP on 1<sup>st</sup> year student's transition and adaption to university was complex due to the multitude of factors at play. A mixed methods approach was chosen to capture the various intricate student experiences and logistical dilemmas facing the organising institute. The methods were used to complement each other and provide an overview of possible improvements, solutions and enhancements that could not be achieved using a single research method. The project comprised of semi structured interviews with university staff and students, student questionnaires, student evaluation forms, focus groups, university retention data and participant observation.

The approach to study used predominantly qualitative methods which aimed to arguably provide a more in depth rich assessment of the influence of OOP on the processes of transition and adaptation to university. By adopting a mainly qualitative methodology it was envisaged that phenomena not touched upon by the questionnaire will be revealed. The philosophical underpinnings of the chosen methodologies and issues concerning their appropriateness will be discussed.

#### 3.1 Philosophical influences – Interpretive phenomenology

The research aim is guided towards exploring the lived experience of OOP on transition and adaptation for 1<sup>st</sup> year students. Through examining the various qualitative research methods available to the research aim, phenomenology is deemed the most appropriate to explore experience (Smith, 2008). One of the key areas of a phenomenological approach to psychology is a focus upon lived experience (Van Manen, 1990; Smith, 2008).

Phenomenology is an approach to psychology heavily rooted in philosophy and various philosophic underpinnings guide the way in which the methodology is applied. The study adopted an interpretive phenomenological design which draws on the work of Van Manen (1990) to better illuminate the lived experience. Van Manen's (1990) phenomenological methodology centres' on the four existentials of the lifeworld.

This methodological stance allows a careful comprehension and examination of each participant's lived experiences of particular phenomena (Langdrige, 2007). This will allow the exploration of participant's experiences of OOP and its impact upon their transition and adaptation to university. This approach like other forms of phenomenological analysis is grounded in the work of noted

philosophers Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre (Langdridge, 2007; Smith, 1996; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009; Van Manen, 1990).

### 3.2 Phenomenology as a philosophy

Husserl (1901/1970) a philosopher and mathematician, in his second volume of *Logische Untersuchungen - Untersuchungen zur Phanomenologie und Theorie der Erkenntnis* was interested in the fundamental issues of both logic and epistemology. One important aspect of this work is the way in which a person could come to understand their own experiences of particular phenomena. Husserl believed that if this is done with rigor and depth, then essential qualities of human experience can be identified. Husserl believed that the essential qualities of an experience could transcend circumstance and illuminate the experience for others (Husserl, 1980).

Husserl (1901/1970) argued that we are wrapped up in natural attitude that makes us likely to categorise experience into pre-existing schemas. In our everyday life we are engaged with activities in the world and take for granted our related experiences. This engagement serves to hide the essences of experience which can only be revealed through consciously reflecting upon the experience.

Husserl (1980) was keen to stress the importance of what is experienced in the consciousness of the individual and he describes this as intentionality. This in phenomenological terms is the relationship between an object of which we are conscious of and our perception of it. These objects can be a 'real' object in the world or something abstract such as a memory or a moment of imaginary thought (Langdridge, 2007; Van Manen, 1990).

In adopting a phenomenological approach to the subject we strive to approach experience in its own right and attend to its individual essences (phenomenological reduction). By using a free imaginative variational method, which logically and rigorously examines essences, we may be able to reveal a level of adequate insight into experience. This involves looking at phenomena from every conceivable position by freeing the mind from its pre-set schemas, stereotypes and prejudices. By approaching phenomena in this way we can start to unravel the essential features of that experience. With this probing we move away from natural attitude to a phenomenological attitude, opening the possibilities of discovery of previously hidden phenomena and discovering essences of experience (Ihde, 1986).

In order to rigorously examine every day experience, we therefore need to give equal thought to each and everything in its own right; we need to take a reflective step away (Husserl, 1980). By

making this reflective step and 'bracketing off' this natural attitude (epoché)<sup>1</sup> it is possible to subjectively examine the content of conscious experience and the essences of experience (Langdridge, 2007; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009).

Husserl was a philosopher, not a psychologist; his thoughts and ideas have been adapted and interpreted differently by both philosophers and psychologists in order to apply them to psychological inquiry (Langdridge, 2007). The way in which the current study will subscribe to Husserl's ideas is in the systematic and vigorous analysis of lived experiences of phenomena with intentionality (Van Manen, 1990). This will allow the illumination of the essential features of the phenomena under investigation.

Husserl provided the platform for philosophical thinking in the area of phenomenological inquiry (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). However, the current study could be seen as one that lies in the middle ground of what is conceptualised as descriptive and interpretive phenomenology (Van Manen, 1990). Ideas are taken from Husserl and an essential structure of experience will be sought, but also ideas are taken from Husserl's scholar Heidegger, an interpretive phenomenologist.

### 3.3 Heidegger

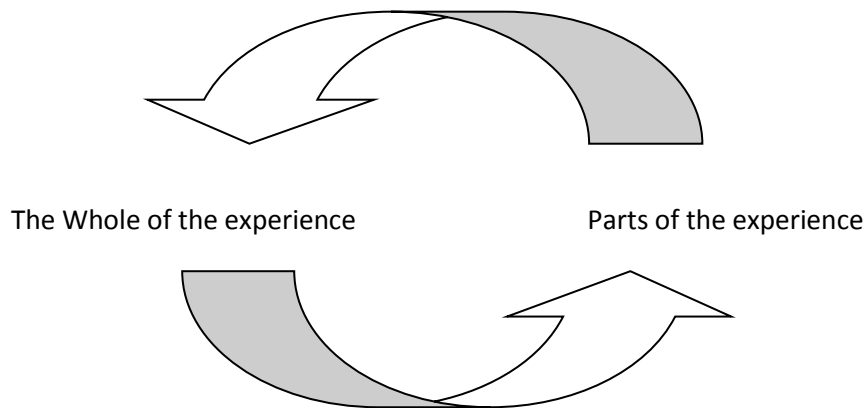
Heidegger's interpretation of phenomenology is in many aspects markedly different to that of Husserl, but still is mindful of aspects of his workings such as the notion of intentionality. Heidegger (1965), in one of his most important works *Being and Time* stated that phenomenology should be predominantly concerned with hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is the theory of interpretation. Specifically in this interpretation; the examination of both visible meaning and disguised or latent meaning. The phenomenon appears and the phenomenologist can help make sense of the appearing (Heidegger, 1985; Langdridge, 2007; Smith, Larkin & Flowers, 2009).

Hermeneutics forms a key part of interpretive phenomenology, especially the idea of the hermeneutic circle (see fig 3.1). This is the flowing relationship between the part and the whole; this occurs on a number of levels. To understand a part of an experience, you must look at the whole, to understand the whole you must look at the parts; this is termed mereology (Heidegger, 1985). For example, by looking at the entire experience of OOP, parts such as the importance of coaches/staff

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<sup>1</sup> Epoché is a term meaning the process of attempting to refrain from our natural attitude. Natural attitude is our presuppositions and biases of everyday knowledge. It is a term used by Husserl ([1931] 1967). It is sometimes referred to as bracketing (Langdridge, 2007).

and support take on greater meaning. Likewise, by examining the parts of the experience such as development of social support networks we gain a better understanding of the entire experience.



*Fig. 3.1 Hermeneutic Circle (as cited in Tuohy et al., 2013)*

This idea is crucial to a dynamic analytical style of thinking which can interpret and enlighten the essences and the whole experience of a given phenomena. It is also a tool in which adequacy and reflexivity can be improved through the thorough examination of how the phenomena are constructed.

### 3.4 Interpretive inquiry

Speech and language are the means by which we understand the world (Van Manen, 1990). Key philosopher Gadamer (1985) was particularly interested in conversation and placed it at the centre of understanding. According to Gadamer (1985) it is through conversation that things 'reveal themselves'. Self-understanding is from a position based on our effective history; it both enables and limits our general understanding of the world (Van Manen, 1990). This position therefore has major implications for our interpretation of lived experience; it shows that lived experience is unique for different individuals.

A key concept from Heidegger (1985) was that when we interpret anything the analyst brings with them their prior experiences, pre-conceptions and possible assumptions. Heidegger (1985) stated that because of our embodied nature in the world we are not able to 'bracket off' (or perform epoché) as Husserl (1980) advocated. We are born into a pre-existing world including society, language and culture; because of this we cannot put aside our natural engagement with the world (Van Manen, 1990).

According to Heidegger (1985) interpretation is based upon fore-conception such as assumptions based on previous experience. This is an important concept in phenomenological inquiry. This concept highlights research must be conducted in a reflective manner; we must acknowledge our

role in the interpretation process in order to reveal lived experience in a credible way (Langdridge, 2007; Smith, Larkin & Flowers, 2009).

### 3.5 Van Manen

Van Manen describes human science research as ‘meaningful expressions of the active inner, cognitive, or spiritual life of the human being in social, historical, or practical contexts.’ The approach aims to attach meaning to such expressions through hermeneutics (van Manen, 1990, p. 181). Van Manen believed that ‘we are led by our immersion in the phenomenon we seek to thematically elucidate, and through interpretation we engage in an active process of meaning-making, producing a deeper understanding of the phenomenon’ (Van Manen, 1990 pg. 181). Phenomenology here places importance on unfolding existence rather than ‘what it is’ (Rich, Graham, Tacket & Shelley, 2013). Van Manen believed phenomenology is a search for what it is to be human, through essences, description of experiential meanings and through attentive practice of thoughtfulness (Van Manen, 1990).

#### 3.5.1 Lifeworld existentials and the current study

The current study will take an existential phenomenological approach championed by Heidegger (1980), and Van Manen (1990). The philosophical ideas discussed around van Manen’s (1990) approach to phenomenology raise questions for the current study around four lifeworld existentials (lifeworld themes) rationality, embodiment (sometimes labelled corporeality), spatiality and temporality.

Relationality is the idea that we can transcend ourselves through lived relations. This is important in the current study when considering the relationships that can develop between the students and between students and staff. For example the experience of encouragement from academic staff and peers may directly affect how the phenomena are experienced. Relationality interactions can therefore shape the lived experience of the OOP and university as a whole.

We are bodily in the world, our body and its actions are often a direct reflection of our intentions. Our body within the world of outdoor adventurous activity is very important. Through the lived body our natural capabilities may shape our identity and experience. This identity and experience can influence enjoyment and therefore increase participation. Interpretation of our own bodily self provides an area of focus.

In terms of spatiality, there are a number of considerations such as; how did the space in which programme were conducted influence the mood of the students, did the setting influence the

experience? For example did the novel environment produce excitement or fear? How did meeting other students and staffs impact on their experience of the OOP? Furthermore another consideration is the metaphorical space, the subjective experience of a space in life.

Temporality can relate to the vivid memories of past experience, self-awareness in the present and a projection of a future self. The reflection of lived time invokes thoughts, feelings and experiences. Temporality can be subjective not just the objective time we all know and understand. 'The way we feel can influence how we experience time and moments, and conversely, constraints, freedoms, and demands placed by time can also affect how we feel' (Rich, Graham, Taket, & Shelley, 2013 pg 12). The lived time may affect the way in which the programme is experienced. The current study looks to understand noema; what is experienced and noesis; the way it is experienced, involved in physical experience not cognition, mental processes and behaviour (Smith, 1996).

### 3.6 Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis (TA) is a method for systematically identifying, organising, and offering insight into patterns of meaning or themes across a data set. This focus on meaning across a data set allows the researcher describe a sense of shared meanings and experiences. Identifying unique themes and experiences found only within a data set is a strength of TA. TA is a structured method of identifying commonalities within a data set and of making sense of those commonalities. Patterns can be identified across any data set and combined in a way to make sense across a range of data on a range of issues. The purpose of analysis is to identify those themes relevant to answering a particular research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

TA is a flexible method that allows the researcher to focus on the data in numerous different ways. The focus could be on analysing meaning across the entire data set, or examination of one particular aspect of a phenomenon in depth. Reporting is also the choice of the researcher based on their particular research question and data set, from the obvious semantic meanings in the data to the interrogation of the latent meanings, the assumptions and ideas that lie behind what is explicitly stated. The many forms TA can take means that it suits a wide variety of research questions and research topics. TA is only a method of data analysis, rather than being an approach to conducting qualitative research. This is a strength because it ensures the accessibility and flexibility of the approach. Researchers using TA need to actively make a series of choices as to what form of TA they are using and to understand and explain why they are using this particular form (Braun & Clarke, 2006).



## Six phase approach to thematic analysis

### 1) Familiarising yourself with the data

Common to all forms of qualitative analysis, this phase involves immersing yourself in the data by reading and rereading textual data (e.g., transcripts of interviews)

### 2) Generating initial codes

Codes are the building blocks of analysis: If your analysis is a brick-built house with a tile roof, your themes are the walls and roof and your codes are the individual bricks and tiles. Codes identify and provide a label for a feature of the data

### 3) Searching for themes

A theme “captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82)

### 4) Reviewing potential themes

This phase involves a recursive process whereby the developing themes are reviewed in relation to the coded data and entire data set. This phase is essentially about quality checking.

### 5) Defining and naming themes

Each theme has a clear focus, scope, and purpose; each in turn builds on and develops the previous theme(s); and together the themes provide a coherent overall story about the data.

### 6) Producing the report

Writing and analysis are thoroughly interwoven in qualitative research—from informal writing of notes and memos to the more formal processes of analysis and report writing. The purpose is to provide a compelling story about data based on your analysis.

The analysis follows Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six stage guide to the analysis process. It is ‘inductive’ thematic analysis which is a bottom up data led way of conducting thematic analysis. This will allow emergent themes from the data not constrained by previous research findings and as such coding will be diverse. The themes are identified at a semantic explicit level rather than a latent level due to the requirements of the research project and the direct nature of the questions. This will allow a more straightforward interpretation and formation of implications for programme delivery.

## Chapter 4 – Method

The way in which the research question was investigated was through a mixed methods action research approach. The data was used to inform the next stages of the OOP/'top up' delivery. Therefore it could be conceptualised as prototype testing i.e. preliminary versions from which other versions are produced to create the most effective OOP that delivers the best experience for students.

This strategy incorporated a number of different research methods with various appropriate analysis techniques chosen based on the thesis research question. Stage 0 was a pilot stage which provided validation of interview schedules, questionnaire and focus group idea creation method. It also provided an opportunity for the researcher to become more familiar with participant observation.

As well as validation this stage also contributed preliminary analysis data and the generation of thematic areas of interest. Ethical clearance was not granted until February 2015 therefore the interviews and focus groups were done retrospectively. At the end of the first OOP (stage 0) the students were required to fill in an evaluation form, it is worth noting that the evaluation form was not previously validated. The evaluation form was not part of the initial research plan and was not created by the researcher. The evaluation form provided data on a range of issues pertinent to the research project. Therefore the researcher deemed that despite the possible reliability and validity issues that the data would be presented as an introduction to the logistical elements of OOP. These research methods were used to inform the first changes to the OOP in the action research process.

Stage 1 data collection and analysis used a range of research methods to again inform changes to the OOP/'top up' activity day and to create the optimum 'blueprint' for the programme delivery. It would also serve to investigate whether the changes made from stage 0 were enhancing the student experience. A phenomenological approach was used to explore the lived experience of an OOP for 1<sup>st</sup> year students based on their semi structured interviews. This research method is concerned with trying to understand lived experience and how participants themselves make sense of their experiences. Therefore, it is centrally concerned with the meanings which those experiences hold for the participants.

Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis was used to analyse student focus groups and university staff interviews, this was chosen to deliver key thematic areas which unveiled practical solutions to issues raised by staff and students to be improved through the action research process. Participant observation was used to supplement the key findings through the researcher being immersed in the

experience. Not only was this data important but also provided a great opportunity to further establish trustworthiness within the project through reflexivity and confirmability.

The Student adaptation to university questionnaire (SACQ) was used to compare the intervention group with a similar student group to highlight if there were any significant differences between student adaptation to university. The questionnaire not only provided full score differences but also a breakdown of constructs which are deemed to be integral in student adaptation, personal adjustment, social adjustment, academic adjustment and institutional attachment. This was supplemented by university retention data.

Student and staff semi structured interviews and student focus groups were conducted following the 'top up' activity day in January 2016 and analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis.

#### 4.1 Action research stages plan

##### Stage 0 - Formative data analysis and Pilot - 2014

Student evaluation form (Content Analysis)

Student semi structured interviews (Interpretive Phenomenology)

Student focus groups (Thematic Analysis)

University staff semi structured interviews (Thematic Analysis)

Pilot SACQ (data not presented in thesis)

Pilot 'Top up' activity day interview/ focus group (data not presented in thesis)

Participant observation

##### Stage 1 - Research project cohort 1 - 2015

Participant observation

Student semi structured interviews (Interpretive Phenomenology)

Student focus groups (Thematic Analysis)

University staff semi structured interviews (Thematic Analysis)

SACQ (Statistical Analysis)

'Top up' activity student semi structured interviews (Thematic Analysis)

'Top up' activity university staff semi structured interviews (Thematic Analysis)

'Top up' activity student focus groups (Thematic Analysis)

## Stage 2 - Research project cohort 2 - 2016

Student semi structured interviews – OOP attending students (Thematic Analysis)

Student semi structured interviews – Non OOP attending students (Thematic Analysis)

SACQ (Statistical Analysis)

## 4.2 Details of the OOP

### 4.2.1 Cost

The focus for universities is to retain as many of their students due to the large financial implications of attrition. For example, if a non-residential student studying at a university that charges tuition fees of £7500 per year, left in the first term, the university would suffer £23400 in lost income over the duration of the 3 year course. This figure is increased for the loss of a residential student, which based on £3000 accommodation fees, would result in a loss of income in excess of £33000 per student (The Reddin Survey of University Tuition Fees, 2013–14).

The cost to the university for the OPP was around £150 per student including travel. Over the 3 years the average number of students taken on the OOP was 135 students plus 10 members of staff. The overall cost to the university was just over £21k. Using the above estimates of potential loss of income from a student leaving university and the cost of taking a cohort on the OPP, it could be said that; if one student stays at university because of the early experiences provided by the OOP and completes their degree who would have otherwise left then that would pay for the OOP for the entire cohort. If two stayed on who would have otherwise left university there is a significant financial benefit to the OOP.

### 4.2.2 Activities

Below is a timetable which sets out the OOP activities and timings which was completed in Stage 2.

## Student Residential YHA Ambleside - 27th - 29th September 2016

Groups will rotate around the adventure activities over the main activity days. Activity days start at 9am and finish at 5pm. Activities may need to change based on prevailing weather conditions.

		Tuesday 27th Sept				Wed 28th Sept				Thurs 29th Sept					
	11.15am	13.00	13.30-17.00	18.45-20.30	7.30 - 8.30	8.30 - 9.00	9.00 - 12.30	12.30 - 13.30	13.30 - 17.00	From 18.00	Evening Dinner	7.30 - 8.30	8.30 - 9.00	8.30 - 9.00	12.00 - 13.00
Group 1-3			Team Development	Town Trail	BREAKFAST	Brief with leaders	Watersports	Watersports	Watersports	Watersports	Watersports	BREAKFAST	Brief with leaders	Check out of bedrooms	Course Reviews & Course Director Debrief Hotel check and group depart
Group 4-6				Team Development	BREAKFAST	Brief with leaders	Watersports	Watersports	Scrambling West Dry gorge	Scrambling West Dry gorge	Watersports	BREAKFAST	Brief with leaders		
Group 7-9	Group arrive, bags to be left in allocated place until rooms available Venue health and safety briefing with a member of the venue team Packed Lunch on arrival		Team Development	Team Development	BREAKFAST	Brief with leaders	Scrambling West Dry gorge	Scrambling West Dry gorge	Watersports	Watersports	Scrambling West Dry gorge	BREAKFAST	Brief with leaders		
Group 10-12	Group travel to venue		Town Trail	Team Development	BREAKFAST	Brief with leaders	Watersports	Watersports	Watersports	Watersports	Scrambling West Dry gorge	BREAKFAST	Brief with leaders		
Group 13-15					BREAKFAST	Brief with leaders	Watersports	Watersports	Watersports	Watersports	Scrambling West Dry gorge	BREAKFAST	Brief with leaders		
	OGO				BREAKFAST	Brief with leaders	Watersports	Watersports	Watersports	Watersports	Scrambling West Dry gorge	BREAKFAST	Brief with leaders		
	Course Director led				BREAKFAST	Brief with leaders	Watersports	Watersports	Watersports	Watersports	Scrambling West Dry gorge	BREAKFAST	Brief with leaders		
	staff Led				BREAKFAST	Brief with leaders	Watersports	Watersports	Watersports	Watersports	Scrambling West Dry gorge	BREAKFAST	Brief with leaders		

Course Director or brief with team leaders will cover the programme, code of conduct, expectations from both, medical consent forms/concerns, and any additional outcomes to be addressed.  
 Course Director brief with Students will cover expectations about timekeeping, kit, programme etc.  
 Course Director Debrief on departure day will cover feedback on the programme including activities, staff, accommodation and for the young people this is about bringing the residential to a positive close before they depart, discussing their week, activities they participated in and their achievements throughout the week.

Figure 4.1 OOP Timetable Stage 2

Activity list stage 0 - 2014

Cohort was split based on which course students were enrolled on over two different sites.

Team building – Ice breakers

Raft building

Night walk/caving

Day walk

Academic session - Referencing

Activity list stage 1 - 2015

Team building

Raft building

Gorge scrambling

Night walk

Academic session – Referencing

Activity list stage one 'top up' - 2015

Bouldering

Low ropes

High ropes

Archery

Indoor 'caving'

Team building puzzles

Climbing wall/ ab sailing

### Activity list stage 2 - 2016

Ice breakers

Town trail – Scavenger hunt

Raft building

Gorge scrambling

Night walk

Academic session – Reflective group work on OOP experience + homework assignment.

Free time – Pub quiz, table tennis tournament and table football tournament.

### 4.3 Participants

There were two cohorts of first year students investigated. The first cohort started university in September 2015 and the second started in September 2016. A pilot study had been carried out between February and September 2015.

The intervention group participated in all aspects of the OOP and are compared with a comparison group of similar characteristics. In order to maintain validity and rigour within the study, all students received equal pastoral and academic support outside of the OOP residential and ‘top up’ activities provided by the researched University. The intervention group consists of students studying PE and sport related degree programmes, justified on the basis that outdoor activities form part of their PE degree programme. The comparison group is those studying sport related degree programmes who are considered to have similar characteristics to the intervention group at the same university, but, who do not have outdoor activities as a curriculum requirement at the university.

### Stage 0 - Formative data analysis and Pilot

Student evaluation form: All students who attended the OOP (93)

Participant observation: Half student cohort (43 due to split site) and staff in attendance of the OOP were observed to note patterns and interactions during the OOP.

Student focus groups: 2 student focus groups of 4/5 student participants from the intervention group (9 total)

Student interviews: 4 students who attended the outdoor orientation programme to investigate the experience of attending an OOP and transition to university.

Staff interviews: 1 university staff member was interviewed to provide specific answers relating to provision, including activity specifics.

Student questionnaires - These were distributed to 10 participants of the outdoor orientation programme and a 10 student comparison group which did not attend an outdoor orientation programme.

#### Stage 1 Cohort 1

Participant observation: All students (136) and staff (10) in attendance of the OOP were observed to note patterns and interactions during the OOP.

Student focus groups: 5 student focus groups of 4/5 student participants from the intervention group (23 total)

Student interviews: 10 students who attended the outdoor orientation programme to investigate the experience of attending an OOP and transition to university.

Staff interviews: 5 university staff members were interviewed to provide specific answers relating to provision, including activity specifics.

Student questionnaires - These were distributed to all participants of the outdoor orientation programme and a comparison group which did not attend an outdoor orientation programme. This not only allowed comparison between outdoor orientation programme attendees and non-attendees but also between years. The number of students in the intervention group was 136 with a comparison group of 40 students.

'Top up' activity day student focus groups: 3 student focus groups of 4/5 student participants from the intervention group (14 total)

'Top up' activity day student interviews: 10 student participants from the intervention group

'Top up' activity day staff interviews: 3 university staff members were interviewed to provide specific answers relating to provision, including activity specifics.



## Stage 2 – Cohort 2

Student interviews: 10 students who attended the outdoor orientation programme to investigate the experience of attending an OOP and transition to university and 10 students from the control group.

Student questionnaires - These were distributed to all participants of the outdoor orientation programme and a comparison group which did not attend an outdoor orientation programme. This not only allowed comparison between outdoor orientation programme attendees and non-attendees but also between years. The number of participants in the intervention group was 134 between students with a comparison group of 40.

### 4.4 Inclusion criteria:

#### Intervention Student

- a) Be over the age of 18.
- b) Studying Sport and PE related degrees at University
- d) Participants in the outdoor orientation programme
- e) Consent to take part in the study.
- f) Willing to talk and forthcoming in an interview/focus group/questionnaire

#### Non Intervention Student

- a) Be over the age of 18.
- b) Studying Sport related degrees at University
- d) Non participants in the outdoor orientation programme
- e) Consent to take part in the study.
- f) Willing to talk and forthcoming in an interview/focus group/questionnaire

#### Academic Staff

- a) Be over the age of 18
- b) Involved in the outdoor orientation programmes

c) University staff member

d) Consent to take part in the study.

e) Willing to talk and forthcoming in an interview

#### 4.5 Recruitment Process

##### Participant observation

1. On arrival at the OOP the researcher verbally addressed all potential participants and informed them about the research project.
2. Information sheets were distributed to all students and staff in attendance.
3. Students and staff were then given a consent form
4. The students and staff could indicate their willingness to participate in the study by agreeing to participate by returning the completed consent form to the researcher. Full written consent was obtained prior to data collection.

##### Student semi structured interviews both OOP and 'top up' activity/Student focus groups both OOP and 'top up' activity

1. The entire intervention student cohort was emailed by the researcher about the opportunity to participate in the research project through both interviews and focus groups.
2. Students who were willing to participate were contacted to arrange an appropriate time for the interview/focus group.
3. The potential participants were made aware of the number of participants needed to be interviewed for the study to avoid disappointment if they were not selected.
4. Full written consent was obtained prior to data collection.

##### University staff semi structured interviews/focus groups both OOP and 'top up' activity

- 1 The staff who attended the OOP/'top up' activity were emailed by the researcher about the opportunity to participate in the research project through an interview.
- 2 Staff who were willing to participate were contacted to arrange an appropriate time for the interview.
- 3 The potential participants were made aware of the number of participants needed to be interviewed for the study to avoid disappointment if they were not selected.
- 4 Full written consent was obtained prior to data collection.

## SAUQ

- 1 The researcher attended a number of the intervention groups/ control groups core lectures and verbally addressed all potential participants and informed them about the research project.
- 2 Information sheets were distributed to all students in attendance.
- 3 Students were then given a consent form and the questionnaire.
- 4 The students could indicate their willingness to participate in the study by agreeing to participate by returning the completed consent form and questionnaire to the researcher. Full written consent was obtained prior to data collection.

### 4.6 Ethics

The action research project received full ethical approval (ref no. SHN 15-001). A copy of the approval can be found in appendix 20.

The ethical issues with the research project were minimal. The students attended the residential OPP and 'top up' activity days regardless of whether they decided to participate in the study. Also, there was no potential physical harm or inconvenience associated with participation in this study.

There was a small risk that talking to student participants in the semi structured interviews or focus groups about the outdoor orientation programme and the transition to university may upset them. If a participant did become upset the interviewer or moderator asked the participant if they wish the interview to be terminated or to leave the focus group. This situation was unlikely given the nature of the questions which were pre-screened by the highly experienced academic supervision team and through the university ethics panel. The researcher was sensitive to distress or disclosure of sensitive or embarrassing information and conducted the interview or focus group accordingly.

The researcher has direct experience of conducting interviews and focus groups which contain potentially difficult subjects. Participants were advised throughout the recruitment process and it was specifically written in the information sheet that they could opt to terminate their participation in the interview or focus group at any point or move onto a different line of questioning. It was also made clear that the participant could remove themselves from the study up until the point of analysis and that participation was not mandatory.

The researcher was particularly sensitive to any participant wishing to remove themselves from focus groups and would facilitate this through natural breaks or shortening the group discussion to

accommodate this. Participant observation did not include those who opted out of the research process, they were not part of any observations.

Every effort was made to reduce risks to the researcher. The University has policies in place to reduce any potential risks. Health and safety procedures were followed according to these policies and a university risk analysis and management form was completed ahead of any activities as required.

The researcher's main academic supervisor was made aware of the time and location of the interviews and focus groups but not any specific details regarding the participants to allow confidentiality. The supervisor was available to be contacted in the event of any problems arising during the interview or focus group. There was also contact details of professionals/supportive organisations available if requested by the participant. The researcher was aware of support provided by the University for any additional emotional or psychological support if required.

Reflective assignments and group presentation form part of their academic development and therefore do not provide cause for concern. Participant information sheets were provided to all students who will then be required to consent to their data being used within the study through signing the appropriate consent form.

All participants were given an information sheet before the start of the OOP. During the OOP, the researcher met students in activity groups to allow questions to be clarified, queried and to make it clear that no obligation is required to participate. The researcher collected the forms so that students did not feel pressurised to participate. Full written consent was obtained prior to data collection. The participants in the programme were made aware of the number of participants needed for the interviews/focus groups for the study to avoid disappointment if they were not selected.

Provisions were made to explicitly explain issues regarding informed consent and the participants' right to withdraw at any point prior to analysis to reduce chance of risk and conform to ethical guidelines. Researcher contact details and those of the research supervision team were provided (Work telephone, email and postal address) in the information sheet. The information sheet also provided details of confidentiality, voluntary participation and the steps to withdrawing from the study (see appendix) Non-participation in the study had no impact upon the service provided within OOP.

Whilst the OOP requires attendance, as it is part of their degree programme, it was made clear that being a participant within the research is a voluntary process and that students must opt-in to the

study. Furthermore it was made clear that there was no loss or gain from participating within the study or not. The residential OOP was planned to take place within the first term of the university year with each cohort of first year undergraduates. An additional outdoor activity session was planned for January to reinforce, build on or 'top up' positive developments from the residential programme. Findings were used to inform and refine each OOP and additional outdoor activity sessions.

Funding for the OOP residential and 'top up' activities was provided by the University. The students therefore did not have to pay to take part. There was no payment made to students as an incentive to take part in the current study.

Permission to use quotations from transcripts was sought through the informed consent. Participants were given the opportunity to view the transcript and amend, clarify or remove quotations as relevant. Participants had the opportunity to view transcripts within 6 weeks from each data collection point.

#### 4.6.1 Subject withdrawal: withdrawal criteria & procedures

During the recruitment process, participants were verbally informed of their right to withdraw from the research. Participants were given information sheets and consent forms which clearly outlined their rights including withdrawal from the research. Full consent was gained from participants, before participant interviews were conducted (see appendix). Participants were again informed of their right to withdraw their data from the study before the analysis process began. If they wished to withdraw their data then it would not be used in the analysis.

### 4.7 Procedure

#### 4.7.1 Student evaluation forms

Following the conclusion of stage 0 OOP students were required to complete a simple evaluation form (see appendix), it included open ended questions, this was analysed through content analysis. This methodology involved coding participant's responses into closed categories. The categories were pre-defined based on a thorough literature search and familiarity with the research topic therefore taking a more directed approach. This approach was appropriate given the amount of literature in the research area.

Any data that was not included in the pre-defined categories was examined in order to determine whether new categories can be formed and implemented, this allowed for emergent data through the participants talk (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). One strength of this type of analysis is that it allowed

the data to be converted into quantitative data by counting the number of relevant responses in each category. This led to emergent patterns and comparative data which was especially useful in the current study.

One of the limitations of directed content analysis is that the informed nature of category construction could be perceived as biased and therefore be more likely to yield responses supportive of championed theory. Pre-defined categories could also limit the researcher's exploration of new phenomena in the data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Despite these methodological critiques with due rigor and reflexivity trustworthiness within qualitative research can be achieved.

Each participant was given an information sheet containing some of the key aspects of the study and issues regarding how their data would be used including reassurances of confidentiality and anonymity (see appendix). The participants were then given a consent form which they were required to sign in line with ethics. The participants were then instructed to complete the evaluation form. The participants were given and talked through a debrief form (see appendix). The transcripts were then coded and analysed.

#### 4.7.2 Semi structured interviews, students and staff

Within one week of the OOP finishing and following 'top up' activities focus groups and semi structured interviews took place with a number of students. The combination of semi structured interviews and focus groups was deemed appropriate given the difference in data they produce. The focus groups delivered opinion around broad thematic areas (see appendix). The semi structured interviews (see appendix) provided a personal in depth dataset.

The common method of data collection used within qualitative research and an appropriate method of eliciting experience is the semi structured interview (Langdrige, 2007; Smith et al., 2009). This style of data collection provides structure that allows comparisons to be made across a sample, yet allows the flexibility of exploring interesting and relevant points as they emerge through prompts and probes (Smith, 2004). It is therefore considered the most appropriate data collection method for the current study.

The interview schedule was informed by the research aims and the reviewed literature, its development was initially made by the researcher. The schedule was checked and recommendations were made by the supervision team. As in most semi structured interviews the schedule was designed to be a starting point from which to explore further and deeper phenomena using appropriate prompts and probes. Following the completion of the schedule the researcher carried

out pilot interviews. The schedule was edited based on the success of the pilots and was then deemed ready for use.

Each participant was contacted to arrange an interview. Prior to the commencement of the interview, participants were given an information sheet containing some of the key aspects of the study and issues regarding how their data would be used including reassurances of confidentiality and anonymity (see appendix). The participants were then given a consent form which they were required to sign in line with ethics.

The participants were then interviewed in a semi structured manner using pre-determined questions, prompts and probes into areas of interest (see appendix). The interviews were recorded using a digital Dictaphone. After the conclusion of the interview the participants were debriefed and presented with a debrief form (see appendix). The recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim; following transcription the data was subjected to the analysis.

#### 4.7.3 Student focus group

The focus groups used a method to generate topics of conversation as proposed by Peterson and Barron (2007). Each participant was asked to write down on post-it notes, three things that students felt helped them to adapt to university and three things they thought could be improved or done differently. The post-it notes were collected and placed on a white board to act as facilitators to the discussion. This method also gives an instant starting point and voice to quiet or unconfident participants. This also ensures all participants contribute information to the focus group. These points can then be referred to by the researcher/moderator to keep the discussion around the subject area and therefore answer the research aims.

Focus groups generate new ideas and general consensus, they also typically overwhelm dissenting or awkward views therefore the use of individual semi structured interviews will allow participants the opportunity to discuss more sensitive issues which they may not have felt comfortable discussing in a group format.

Each participant was contacted to arrange the focus group. Prior to the commencement of the focus group, participants were given an information sheet containing some of the key aspects of the study and issues regarding how their data would be used including reassurances of confidentiality and anonymity (see appendix). The participants were then given a consent form which they were required to sign in line with ethics. The participants were then instructed on the above method of topic generation and informed about the process and the role of the moderator (see appendix). The focus groups were recorded using a digital Dictaphone. After the conclusion of the focus group the

participants were debriefed and presented with a debrief form (see appendix). The recorded focus groups were transcribed verbatim; following transcription the data was subjected to the analysis.

#### 4.7.4 Questionnaire of students

Two weeks after the OOP the Student Adaptation to University questionnaire (see appendix 15) was distributed in University core lectures to all students who attended the OOP (approx. 110-150) and a comparison group (40-60). This timescale was chosen to allow the students' time to become familiar with their new surroundings as advocated by Baker and Siryk (1989).

The Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ) (Baker & Siryk, 1989) is a multidimensional assessment of the construct of student adjustment to a HEI. It splits question items into four categories that make up overall adjustment. These are academic adjustment, social adjustment, personal/emotional adjustment and institutional attachment. SACQ is currently the most widely used measure of student adjustment. The SACQ has a distinct focus on the students in their new higher education environment (Crede & Niehorster, 2011).

Crede and Niehorster (2011) conducted a meta-analysis of 237 studies which utilised the SACQ; this incorporated the responses of 44668 students. The results indicated that the predictive validity of academic adjustment is almost as strong as grade point average and SAT scores with regard to retention and academic achievement. They also highlighted that institutional attachment has the largest correlation with retention rates.

Crede and Niehorster (2011) point out that the category of institutional attachment may in fact be an outcome of the other three categories hence its importance to retention. The SACQ remains the most predominantly utilised measure of student adjustment to a HEI. The questionnaire has been shown to demonstrate high internal validity and provides a link between adjustment, retention and academic attainment (Mattern & Patterson, 2009). The SACQ is therefore considered a useful tool as part of the proposed mixed methodology design of the current study.

Each participant was given an information sheet containing some of the key aspects of the study and issues regarding how their data would be used including reassurances of confidentiality and anonymity (see appendix). The participants were then given a consent form which they were required to sign in line with ethics. The participants were then instructed to complete the questionnaire. The participants were given and talked through a debrief form (see appendix). The questionnaires were then scored and analysed.



#### 4.7.5 Participant observation on location of outdoor orientation programme

Participant observation took place throughout the three day residential OOP. Participants were observed during daytime activities and free time periods. Observation notes, informal interviews, counts of specific observations, lists, categories, video recording and notational analysis and process flows were used for data collection. These were based on recommendations for participant observation provided by Dewalt and Dewalt (1998).

During participant observation the researcher takes part in the daily activities, interactions and events of a group of people. The data collected based on these activities and interactions is explicitly recorded and analysed. Participant observation was utilised to examine verbal behaviour, physical behaviour and gestures, personal space, human traffic, people who stand out using various methods.

The methods of data collection utilised field notes, casual conversations or informal interviews, counts of specific observations, lists and categories and process flows. The participant observation was undertaken with the research question in mind which is well defined and specific. Dewalt and Dewalt (1998) outlined a number of best practice guidelines for the various methods of data collection used with participant observation. These include specific recommendations on field notes and recording of physical spaces and interactions. They also draw attention to key elements of conducting informal interviews and counts.

Participant observation has certain limitations. The most prominent is that of observer bias, within participant observation the researcher is the tool therefore the role of reflexivity, good practice guidelines and thorough data collection are key to overcoming the barriers of observer bias and increasing reliability. Despite the possibility of observer bias the use of participant observation provided supplementary data to the other methods being utilised within the mixed methodology design.

The range of data collected through the various methods within participant observation will add a naturalistic element to the study. In contrast to possible observer bias, this type of data collection may reduce demand characteristics that can be present in more formal interviews.

Each participant was given an information sheet containing some of the key aspects of the study and issues regarding how their data would be used including reassurances of confidentiality and anonymity (see appendix) at the start of the OOP. The participants were then given a consent form which they were required to sign in line with ethics. Following the OOP participants were given and

talked through a debrief form (see appendix). The notes, diagrams, informal interviews and process flows were then coded and analysed.

#### 4.8 Establishing trustworthiness - Study quality and rigour

##### 4.8.1 Establishing trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose four criteria that can help establish trustworthiness of a qualitative study. These criteria correspond with rigour applied to positivist investigation (Shenton, 2003):

- 1) Credibility – Internal Validity
- 2) Transferability - Generalisability
- 3) Dependability – Reliability
- 4) Confirmability – Objectivity

Credibility of the investigation was ensured by using well established research methods thematic analysis, interpretive phenomenology and content analysis. The interview schedules and specific interview questions were not derived from a previous study, they were constructed then checked and altered based on feedback from the supervision team. The questions were then tested in a pilot interview and subsequently modified or changed where appropriate. The third method used to ensure credibility was that participants were given the opportunity to refuse to participate, answer certain questions or withdraw without reason at any time prior to data analysis, this helps to ensure the honesty of participants (Shenton, 2004).

The honesty of participants was achieved by building rapport. Rapport was developed by conversation prior to the student and staff interviews and student focus groups including information about me, my studies and interests as well as informal chat. Fourthly, the investigation was the subject of scrutiny from supervision team; consultation and collaboration with the supervision team who have substantial expertise in qualitative methods ensured the interview questions were not leading and the prompts, probes and interview style were objective and appropriate. Encouragement was given to go beyond the interpretation of themes and focus upon what these themes mean to the individuals and what we can elicit from this meaning. This feedback offered different viewpoints on my assumptions, research design and analysis.

Transferability of the findings from the study was attempted by providing enough contextual information to allow the reader to relate the findings in the analysis to their own experience and the plausibility of others being able to do so, transferability was also improved through thick description

of the phenomena under investigation. Detailed description of the participants, procedure and methods employed in analysis allow the reader to decide upon the appropriateness of transferring the findings from the study to similar investigation.

Dependability was also aided by detailed description of the participants, procedure and methods employed in analysis allowing a future researcher to repeat the investigation and to allow the reader the opportunity to decide if the analysis has been conducted using appropriate methodological practices.

Confirmability was achieved firstly by acknowledging my own predispositions. The Interview schedule and research design development were influenced by the researchers position as an insider in regards to the institution under investigation whilst also being a recent undergraduate. The researcher constructed the questions involved in the interview process, this construction was not pulled from thin air; it was rooted in the researchers personal experiences. The researcher also drew on past studies and theoretical understanding. Detailed methodology and the inclusion of items involved in the 'process of analysis' allow the reader to see the steps taken, hence make their own decision on the objectiveness of the investigation.

#### 4.8.2 Further establishing trustworthiness

The research focus and subsequent construction of the interview schedules was invariably influenced by the researcher's position. The interview schedule construction drew on a combination of experience, past studies and theoretical understanding. The prompting and probing involved in a semi structured interview is guided by research aims. The findings from the study are presented with enough contextual information to allow the reader to relate the findings in the analysis to their own experience. This is important when considering the application of research findings and authenticity (Langdrige, 2007).

The research considered a number of additional techniques used to further establish trustworthiness, this included triangulation. Investigator triangulation can be defined as the use of more than two researchers in any of the research stages in the same study. It involves the use of multiple observers, interviewers, or data analysts in the same study for confirmation purposes (Hussein, 2009). This was applied in part through the active role the supervision team engaged in during the analysis process.

Other elements of triangulation were considered including data triangulation, theoretical triangulation and analysis triangulation. Despite the merits of such techniques the application of these was not considered appropriate for the current data set. The focus was upon the experience of

the individuals so the theoretical and data triangulation would not have enhanced the data collected.

Another technique used was respondent validation. This is where feedback is obtained from the participants about the accuracy of the data they have given, and also the researcher's interpretation of that data. In addition, feedback after the completion of the research project on the interpretation of all the data that has been obtained and interpreted can provide another type of validation (Torrance, 2012). This is another way in which trustworthiness has been established.

#### 4.8.3 Study rigour

Rigour is the way in which we can establish trust and confidence in qualitative research findings. Rigour in the current study was achieved through adhering to the six research activities of Van Manen (1990). Through these activities the research was reflective and explicit clear description of the participants was given.

#### 4.8.4 Reflexivity

One of the key ways in which study quality and rigor were achieved in the current study was through reflexivity. Reflexivity within the current study takes upon extra importance due to the researcher's role within the research. The researcher is also a student and university staff member. This position raises a number of fundamental questions which could compromise the credibility of the research.

The researchers lived experiences to a position where of investigating experiences OOP on transition and adaptation to university for 1<sup>st</sup> year students. The researchers interpretation of others' experiences may be influenced their own positioning and experience of such events. The researcher did not intend to take a 'gods eye view' of the phenomenon in question. They to minimise the effects of natural attitude while acknowledging their position as a researcher.

To best encourage a reflexive approach to the research there were a number of questions the researcher engaged with from the start and throughout the research process. For example;

Why am I carrying out the study? And what is my relationship to the topic being investigated?

Through careful reflection it is possible to minimise researcher involvement in the research and at the same time acknowledge that the researchers own being impacts on their interpretation (Van Manen, 1990).

This dialogue of reflexivity enabled the researcher to construct an account that was rigorous and true to the experience. The reading and re-reading of the data developed themes that were as close to the experience as possible.

#### 4.8.5 Operationalizing Van Manen's six research activities

Rigour in the current study was also achieved through adhering to the six research activities of Van Manen (1990). Through these activities the research is reflective and explicit. Despite them being of a phenomenological nature the message is transferable to all areas of qualitative research, providing thought provoking questions that can serve to enhance reflexivity, rigour and establish trustworthiness.

Van Manen's six research activities.

1. Turning to the nature of lived experience; Interviews and data.

'Lived experiences gather hermeneutic significance as we (reflectively) gather them by giving memory to them. Through meditations, conversations, day dreams, inspirations and other interpretive acts we assign meaning to the phenomena of life' (Van Manen, 1990 pg. 37). These experiences were revealed through the interview process, the participants offered their lived experience interpretations. It was then a task for the researcher to interpret these meanings and phenomena.

2. Investigating experience as we live it; interviews, data and initial interpretation.

'We are interested in the particular experiences of this child, this adolescent, or this adult since they allow us to become 'in-formed,' shaped or enriched by this experience so as to able to render the full significance of its meaning' (Van Manen, 1990 pg. 62). By interviewing the people who are at the heart of the phenomenon i.e. 1<sup>st</sup> year students experiencing this transition and adaptation we can get closer to the original lived experience thereby moving towards the process of revealing the true essence of the experience.

3. Reflecting on essential themes; development of analysis and recognizing two essential themes.

'The insight into the essence of a phenomenon involves a process of reflecting appropriating, of clarifying, and of making explicit the meaning of the lived experience'. (Van Manen, 1990 pg. 77). This reflection requires the researcher to uncover the essence of the experience rather than its 'face value' appearance. This is done in this study through a process of interpretation and clear

description. The engagement with the text looked to move away from a rigid style of coding to allow the meaning to emerge hermeneutically, whereby the importance of the analyst in the construction of meaning is recognised. Through this process initial themes were identified.

4. The art of writing and re-writing; aided in reflective nature of the research and essential theme development.

‘The methodology of phenomenology requires a dialectical going back and forth among these various levels of questioning. To be able to do justice to the fullness and ambiguity of the experience of the lifeworld, writing may turn into a complex process of rewriting (re-thinking, re-reflecting, re-cognizing).’ (Van Manen, 1990 pg. 131).

The way in which the current study adheres to these principles is through being true to the data. The researcher approached the analysis process with a conscious attempt to reduce natural attitude by systematically examining the transcripts, giving equal devotion to each sentence allowing the meaning of what was being said to emerge and not just focusing upon my understanding and experience. Second level coding was approached in the same way, in a bottom up data led manner. The themes and sub themes that emerged are labelled in a way which is close to the data in order to keep alive the meaning of what was said and the way it was intended. The re-writing concept helps identify thematic areas, essential themes and the essence of the experience.

5. Maintaining a strong and oriented relation to lived experience; reflexivity and illuminating the essential experience.

‘The tendency to abstraction is a common hazard of all academic activity. It is, in part, the reason for the disdain that practitioners hold for university-based theorists who have lost touch with ‘the real world’. (Van Manen, 1990 pg. 138). The current study is data driven in the development of themes and through discussing the perceived essences of experience. There was a focus on the research aims to avoid an abstract ‘wandering’. By staying close to the research aims, the findings and subsequent conclusions have implications for practice, policy and research.

6. Balancing the research context by considering parts and whole; identifying structure of the experience.

This was attended to through adherence to the other five research activities and careful reflection and considerations of the hermeneutic circle.

## Chapter 5 – Analysis Stage 0

Analysis stage 0 September 2014 consisted firstly of an evaluation questionnaire which intervention students were required to fill in following the OOP, this was analysed through content analysis. The stage also included analysis of the pilot student semi structured interview, university staff semi structured interviews and student focus groups. The combined findings from the stage 0 analysis process were used to inform changes required for the OOP 2015.

### 5.1 Content analysis of evaluation questionnaire

The University created an evaluation questionnaire to receive feedback on the OOP from students in order to have a greater informed input in future OOP's. The evaluation from students informed specific recommendations for programme content.

The first section of this analysis addresses the findings of this basic evaluation form completed by students who attended the first OOP. The purpose was to address fundamental logistical concerns and to improve the processes required to deliver a successful OPP. These issues are then explored in more detail through the in depth interviews and focus groups.

The section involves an open ended evaluative questionnaire, the level of detail within the written questionnaire feedback was limited. Given the open ended style of the questionnaire the research methodology most suited to the analysis of such data was content analysis (Berelson, 1952; Krippendorff, 1980). This methodology allows a range of responses to be incorporated into the analysis not restricted by a 'tick box' questionnaire. The present study looks to record obvious meaning units referred to as manifest content which is the literal subject matter of the question (Kondracki et al., 2002). This is due to the directness of the evaluative questions asked to the participants. The simple form of questionnaire was selected due to the ease and time required to complete, this was done to encourage a high response rate, furthermore the responses received in this questionnaire will inform future groups evaluation questions.

Question 1: What were your expectations and feelings prior to attending the residential?

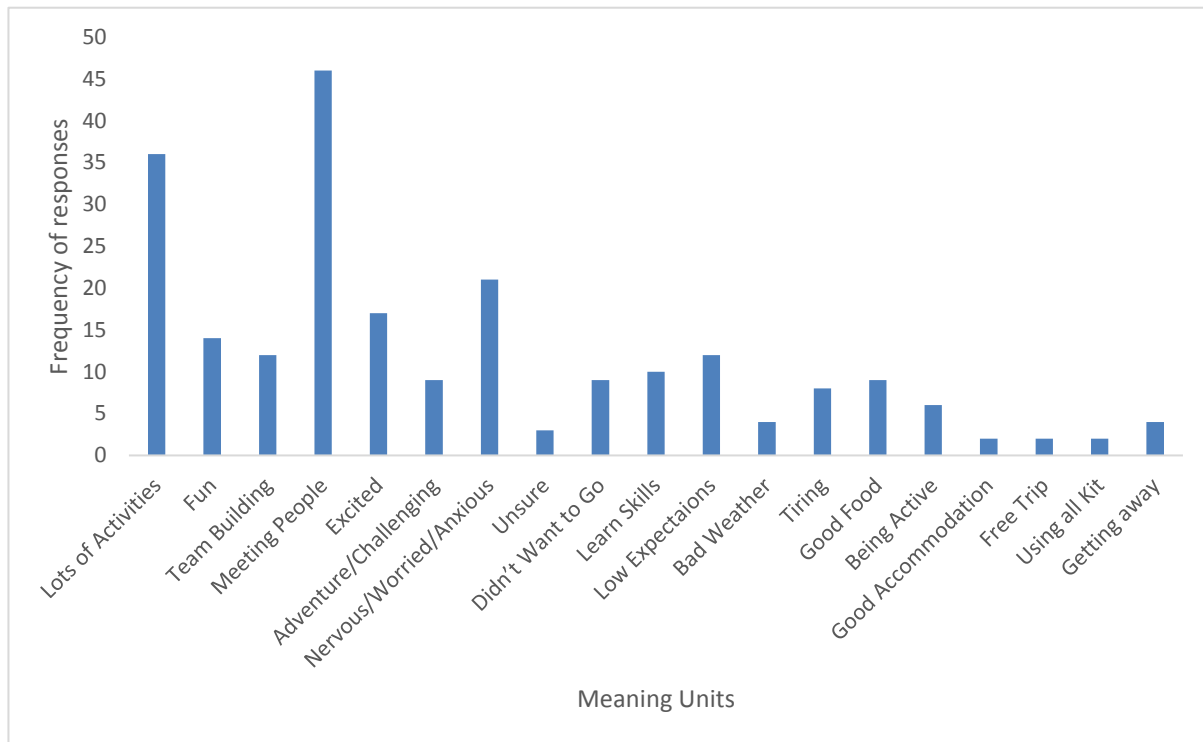


Figure 5.1. A bar chart to show student expectation before the OOP

Figure 5.1 above demonstrates the overriding feelings and expectations of students prior to attending the OOP. The main expectation was to meet peers and academic staff and make friends (20%). This was very encouraging as it suggests students were aware and open to the possibility of friendship formation. These peer relations are one of the key factors in aiding student transition to university (Bell, 2012). Furthermore staff and student interaction can help aid belonging to a university (Bell et al., 2014).

Students were also expecting to be involved in lots of activities (16%). The idea that students were generally aware of the structure of an OOP is also an interesting point. It ties in with the responses such as excitement, fun, expecting adventure and challenges and learning new skills. It can also be associated with low expectations and not wanting to go. This may be explained by previous experience of similar events which have been poorly managed, these negative answers were surprising especially the 'didn't want to go' as the OOP was not compulsory.

In fact 24% of expectations and feelings were negative towards the OOP. The largest of which was nervous/worried or anxious, this accounted for 9% of all responses, although nervous (7% in this response category) could possibly be interpreted as positive or negative as someone could be nervously excited. This is an underreported aspect of a first year student experience. Being nervous



or anxious when meeting a large group of new people in an unfamiliar setting would affect even the most confident of people, the OOP can help counteract these feelings by providing opportunity to meet people in a friendly atmosphere bonding people through shared experience (Bell, Holmes and Williams, 2010).

Question 2: How do you feel now after attending the residential?

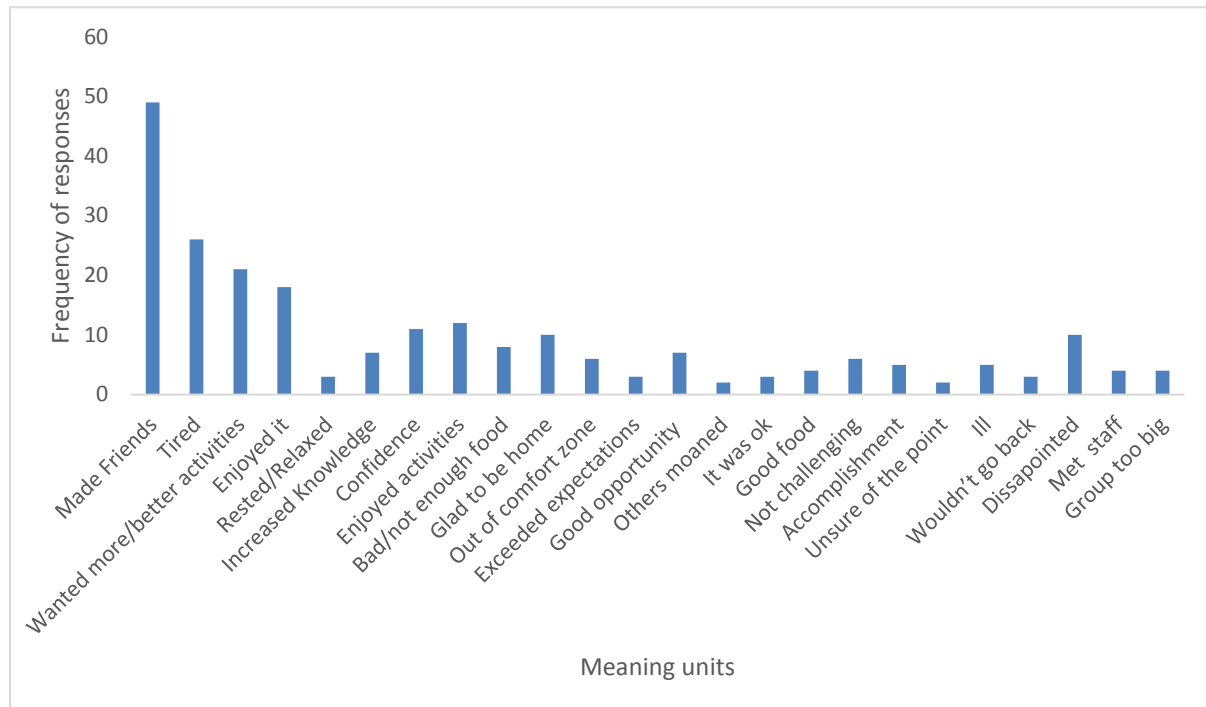


Figure 5.2. A bar chart to show student feelings following the OOP.

The student feeling and opinion after attending the OOP was generally split, 56% of responses were positive with 44% of answers negative. The most common responses were 'made friends' (21%). This is an important finding given the goals of the OOP. There were 84 respondents, of these 49 reported that they had made friends (see fig 5.2 above), this type of response justifies the use of OOP to build peer relations and friendships (Bell et al., 2014).

This may have helped some students (11 respondents) with increased confidence. Many of the respondents (30 respondents) also stated they enjoyed the OOP or the activities (see fig 5.2). 11% of the negative responses was tiredness, this is to be expected given the physical and demanding nature of the OOP programme. More worrying responses were the 'unsure of the point', 'wouldn't go back', however this only accounted for less than 5% of the respondents.

The response of not challenging is also of interest as this is one of the key principles in OOP's. The third highest response was the students felt they needed more or improved activities. The negative

feelings expressed can be tackled through better programme management. Issues like 'unsure of the point' can be addressed through clear brief and instruction prior to the start of the OOP.

Other issues such as food and number and type of activities can also be enhanced prior to the next intake of 1<sup>st</sup> year undergraduate students. The most encouraging aspect of this set of results is the point that many of the students made friends and enjoyed the experience.

The amount and nature of the negative responses also demonstrates the method with which the evaluation questionnaire was administered and collected was appropriate for the study by providing anonymity the expression of negative feelings towards the current OOP will serve to improve the organisation and subsequent experience for future students.

A large number of meaning units were used for this question, this was a deliberate action to allow the reader to see the range of positive and negative comments expressed by the student participants therefore providing a fuller picture of their thoughts, feelings and experience.

Question 3: What did you enjoy the most about the residential?

The responses regarding the most enjoyable elements of the OOP were as follows. Activities (62%) and making friends (31%) were the overwhelming majority of responses. Despite the fact in the previous question a number of student responses stated they would like more or improved activities, the activities that did take place were the most enjoyable part of the OOP.

This can help with future planning of OOP's. The activities undertaken can be retained for future OOP's with additional activities added to improve the schedule. Again forming friendships with peers was at the forefront of many students thoughts regarding the OOP. The responses to this question provide support for the success of the OOP experience for students.

It is worth noting, despite the question asking for positive comments, 4% of answers were negative. Three students said they enjoyed no elements of the OOP, this may be a slight cause for concern. By addressing the problems raised in the previous question and improving the activity schedule in future OOP's this should enable future students to enjoy the experience.

Question 4: Tell us at least one thing which could have improved your residential experience.

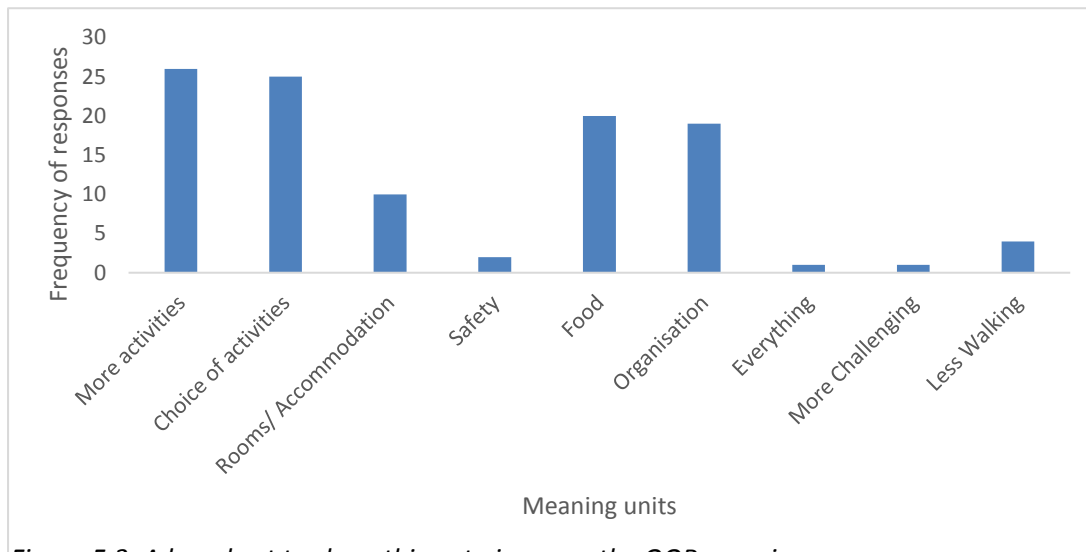


Figure 5.3. A bar chart to show things to improve the OOP experience

Figure 5.3 shows the responses students gave to things they would do to improve the OOP. There were 4 main responses to this question, two of which concerned the activities. Students wanted more activities (24%) and a greater choice of activities (23%). This echoes the student sentiment expressed in question 2. These were the two highest responses and therefore take on the greatest significance when making adjustments to the OOP schedule for future year groups.

The next highest responses were better food (19%), similarly this can be easily addressed in future OOP's. Students also revealed that the OOP could have been better organised (18%). This is a disappointing finding yet it was the universities first OOP, this lack of experience may have contributed to this feeling.

As the university becomes most accustomed to organising this type of event and student feedback is taken into consideration, the organisational structure is likely to improve. This should enhance student experience of the OOP. The other score of note was 9% were unhappy with the accommodation or rooms, the main concern highlighted with the rooms was the large dormitory style of room was thought to be inappropriate for this type of event.

Question 5: Was the timing of the residential appropriate?

The majority of responses were in favour of the timing (71%) Vs not favouring the timing (29%). This provides support for the timing of the OOP which was in the first teaching week of term. This gave residential students time to move into halls of residence and all students the opportunity to take part in 'fresher's week' before the OOP began.

The open ended questions were supplemented by a short scale based section of the questionnaire. The scale ranged from 4 = strongly agree to 1 = strongly disagree

The descriptive statistics of the scale score aspect of the evaluation questionnaire.

The highest scoring was the instructor knowledge (mean 5.59) closely followed by activity instructions (mean 3.48). This was a point that was included in both the feelings after the OPP question and the most enjoyable elements of the OOP question. This does provide some evidence that the paid staff on site were appropriate for the activities and they enhanced the student experience. It also provides justification for using an outdoor adventure company with extensive experience.

The lowest scoring question was the range of activities (mean 2.52), although this had the largest standard deviation indicating a larger spread of scores. This is one of the main points of concern raised from the evaluation questionnaire and is an issue that can be addressed for future OOP's. The accommodation scored second lowest (mean 2.97), student concerns over accommodation will be acknowledged such as the large dormitory style rooms. This is again something which is easily adaptable for future 1<sup>st</sup> year students. The scale scored questions provided validation for the content analysis findings, generally yielding similar results thereby enhancing the trustworthiness of the content analysis findings and reinforcing the student opinion.

Implications and contribution

The questionnaire provided insight into the individual intricate factors at play in OOP's. The main points raised by students were not evident in the reviewed literature, including the number and length of activities and the type of accommodation and food provided. The questionnaire therefore, provided future OOP design points for consideration by the university. Firstly, and most importantly for the students, was that more activities were needed. Organisation prior and during the OOP needed improving, this included meal time structure and type of room allocation. The study also found that the timing of the OOP was well selected by the university.

Overall the evaluation questionnaire demonstrated the students enjoyed the activities and the OOP in general facilitated the development of friendship for many students which are outcomes frequently cited in OOP literature (Bell et al., 2014). The issues may seem relatively small, yet tweaking these elements will serve to improve the student experience which may add to the positive comments already felt by the participants.

## 5.2 Student Interviews analysis and discussion

### The pressure of making friends

In the following quote John made a number of interesting points, firstly that there is initial pressure when meeting people for the first time. Here it manifests itself as feelings of nervousness and being anxious. This is conveyed through an introspective thought of how new people will view his personality. These feelings are widely reported (Shim & Ryan, 2012; Richardson, King & Garret, 2012).

The second point made by John holds resonance in that he is acutely aware of a small temporal window in which the dynamics of friendship making take place. He is also aware of how his actions within this small window will affect his social world for at least the next year of his life.

*'I was worried that it was the first time I was going to meet people from my course and I guess that's the time to see each other's personalities a bit more so I was a bit nervous how people would react to my personality and how I would react to them because I have to essentially get on with them for the rest of the year, it's quite a small window.'* John

The points made by John in the first quote signal the importance of providing a setting for friendship formation which aims to reduce these feelings of anxiousness. McDonald and Robinson (2014) highlight the use of team building activities and icebreakers to facilitate this friendship making, both of which are a key starting point on most OOP's.

In the following quote John speaks of a pressure on his own identity. The quote signals the struggle of conformity to enable social acceptance versus a desire to remain true to his own personality and face potential social rejection. The ideal outcome in this struggle is to be socially accepted as oneself yet this can take bravery in a situation that has already been described as causing nervousness.

*'The most challenging activity was being myself actually. It wasn't the challenges themselves. Just being myself being confident person potentially. Each activity had the same challenge in being myself, if that makes any sense.'* John

This point again highlights the importance of providing opportunities for social interaction that are non-divisive and which promote friendship formation. Thomas (2012) described how something as simple as eating lunch together can help students feel more relaxed to start to develop friendships. The free time periods and communal eating elements of the OOP could therefore be facilitating relationship building in addition to the opportunities provided within the structured adventure activities.

### Friends for keeps

Here Ryan shows the positive impact the OOP can have on people's lives. The early friendship formation on the OOP directly impacted Ryan's social world. It also shows that creating an artificial lived space in which these relationships develop can also transfer back into the lived space of university. Buote et al. (2007) describes the importance friendships can have on a student's adjustment to university, therefore any assistance the university can provide in this development through interventions such as the OOP can only be beneficial.

*'Yeah probably the four people I'm closest with on my course now were the ones I spent the majority time on the residential with. We were in the same room. Met on the coach on the way down there and then stayed in the same room.'* Ryan

*'The people from the residential I do still speak to because they are on the same course as me so thanks to the residential it has broken down that barrier for the fact I know people on my course. I wouldn't say they are my closest friends or anything but they're not acquaintances either. So they're my friends, I get on with them basically. I got to know them on that level which I wouldn't have done otherwise.'* John

In contrast the social ties John developed through the OOP do not seem to be as strong, despite this the OOP did provide a clear opportunity to meet and interact with his fellow course mates. In the quote there is the feeling that the OOP has enabled John to make friends that he would not have without the programme and with a greater level of intimacy.

Pittman and Richmond (2008) state that those who do not have a connection to larger groups or communities are more likely to experience increased stress and emotional distress. This again gives value to the OOP including the entire student body from PE based courses, this allowed for greater opportunity for students to meet and network with course mates. This could also foster feelings of belonging through shared experience (Pittman & Richmond, 2008).

### Logistics of making friends & People politics

In the first quote Ryan comments on the initial team building activities. Ryan is very clear on the aim of the activities and their expected outcomes. The point made about crawling through strangers legs is also of importance. Physical contact is not usually made until a relationship has already developed (Altman & Taylor, 1973), the strategy of introducing this in a team building activity is designed to accelerate the familiarity of the participating students (Lein & Goldenberg, 2012).

*'The first group activity was a team building activity cos it's just a load of stupid stuff where you're basically there to have a laugh and get to know each other.'*

*That was quite good at getting to know people, there's no better way to get to know someone than crawling through a strangers legs!' Ryan*

In the following comment from John his opinion on the overnight stay aspect of the OOP is interesting, especially the choice of the words. It conjures the idea of being vulnerable or defenceless, yet he seems to have taken this feeling to empathise with other people in the same situation to develop friendships. Students in a qualitative study conducted by Wolfe and Kay (2011) verbalise the added benefits of spending overnight time with fellow students and how it allows for a deeper friendship formation.

*'But the actual sleeping over the night for the fact everyone is exposed, everyone is unwinding. You get to know each other on that one to one basis level so just having that time to yourself and with each other to talk.'* John

John goes on to state how the organised activities give another opportunity to find out about other students personal attributes. The activities have also allowed John to test his own self limits and demonstrate that he has a level of self-confidence he did not believe he had.

*'But activity wise I really enjoyed the night walk and night caving. It's something you wouldn't usually do, completely new to me anyway. It was just a new experience and really interesting to see the different characters come out of that. I was surprised how confident I was going first with everything whereas other people who I thought would be first were at the back of the queue, do you know what I mean. So for that reason I really enjoyed that.'* John

These feelings of developing self-confidence through OOP's was investigated by Paxton and MCAvoy (2000). The research suggests that undertaking, new, novel or exciting activities allows participants the chance to learn that they are capable of overcoming challenges. The overcoming of challenges is a key concept in many OOP activities, it allows the growth of self-confidence, self-efficacy and self-image. The quote from John above shows this personal growth. The way in which the activities can challenge people is perfectly evidenced in the quote below from Ryan.

*'That's the bit I remember most about it, it's challenging to be put outside your comfort zone, especially the night time walk because you can't see where you are going so trying to navigate on a map at night with no torches is challenging, even just communicating with people at night time is difficult as well.'* Ryan

The experience that Ryan speaks of below is clear and vivid and demonstrates the positive feelings of the process of making friends, the clarity of the recall also points to it being a significant experience. Such snapshots of experience may seem unimportant yet such interactions are the basis of the key social developments in the students' social world and as such take on great significance to the individuals involved. Li and Cheng (2015) highlight the importance of shared experience and shared interest in the development of friendship and relationships.

*'Yeah, I managed to get signal on my phone for the internet so I set it up as a hotspot, I'd taken my tablet with me as well. Champions League games were on that night so I set up the tablet in the dorm room for people to watch it.'* Ryan.

### Staff interaction

Briggs, Clark and Hall (2012) state that building relationships with academic staff is one of the most important aspects of a student's transition to university. The following quote from John shows the level of interaction the OOP allowed students to have with staff from their academic department. This level of interaction can only be beneficial for new undergraduates embarking on a degree programme.

*'I got to know a couple of members of staff quite well, my progress tutor especially, I didn't know they were my progress tutor at the time but I got to know him very well. It was good, each activity we had a different staff member with us and we got to know them on a one to one basis essentially so not in the formal way you would expect in lectures and stuff although surprisingly they are the same both ways which did surprise me. I thought it was going to be like school where they would act one way in lectures and another outside. On the residential you really got to know them as a person rather than a teacher or a lecturer which really helped when we came back.'* John

### Academic Study

The involvement of an academic element in the OOP was perceived in the student interviews as a positive in the trip. By referring back to university and applying to future work based situations it reminds the students why they are on the OOP. It provides a grounding to the programme and activities.

Wolfe and Kay (2011) state that students who are integrated academically and socially are more likely to become committed to that university. The implementation of an academic element amongst the many opportunities for social world development could therefore be seen as an important part of the OOP. The students are still new to the experience of university so this early 'taster' of future assignments may be invaluable.

*'I think so because by that time we'd filled all of our time with the activities and it was a good way to wind down the session. Our session was the last one of the night so I was good to get a bit of work done. It tied in quite well to the stuff we had been doing in the OOP.'* Ryan

*'It was integrated really well, each activity while we were doing it were applied to if you were taking school children out what would you do with them, what age group would you work with, that sort of thing also the safety elements, would you*



*let a child do this which makes you think about it while you are doing the activity so I thought that part was integrated really well.’ John*

Some elements of the OOP were mentioned by the participants as needing improvement in order to maximise the potential for social interaction.

*‘At night. we got to know each other in our rooms and stuff, so when we had our free time we couldn’t exactly interact with anyone else because we hadn’t really met anyone only people in our assigned groups so maybe include a big group session, like when you go camping so round the fire or something like that so maybe organised things to do in the free time or structure because I think erm in that way you get to know people a bit more.’ John*

The possible implementation of further activities in the free time period is one suggestion. Another suggestion below from Ryan is to give the students more ownership of certain activities. This could potentially increase the challenge aspect of a task such as walking to include navigation or orienteering. This would be a simple way to develop the activities further to enhance the trip and the experiences the student have. Research highlighted by Posey et al. (2015) mentions the benefits of providing student with a choice of activity. This is further supported by Ramsing and Sibthorp (2008) who believe more individual choice allows participants to have a voice and enhances the experience.

*‘I think if you’re going to be on a trip like that, we did our walk which was different to the others, whereas other groups just stuck to the roads and stuff, we went up through the fields and did a bit of self-navigation and stuff, so maybe giving the students a little more control over the walk. Our guide said he was going to follow us, he said here’s the map, you do what you want. Ryan*

### 5.3 Focus groups preliminary analysis and discussion



Figure 5.4 - Diagram of discussion ideas created by the participants

Figure 5.4 shows the post-it note method of idea creation Peterson and Barron (2007) discussed in the method section, it is displayed here to demonstrate the types of things that initially came to mind for the students in terms of positives and negatives of the OOP. Positives are written in blue with the negatives written in red. In just a quick snapshot we start to see that the students seemed to value and remember the potential social benefits. Here 6 of the 9 positives are related to meeting new people and team building.

#### The logistics of making friends

One of the issues to emerge during the focus group was the allocation and type of room. This may seem to be a trivial matter yet the profound impact it had on the dynamics of relationship development between many of the girls who attend the OOP is overwhelming.

*F1 – I was nervous of like sharing a room with 17 people I didn't know*

*F2 – was it 17 in our group?*

*F3 – yeah I thought we were going to be sharing with 3 or 4 other people so....*

*F1 – I would have preferred smaller groups though*

*M1 – it was probably worse for the girls because they had bigger rooms to share whereas the lads had like 6 people*

*F2 – I didn't think anyone in our room socialised they just fell a sleep*

*F3 – true, the other girls in the smaller room made friends really quickly and are still friends to this day*

*F1 – not many people from the big room are friends now'.*

Classic psychological research social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) would attribute the described contrasting interactions to the perceived membership of a social group i.e. 'the girls in the small room'. This differentiation creates in group and out group mentality that seemingly increased the cohesion of the group of girls sleeping in a different area to the rest of the group. The males were not segregated in this way and no such problems were described.

The next issue raised was again one which may have been considered minor. At the start of the OOP students had to split themselves into groups for activities and to share rooms with. This experience has been expressed as one which was deeply negative. The following conversation clearly expresses feelings of awkwardness, unease and dislike.

*'F1 – we had to split into groups*

*M1 – yeah I think that was bad*

*M3 – we had to sort our own rooms*

*M1 – it was bad because they didn't do it for us*

*F2 – I think it would've been better if they just gave us a room*

*M1 – because there was already groups of people together, already like mates and there was like outsiders and they didn't really know what to do.'*

One of the main concepts of OOP is to ensure everyone is involved and to help the development of social connections (Bell et al., 2014), yet this logistical oversight has created the very opposite situation. An exclusive mentality where people can be excluded based on first impressions.

A further consideration was raised during the focus group, when the OOP should take place. Again the difference of one week into term or prior may not appear to be of great significance yet some students felt really strongly about when and why it should take place.

*'M1 – the trip helped meeting people in a way*

*F2 – I think they should've waited another week though*

*F1 – I don't*

*M1 – I think they should've had*

*M1 – I think they should've had the residential in the first week rather than waiting because everyone had started and wasn't really speaking, then we went and everyone was speaking*

*M2 – yeah before*

*F2 - before everyone had formed their groups*

*M1 – yeah before then everyone could've got speaking and then had freshers and everyone would've known each other for that. That would've been better.*

*F1 – if you were in halls you already knew people so you were alright.'*

### University staff interview preliminary analysis and discussion

#### Logistics, Partnership and Costing

The process of organising the OOP was given to a graduate teaching assistant (GTA) under instruction from the department leader. The brief was not rigid in content, although it did contain certain guidelines.

*'The first was keenness from the university and head of department that it should be far enough away from campus that the students may not have been to that area before.'* Alison

The expertise of the organising company was consulted in designing the OOP for university students. Their knowledge, guidance and relationship with YHA influenced the location selection for the OOP.

*'also I think practicalities of working with the organising company they have run this scheme at another university for their students for the last 10 years so we went with their expertise.'* Alison

The activities were chosen based on cost and were selected by the organising GTA who admitted it was a case of 'trial and error'. This strategy for activity selection will be improved based on feedback and evaluation from students and informed by literature.

*'In terms of how the activities were planned it started from a budgetary point of view looking at various models from the organisers and then got feedback from the students. I think based on that this year we have gone for more wow factor type activities, gorge scrambling, some water based kayaking; raft building and the night walk which seemed really popular with students as well.'* Alison

*'We got the cost down as much as possible without compromising on the type of accommodation we stayed in. YHA, Hawkshead and Langdale are both a nice level and well regarded and reviewed. The food seemed to go down really well.'*

*Alison*

The level and location of the accommodation was judged by the member of university staff to be of a good standard, yet this does not take into account the expectations and standards expected by the students. The observation regarding dining requires further investigation based on student opinion.

The researched university made a concerted effort to involve as many staff members from the sport department as possible. The result was an environment for staff and students to mix comfortably while maintaining a strong staff presence as promoted by Briggs, Clark and Hall (2012). Their presence may have reinforced the idea to students that it was a university trip.

*'I think with 135 students there was 12 members of staff which was just about enough. I do know with working with colleagues they will have the same number of students and have 3 members of staff so we do go above some of our competitors in terms of trying to get to know the students.'* Alison

The following statement from Alison describes the academic element implemented on the OOP, the reason for implementing this part of the OOP should be clearly defined. This would be preferential to the notion that it was included purely because the trip took place in academic teaching time. Vlamiš, Bell and Gass (2011) state that OOP's work best if have participants work toward specific and intended goal. This could be implemented through a guided goal centred academic part of the trip.

*'In the evenings we had academic sessions because we took them in the first week of teaching, we did an academic session one evening, they were 50 minutes maybe an hour long so it wasn't designed to be a heavy lecture.'* Alison

#### Room for improvement

Simple logistical tweaking could easily enhance student experience through better management of essential daily events such as lunch and evening dinner. The splitting of groups and when activities take place could also be improved to present a clear structure to the students of the trip as a whole and the individual day schedules.

*'I think the major issues to do with the accommodation were the timings, either breakfast or dinner was served and the times we were leaving and arriving back, they are all manageable, logistical things'* Alison

### What an OOP brings – Student development

*'They have to trust people it's that kind of forced scenario where I think those types of interactions might have emerged months down the line but this manufactured situation that we put them into to make them work together as a team to see who the emergent leaders are, you know can be quite useful for the students themselves, trust and trying new experiences seems to be what comes out of it really.'* Alison

Alison is very clear on the reasons she believes OOP activities work to develop relationships between students. The idea of trust is a very interesting one which requires further investigation. This idea of trust may also extend to trusting in others to offer acceptance. Alison also mentions the term 'manufactured experience' this again is an important element of the overall OOP concept. These manufactured experiences are designed to remove individuals from their comfort zone, to challenge them and allow a growth of self-belief and self-confidence. They also allow shared experience events for new developing relationships.

### Secondary Benefits - Staff bonding

Further to the aim of aiding student transition to university Alison mentions a possible further novel benefit. The university staff are also experiencing similar experience to the students. This may enhance staff relationships, allowing them to get to know each other on a more personal level. This potential by-product of the design of the OOP can only enhance staff morale and closeness within the sport department.

*'Absolutely, definitely I think that scenario whether it's OAA or weekend or excursion, these manufactured situations they force people to work together often with people they might know but often with people that they don't know or spend any time with. There's staff from the residential that I'd be much more confident knocking on their door asking for a bit of advice than before I spent three days with them.'* Alison

## 5.4 Discussion of the analysis



*Figure 5.5 Combined analysis diagram*

A number of key recurring themes have emerged throughout the pilot student and staff interviews and the focus group provided visually in figure 5.5 above. The theme 'Logistics of making friends' encapsulates the feelings of nervousness and anxiousness experienced by the students. This was particularly evident in excerpts from the focus groups while explaining the negative feelings associated with choosing other students to join groups with. This added pressure to an already stressful situation.

The initial feelings of nervousness were echoed in the student interview. When discussing friendships made during the OOP it was evident from both the focus group and student interviews that many of them made lasting enduring friendships aided by the experience of the OOP. This was through a range of situations including the free time and the structured activities.

One of the key 'positives' that emerged from both the staff and student interviews and focus groups was the level of staff-student interaction. The reaction of the students to the extent they got to meet and get to know academic staff was one of the planned aims before the OOP took place. The



students reported some of the planned activities were challenging and fun. As previously reported challenging activity are required to enable a level of personal and social growth within and between the students. The initial team building activities were deemed a success in the focus groups and student interviews, they were reported as fun and a good way to get to know people.

The third and final theme that ran through the transcripts was 'room for improvement'. This was particularly evident in the focus group transcript and general tone of conversation. They highlighted a number of logistical issues that could be improved. Some of these concerns were echoed through the staff interview and student interviews.

The positive outcomes to take from these seemingly negative comments on the OOP is that many of them are very easy to rectify now the issues have been raised. The analysed preliminary data will allow certain changes to be implemented before the 2015 intake of new students. These initial improvements should enhance the OOP experience for the SHN students in 2015.

List of changes made to the OPP through the action research process

1. Range and type of activities increased and improved.

The number of activities was increased with the addition of a 'wow factor' activity gorge scrambling. The amount of walking time between activities was also greatly reduced.

2. Room type

All students would be allocated room sizes of no more than five people to address concerns raised and facilitate a greater level of intimacy between room sharing students.

3. Allocation of rooms and groups

All student room sharing arrangements and activity group selection were made by the trip organiser to reduce initial anxiety and apprehension of students. This also serves a purpose of increasing contact between people who would otherwise have interacted mainly with existing friend groups.

4. Introduction of team leaders

Each activity group would be allocated a team leader with the responsibilities of ensuring groups stick to activity schedules, meal sittings and night time head count. They were also given a separate mandate to try and encourage all members of the group to participate not only in the activities but also the social aspects of the trip.



5. Food

Trip organisers liaised with the hostel direct to discuss a meal sitting schedule to reduce logistical difficulty of serving over a hundred guests.

6. Location

The duel site approach was changed so all students had chance to meet people from other courses and expand their potential friendship groups.

## Chapter 6 - Analysis Stage 1

This chapter details the combined analysis of the data of stage 1 from the questionnaires, interviews, focus groups and participant observation. The first section of this chapter presents the statistical findings of the student adaptation to university questionnaire. Following this the combined analysis of student and university staff semi structured interviews, and student focus groups analysis and participant observation.

The use of qualitative data is used to provide greater confidence in the findings. There was no baseline test carried out therefore it is not certain whether the intervention group were not already at a higher starting point of adjustment to university than the control group as it was only a post-intervention measure, however explanations from a qualitative perspective between groups can help to validate the data. Then a discussion of implications and changes required for the final OOP 2016 is presented. The analysis and discussion of the combined data for the 'top up' activity day is then provided.

### 6.1 Results of Adaptation to University Questionnaire

Normality testing indicated that for each construct and the full score that the data was normally distributed ( $p > 0.05$ ) except the experimental condition for the construct attachment. Therefore for each construct except attachment an independent t-test was conducted. For the construct of attachment the non-parametric equivalent of the independent t-test was used which is the Mann Whitney U test.

Figure 6.1 shows that the experimental group who attended the outdoor residential scored higher on the overall full score of adaptation to university ( $M = 457.23$ ,  $SD = 58.38$ ) than the control group who did not attend the outdoor residential ( $M = 396.04$ ,  $SD = 69.19$ )

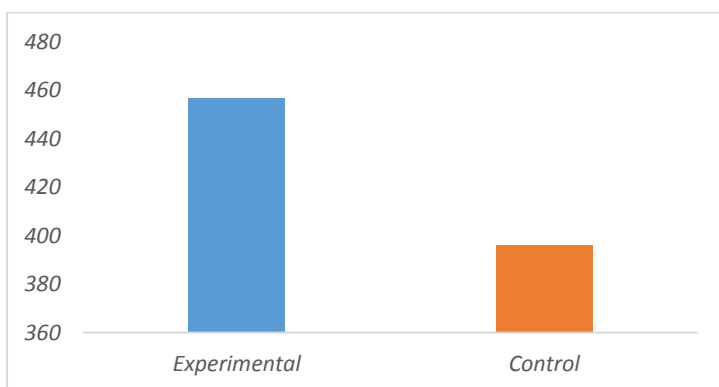
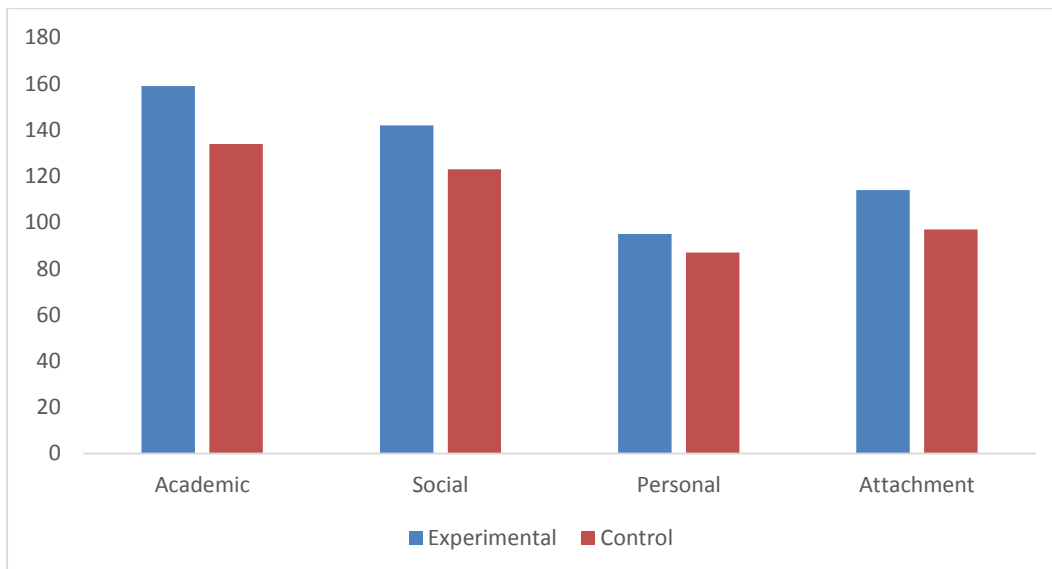


Figure 6.1. A graph to show overall scores of the Student Adaptation to University Questionnaire

An independent t-test showed that the difference between the experimental condition who attended the residential and the control condition who did not attend the residential for the full score was significant,  $t(76) = 4.07$ ,  $p < 0.05$ , 95% CL [31.23, 91.14].

Figure 6.2 shows the four individual constructs recorded by the Student Adaptation to University questionnaire. In each of the four constructs the experimental condition on average score higher than the control group. In the academic adjustment construct the experimental condition scored  $M = 158.60$ ,  $SD = 24.76$  compared to the control condition  $M = 133.52$ ,  $SD = 21.83$ . Similarly in the social adjustment construct the experimental condition scored  $M = 141.60$ ,  $SD = 19.96$  compared to the control condition  $M = 122.60$ ,  $SD = 23.40$ . In the personal adjustment construct the experimental condition scored  $M = 95.21$ ,  $SD = 14.80$  compared to the control condition  $M = 87.04$ ,  $SD = 17.64$ . In the institutional attachment construct the experimental condition again scored higher  $M = 113.68$ ,  $SD = 17.19$  compared to the control condition  $M = 96.76$ ,  $SD = 22.93$ .



*Figure 6.2. A graph to show individual constructs of the Student Adaptation to University Questionnaire*

Table 6.1 below demonstrates that in each individual adjustment construct that were normally distributed there is a statistically significant difference between experimental condition who attended the residential and the control condition who did not attend the residential.

Table 6.1. A table to show t-test results for the three individual adaptation constructs.

	DF	T Score	Significance	95% CL lower	95% CL upper
Academic	76	4.33	p< 0.05	13.55	36.62
Social	76	3.71	p< 0.05	8.81	29.20
Personal	76	2.14	p< 0.05	0.56	15.78

A Mann Whitney U test indicated for the construct of Attachment that there is a statistically significant difference ( $p < 0.05$ ) between experimental condition who attended the residential and the control condition who did not attend the residential.

The findings of this questionnaire demonstrate that the students who attended the outdoor residential have on average adapted to university better than students studying a similar course who did not attend an outdoor residential. The results also demonstrate that not only were the students overall better adapted but also on the four other constructs the questionnaire measures. The next stage of the analysis will attempt to discover in depth why this occurred through a series of qualitative methods. Links between these constructs will be illuminated and explained through the data and previous research. This serves to provide a holistic assessment of the residential experience and why it is a useful tool to aid the transition to university process.

## 6.2 Combined qualitative analysis

This section of the analysis reveals a number of intertwined and independent in-depth themes (see table 6.2) generated through both individual semi structured interviews and student focus groups and observations made in the participant observation. The issues surrounding these themes are highlighted and debated. Although the findings are combined for the semi structured interviews and focus groups they are still delineated.

This section culminates with a discussion of what are considered the main findings as related to the experience of attending an outdoor residential as a first year university student. These findings will then be utilised to inform the final changes to the residential 'blueprint' to deliver the best experience to aid adaptation to university. Following this the 'top up' one day analysis is presented, this also takes shape as a combined analysis utilising data from the student and university staff interviews and the student focus groups. The thematic areas are shared between the OOP and the 'top up' activity, this is a choice made to highlight similarities and differences in the experiences of the two events. The findings will be discussed and draw the chapter to a close.

Table 6.2. Summary of themes and sub themes

Themes	Sub themes					
Logistics Activities Staff	University trip, not a holiday	Respect for rules or not?	Activity preference	Length and timing of trip		Location
	Food	University & Organising Staff	Free time activities	Free trip	Team Leader	Hostel
Pre university thoughts, feelings, hopes and fears	Nervous excitement	Anxiety and apprehension	Really moving away	Craving the experience	Meeting new people	
Personal Development Building more than a raft	Fine line between challenge and fear	Students Self Perception		Building Self Confidence and Self Efficacy through.....		
		1 - Self Deprecation	2 - Self Confidence	1 - Personal achievement	2 - Shared experience	
Social Development	Accelerated friendships	Initial friendships	Mixed groups and rooms	Drinks in the bar	Technology facilitating friendships	
	Enhanced friendships	Extra friendships	Personal and professional relationships	Platform to work together	Friends through activities	

Table 6.3 Participant profiles

<u>Name</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Staff/Student</u>	<u>Live on campus?</u>
<u>Emma</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>Student</u>	<u>Commute</u>
<u>Luke</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>Student</u>	<u>Campus</u>
<u>Alison</u>	<u>21</u>	<u>Student</u>	<u>Campus</u>
<u>Michael</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>Student</u>	<u>Campus</u>
<u>Jack</u>	<u>21</u>	<u>Student</u>	<u>Campus</u>
<u>Lucas</u>	<u>22</u>	<u>Student</u>	<u>Campus</u>
<u>Claire</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>Student</u>	<u>Campus</u>
<u>Steve</u>	<u>24</u>	<u>Student</u>	<u>Campus</u>
<u>Carrie</u>	<u>19</u>	<u>Student</u>	<u>Commute</u>
<u>Tony</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>Student</u>	<u>Campus</u>
<u>Rose</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>Student</u>	<u>Campus</u>
<u>Bobby</u>	<u>19</u>	<u>Student</u>	<u>Campus</u>
<u>Alex</u>	<u>19</u>	<u>Student</u>	<u>Campus</u>
<u>Rach</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>Student</u>	<u>Commute</u>
<u>Karen</u>	<u>NA</u>	<u>Staff</u>	<u>NA</u>
<u>Ian</u>	<u>NA</u>	<u>Staff</u>	<u>NA</u>
<u>Sarah</u>	<u>NA</u>	<u>Staff</u>	<u>NA</u>
<u>Simon</u>	<u>NA</u>	<u>Staff</u>	<u>NA</u>

Table 6.3 above provides a quick reference guide for the readers about the participants of the staff and student interviews. The information should provide a little more context to their quotes based on whether they are 'traditional students', mature students, live on campus or commute.

### 6.2.1 Pre university thoughts, feelings, hopes and fears

Becoming a first year university student can bring huge changes in their lifeworlds, these are changes in their lived space, relationality, natural changes of lived time and also the embodied nature of identity. These changes can bring feelings of excitement such as students looking forward to enjoying a social life away from their traditional home. This creates the importance of forming a supportive peer network (Lowe & Cook, 2003). This can also cause anxieties in the student, Bell and Williams (2006) found that students entering the university feared failing socially more than failing academically. Some of this excitement is demonstrated in the below quotes.

*'Really excited to be honest, really excited because I think it's a great opportunity to bond and get to know everybody before you're put in an academic situation with them and have to do group tasks and things, you already know everybody on the course to speak to anyway.'* (Emma)

*'Looking forward to it really, the last residential I went on was primary school obviously some things that you can do at that age is different to the things you can do at an older age but yeah looking forward to it. I'm quite an outgoing guy so I'm always willing to try new things.'* (Luke)

The quote by Luke also touches on one of the issues of lived time and acknowledges that experiences of the same thing can be entirely different over time based on our own perceptions. The most commonly reported feeling among the students interviewed and within the focus groups was that of a nervous excitement.

This shows parallels with Whiteley (1982) who stated incoming first year students have high levels of expectation of university life. Nervous feelings are to be expected given the level of change they are experiencing. The quote below encapsulates these feelings and acknowledges that they are embarking on a new stage of their life which has required years of study and commitment to get to this point, also expressed in (Earwalker, 1992). Again the importance of lived time is illustrated, the build up to this point, now the time has arrived. Will the experience live up to expectations?

*'I was nervous, I was excited but I was nervous as well because it's a big step up from a levels and GCSE and it's kind of the thing that I've always been working towards. I always knew I wanted to come to uni, I always used to say when I was younger that I'd be going to uni, my parents would say don't wish your life away because I was so young and I would say I know even at 7 years old that I wanted to go to university.'* (Alison)

*'I was a bit nervous because of the thought of living on my own but I was also excited because I knew it was a course I wanted to do and I knew it would be worth it in the end, I thought it would be a good journey.'* (Focus group 1)

The second quote uses interesting language in that they are expressing university life as embarking on a new journey, this journey even for an incoming first year student had the end in sight. Whereas the below quote illustrates a more serious tone linked to Thomas (2012) showing uncomfortable levels of anxiety. The language used reveals a number of key concerns facing the student, these include acceptance, self-worth, losing family and social support paired with an acknowledgement that these early moments of their university life will impact them for a sizable amount of time.

*'I was a bit nervous at first, the wait of will they accept me, and will they allow me to come to their university. Then when you get that offer it's the wait of am I*

*going to do well enough to get in and it's that nervous wait but obviously it's going to be nerve wracking when you are starting a new life really. Moving away from home going to live in halls it's going to be like you're basically picking yourself up and moving away for 3 or 4 years of your life so I was a bit.'* (Matt)

It is the concerns raised in this quote relating to lived space (the new physical space the individual will occupy) and relationality (the new social support systems the individual will require) which will be attempted to be improved through the outdoor residential experience. The residential experience seeks to aid this transition through significant increases in friendship formation (Devlin, 1996) and increased social skills development (Kafsky, 2001).

Overcoming these challenges may also bring added resilience (Ewert & Yoshino, 2011) and lead to the formation of significant attachments (Bowlby, 1980). These frameworks which may explain the processes of the OOP could be unified under social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986) in which behaviour and personal factors are affected through the environmental setting.

#### Really moving away?

What is evident is that not all students are from the same background and geographic location. Some students are from relatively close towns and cities, it could therefore be suggested that these students retain an element of social support through local family and friends just a short journey away.

Studies such as Berge and Huang (2004) have shown that commuting students are at a higher risk of dropping out of university. Reay, Crozier and Clayton (2009) meanwhile comment on students attending nearby universities not fully engaging in university life due to the close proximity to home. This is a clear example of research described by Wardley and Belanger (2012) who described that existing ties can limit opportunities for full integration into university life. The individuals are occupying two lifeworlds without fully completing an integral transitional process.

*'Yeah erm because of my horse I didn't want to up and leave because I would have to either leave her behind or move her which might be stressful, I already live near this university so it was perfect.'* (Emma)

*'1 – I'm from Barnsley but it's still a big jump and change in your life.*

*2 – Still like an hour away.'* (Focus group 1)

In contrast other students have chosen a university further away to fully engage in university life, these students are more likely to adapt to university according to Reay, Crozier and Clayton (2009). This is demonstrated by the below interview excerpts. This shows a commitment on behalf of the



individuals to quickly make the key steps in the transition process, they are keen for new lived space and new relationships.

*'Yeah but I wanted to move a distance away from home because you can be individual, you don't have to rely on parents as much yeah so I wanted to move far enough away it is a good city to go to. When I came to the applicant day it was really good here for my course so yeah.'* (Jack)

*'Coming up here I didn't know anyone, I wanted to get quite far away, a new challenge and meet a lot of new people. A lot of my friends from around my area they all went to universities close to home. I thought that I wanted to be independent and really mature and things like that, so I thought I'd come away to here. I'd heard good things about this university and because I wanted to be a teacher I've heard that here is good for that so I thought this would be a good place to come and it's a decent distance away so I can be independent rather than rely on parents.'* (Lucas t)

Despite the perceived benefits of fully committing to a more distant university life this also raises a number of concerns as described within Gerdes and Mallinckrodt (1994) such as the loss of social support systems. Yet, as with the previous quotes they also demonstrates a certain inner strength and commitment to the transitional process by being prepared to make such drastic changes. This is illustrated below.

*'Well definitely making friends was a big concern just because I had such a big group of friends in Ireland and they were all staying in Ireland, not one of my friends left out of about 20 I was the only person to leave even to just go down the road. Everybody stayed in their own house so that was a big change, I thought I might lose my friends but I haven't so far which is good. Also not liking the course was a big factor because I didn't know what I wanted to do before.'*  
(Claire)

The purpose of this section of analysis is to demonstrate the different challenges facing different student demographics and the variety of lived spaces individuals have arrived from to this new space of first year undergraduate (Patiniotis & Holdsworth, 2005; Wardley & Belanger, 2012).

Yet, even with these differences in background the key theme of requiring social support (relationality) as described within Bell et al., (2014) is evident. As stated the residential experience can aid this transition though improving social support networks and therefore provide something essential for all student demographics (Wolfe & Kay, 2011).

### Craving the experience

Bell, Holmes and Williams (2010) state that new, exciting outdoor experiences help create bonds between students. This excitement and anticipation of such experiences is demonstrated below.

*'Because I'm from down south there isn't much opportunity to do activities like that, it's really built up areas, no large grassland, no hills so when it said about different activities like gorge walking, I've never heard that in my life, there's nowhere to do that so I thought that will be amazing to do. Because where I'm from is a built up area I'm not used to that type of lifestyle being outside all the time and taking part in these type of activities so I thought it would be an amazing experience and it would probably help to get to know people up here because I think the way they think and live is different to me so I thought it would give me a good opportunity to meet people and understand how other students work.'* (Lucas)

This quote encompasses the lifeworld existentials; lived space through the clear changes in the physical space he can now experience and now occupies, lived time through what was or was not possible in a previous time and relationality through the new relationships that are expected. There is also the embodied identity that is viewed as somewhat different to his peers. All of which are key changes and perceptions in the experience of the transition to university. The quote below shows a slightly more apprehensive narrative, yet this is underlined by a clear level of determination that could be termed resilience.

*'I might panic a bit during the residential but ill kick myself if I don't go because I've got to look at it on the aspect that its uni, it's an experience that because I want to be a teacher is going to be something that is part of the curriculum that I will have to teach OAA at some point.'* (Alison)

Some students harboured negative feelings towards the residential trip. These early feelings are to be expected given the recent sudden changes with their lifeworlds (Earwalker, 1992). The process of transition is not always one which is smooth yet these feelings of resistance once overcome may help enhance the individual's resilience (Linley, 2009) therefore adding to the effectiveness of the OOP before it as even begun.

*'2 – I hated the idea of the residential I was like no.*

*3 – At first yeah.*

*4 – I've been to a few at school and stuff and I didn't enjoy it then so I didn't expect to enjoy it now.*

*3 – I'd never done it and to be honest I didn't want to do it, after I got the letter I was like I don't want to go.*

*2 – I said that I'm not going.*

*3 – I just couldn't be bothered, I don't want to its too much effort.*

*2 – I think that close into uni and you don't know anyone then you are going somewhere with loads of people it was just a bit scary.*

*1 – Too soon kind of thing.' (Focus group 3)*

*'I wasn't too happy about going at first, I couldn't be bothered, we'd just moved in and stuff, but then the morning came and I was a bit more excited about it.'*

*(Bobby)*

*'Erm I don't like that kind of stuff in all honesty. Mainly because when I was back in high school that was the last time I did it and even back then I was dreading it, I guess nothing really changed so when I initially got the letter I thought why are we doing this and what's the point erm I guess I overlooked the fact of getting to know people and meeting people and stuff like that. It was one of those things that I thought I'd got out of. So that's how I thought when I initially received it.'*

*(Steve)*

For these students the prevailing memory of previous residential trips was negative (previous lived time), this is also paired with feelings of been prematurely being pulled away from university when they were trying to settle in, quickly shifting and changing spaces in which they are occupying in an already emotionally turbulent time (Carr, Colthurst, Coyle & Elliott, 2013). This feeling of disappointment of previous experiences demonstrates the need for the organisation, structure and delivery of the current residential to be excellent to dispel these thoughts and ease the transition process.

A further demonstration of apprehension and anxiety are provided in the quotes below. In the first quote there are the concerns of a mature student, followed by the concerns of an overseas student both are described as higher risk of failing to adapt to university (Patiniotis & Holdsworth, 2005). The final quote in this section clearly show lack of self-worth paired with apprehension of her own perception. Despite the negative tone, by overcoming such self-perceptions there is an opportunity for personal growth, increased self-worth and a higher opinion of how other view them (Bell et al., 2014).

*'When I arrived at university I wasn't really sure what it would entail in many respects being 44 years old and twice the age of many of the students and when I found out I was going on a residential I thought oh no I'm going to have to share a room with 3 kids because I have children older than many of the people there and I was a bit concerned about going, I also have injuries and issues such as that, so I wondered what I would have to do. When we got there I knew a couple of the people because I had spent a couple of weeks with them at uni.'* (Focus group 2)

*'well because I'm from Ireland I was a bit apprehensive about coming to university because I didn't know anybody and I didn't know this city at all, didn't know England at all and I still don't really.'* (Claire)

*'Nervous, I didn't know anybody at all and I'm not a very likable person, kind of a gob shite to be honest.'* (Emma)

These are provided to further illuminate the range of issues and concerns facing new students from a range of perspectives and to remind the reader that despite the label of 'traditional student' the actual student body of many universities is diverse in a number of ways (Willcoxson, Cotter & Jay, 2011). In the quotes the opinions of a mature student, an overseas student and one from the local area not living on campus are given. This further demonstrates the different lived spaces from which students have arrived. Different identities on different levels such as father, nationality and personality are also displayed in the text.

This issue of self-perception or self-awareness is one which troubles many when first meeting new people (Gass, Garvey & Sugarman, 2003). Suddenly the normally simple process of talking to one's peers becomes complicated and being yourself while trying to fit in becomes difficult as illustrated below. Our identity though our lived body can shape our relationality with others. Through personal growth we may change how we perceive ourselves and in turn how we then approach others.

*'When I first came because I didn't know anyone it was quite daunting, didn't know anyone else, had to make friends, where do you go first, who do you talk to, do you approach people because everyone is their own individual person. You can't just act how you are at home with friends you have known ages. I was quite nervous. But after the first session you get to know people and it gets better. I enjoyed it, like I said it was daunting at first but after speaking to a couple of people it was fine because you get to know people and it just gets better and better.'* (Jack)

The recurrent messages being portrayed through the participant accounts are the importance of developing social ties and integration into the new environment. The outdoor residential experience aims to remove status and share power through shared challenging activities to allow the development of healthy peer connections and relationships for a young student in transition (Bell et al., 2014).

### 6.2.2 Personal development – Building more than a raft

Some students entered the residential experience with low levels of self-efficacy and self-confidence this can manifest as feelings of stress and being scared. The nature of such adventure experience dictates that for some it will pose higher levels of challenge. This element of challenge could be perceived as a negative by individuals at the time, yet is one of the OOP's main strengths. It gives

individuals opportunity to overcome resistance and therefore aids in personal growth and increases resilience (Ewert & Yoshino, 2011).

*'I was scared because I'm not an outdoors person, I've never really liked outdoors, never liked heights, I can't really swim that well so when it said about swimming I was like oh my god I don't know what to do, erm I was really stressed about it, my parents were like oh it'll be fine and you'll enjoy it. I was like no I would literally rather do anything else than go on this residential so I was panicking quite a lot about it.'* (Alison)

This is in stark contrast to other students with a distinct amount of self-confidence. The quote below demonstrates this confidence but it also shows a high level of familiarity with this type of scenario. This in itself would reduce feelings of apprehension and unease. Some individuals already possess a level of self-efficacy which allows the approach of experiences like OOP to almost seem incidental.

*'It was in the lake district so I go there every year anyway to do like a walking holiday type of thing so I kind of knew the place and the surrounding area and I was looking forward to it because I like that sort of stuff, I like just getting involved, I'd rather do that than be in a classroom all the time or something like that so I found it really good, when I got the letter I was like yeah I'm up for it so yeah it was good.'* (Jack)

#### Building Self efficacy and self confidence

Ewert and Yoshino (2011) therefore believe the key element of outdoor orientation programs is to be both physically and emotionally challenging. By overcoming these challenges students improve self-confidence, mastery and competence and strengthen coping strategies and therefore as a result resilience.

*'I was on gorge scrambling and I was scared, I didn't want to do it at all because I don't climb and I didn't want to fall and get hurt so I didn't really want to do that at first but as we did it I started to like it and I can climb apparently so yeah it was good after.'* (Carrie)

*'I was hoping to surprise myself more than anything because I was stressed that much about it I was hoping I might surprise myself and do more than I think I can do. I sat under a waterfall for 5 seconds so I think I definitely surprised myself.'*  
(Alison)

*'It was better than I thought it could be, a lot better. It's made me more confident in my own ability to do things and not to doubt myself as much.'* (Alison)

These improvements to self-esteem, concept and efficacy as demonstrated above are attributed to the success of OOP's influence on adaptation to university (Ewert & Yoshino, 2011). The OOP is aiding student's personal growth by providing a platform of carefully selected activities in the correct

environment. This is a clear example of the strengths of OOP having a clear influence on the participating students.

#### Building self-confidence and self-efficacy through shared experience

Based on student development theory, OOPs accelerate psychological growth (Vlamiš, Bell & Gass, 2011). The activities on such programmes look to develop social skills such as leadership and self-esteem. The quote below demonstrates a clear message of developing self-efficacy through overcoming challenges as well as the additional benefit of increasing social confidence through the opportunity to meet peers.

*'Yeah they were a great experience socially and other things like being able to get over things that you weren't so sure about at the start. I feel like it gave you the confidence to be able to accomplish more if you get what I mean. Yeah I'd say it enhanced my confidence socially and with the work as well and that's the sort of thing we need to learn as well for PE the OAA stuff.'* (Claire)

Self-efficacy is demonstrated clearly in the quote below with students acknowledging their strengths and weaknesses and allocating tasks based on these attributes.

*'I just think we divided roles, we all knew what we were doing. We identified strengths and weaknesses before we started so like some people knew what they were doing with knots and some knew how they were going to organise the raft so we divided up roles and did it that way.'* (Michael)

While others who were self-confident in certain tasks and activities actively looked out for other team members and guide them through difficult situations. This can provide increased self-confidence for the person helping whilst also providing the person that required help a level of support to achieve group goals (Allen, McKenna & Hind, 2012).

*'They were pretty easy. I found it really easy, it was nice to be able to help people who haven't done it before, do you know Jack the little Indian lad, we went on the first day where there was really rough water and he kept getting dragged away so I obviously knew how to do it so I helped telling people to go there then go there and cross here which worked even better because I was team leader, it was alright.'* (Toby)

#### The fine line between challenge and fear

Khafaji (2012) highlights a number of criteria activities should adhere to; challenges should be manageable, challenges should be sufficiently difficult that the participants have to use their full range of personal cognitive, emotional, and psychomotor resources in order to complete the tasks. Priest & Gass (2005) state participants are more likely to retain the lessons learned from successfully

completing the activity or task if the challenge is extremely difficult. The below quote is from a focus group and highlights that sometimes challenges can be too tough for some people. Yet, Alfi, Assor and Katz, (2004) states that that failure can play a key role in teaching that sometimes sustained effort is required and also how to turn failure into success, the key is to have the difficulty at an achievable level not a debilitating level (Ewert & Yoshino, 2011).

*‘3 – The thing is the situation that happened with Sarah are going to put people off it because you basically did stuff you didn’t want to do which made you feel bad about being there.*

*2 – I cried all the way through the cave, I didn’t know we were going in it until we got outside it, they also didn’t tell us that we would be climbing, and you fell over didn’t you.’ (Focus group 2)*

Whereas for others they embraced the challenge, even when it came to a situation when someone who couldn’t swim engaged in a water based activity. This is an example of a well-constructed activity that has involved water but not required swimming ability, it is therefore an inclusive activity that has allowed certain individuals to embrace fears and achieve.

The participant observation noted that this particular activity involved jumping into the water from a small jetty, it was recorded that a number of students were encouraging, helping and challenging each other including linking arms to inspire confidence in others. Overcoming such challenges aids in personal growth through self-efficacy and self-worth.

*‘4 – I had to jump in with John and he couldn’t swim he just clung on to me and I was like get off, we had life jackets on so it’s not like we were going to die.*

*3 – Why would you jump in if you couldn’t swim?*

*4 – I asked him beforehand.*

*2 – That’s good though that he had the confidence to do it.*

*1 – There was a few people who weren’t confident doing stuff but as soon as they did they were like I don’t know why I was worried.’ (Focus group 2)*

### 6.2.3 Logistics, Activities and Staff

This section of the qualitative analysis takes a focus upon the more practical and logistical elements of a successful outdoor residential experience. They are the details which can be used to maintain and develop the successful aspects implemented through the stage 0 changes of the action research process. It also serves to provide further information on issues that require improving to deliver the correct time, space, activities and environment for the best student experience.

### Location

The following quotes demonstrate the sentiment of the trip organiser and the view that following changes made through stage 0 that the environment provided for students is suitable given the aims.

*'For me it's the other things like the accommodation, the social space, it's the downtime, what facilities do they have nearby to allow them to get to know their peers, feel comfortable talking to staff and for me Ambleside provided that location.'* (Karen)

This feeling of the organiser was echoed in the comments made by students regarding the location and setting of the OOP. The overwhelming message from the student accounts is the location was well selected. Informal interviews in the participant observation received comments such as 'I wasn't expecting it to be this nice' and 'I can't believe how close we are to the water'. The quotes below are just a small number of the positive feelings voiced.

*'I thought it was a really nice place, I really liked that you could see Windermere especially the second day when it ended up being a bit sunny so when it was bouncing off the lake it was really nice to look at so yeah a really nice place.'* (Alison)

*'I've never been there before and I really liked the place, it was quite calm, good scenery and sights and I would actually go back there if I could again. I really did like it yeah close to everywhere we had to go and it had a good site outside as well. It was nice. One of the best bits was the moonlight on the lake at night, it was really good.'* (Alex)

*'It was good for the activities and that's why we were there so, we were in the outdoors, erm yeah I thought it was a good place.'* (Rach)

The location of the accommodation and activities is something which has been the subject of research. Thompson Coon et al. (2011) investigated whether activity outdoors was more beneficial than activity delivered indoors in a gym style setting. The research found that green activity participants reported better wellbeing. In addition, the green activity also appealed to some people who reported not enjoying 'traditional gym exercise'.

Participants also expressed feelings of escapism from city life and a connection with the natural environment. These are important aspects of the OOP experience that have been provided for the students. The location also has to be suitable based on the activity programme provided. Therefore the location of the 2015 OOP could be considered a success based on the positive feedback.



## Hostel

The general consensus was that the hostel provided adequate accommodation given the nature of the trip. Many of the students provided comments on the accommodation summarised by the quotes below.

*'The building was really good for what we needed it for because the rooms had plenty of room inside with bunks and that. The facilities were good as well and the bar and that so there was always a social element there wherever you went in the building. Because it's up in the lakes there wasn't much around the building but for what we used it for and its whole purpose it did suit.'* (Michael)

*'It was good, considering it was just a hostel it was really good, the beds were really comfy I found, the rooms were warm.'* (Bobby)

Despite the general positive feeling towards the building itself one issue surrounding organisation at the hostel created problems for students almost immediately on arrival. The participant observation recorded the disappointment of some of the students having nowhere to leave their things, the students were also required to change in hallways or find a room such as a kitchen or toilet in order to be ready for the first activity. The informal comments were negative on this subject which is unsurprising given the fact that many had just met for the first time and were being asked to undress near each other.

*'When we arrived at lunch time we were straight into an activity but we were told by YHA when we arrived that the rooms weren't available even though the booking had been made 6-9 months previous so it's not like they didn't know when we were arriving and it was frustrating that they didn't make any suggestions like make a few rooms available because we had a group going straight out gorge scrambling so they needed to get changed and put their bags somewhere, they had just spent an hour and a half two hours on a bus so I just think things like that we need to iron out.'* (Karen)

The issues this caused for students will be one area that needs addressing through the action research process, the resolution of issues raised will be presented at the end of this thematic area under the title Changes to implement.

The general consensus was that the accommodation was more than acceptable. Despite this not all comments regarding the hostel were entirely positive yet through the following quote there is also an acknowledgement and understanding that the university had provided the finances for the trip.

*'The building was nice, the rooms were... I wasn't expecting them to be massive but we would've liked the rooms for 4 people to be a bit bigger. We felt like when you walked in because the way the beds were structured there wasn't much room*

*to manoeuvre yourself to walk up and down. We weren't expecting much because it's a youth hostel and it was a free trip but I would've liked the room to be a bit bigger.'* (Alison)

### Free trip

The trip was fully financed by the university and required no subsidy from the students who attended. This was a point appreciated by the students and illustrated clearly in the following focus group exchange.

*'What was good though was we didn't have to pay for anything, all we had to do was take a bit of spending money so we can't complain, we were getting it free, and it was a good experience.*

*Uni paid for all of it for us, I've been on stuff like I did last year and you have to pay hundred and odd pounds for it, so in that sense to get it free.'* (Focus Group 3)

Along with the appreciation of the costs of the trip being covered by the university the students also acknowledge implications of recent financial changes associated with becoming a full time university student. The general consensus being that it would not be financially viable for all students to attend if there was a cost involved based on differing individual circumstances.

*'I was happy that it was free and I didn't have to spend anymore more than I already have done.*

*If it wasn't free I would have had real issues with going if I'm being totally honest.*

*Me too.*

*I've gone from full time job to full time student so money was an absolute priority so if I had to go on something with cost involved it would have screwed me over.'*  
(Focus Group 2)

### Length and timing of trip

Another key logistical concern is whether the trip is long enough to provide enough activities and social time to deliver the best student experience.

*'I think it was definitely enough, there is always an option for another day but I think if you went for a week I think there would be a chance to get bored so it's*

*definitely a long enough span to keep them interested and wanting to do stuff while they are there.’ (Michael)*

*‘I think it was the perfect time, enough time to do all the activities and enough time to chill out and wind down at night, I thought it was spot on with the timings. It was just enough.’ (Alison)*

One of the more contentious issues that was discussed in the interview was the week in which the trip took place. The timing chose was the second week of lecture in semester one. The implications of this are highlighted in the first of the three quotes.

*‘Well it was second week so we’d had a week of lectures and stuff but I felt at the time it was a bit stop and start because having a week lectures and then cutting it short to go on residential so I would’ve started it before lectures so on the 28<sup>th</sup> the first week. Not fresher’s week but the week after, that way when we got back we could’ve then started lectures.’ (Alison)*

Whereas the next opinion of a different student implies the timing allowed for the development of friendships prior to the trip, this allowed the student to have some level of social support before embarking on this potentially anxious time.

*‘Yeah for me it as fine, one of the lads from my flat who is on my course so I had time to get to know him before we went so when it comes down to going we could set off together pack our bag together so I knew a bit more about him and throughout the week you get to know people previous to going so the journey is a bit more enjoyable. It was placed at the right time in the timetable.’ (Luke)*

Then further support for moving to the first teaching week is echoed in the following quote.

*‘Yeah I think it was just right, it was a good time we were there for. Although I would have preferred it in the first teaching week not the second when we’d done some lectures and given us directed tasks and then we had residential and we were off so it was like when do we have to hand them in which took us out of the swing of it.’ (Rose)*

This type of issue is one where the solution cannot possibly please everyone and must be taken to satisfy the needs of both the students and the university. With this in mind the decision for stage 2 is to take the students in the first teaching week of semester one to have as little disruption to the timetable as discussed in the above quotes. Secondly one of the key aims is to encourage students to interact with as many of their course mates as possible. The first week slot will potentially reduce the development of cliques and aid in the integration of a wider number of students. Furthermore Schofield and Dismore (2010) believe that early delivery of these types of intervention is key in developing valued, engaged, dedicated and motivated students, all of which reduce attrition.

## Food

The issues surrounding food were raised in stage 0 and led to the introduction of an organised rotating sittings with group leaders responsible for their group attending the correct sitting. Despite this concerns were again raised.

*'It was run well I think, the only problem was each group was given times, most of the time people went in whenever they wanted, it was hard to check which group you were in so at times you might find yourself without a seat and have to go and sit somewhere else but they definitely coped well with what they were given. The food was alright yeah. I think sometimes it didn't look too good but once you tasted it was nice.'* (Michael)

*'You know like we had times for food I don't think people stuck to them*

*No they didn't*

*If you were one of the earlier ones you could see that the queues just got shorter and there was meant to be even amount of groups in all three times*

*Every time we came down it was packed, at one point we ended up eating outside because there was no space*

*I think that needed to be monitored a bit more from like a uni staff point of view*

*I don't think everyone knew what times were though, I didn't know*

*It was on those pieces of paper but they were out of the way, people were sat or stood in front of them so you obviously weren't going to ask them to move*

*They should print something out on the computer that you have to hand in when you get your food or something, maybe per room with a proper timetable*

*I just didn't think it was in the most convenient of places*

*I think it should have been near reception' (Focus Group 3)*

The message within these comments were also observed by the researcher, the first sitting time was by far the busiest leading to long queues and long subsequent waiting times for some students whereas the third sitting had much lower numbers. This is something which needs closer monitoring from the university staff, one possible solution that will be implemented is to also allocate a member of staff to each group who also eat with the group to ensure times are adhered to by students. Sitting times will also be placed in a highly visible area and a token system put in place with the correct token needed for each sitting. These will be the responsibility of the team leaders. With regards to the food quality the response was positive.

*'It was quite good, normally, erm there was options of soup and pasta and you got quite a lot which was good because of all the activities and exercise type thing*

*and the gorge walking so I thought it was decent portion sizes and it was nice as well' (Rose)*

*'It was really nice, that was the other thing I was worried about because my parents said to me it would be stews and stuff that you won't like so take some snacks in case you get hungry but the food was lovely and I felt I ate really well' (Alison)*

Despite this improvements are always possible, the organising staff member's opinion was based on comparisons with previous trips. Providing choice while improving organisation will provide a positive meal time experience for students and staff alike.

*'I think as staff we probably compared that to the previous years where we thought the quality and choice was better. The previous year students were given an option in the morning and that didn't really seem to happen this time so I think that would be something we would push for next time.'* (Karen)

The concerns mentioned by university staff were not in general aligned to what was observed, many students commented on the good standard of the food especially the breakfast.

#### Team Leader

As mentioned this trip saw the introduction of team leaders within groups, this was done to help with organisation while giving students a degree of responsibility.

*'Another thing we had this year was nominated group leaders so we had about 12 groups but each of those 12 groups had about 10-12 students in and each of those groups had a student group leader, their responsibility was to brief their group on the timings, when they were meeting for activities, erm what they needed to bring with them. It was also their responsibility to make sure everyone in their group was involved both on and off activity so as a member of staff if I saw a couple of students looking a little withdrawn or sitting on their own then I would go to the group leader and say look can you just make sure you are including everyone in your group, I wouldn't say especially go and bring that guy over who is sat on their own but we tried to put more responsibility on the students because at the end of the day they are adults doing a degree whereby they are interested in physical education or coaching or sports development so trying to put more responsibility and emphasis on them and students seemed to really enjoy that role as well, they were kind of playing up to it and it seemed to be 'oh yeah your group leader, get everyone involved' so I think that was a really good addition this year.'* (Karen)

This role was embraced and relished by some students selected.

*'At the start I was like I came here to chill but once I got into it, it was decent, it was good. I'm guessing they just pulled names out of a hat which was ok for me but if one of the quiet lads got team leader that wouldn't work, some were so far in their shell they wouldn't know what to do. I think for next time they should look*

*into the lessons and before they do it see who is standing out in those lessons and assign them as team leaders. More of a selection, if one of the lads in my room got team leader they wouldn't know what to do and then that would be a shambles.*

*How was it being in charge of curfews?*

*it was fine because my group were always with me anyway we'd made friends but if they were going up to the room they tell me, I'd just get them to send me a picture of their bed to show they were in the room, easy enough.' (Toby)*

Yet due to the random selection of team leaders not every group was positive about their nominated leaders. This may appear to be a problem but the group sizes were selected to allow for individuals to facilitate independence, be large enough for conflict but small enough for conflict resolution (Allen, McKenna & Hind, 2012), this potential problem can serve to be a good lesson in group work and overcoming individual differences.

*'I think John was the worst team leader there possibly could've been because he was a loner with a Napoleon complex basically, he wasn't part of the team and when he did get to make decisions it went to his head, at one point I had to pretend to be on my phone so I didn't have to listen to what he was telling me to do. He was telling us we had to be downstairs right away even though we still had 15 minutes, I was fine where I was.' (Focus Group 2)*

A potential practical solution to this was suggested by the student from the above quote Toby. This would involve a selection process by staff although this may prove difficult with the stage 2 trip planned for teaching week one. The introduction of the role of group leaders was deemed a success by the majority of students and staff alike. From the participant observation the role seemed to create an added level of in-group behaviour, with group leaders talking before the rest of 'their' groups integrated. The group leaders were seen actively embracing their role of keeping all group members involved. Practically the role also facilitated head counts of students.

#### University trip not a holiday

The students taking part in the OOP were missing three term timetabled days. The choice was made to include an academic session covering the basics of academic writing and the accompanying rules. This was a lecture that many of their peers would be being taught back at university.

*'I think it was a good idea to put in the academic session so we didn't miss anything obviously it was tough because there was no projector and you had to work off the sheets but it was definitely beneficial especially because it was on referencing which is so important while you are at university it was definitely beneficial.' (Michael)*

Yet for many of the students the following quotes summed up the general feeling. The issues raised was the relevance of the session content to the trip and concentration. This was further noted in the participant observation with comments such as 'oh god I've got stupid PDP tonight' and following the session 'I have no clue why we have just done that'.

*'It was fine, I didn't really find it that interesting, I'm not especially keen on PDP, it was just standard stuff that we would do at uni.'* (Alison)

*'I didn't really find that beneficial on the trip I think I would have rather do that at university because I was so tired I nearly fell to sleep, not because of the work but because I'd been up and hadn't slept very well in the room so I was just knackered and couldn't concentrate on it much whereas if it was done at university in a lecture theatre I think I would have enjoyed it a lot.'* (Claire)

A potential solution was created within one of the focus groups. The idea is to involve some form of assessment based on the residential experience.

*'We were told it was compulsory to go but coming back off it we haven't used it for anything have we really*

*I didn't see much point in the lesson at night because as soon as we got back to uni we did the same session again. I think they should have made it relevant to our course instead of doing something we would repeat when we got back*

*Or something to do with the trip as a whole because normally like when you go on a trip you have to write something up after and that's why I thought it was compulsory so part of that would've gone towards our course like one of the modules or something. It was a bit weird when people were like I'm not going but then when we got back we could've not gone because it didn't make any difference to your module or anything*

*It could've formed part of your practical mark, I think if it was longer they could've showed us some teaching methods and then we could've practiced them that would've been a good thing*

*Yeah yeah yeah*

*Say 5 of us in a group we could take turns and teach a kayaking method or something or how to tie a rope. I think they could've done that for our course because it's coaching that way we would have got some beneficial experience out of it*

*Groups were course based anyway weren't they so we could've done a bit of coaching, it could've been adapted in that way. I think there needed to be more of a point to it. It was good for meeting people and things like that but I think if there was another work related point to it then maybe more people would've gone*

*Or put more effort in. just some experience of outdoor coaching*

*Like your outdoor activities because people wanting to be PE teachers the curriculum has outdoor education and adventurous activities in it*

*It would've given us a heads up about what to do. It would've been an ideal time for our tutors or lecturers to see how we are in that outdoor situation*

*It could've been changed for people on different courses just to get something out of it. Yeah you get to meet new people but something else that would've been better for us*

*Yeah because it just felt like a generic outdoor activity trip*

*I think if there was a coursework element it would get more people to come and maybe if it was a bit later on when people knew each other. It was good to meet people but I think also that might be why some people didn't come because they felt like they didn't know anyone*

*But if there's a point to it, its compulsory and you are going to get something out of it then maybe people will go*

*They could do extra marks but it's not compulsory*

*Or like part of your practical something like that. A bit like directed tasks, it gives you a percentage of your module*

*I didn't like the fact that we had to take our directed task with me, I left mine, I did it then left it so I didn't get one of my marks*

*When I took mine it got wrecked because it was wet, put it in my bag and it got wet*

*And the lecture you couldn't really hear it because it echoed, there wasn't much point in that and then we handed in our directed task and they got signed and handed back to us but there was no point to that as well, it should've been something to do with going on the trip*

*They might have taken them more seriously then, it was irrelevant to the trip, if it was about the trip it would've been better. It could've even something to benefit you like everyone needs to give positives and negatives about the trip, then you would have a hundred and odd reviews.' (Focus Group 3)*

This solution provides more than a relevant academic session. It also provides incentives for all students to attend given the assessment element. It also allows young aspiring teachers the chance to practice coaching and teaching skills in a field environment. A more in depth explanation of the academic session and assessment will be provided at the end of the stage 1 analysis.



### Respect for rules or not?

Some students felt restricted by the rule that students were not allowed off the hostel site except during activities. This feeling is understandable given the attractive location selected for the OOP. This decision was made based on the risk assessment conducted prior to the trip. The hostel was less than 5 metres away from Lake Windermere and the same distance from a busy A road, despite the students legally being adults they were under the care of the university and therefore the risk was considered too great. The general student feeling was typified by the following statement.

*'Well I wasn't allowed to leave the place, not even walk down the road. Just stuck in one building and just have to do that. Also I would've liked to have a look around where I was. I've never been up Windermere and I like exploring so I would've liked to have a walk around on a little trek, not up the mountains and that because we did that anyway just have a look around where we are like is there anything Windermere had culturally to offer. If one of the afternoons was a free period where we could just go and have a look or even the pub next door. To see how other people react. I noticed there wasn't a lot of young people. So I thought it might be a little fisherman's village and they have the best pubs because they're nice and chilled they tell stories and you get to listen to people.'*  
(Toby)

Although this sentiment was not shared by every student. This is not a clear endorsement of the strategy but an acceptance that some rules were put in place for student safety based on the large number of students and a close proximity to potential hazards.

*'I understand why they did that because off site there wasn't really too much but because we are so far away from uni I understand why the rule was put in, they could let you off site but there is so much risk associated with that it is easier just to keep them on site.'* (Michael)

The restriction was in place to minimise risk and adhere to the risk assessment. There was also a strategic reason to keep students together in a shared environment illustrated by the quote from a university staff member below.

*'I think it was probably a positive that they weren't allowed off site. There was facilities on site with a bar for socialising, it could've benefited from a bigger social space because they ended up queueing around the corner in the evenings which is not great so a bigger bar or more staff or a bigger space. I did like that they didn't just form their own groups and go off to different locations because you could've had different groups going to different pubs and then they wouldn't have been in the same space interacting with each other. Whereas having them in the same site in the evening again forces them and brings them together as one big social group rather than lots of individual groups.'* (Ian)

This was also recognised as a positive in terms of social group development by some students interviewed summed up by the following quote.

*'I think it would have divided the groups more, say if you were by yourself and your roommates who you felt closer to all went off into town you'd just be sitting there. I don't think it would've worked and I'm glad there was that restriction and everyone had to be together and mix which was good.'* (Claire)

Keeping all the students together, especially in the free time period was considered essential in facilitating social group formation and the opportunity to meet as many new people as possible. Although the perceived restriction was not a problem for all students a solution has been worked into the timetable in the form of an activity for OOP 2016. A half day local area scavenger hunt has been included as one of the activities, it takes in the local town and surrounding area and provides some free time in the local town. This should alleviate negative feelings towards the issue of feeling unable to explore the local area.

#### Activity preference

Feedback for all of the activities was on the whole very positive with the exception of the team building exercises (this will be replaced with the above mentioned scavenger hunt). The activity that received the most praise was the gorge walk.

*'Feedback from students and staff was that the gorge scrambling had that wow factor, those adrenaline junkie students and staff it satisfies all their needs but there was an awful lot of students who I got the impression that were reserved or reluctant or apprehensive beforehand but the comments when they returned to the hostel were like 'wow' 'incredible' 'I'm glad I was encouraged or pushed to do that' 'I would have never normally do anything like that' so for me that will be the activity that they remember for the next 10, 20 or 30 years. (Karen, Pg. 3)*

*Genuinely the gorge scrambling is one of the best things I have done in the last 10 years, it was fantastic I could have done that for hours and hours and hours.'*  
(Focus Group 2)

The gorge walk followed a number of the rules for activity success proposed by McKenzie (2000). It had clearly defined goals with a distinct beginning and end. Difficulty increased incrementally further up the stream. The activity required physical and mental and emotional resources to complete and it encouraged and required team work and trust in fellow participants to succeed. The activity also took place in the natural environment which provided the challenge and 'natural rules' to the task. In contrast comments for the team building exercises were generally negative illustrated by the following quotes.

*'We were the last group to do it and to be honest I wasn't too keen of the team building activities, they were a bit basic and childish if that's the word. Just based on other trips away and the other residential I remember doing some of those activities then in year 6 so.'* (Luke)

*'Team building which I didn't like, it was a bit boring. It was just really boring especially because we had it in the morning and we needed something to wake us up and team building just didn't wake us up.'* (Rose)

The team building activities did not meet as many of the criteria proposed by McKenzie (2000) the quotes illustrate that some students did not find them particularly challenging and engaging and therefore did not require a significant investment of personal resources. The body language noted in the students was much more negative during this activity such as slumped shoulders and sitting down at any opportunity. This was paired with some members of groups not taking the activity seriously and forming their own fun. For these reasons the team building activities will be replaced with the scavenger hunt exercise. The students will also complete some ice breaking exercises as a whole group when we arrive so the elements of team building are not lost from the programme.

#### Free time activities

Some students offered ideas to potentially introduce some activities in the free time period ideas included games, quizzes and a number of students expressed the following idea.

*'It would've been cool to have a little camp out, go out into the woods, obviously with one of the people that works at the place, make a camp fire, marshmallows stuff like that. That would've been sound but only if the weather let us do it. Everyone would be round the camp fire having a good time. Maybe several camp fires.'* (Toby)

The discussion with activity organising company and the hostel to implement an evening campfire activity is provisionally agreed weather permitting. The inclusion of a purely experiential activity that is not task orientated mainly geared towards social interaction may be a welcome addition to the programme and add some structure to the free time period for the students that wanted to participate. This option may be particularly useful for students who are struggling to interact with their peers and may require a further activity to encourage bonding.

#### University and organising staff

The role of staff, instructors or service providers could be one of the key factors in the success of OOPs (Khafaji, 2012). An effective instructor often facilitates the interaction with the physical environment. Instructors teach participants how to perform the skills that are essential in the physical environment (McKenzie, 2000). Finally, within the social environment instructors often work to facilitate the reorganization of thinking at the core of affective growth in the participants (Khafaji, 2012).

This important role in the program requires the service providers to have certain key qualities. On the basis of their model, Walsh and Golins (1976) state that instructors must show empathy, be genuine and be willing to confront participants when they are not displaying the required behaviour. The instructors observed were all highly competent and knowledgeable yet their styles were distinct. Some approached the activities more seriously whereas some were more informal and made jokes and told stories.

The feeling from all the students in both the interviews and focus groups were extremely positive with regards to the activity organising company instructors on a range of issues from their knowledge through to their personalities advocated by Khafaji (2012). This demonstrates that the choice of the organisation and staff who deliver the experience is a positive for the programme.

*'I would say activity organising company staff are very important because even if the activity isn't great they can almost make it good by interacting with the students to make it more interesting for them. I'd also say the activities are more important than the location. Yeah I'd rank staff and activities above location in importance because I think those are the things that bring the students together and get them to interact with each other and enjoy the experience. Location can be important but as long as the hostel is in good condition and nice I don't think it's as important as staff and activities.'* (Ian)

*'They were really good and helpful, took good care, gave you good coaching points especially with the dangerous activities like gill scrambling. I'm not one to shy away from it but you may have a couple in your group who are a bit anxious towards certain activities so yeah. From looking over, erm I was a team leader as well so I was kind of leading it with them so taking part but they were telling me what to say to the rest of the group as well so they were passing on good information so I felt safe and comfortable with all the activities.'* (Luke)

Students gave mixed responses to the interaction they had with university staff. In stage 0 this came through as a clear positive in the student experience. For some students this was again a highlight of the experience.

*'They were good fun actually you could tell they were enthusiastic about their job which then gets you more interested because if they like what they're doing it breathes a bit of confidence into you. It makes you trust them. It was definitely good fun with them because you could chat to them and it wasn't just like a situation where they are the teacher and they tell you what to do it was more like they were one of you trying to have fun.'* (Michael, Pg. 3)

*It was good that the university staff got involved*

*They were almost like one of us which made us feel less like children more like actual adults.'* (Focus group 1)

A disappointing reflection was made by some students highlighted below. This is of particular concern as one of the highlighted benefits of OOP is the chance for students to meet academic staff on a more personal level, this has been shown to increase feelings of belonging and institutional attachment in student groups (Bell et al., 2014).

*'Not really no I didn't meet any.'* (Carrie)

*'No not really, I think I would've liked to be introduced to them a bit more not as a lecturer, not just stood in front of us giving us information, more on their personality, I think that would have given me more respect for them maybe if I'd seen what type of person they are.'* (Claire)

To rectify this the addition of staff allocated to individual groups will increase this interaction. Staff will also be given a clear mandate to actively interact with students and engage in conversation.

#### 6.2.4 Social group development

Transition processes are achieved by helping students develop constructive social support systems as well as providing them with feelings of belonging, trust and connection to a group of peers. These peer relationships provide both critical emotional support and strengthen educational gains (Bell et al., 2014). As stated earlier it has been proposed that "the single most powerful source of influence on the undergraduate student's academic and personal development is the peer group" (Astin, 1993 p. 3).

#### Accelerated friendships

Much of the following section of analysis has a key theme created through the residential experience, that theme is accelerated friendships. Many of the students without this intervention would have eventually come together naturally through their time at university but crucially what the residential provides is a platform for these social networks to develop more widely and more quickly than in a regular university environment.

Much is made of the social benefits (Bell et al., 2014; Wolfe & Kay, 2011) yet research has not clearly highlighted that it is the speed in which these social group formations occur that is a particular benefit of OOP. Getting these social support systems in place early is imperative in the transition and adaptation to university process. This is made abundantly clear in the quotes below.

*'I hadn't done a residential since like year 6 so I was looking forward to it in a sense that it's something new because I haven't done it in so long but then of course you are still thinking like you're going away with like 120 of us, new faces that you have probably never spoken to before or you haven't known them for that long so its throwing you in a situation where you might feel out of your depth*

*but with the activities they have put on I fell that it really helped you socially in terms of getting to know people and things like that.’ (Michael)*

*‘That was the same with me, we’re on the same course so a lot of us have things in common. We met a lot of people quite quickly which is good, we wouldn’t have met that many people without the activities. It’s like sharing a room with someone speeds that up as well.*

*After the residential we had a practical nearly straight away when we got back and I knew everyone in the practical or at least recognised them from the residential so, the people I met on the residential I’d say are more course mates but others are friends. Some of them I do stuff with.’ (Focus group 4)*

The following sections of this thematic area will look to demonstrate how the OOP achieved the accelerated development of social networks.

#### Initial friendships and sticking together

Some students had already made initial connections and friendships before the residential trip. Erb, Renshaw, Short and Pollard (2014) highlight the idea that many key friendships are made with room and hall mates in the initial transition period of adaptation to university.

*‘I know it was just a team building thing but I didn’t really think of it as that because I already had friends going on the trip so that made it a little bit easier.’  
(Claire)*

Whereas others were joined at the university by previous friends and acquaintances. In this case previous connections seem to have enhanced the transition process. Despite research by Wardley and Belanger (2012) which mentions the detriment previous social ties can have on immersion in university life. So in this case the social ties in question can actually provide support in this transitional period.

*‘Yeah there’s a few lads from the previous school I went to on the same course so I know them and there is a lad in my flat who’s on the same course so yeah I knew a few people, just word of mouth and getting involved meeting up yeah.’  
(Luke)*

While some students had already been at university together for an extended amount of time due to the course they were enrolled on.

*‘Thing is we had started earlier than everyone else in the accelerator we started on September 7th, our first piece of work was due in before anyone else rocked up in fresher’s week, so we’d almost spent a month together by this point so that’s why we were already a tight unit because we weren’t getting to know each other we knew each other, so I don’t know how you would get round that other than changing the start date, that’s only 16 out of 120 so we started earlier so we*

*are going to be closer the others were probably a little more fluid and mixing amongst each other I'm guessing.' (Focus group 2)*

These initial friendships are great for the students, yet for the purpose of the residential experience such cliques can be detrimental to the process of wider integration with course mates due to reluctance to go beyond established social groups. The previous quotes illustrate that coming into this residential experience students have varying amounts of time with their peers and as such have different degrees of social group formation. With this in mind one of the key changes and implementation from stage 0 of the action research process to stage 1 was the allocation of roommates and activity groups. This was done to provide all students with a 'fresh start' to meet a variety of their new course mates.

### Mixed groups and rooms

The allocation of roommates and activity groups provided one of the most positively received elements of the residential experience. This was one of the key factors in delivering the accelerated social support network formation.

*'Being put into a room with people I haven't met before was good because you're literally stuck and you have to get to know them. People who are quiet there was always someone in the room to get them talking which is always a good thing. There was two quiet lads in our room me and this other lad. Me and this other lad got everyone talking and everyone had a good time after that. You just give them a question and listen to them, literally tell them you are listening to them. Most of the time people are too scared to be noticed. So show them some attention and they come out of their shells. Half the time they are the funniest people I have met because they have so much shit to say that they haven't said. You just have to make sure they have someone to say it to.'* (Toby)

The above quote shows how even the most introverted people can flourish and build friendships given the right environment provided in the OOP experience. The way in which the residential tried to achieve this is by limiting room size to allow for greater intimacy between students who were sharing a room. This quality time in a closed space again accelerates friendship development. The sentiments are echoed in the below quote.

*'It was a really good way to do it because if you put people in their friendship groups that's kind of limiting who they are going to talk to whereas put them in a group with new people who they haven't spoken to before, it doesn't force them but it gives them an easier setting to get to know people better because you are practically living with them for 3 days so you are going to get to know them aren't you.'* (Michael)

The following quote shows the value placed on connections made purely based on spending time together during the residential that may have otherwise not developed.

*'One boy who I didn't really speak to got put in a room with me and now we speak near enough every day now and he lives in all saints as well, so I talk to him, sometimes he comes out with us so it was good that way so it helped with social aspects.'* (Jack)

The process illuminated in the interview excerpt below is the general consensus from the student interviews regarding the allocation of rooms and activity groups.

*'It was good really, I think if someone gave me the choice I probably wouldn't have picked the people I stayed with, I would've probably picked people I know, you live in my accommodation, I got put with people I didn't know existed, because we stayed together for a few nights and obviously we communicated, we became friends and took each other's Facebook and number and I think that helped. It was a bit intimidating at first when you walk into a room and there's 4 other lads you don't know, you think I hope they like me and don't think I'm embarrassing or make a fool of myself but yeah I thought that was a good way of doing it, it makes you push yourself. It doesn't give you the opportunity to be comfortable, it pushes you out of your comfort zone, you have to make friends, then it just comes naturally I think so it was good.'* (Lucas t)

Despite the general positive feeling surrounding this strategy of randomising group and roommates was not universally embraced.

*'I didn't like the fact we had to share rooms me with people we didn't know*

*You should've been able to choose*

*Yeah*

*I don't think that but if you got told prior to the trip then you could've made an effort to meet them beforehand*

*Not 3 of you turn up a room like 'that's us'*

*Exactly*

*To be fair I had Tony and that was a pretty painful experience*

*I had George in who I still haven't spoken to since I got back.'* (Focus group 1)

It also demonstrates a key point, regardless of what intervention, environment and activities some people will just not get along with each other. The opportunity has been provided for these relationships to form via the OOP experience if they are mutually beneficial for the students. The randomised room allocation can also serve as a detriment to some people based on the sentiments illustrated in the above quote. This is echoed in the experience of one student below.



*'Erm this is probably different than anyone else, I don't think it really benefited me in that way in terms of making friends, I never came away with a friend, the two people I stopped with in the room, I was lucky that we got an ensuite and the other two people were pretty chilled to be fair, they weren't loud and they weren't like the other rooms which was nice to be fair but sometimes I think it might have been better the other way. They were not introvert as such but, one of them has left now so I don't speak to them, the other one doesn't live in uni so can be a bit hard to get in contact with him so we don't really speak. The friends and the people I talk to on residential is not the people I talk to know. I know people now, I can't put a face to a name back then. So it didn't really help me in that that sense.'* (Steve)

#### Drinks in the bar and cascade effect of friendship making

The hostel provided a range of social spaces one of which became the focal point of the evening free time, the bar. The following quotes provide an insight into how relationships developed through time. The daytime activities encouraged introductions and meetings while the social time in the bar served to cement these new relationships. The bar area was observed as a hive of activity in the evening time with chatter, laughter, games and singing.

*'The drinking social, that's when everyone came out of their shells, they stopped being like hi my names Susan and started showing who they are, games came out and people started playing different drinking games and got smashed, it's always fun. In the morning you'd be able to go back to that person and be like yeah you did this last night so everyone got a lot further into who everyone was and start to understand who they were instead of you're the guy that does sports, you're the girl that ran over there that time so you actually know something about them.'* (Toby)

*'That bit was good. First night I was just so tired from travelling and everything I just wanted to go to bed but no it was good, the second night was better because everyone knew we were going home in the morning so may as well have a bit of fun. That is the bit where we actually got to know well me personally got to know people from my course a lot better especially some of the girls who had maybe being a bit more shy before, I got to know them really well and I am friends with them now as well because I'm on teams with them. So I got to know them a bit better so it was good, we just had a few drinks at the bar and just talked really.'* (Claire)

What is evident in the following series of quotes is what the researcher has termed the 'cascade effect of friendship making'. It was observed that at the beginning of the night students tended to stick in their groups on separate tables but as the night progressed tables combined and interacted with each other, by the close of the evening many of the students were in one large group. The multitude of groups people were assigned meant that multiple introductions became common place.

*'I went with the lads from my room and introduced them to the lad from my flat and he introduced me to his room some of the lads in my room introduced me to people from their flat at uni so we had a few drinks together, There was about 15 of us, after a few beers we got hungry so we ordered take away on both of the nights so we got that delivered.'* (Luke)

*'I went in to the bar, it was quite busy but yeah, because everyone is drinking you speak to a lot of people and because it's a small area it's not as if you sit in a corner with your friends because they are speaking to people they stay with you go and talk to them all so you keep building them friendships and connections with people which helps. Being a student in a bar setting can only mean good things.'* (Lucas t)

While not everyone was drinking in the bar the effects were still replicated in other social spaces of the hostel.

*'We all went to the canteen area and we sat there because we didn't want to drink and we all chatted, I don't know we just stayed and talked. There was me, a few of my friends and a couple of lads came in. so we got to know a few new people and then our door fell off so we went to bed. It was quite fun though.'*  
(Rose)

#### Technology facilitating friendships

An interesting finding from the analysis of the data was the importance placed on technology in the description of how students were forming friendships. The quotes below show the prevalence of technology use even on an action packed adventure trip. It also show the value placed on what is now seen as a basic requirement of a strong Wi-Fi connection.

*'One thing that disappointed was the signal, no signal or internet but other than that it was good really. Maybe it might have helped pass one of the hours because we had the iPad and iPhone we were alright we just messed about really, football manager and things like that.'* (Luke)

*'A few of the lads had their iPad so we were playing games. IPod, iPhone just socialising really. It was a good laugh.'* (Luke)

In the quote below connecting with people on Facebook is seen as a basic step in establishing friendships as found in Jackson (2013).

*'I got put with people I didn't know existed, because we stayed together for a few nights and obviously we communicated, we became friends and took each other's Facebook and number and I think that helped.'* (Lucas t)

With this in mind ensuring students are provided with Wi-Fi code for use in the hostel could help the use of such mediums to connect with each other and accelerate the development of a wider social group.

### Friends through activities

The role of specific activities is another key factor in the success of OOPs (Khafaji, 2012). Activities can range in type and purpose. Some pose challenging, problem-solving tasks, participants must complete while others are more experience based. These tasks range from physical activities, such as rock climbing and hiking, to activities such as trust exercises (McKenzie, 2000). Khafaji (2012) highlights a number of criteria activities should adhere to.

- 1) Challenges should be concrete and manageable as well as time and space limited.
- 2) The participants must have the ability to solve the task in order for learning to occur.
- 3) The activities and tasks must be structured so that there are natural consequences for the activities and tasks.
- 4) The challenges should be so difficult that the participants have to use their full range of personal cognitive, emotional, and psychomotor resources in order to complete the tasks. Participants are more likely to retain the lessons learned from successfully completing the activity or task if the challenge is extremely difficult (Priest & Gass, 2005).
- 5) The difficulty level should be set so that the participants question whether they will be able to accomplish the task or activity. However, the difficulty should not so exceed their abilities that they are unable to believe they can succeed.

Gorge scrambling involved team work, cooperation and a high level of challenge and danger. This danger element required the students to trust one another in order to succeed and seems to adhere to criteria 4 and 5 based on the feedback below.

*'Gorge scrambling was good because it was a real close team moment wasn't it, I know it was difficult for you because you are blind without your glasses but you added an element for the whole day for the rest of us which wouldn't have been there otherwise. Looking at the team, if your team is fairly capable you are just a bunch of individuals that occasionally have to rely on each other but because we had a focus of someone who needed our help we did rally round to make sure you were ok.'* (Focus group 2)

*'Yeah that was really good fun as well. It was the first time I had ever done anything like that so it was definitely a new experience for me but yeah it was good fun especially when you underestimate the current as well, you put your foot in and then all of a sudden it's trying to pull you away, you get a bit nervous at times. It was good fun. It kind of forced teamwork again because at times you had to make sure they got across the gorge so you had to trust whoever was next to you or at the side so it was showing that you really need teamwork and to get on with your peers.'* (Michael)

*'The dangerous aspect of it you kind of rely on other people actually to help you. When you climb up rocks you rely not just on the instructor but your fellow students to help you get through it. On team building you communicate and talk to one another but if you have those skills already like communication skills you don't really improve but when you add that dangerous element where if you fall you could hurt yourself you have to rely on them more than yourself whereas in team building you don't have to rely on them. So I would say the gorge walking with the dangerous element was more beneficial to communication skills to help you pull through things so yeah that was more helpful than other activities.'*  
(Lucas)

The raft building activity required high levels of team work, imagination and physical abilities to complete the build and successfully take it out on the water. This task adheres to all of the criteria and also generated the positive feedback below (McKenzie, 2000).

*'Probably raft building because you seemed to talk more as a team and get along with each other and make friends like when we were in the water someone said can we all stand up and some didn't think they could but we all managed to do it, so we were messing around but yeah. We all jumped in so it was quite good.'*  
(Rach)

*'Raft building, which was so fun. We worked really well together as a group and our raft was great, that was the one I was panicky about because of the swimming because I thought if I go in the water I don't really know what I'm going to do and I'll panic quite a lot but thankfully our raft because we worked that well together our raft was built really really well so even when other people got off it I still managed to stay on it so that one was really really fun.'* (Carrie)

The activities serve to accelerate the rate with which relationships develop. They encourage teamwork, cooperation, physical closeness, trust, shared goal, elements of competition and shared fun experience. These elements create social bonds quickly (McKenzie, 2000).

### Enhanced friendships

The shared experiences and bringing people together has also allowed for acquaintances to become much more than that and developed into fully fledged friendships (Bell, Holmes and Williams, 2010).

*'There is one boy from my floor and one from downstairs and the two were friends so we became friends with them as well, we got a lot closer on the trip so it was really good to know a lot of people before going.'* (Claire)

*'We've been out quite a bit together, I went into the city with one of the lads shopping yesterday to spend a bit of my birthday money, in class time we always work together and sit around together so yeah its gone well ever since.'* (Luke)

The entire experience aims to bring people closer together though this unique residential time which is evident in the previous two quotes.

### Extra friendships

Not everyone considers the people they met on the residential to be their closest friends but the important point to take from the following quotes is that they now have additional contacts at university and a familiarity with many more people on their course. This serves to help with practical sessions, group work and a general feeling of ease with their fellow course mates (Wolfe & Kay, 2011).

*'Although in lectures and stuff I sit with people I met before the residential, the people I met before that we sit with but I know a lot more people than I did before. Erm yeah I do know more people now, maybe not to sit with. It's good to know names and faces in practicals and that. We know people whereas before we were just stood there and it was awkward now we know people better and it's a bit more relaxed in practical than it was before.'* (Rose)

*'I didn't spend that much with my friends we spent it with people we were staying with, this is going to sound stupid but I fed the ducks, other people started coming over, I didn't even know who they were, because you're stuck in one area and you can't go out and do things you make your own fun and because other people join on I spoke to people I didn't even know who existed, that helped because when you're in your class the people I had fun with are in my class as well so I can sit with and chat, I just helps like that really. So I didn't really spend a lot of my time with my friends who I live with or even people on my course, I spent time with people I didn't know. Because there was so many people in one area you had no choice really, that was better because it made you push yourself and talk to people and make friends with people you didn't know.'* (Lucas)

### Personal and professional relationships – Support networks at university

Creating an environment where students have access to support networks appears to be an integral factor influencing student retention (Tinto, 2006) in addition students who have staff relationships are less likely to leave university (Martin, 2011).

This type of retention intervention is also a good way for academic staff to be introduced and interact with students on a more social level which can break down barriers and improve interaction (Thomas, 2012). This is illustrated below.

*'The activities really and getting to know more people, learning about your course because it was mainly a PE course, getting to know everyone, you get to get involved more with each other, teamwork, get to know some of your lecturers better outside of the uni yeah.'* (Jack)

*'Yeah and I think the football coach and postgrad students, they were more linked with my group, got to know them better than my tutor so they staff that we did get to meet were a good laugh really, they made us feel comfortable. It was good and in the free time especially they treat you like adults, they had a good sense of*

*humour and you could say things that you wouldn't necessarily say at school or college to your tutors back then. It was a good laugh really.'* (Luke)

*'I would say so, there was this one guy and he told me because he lives off campus he doesn't have many friends here, we met him and now he speaks to us. So he has someone to talk to so that was good yeah so most people I speak to now.'* (Rach)

### Platform to work together

The residential has developed professional working relationships between the students who attended. These lasting connections will serve to support each other academically as previously researched by Cooley et al. (2014).

*'Some people I shared a room with on residential I actually work in a group with back here on a module task for PE presentation, I did it with someone I roomed with on residential, because we already had a connection it felt easier and more confident in talking to him to work together and produce ideas so it did benefit me from that point of view.'* (Lucas)

*'If I see them I can talk to them, as I said I worked with one of them in a group and because I knew him and he knew me we found it a lot easier to talk rather than not knowing each other. I definitely think the people I have seen on campus or if I'm in class with them because I know them I feel comfortable sitting with them or talking to them which I think helps because when you walk into an environment and don't know people compared to if you know someone, you don't have to feel as isolated, I can walk up to him or her and say hello because we have that connection from staying on the residential so I think it helped like that.'*  
(Lucas)

### 6.2.5 Student Conclusions

A number of students made concluding statements about their residential experience and how it has affected their time at university. They are powerful in nature and demonstrate the worth of the residential experience. They also importantly highlight what is important to them and their university life, it is the friends and connections they have made. It also demonstrates that the residential has played a key role in helping form those friendships.

*'It's helped me adapt because I'm mainly staying with people next year in a house through my course so that helped as well through that so it helps you adapt through who you are friends with, who you live with next year yeah so that's helped me'.* (Jack)

*'Yeah I think maybe not now because we're comfortable now but I think definitely at the beginning because it was in the second week but I think yeah it definitely helped at the beginning but now you are comfortable and know more people. For people coming up next year it definitely helps in the beginning, then you can cement friendships through that as well.'* (Lucas)

*'Yeah definitely obviously meeting new people, beneficial meeting some of the staff and just feeling more comfortable about uni life really because it's totally different to any experience I've had before and I've continued to enjoy it ever since.'* (Luke)

*'It definitely met my expectations, I had a lot more fun than I thought I would and more like the social benefits because now I feel more confident with who I'm with because we met on the residential because we've had that experience and we know each other a bit more so it's easier just to feed back into the classes.'*  
(Michael)

*'Yeah I wanted to have fun and I did, I wanted to meet new people and I did and try different things and I did. The people that I met I still talk to now, they are in my lessons, when I see them I have a chat with them when I see them in the bar and that, we get along well. Before the trip I knew a few people but not many but after the trip I knew everyone's faces and names and stuff even if I didn't speak to them so it made it all easier to chat to them in future. So it's easier to get along with them. It was good that we were put into group because otherwise you would just pick your mates and not meet any other different people so I thought it was good that everyone was put in a different group like randomly.'* (Alex)

#### 6.2.6 Charting a student's decision to stay at university through social support network

Below is an example from one interview which perfectly summarises the effect the residential experience can have on a student. The first two quotes are an explanation of troubles faced at university. The student commutes to university from a local town. The student has had a number of issues and has considered leaving university.

*'My first semester wasn't right good to be honest, I suffer a lot, and I'm quite an anxious person. You wouldn't think it and I don't come across like that, I come across quite confident. I don't know, I just didn't come to uni at all. I used to come up sometimes and id drive around the car park, if I couldn't find anywhere to park then instead of looking at Parkside or getting the shuttlebus from Morrison's I would just go home and back to bed. I failed my first semester practical's because I didn't go to them'*

*'It's been up and down, I've had to kick my arse into gear a few times. I've handled this semester better, I've met my deadlines before they were due except the last one. Whereas normally I'm like the night before its due in thinking I really need to do this assignment whereas this semester I've done them with a good week and even been able to look at the similarity report and change it if I need to and things like that.'*

She then moves on to talk about how she felt prior to the residential.

*'Really excited to be honest, really excited because I think it's a great opportunity to bond and get to know everybody before you're put in an academic situation*

*with them and have to do group tasks and things, you already know everybody on the course to speak to anyway.'*

This was her thoughts following the residential

*'The residential really helped on that side of things and in the practical's as well because when you're in that classroom scenario it's hard to get to know people but in that residential and practical environment it helps you bond with everyone, everyone here is competitive that's why they have chosen to do sport so it's a laugh.'*

She remembers specifically the activity where she made friends

*'I liked the night walk because everyone was helping each other and we were talking to everybody and I think that is where I made most of my friends actually on the night walk. I knew a few of the lasses but all the lads because they were terrorising everyone and found it hilarious but it was fun.'*

She formed a bond with roommates

*'The rooms wasn't that bad because I was in with three other girls, one of them I was really good friends with, I started speaking to her on applicant day and then the other two, Shannon has dropped out because she is having a baby it was easier to integrate with the other two in the room who I'm also quite good friends with now but our room broke, a door came off the handle so we had to up and move rooms which was interesting to say the least. At like 4 in the morning the door frame fell off. Shannon had opened the door to go to the toilet and it just fell off, the full frame, it was hilarious.'*

And continued to develop that friendship with the girls.

*'The girls you roomed with are you still in touch with them?*

*Yeah I sit with them in lectures, they are both called Becky, and I've had quite a lot of group studies. I would say the residential really helped for me to get to know everyone because I don't live on site and I didn't really do fresher's, I went out a couple of times. One of my best friends who's not on this course but she lives on trinity close so I go out with her for fresher's and stuff but I didn't get to know people on my course so the residential helped. I think the social side of the residential and the night time when we were all in the bar having a drink and stuff it helped everyone to get to know each other.'*

Bonded over shared experiences.

*'I just remember getting really drunk on the second night playing save the queen. The other night we came back from the night walk really late and we didn't get chance to go in the bar so we just showered and went to bed. Then the second night we had tea, I sat out front, there was ducks on the lake so me and Shannon were throwing bread in, running inside and nicking loads of bread then throwing it for the ducks, then we carried on drinking for the rest of the night. Everyone was talking, it wasn't just certain groups it was everybody getting involved and having a laugh*



*R – Did the activities help?*

*I'd say the activities helped you get to know the people then then the drinking on a night time made them your friends really, it's just how you bond really.'*

These friendships created through the residential are providing a good deal of academic and social support.

*'The residential or top up day helped because the more friends I've got the more I've realised that it doesn't matter if I'm late, just get them to get my lecture notes so I can carry on with my day I think that help a lot. For our research methods, me Gemma, Gemma and Becca and Carrie sat in the library, after id seen you and we were there until about nine at night trying to do this one assignment, I didn't think I'd get it done but because of that I managed to do it for the morning, I got up at six and finished it, I did it though eventually*

*Are you going to do anything different next year?*

*I'm just going to plan way ahead. Christmas was horrible, I had like seven things to hand in and did not even started them the week before and I was proper stressed. It got me right upset and I was down. I even had to take a week off work to get the assignments done. I won't be doing that again, not a chance, I will be more prepared.'* (Emma)

This is a great example of the role a social support network can influence a student's time at university and provide a platform for success. Without such networks people can feel lost and isolated. This personal account demonstrates the power having a support network can provide for a struggling student, not just socially but academically. The story here shows a student who would be considered in Wardley and Belanger (2012) research to be most susceptible to poor transition and adaptation to university. Through the platform provided by the OOP the student has persisted at university. This account is in some ways more powerful than statistically significant effect on adaptation for OOP participating students vs the control group because it adds a picture of human experience to the statistical findings. In some ways it may also be more powerful than the themes and sub themes illustrated in the combined analysis because it demonstrates these themes in action in a succinct account.

Pictures of analysis process

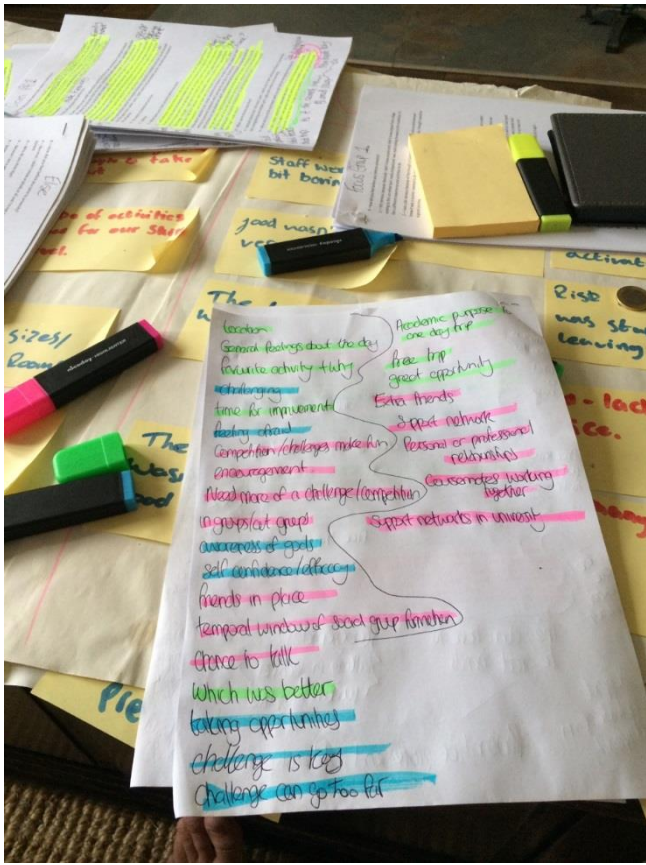


Figure 6.3. Coding

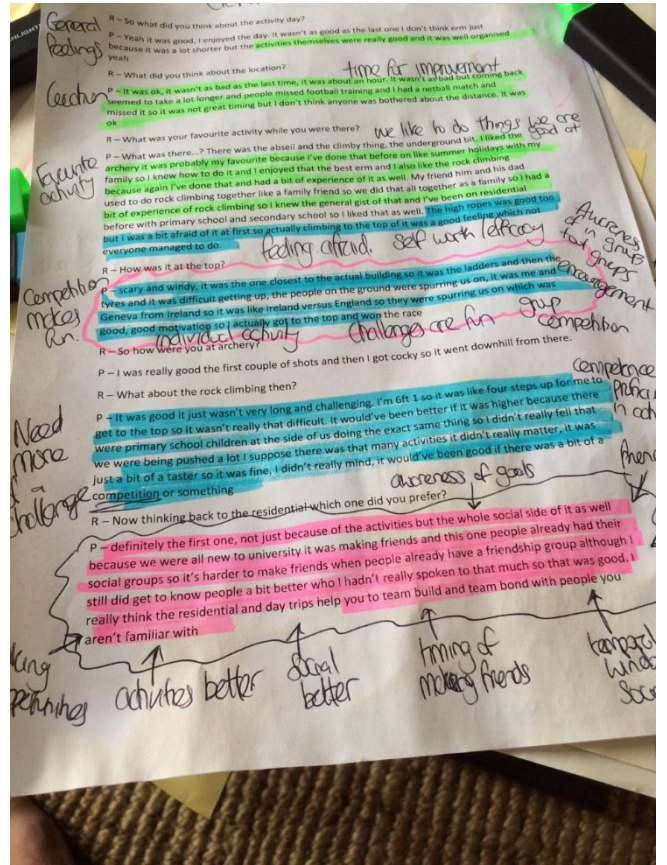


Figure 6.4. Sub theme development



Figure 6.5. Blank space

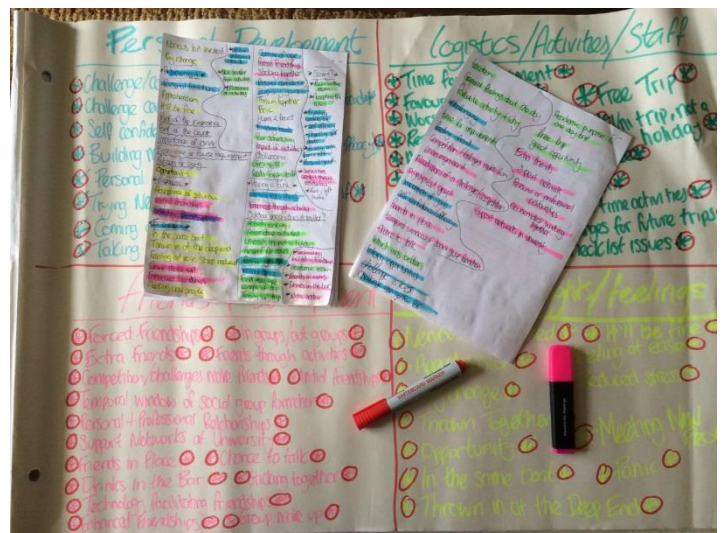


Figure 6.6. Formation of thematic structure

### 6.2.7 Summary of the analysis

The statistical analysis of the SAUQ provided the statistically significant result that students who attended the OOP were better adjusted to university compared to a similar control group. This result provides a credible finding but it does not tell us why or how this has occurred. The SAUQ provides scores on four key areas of adaptation to university. They are personal - emotional, social, academic and institutional attachment. In each of these four areas the students who attended the OOP scored significantly higher than the control.

The role of uncovering and discovering why this has occurred was attempted in the combined qualitative analysis. The personal accounts of individual students are given to illuminate the experience of being a first year student making the transition to university. It is attempted through the qualitative analysis process to demonstrate not only why it has occurred but also to provide a theoretical explanation for what has occurred.

The four figures above (6.3, 6.4, 6.5 & 6.6) provide a visual representation of the qualitative analysis process undertaken by the researcher. They show the development of themes and sub themes from the initial coding stage. A number of key recurring themes emerged throughout the student and staff interviews and the student focus group. The key areas of adaptation to university the questionnaire measures are addressed within the thematic areas presented in the analysis.

The theme 'pre university thoughts and feelings' provides the emotional back drop of what the students are experiencing in terms of the transition to university, the huge changes in this transitional period are expressed as fear, apprehension and excitement. The feelings found within this theme were generally in line with the literature reviewed in the student experience perspective section. This theme provided a number of challenges that the incoming students were experiencing. One of the key messages from the students was that they were excited to meet new people but they were more worried about making friends and social issues than academic issues.

The theme 'personal development, building more than a raft' highlights in vivid detail how the OOP process has aided personal growth through overcoming challenges such as making friends and the physical challenges of OOP highlighted in the previous theme. The first year students developed in terms of self-worth and self-efficacy through overcoming challenges in two different ways. Firstly some of the challenges especially social were overcome through shared experience of both being a new first year student and making this transition. Secondly was overcoming personal challenge, surprising themselves and achieving. Much of this was supported in the literature and illuminated through a phenomenological lens. This theme clearly illustrates the ways in which students personal

growth can be accelerated and achieved through OOP and could therefore indicate possible reasons why these students scored higher on the personal – emotional scale of the SAUQ in comparison to their peers at university on a similar course experiencing the same transition process.

‘Social development’ placed a focus on a previously under researched phenomena facilitated through OOP, this was ‘accelerated friendships’. The analysis provided a number of possible reasons why this happens and provided examples of this at work such as shared living space and the development of trust through the activities. The OOP environment was constructed to best facilitate and provide a platform to allow these social interactions to flourish into meaningful social support networks. The comments and quotes made by students has possibly made this theme the most important or powerful to students during the transition process. This was through having more known course mates for group work at university, more friends for sports and leisure activities and a wider social support network.

This was most evident in the student conclusions and the account of Emma who spoke of how the support network she developed through OOP are one of the key reasons for her still being at university. The student conclusions speak of feeling more comfortable with course mates and in one account becoming such good friends that they are planning on living together in their second year. The quotes provided within this theme clearly show for many students their social support network was increased or improved through OOP, this could explain why the students who attended the OOP scored higher on social adjustment in the SAUQ than the comparison group of similar students.

‘Logistics, activities and staff’ provided a simple explanation of the issues raised by students and how to address them, the theme and sub themes and explanations were again heavily supported by the OOP literature. The general feeling from a student perspective was positive. The location, hostel, food, activities and free time were all well received. Getting the logistic right is key in being able to offer the best possible platform for personal growth and social support network formation.

Within this theme there was also the acknowledgment by students that the trip was free and that they were happy that the university had put on such an event. There was also the idea that students got to meet university staff in a more informal setting. These two things combined could explain the students scoring higher on institutional attachment than the comparison group of students on the SACQ. There were some logistical issues highlighted within the student and staff interviews and the focus groups, the changes made through this action research process for the 2016 OOP are listed at the end of this chapter.



A combination of having a wider social support network including their course mates and knowing university staff on a more personal basis may explain why students scored higher on the academic adjustment in the SAUQ. This could be due to having more student and staff contacts to speak about assignments and what is required of them academically.



*Figure 6.7 Visual representation of students building resilience*

The framing and explanation of the research findings through theory is also one of the aims of the action research process. This has been approached in a bottom up inductive approach which is data led. This was chosen to aid in the trustworthiness of the analysis process by reducing the risk of trying to fit parts of the analysis to a particular theory or psychological mechanism.

A number of possible theories were indicated in the literature review as having potential to explain the research findings in this area. The one which was thought to have the most potential was SCT (Bandura, 1980) yet the idea of students modelling behaviour never really emerged from the data, this is one of the key underpinning concepts of the theory.

The theory which provided the best explanation of the analysed data was resilience theory. Figure 6.7 provides a visual representation of the process of resilience at work during the OOP experience. The climbing wall represents the challenges facing first year students, some of these were highlighted in the pre university thoughts, feelings, hopes and fears theme such as social group development. Other

challenges of the OOP experiences were personal physical challenges. The individuals had different natural levels of resilience with some needing more support to overcome the various challenges. This support represented by the ropes was provided within the OOP experience, for example the activities were set up in such a way to require team building, trust and communication with others.

Such an environment and activities aid social group development, these relationships were solidified through other activities, sharing living space and free time periods. The environment the students have been placed in almost 'forces' certain behaviours based on the shared goals and common interests therefore completing common challenges in a physical sense facilitates interactions, as does the common goal of making friends.

Peer support, support from activity staff and university staff helped in both social and personal terms. Personal growth was achieved through the platform provided by the OOP to challenge themselves and succeed. By overcoming the challenges in this case represented by the wall the achievement can provide development of self-efficacy and self-worth. This section particularly aligns with resilience theory as an explanation of how OOP can help first year students in their personal development. This process was ongoing throughout.

In conclusion the OOP stage 1 has had a positive effect on first year student's adaptation to university. This was achieved through providing a platform which encourages personal growth and social support network formation. The SAUQ provided statistical evidence of the adaptation. The processes of which have been illustrated through illuminative quotes and researcher analysis and explained through resilience theory. The process is not perfect, a number of issues have been highlighted that can be changed to further improve the student experience of OOP. These changes can serve to further improve the influence of OOP on first year student's adaptation to university. These changes are listed below.

List of changes made to the OPP through the action research process

1. Arrival issues – Liaised with activity organising company and YHA to ensure that check in can occur on arrival of students leading to a smoother process of students settling into the OOP experience
2. Food - Token system discussed to ensure each food sitting is served at the allotted time to avoid excess queuing and allow smooth service process.

3. Activity change – the team building activity has been changed to a team scavenger hunt in the local town, this was done to address the poor reaction to the team building activity and to allow the students the opportunity to explore the picturesque surroundings in a safe and controlled manner.
4. University staff interaction - staff allocated to individual groups will increase this student – staff interaction. Staff will also be given a clear mandate to actively interact with students and engage in conversation.
5. Free time activity - implement an evening campfire activity that is not task orientated geared towards social interaction to further encourage bonding.
6. Academic session – One of the most significant changes has been made surrounding the academic session. The students normally study a module in semester 2 that includes OAA. This has now been moved to semester 1 to link up and coincide with the OOP. The academic session will now be used set up a group presentation project based on OOP experiences to be delivered on return to university. This has been done to create real relevance between the session and what the students are experiencing for themselves. It also provides more group work while on the OOP which will continue into the first semester module. One issue with OOP 2015 was that a number of students did not attend despite it being compulsory. The inclusion of an assessed academic project that requires attendance of the OOP will be made explicitly clear to students prior to the trip. This will provide added incentive to students to attend.

### 'Top up' activity day analysis

The 'top up activity' day was a one day trip. The trip consisted of a short journey to an outdoor activity centre. Throughout the day students took part in around eight activities ranging from team building puzzle games to archery and high rope climbing challenges. The students were split into groups of between eight and ten. The groups were assigned a group leader in the form of an activity coach from the outdoor activity centre, they then proceeded to move around the different activities for the rest of the day (around 6 hours) with just a break for lunch in between.

The day was implemented into the first year student schedule at the beginning of semester 2 in January. The thought process of the organiser was to include the 'top up' activity day to reinforce the positives experienced in the OOP, as a continuation of their personal growth and social group formation.

#### 6.3.1 Logistics

The theme logistics takes much the same shape as theme described in the OOP section and describes the practical and logistical elements of a successful outdoor activity experience. These are the activity specifics which demonstrate the successful aspects and areas that need improvement as part of the action research process. Firstly some students commented on the comparisons between the 'top up' activity day and the OOP. The overt differences are described in the quote below.

*'I preferred that than the residential because I prefer shorter short bursts and days rather than over a continuous amount of time so it's good that we did about 6 activities in the day I prefer doing that than having 6 over 3 days or over 4 days. I'd prefer to get it out of the way. Go there with your food, don't take as much clothes and stuff and all that I kind of prefer that. I'd probably rate the second one 9 and the first one 7 just based on the spread of activities. They had activities on the second one that I didn't even know about like the labyrinth, I enjoyed that one because it's something that I've not done before and the fact that you were underground in a room its different to being in a cave, it actually feels like you can't get out properly which I like.'* (Nathan).

Nathan states that the number and range of activities over a short period of time on the 'top up' day was in his opinion better than the schedule of the residential. Towards the end of the quote Nathan also mentions the difficulty and challenge posed by one of the activities which was particularly memorable, this supports activity research proposed by McKenzie (2000).

The quote below from Rose again comments on the speed of which the activities occur and how it enhances the trip.



*'It was better because we wasn't stood around. On the residential there were parts where we just didn't do anything which meant that we was getting bored. We'd just be sat around like in between activities, we'd be sat around not doing anything. I mean I think we could've fit in more activities in and make it shorter or we could've done some different activities as well. Whereas this one we did quite a lot of activities.'* (Rose).

This is in contrast to one of the students interviewed who viewed the intensity and number of activities as a negative for his experience, yet his assessment does include an acknowledgment that the intensity may be a positive for other students.'

*As the day progressed on I got less and less involved because on our schedule it started off easy then all of a sudden jumped from one side of the spectrum to the other, that's good for some people but for me it was a case of its too much now, I've climbed this wall, then bouldering my hands were just aching, then the high ropes and you had to climb up those tyres then the ladder thing, I just couldn't do it at that point because I was just physically exhausted so then I felt I couldn't get involved or do that type of stuff and felt a bit left out.'* (Steve).

The quote provides a clear demonstration of self-worth and self-efficacy being constructed through ability to perform and participate and that poor performance can create powerful negative feelings. This is where activities for some individuals could be debilitating (Ewert & Yoshino, 2011).

The following conversation from a focus group provides an interesting assessment of why they preferred the 'top up' day. The preference was because they were already comfortable with the other students. This quote shows that initially the OOP caused feeling of unease, these were powerful feelings if they were still being remembered months later. Despite the comments the period of transition is one that requires an adjustment in their personal and social worlds (Earwalker, 1992), as commented in the OOP analysis the idea of accelerating this process is a key element of the OOP so creating these feelings of unease that are then remedied quickly is exactly what the OOP aims to achieve. These feelings were to be expected given the difficult transition they were experiencing.

*3 – I thought it was better than the residential to be fair*

*4 – You got a prize for winning as well and our team won*

*3 – I thought it was better because we knew everybody by then*

*1 – Yeah I didn't feel uncomfortable with anyone, on the first one we went on I didn't want to talk to anyone*

*5 – I felt awkward as fuck.'* (Focus group 1)

Two of the students interviewed commented on the possibility that the two trips could be switched again focussing on the possible transitional problems and the unsettling nature of the first few weeks at university that in Nick's opinion may be exacerbated. Yet these feelings may still provide a positive in terms of personal growth if they are worked through, resilience is achieved through adaptation to significant threat or adversity (Ewert & Yoshino, 2011)

*'I think the day one should've been at the start of the year, they should've swapped them around because I think not for me but for other people it can be quite daunting moving away and getting used to living in halls and for them to move away again for another 4 days that they didn't know about could be daunting.'* (Nathan)

### 6.3.2 Activities

The students generally identified bouldering as their least favourite activity. Bouldering was a climbing activity based in a small indoor room (see fig 6.8 below), the room was covered in climbing handles even on the ceiling, and the room's floor was a crash mat for safety if individuals fall from the wall or ceiling.



Figure 6.8 Bouldering

*'What about the bouldering?*

*That was probably my least favourite activity just because they were a bit difficult to hold on to, I preferred actually on the walls.'* (Bobby).

*'I didn't like bouldering, I have tendonitis so I don't have a lot of strength in my wrist, I was fine with the rock climbing because you can get your feet in and push*

*yourself up, bouldering you have to pull yourself up so I just kind of sat there and watched.’ (Emma)*

The negative comments made by students were based on difficulty, challenge is a key element in adventurous activity as long as success is achievable and the challenge needs to be achievable in order to be growth inducing rather than debilitating (McKenzie, 2000). This activity for some may be too difficult, although it provides an adequate challenge for the more experienced or stronger climbers.

*‘Bouldering, like a weird shaped room with rock climbing things and you climb up without any harnesses or anything because there is mats so if you fall you land on the mat. It was good but it was very hard. I could get to the wall but I couldn’t get to the skylight because I don’t have strong enough arms.’ (Rose)*

Whereas the following comment about the low ropes activity (see fig 6.9 below) is more worrying, it paints a picture of boredom and general lack of interest.



*Figure 6.9 Low ropes*

*'I don't really know, I would take out the low ropes, I didn't like the low ropes at all so I found it pointless, everyone just wondered around for half an hour, I don't think anyone enjoyed the low ropes at all.'* (Claire)

The following quote demonstrates how the instructor and their style of communication and motivation may not be well received. Appropriate encouragement is seen as a key responsibility of an instructor (Khafaji, 2012), and in this case the student felt misled about the achievability of the activity.

*'Because I'm quite light and agile I pretty much just walked up the first two it wasn't that challenging and then it got really hard to get up and then they were saying year sixes completed it which is probably a load of rubbish. They kept saying year sixes could do it but the first log is like ten times higher than them. They were trying to motivate us to push ourselves which I thought was helpful but not for our age just making it up to make us feel like we should be able to do it. If they told year nines oh year sixes can do this they may think we have to beat year six whereas I think at our age it's more like if they did they did so good on them or more likely you're just chatting shit. You're just making it up.'* (Nathan).

One organisational issue raised was that the activities overrun on time and meant the group was late getting back to university. This posed a problem for a number of students who then missed sports fixtures.

*'It wasn't the distance that bothered me it was that they told us that we would be back for half 5 which didn't bother me what time I got back I had a netball match and told my team that I would be back in time but because we set off later than they said, they said we would set off back at half four but we didn't set off till quarter to five so it meant I got back late which meant I couldn't play which meant my team didn't have enough players.'* (Rose)

*'It was ok, it wasn't as bad as the last time, it was about an hour. It wasn't as bad but coming back seemed to take a lot longer and people missed football training and I had a netball match and missed it so it was not great timing but I don't think anyone was bothered about the distance. It was ok.'* (Claire)

The general feeling of students interviewed about the trip overall was typified by the quote below. The feeling was positive with little room for improvement. This was seen as a result of the intensity of the experience.

*'Would you make any changes to the one day trip?*

*No I don't think so, there wasn't really anytime to stop and do anything. It was a packed day but it meant it went fast which was better I guess so no I don't think I would change anything.'* (Rose)

### 6.3.2 Personal development

#### Competition and challenge

In terms of personal development and personal growth comments made in student interviews were of the opinion that the activities were pitched at an appropriate difficulty to both challenge and succeed. The quote from Claire goes on to recognise another feature of successful activity the element of competition. Kilpatrick, Hebert and Bartholomew (2005) highlight competition and challenge as very important factors in motivation to participate in sport and exercise. Clear feelings of personal development are highlighted below

*'I think everyone likes a challenge because that's what it's all about challenging yourself.'* (Claire)

*'People on the ground were spurring us on, it was me and Geneva from Ireland so it was like Ireland versus England so they were spurring us on which was good, good motivation so I actually got to the top and won the race.'* (Claire)

Well-structured activities as described by McKenzie (2000) use achievement to develop personal growth and self-efficacy. These clear feelings of personal development are highlighted below.

*'I would say the one day trip was better for the activities I reckon just because it was more hands on like with all the rock climbing and abseiling and the high ropes, it felt like you were just by yourself doing it so you were more dependent on yourself rather than just everyone else. It felt like you'd accomplished something if you reached the top which was quite good.'* (Bobby)

These feelings of achievement can be aided through competent coaching and support from activity staff but also from other students (Allen, McKenna & Hind, 2012).

*'My friends were quite nice to me they helped so it's alright in the end. The staff were helpful as well we had this girl called Becky I think and she was nice and helpful. Two of my friends went down and was like helping me from the bottom and then the rest of them at the top was like go on you'll be alright so I went down eventually. I was glad I did it but I would probably still avoid it in the future. I wouldn't do it again but I was glad I tried it.'* (Rose)

Peer support is good for two reasons, firstly it could show that a relationship has developed sufficiently for the individual to allow someone to help them which for some people can be a big step based on trust (Bell, 2005). Secondly it provides others an opportunity to enhance their self-worth by being competent enough to help others.

*'It was on the abseil when people were really scared because when we were at the top you could obviously see down, everyone was really helpful and tried to*

*encourage them and to be fair they went down as well so they managed to conquer a fear really but its jus when they got to the top they were quite scared.'*  
(Bobby)

Self-efficacy and self-worth can be enhanced simply by trying something new and succeeding, below Emma talks of surprising herself, this can only serve to enhance her self-concept. Paxton and McAvoy (2000) suggests that undertaking, new, novel or exciting activities allows participants the chance to learn that they are capable of overcoming challenges.

*'I surprised myself because I was quite good at archery, I'd never done it before.'* (Emma)

Whereas the following quote from Steve indicate that for some individuals challenge can go too far and become negative aspect of experience on an outdoor activity trip. This is in stark contrast to the research of Priest & Gass (2005) who state participants are more likely to retain the lessons learned from successfully completing the activity or task if the challenge is extremely difficult.

*'The day was more challenging which got a lot of people not involved, for one the wall climbing one I was in a particular group that had a lot of worries and it was a more physical challenge for them in every aspect, they didn't want to do it, they didn't want to go up the wall, they didn't want to get to the top and abseil down, which meant with them not being involved, it's not a topic you can talk to them about you just feel bad for them. I just feel less people got involved because it was more of a challenge.'* (Steve)

The challenge Steve speaks about in his interview was not evident for all students. The number of activities and pace with which groups moved round allowed a wide range of activities, people will be naturally more competent in some rather than others.

*'Probably the labyrinth really which is the one where you had to go underground, that was probably the hardest just because you didn't know where you were going and it's like going into the unknown really which is just a harder thing to do and the lights were off as well but that is the only thing that I felt was difficult or at least more difficult than the others. Other than that I didn't find a lot of it challenging. Oh I suppose I found the bouldering quite hard actually just because I couldn't keep my grip, I managed to get to the ceiling on some of them but when I did get to the ceiling and tried to get further I just kept on losing my grip, when you had to reach for it one hand would just slip off at full stretch and id just fall down which was irritating. Those were the only things I found difficult everything else was fairly simple to be able to do.'* (Bobby)

Despite commenting that it was not challenging further examination of the quote identifies a number of activities that did provide a challenge to the student. Again the range of activities and the differing level of ability to succeed seems to have been a positive of the 'top up' activity day.

### Professional development

Value was also placed on the way in which the activities were delivered demonstrating practical techniques that could be used by the student's in the future on OAA activities with young students.

*'On the one day trip especially we learnt techniques we could use, they went through how it would go across into OAA, each one, which skills like leadership, communication and stuff like that which was quite helpful to be fair. They didn't do that as much in the residential but it's harder to do with like raft building which is harder to relate to everyday life in a school whereas the one day was a bit more enclosed, we were all around each other most of the time.'* (Bobby)

In terms of academic development students found greater links between the trip and their academic work. This strength has now been transferred to the OOP for 2016. By linking theory and practice the students also had the opportunity for personal growth in a professional context i.e. learning skills pertinent to their possible career choice.

*'I think the one we have just been on was a bit more relevant to us because we were learning in the lectures about outdoor education so we were learning the theory then going out and doing it so I found it a lot more beneficial, whereas the first one seemed like here's a trip lets go have fun, do you know what I mean. I would say you learnt more on this one and what you could do with children or what trips away you might do if you were a PE teacher or whatever so a bit more educational maybe rather than the first one but it was really good for the university to put them on free of charge as well its brilliant. I gave us a really good chance to see outdoor education otherwise we might have to do a course in it or something and pay for it ourselves so it's good the university funds it and gives us the opportunity to do it.'* (Claire)

### 6.3.3 Friendships

Two contrasting feelings were given regarding friendship making opportunity during the 'top up' activity day. In the first quote Rose highlights the positives of already having friendships prior to taking part, she describes how these friendships can make it easier to offer support. She describes how these prior friendships facilitate a supportive atmosphere.

*'Yeah because people knew each other so they were being more supportive and talk to you more than they did last time. Last time we didn't really know each other so we were still supportive we were just didn't really know the person so we couldn't give them personal support.'* (Rose)

Whereas Claire speaks of how the activity day gave her opportunity to meet and interact with different people, while this was not a common theme it is important to highlight that for some individuals the day did provide an opportunity to meet some of her course mates that she has not up

to this point. Becoming 'best friends' through a one day activity session may not be realistic but adding to a wider group of contacts and acquaintances that may be useful in a more professional context creating a general feeling of ease with their fellow course mates (Wolfe & Kay, 2011).

*'Completely different I don't think there was anyone from the same group but I enjoyed it, I don't mind. I'm not exactly shy or anything so I don't mind being stuck in with people that I'm not that familiar with because you just get on with it, you make friends and just get on with them so that was fine. Both groups were good, I didn't feel uncomfortable or anything, it was good.'* (Claire)

By this point in the academic year many friendships and group dynamics between course mates has already developed. The following comment does raise an interesting question of whether the 'top up' activity day is needed. It was seen as a positive experience especially in group work skills as described by Cooley et al. (2014) but whether it truly adds something significant in terms of social development is not entirely convincing for this individual.

*'Erm it definitely did its job because people were working in teams better erm but I didn't necessarily need it, maybe because people were already doing that anyway. People on the course are quite friendly with each other anyway and work together so it's quite nice.'* (Rose)

This feeling is reiterated in the first section of the following interview statement. For this individual the 'top up' activity was seen as not effective for friendship making but still as a tool to speak to a different range of people.

*'This one people already had their social groups so it's harder to make friends when people already have a friendship group although I still did get to know people a bit better who I hadn't really spoken to that much, so that was good. I really think the residential and day trips help you to team build and team bond with people you aren't familiar with.'* (Claire)

#### 6.3.4 Discussion of 'top up' activity day analysis

The main thematic difference between the OOP and the 'top up' activity day was between personal development and social development. The clear strength of the 'top up' activity day was in the delivery of a high number of activities in a short space of time, the activities were individual in nature. As such many of the positives highlighted were predominantly around personal development. Personal growth through challenge was a recurring sub theme throughout the interviews and focus groups. This personal growth can be explained through resilience theory by the challenges that students had to overcome to achieve success. The students also commented that one of the strengths of the day was direct application to the academic work they were completing at



the time and the practical teaching skills they were taught. This was therefore aiding their professional growth.

The theme of social development posed more questions than it answered. The thematic area acknowledged that it may provide opportunity to enhance existing friendships and connections. Its overall effectiveness in group formation and development was called into question by some students interviewed.

Logistically speaking the comments and quotes were very positive in nature. The amount and variety of activities were described in positive terms. The instructors received mixed opinion. For some they were supporting yet for one student in particular their motivational style chosen was a detriment to the activity. Overall the only issue requiring change is a clearer communication with students that due to the amount of activities and traffic returning that sports fixtures may be effected and the time of arrival back at university cannot be guaranteed.

The 'top up' activity day was well received by the students. Many of the quotes and comments were very positive in nature. Such experiences can only enhance feelings of institutional attachment i.e. the university is providing these 'great' experiences at no cost therefore the student may feel valued. Helping students develop personally and professionally was a positive outcome.

The students generally indicated that by this point in their university life many of the connections and friendships had already been made by this point so the social benefits were more limited. Based on the research feedback and discussions with the University it was decided that the top up day would not be run for stage two of the action research project. The value added seemed negligible in terms of student transition. While it was a positive experience for students to attend a free adventure trip the key aims for the University were not being met and was therefore deemed not value for money.

This demonstrates that the action research served its purpose to shape activities which provide the best transition experience for students while taking into account the requirements of the University.

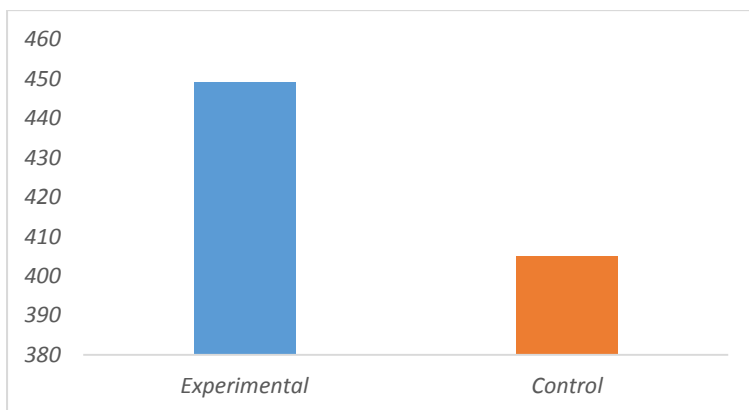
## Chapter 7 - Stage 2 Analysis

This chapter details the combined analysis of the data of stage 2 from the questionnaires and interviews. The first section of this chapter presents the statistical findings of the student adaptation to university questionnaire. Following this the combined analysis of student semi structured interviews. The use of qualitative data is used to provide greater confidence in the statistical findings. There was no baseline test carried out therefore it is not certain whether the intervention group were not already at a higher starting point of adjustment to university than the control group as it was only a post-intervention measure, however explanations from a qualitative perspective between groups can help to validate the data. Then a discussion of the final OOP 2016 is presented.

### 7.1 Results of Adaptation to University Questionnaire

Normality testing indicated that for academic and personal constructs and the full score that the data is normally distributed ( $p > 0.05$ ). The data was not normally distributed for the constructs attachment and social. Therefore for full score, academic and personal an independent t-test will be conducted. For the construct of attachment and social the non-parametric equivalent of the independent t test was used which is the Mann Whitney U test.

Figure 7.1 shows that the experimental group who attended the outdoor residential scored higher on the overall full score of adaptation to university ( $M = 449.07$ ,  $SD = 56.51$ ) than the control group who did not attend the outdoor residential ( $M = 404.68$ ,  $SD = 64.63$ )



*Figure 7.1 A graph to show overall scores of the Student Adaptation to University Questionnaire*

An independent t-test showed that the difference between the experimental condition who attended the residential and the control condition who did not attend the residential for the full score was significant,  $t(85) = 3.38$ ,  $p < 0.05$ , 95% CL [18.26, 70.53].

Figure 7.2 shows the four individual constructs recorded by the Student Adaptation to University questionnaire. In each of the four constructs the experimental condition on average score higher than the control group. In the academic adjustment construct the experimental condition scored  $M = 155.49$ ,  $SD = 20.27$  compared to the control condition  $M = 144.88$ ,  $SD = 20.33$ . Similarly in the social adjustment construct the experimental condition scored  $M = 137.82$ ,  $SD = 20.10$  compared to the control condition  $M = 121.85$ ,  $SD = 25.32$ . In the personal adjustment construct the experimental condition scored  $M = 92.76$ ,  $SD = 21.65$  compared to the control condition  $M = 83.10$ ,  $SD = 21.91$ . In the institutional attachment construct the experimental condition again scored higher  $M = 111.49$ ,  $SD = 16.90$  compared to the control condition  $M = 98.93$ ,  $SD = 20.38$ .

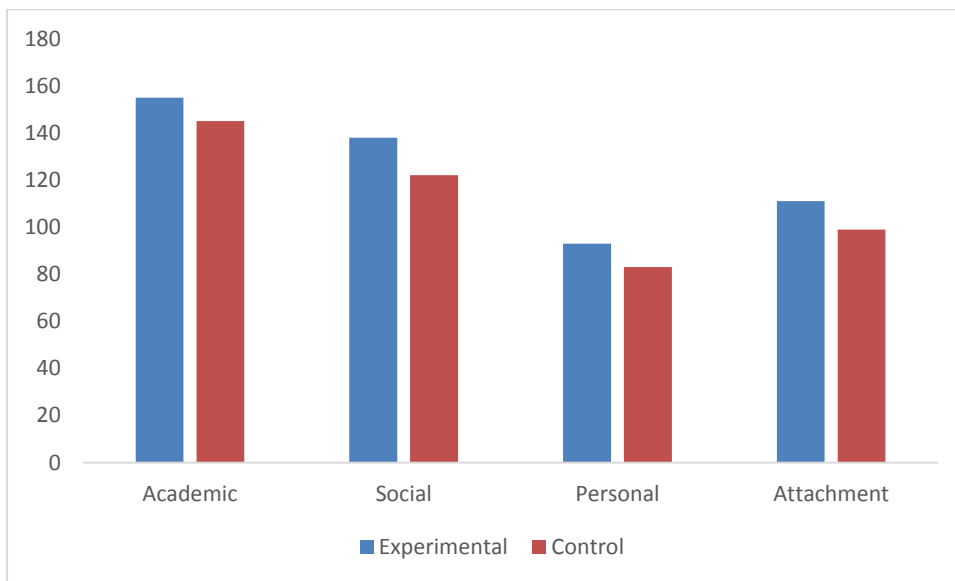


Figure 7.2. A graph to show individual constructs of the Student Adaptation to University Questionnaire

Table 7.2 below demonstrates that for academic and personal constructs there was a statistically significant difference between experimental condition who attended the residential and the control condition who did not attend the residential.

Table 7.1. A table to show t-test results for the three individual adaptation constructs.

	DF	T Score	Significance	95% CL lower	95% CL upper
Academic	85	2.41	$p < 0.05$	1.84	19.39
Personal	85	2.68	$p < 0.05$	2.94	19.97

A Mann Whitney U test indicated for the constructs of Attachment and Social that there is a statistically significant difference ( $p < 0.05$ ) between experimental condition who attended the residential and the control condition who did not attend the residential.

The findings of this questionnaire demonstrate that the students who attended the outdoor residential have on average adapted to university better than students studying a similar course who did not attend an outdoor residential. The results also demonstrate that not only were the students overall better adapted but also on the four other constructs the questionnaire measures. The next stage of the analysis will attempt to discover in depth why this occurred through a series of qualitative methods. Links between these constructs will be illuminated and explained through the data and previous research. This serves to provide a holistic assessment of the residential experience and why it is a useful tool to aid the transition to university process.

## 7.2 Combined qualitative analysis

This section of the analysis reveals a number of intertwined and independent in-depth themes (see table 7.2) generated through individual semi structured interviews. The issues surrounding these themes are highlighted and debated. This section culminates with a discussion of what are considered the main findings as related to the experience of attending an outdoor residential as a first year university student. The findings will be discussed and draw the chapter to a close.

Table 7.2. Summary of themes and sub themes

Themes	Sub themes						
<u>The type of student at this University</u>	Part time work	<u>Lower socio-economic background</u>	Commuting student	Academic ability			
<u>Staying local - 'at what cost?'</u>	<u>Difficulty in transition</u>	Perception of traditional fresher's culture – Not always a party		<u>Years of consequence</u>	<u>Ways friendships are developed</u>		
<u>Impact of the residential experience</u>	<u>Magnitude of the effect – best friends</u>	<u>Acceleration of friendship making</u>	<u>Platform for friendship making</u>	Confidence building	Expanding friendship groups	Exceeding expectations	Transitioning to University
<u>Non – attending students</u>	Similar early fears		Similar student type		Different early experience		

Table 7.3 Participant profiles

<u>Name</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Attending OOP Y/N</u>	<u>Live on campus?</u>
<u>Sarah</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>Yes</u>
<u>Rosie</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
<u>Jen</u>	<u>19</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>Yes</u>
<u>Carla</u>	<u>27</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
<u>Nathan</u>	<u>19</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
<u>Hugo</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
<u>Danny</u>	<u>24</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
<u>Charlie</u>	<u>24</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
<u>Jon</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
<u>James</u>	<u>21</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>Yes</u>
<u>Gemma</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Yes</u>
<u>Gina</u>	<u>19</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>No</u>
<u>Olivia</u>	<u>19</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Yes</u>
<u>Holly</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>No</u>
<u>Ross</u>	<u>21</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>No</u>
<u>Henry</u>	<u>23</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>No</u>
<u>Josh</u>	<u>19</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>No</u>
<u>Tom</u>	<u>19</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Yes</u>

Table 7.3 above provides a quick reference guide for the readers about the participants of the research interviews. The information should provide a little more context to their quotes based on whether they are 'in the control or intervention group, mature students, live on campus or commute.

### 7.2.1 Staying local - 'at what cost?'

The quotes below from Nathan and James indicates that affordability informs the decision process when choosing a University. In this instance it seems to have determined the decision to commute to University rather than live on campus. This choice has a direct impact on the experience the student will have throughout their University life. This notion is supported in the work of Reay, Crozier and Clayton (2010) who found that working part time or full time while studying can have a huge effect on a student's engagement University life. It can also be seen in the quote that it has also limited the choice of Universities available to the students, despite them seeming happy with their choice there may have been a more suitable University for them not located within their search radius.

*'I knew I wanted to stay at home so I could afford things like my car and bike insurance so I wanted to stay local. When I was looking through courses I saw sports and exercise science at \*\*\*\*\* and \*\*\*\*\* and \*\*\*\*\* but when I went on the open days I didn't really like the topic. Then I came here and saw PE and sports coaching and I really enjoyed the atmosphere and all the modules. There is a sports and exercise module as well so I still get that part of it which I quite enjoy.'* (Nathan)

*'I don't live on campus so I'm commuting from home so you still have that going home at a certain time and back to your house rather than living on campus but you have a lot more responsibility in doing stuff and the workload is different but I like that so and it's been good so far \*\*\*\*\* so like a ten minute drive and basically I thought if I live ten minutes away from home there's not much point in living on campus. I can understand why you would want to but I thought financially it's a bit silly moving out when I'm so close to home so staying at home was an easier choice and financially and be better off.'* (James)

The following quotes by Jen and Jon typify the feelings expressed through the interviews of commuting students many indicated the small size of the University as one of the main reason they chose the University. The quote by Jon alludes to the idea of a more intimate campus, this could also be construed as not as intimidating. Working class students may feel more comfortable in this type of environment and feel acceptance but this type of setting may create a situation where they never fully integrate into University life (Archer & Leathwood, 2003).

*'Because it's close to home but then I chose it over places like \*\*\*\*\* because it's smaller.'* (Jen)

*'I went round \*\*\*\*\* and the other ones and their city campus was a bit hectic and it seemed more quantity over quality with students they try and ram as many in as they can whereas here its more one to one and you can get the personal approach that you need really especially in studies like this. I like the area as well to be honest even though it's a little bit out of the way and a bus ride away for me it's not bad. Twenty minutes away in the opposite direction of the city so it's pretty straight forward.'* (Jon)

Other reasons given for choosing the University also included previously attending for an access course, through the quote from Carla other Universities were just not an option. The short commute being one of the main reasons for the choice.

*'I did look elsewhere including \*\*\*\*\* but out of all of my 5 choices 4 of them were for here, because I knew the campus and some of my friends who were on access were coming here, so I knew some people. I live in \*\*\*\*\*so this is also local for me rather than having to commute into town or \*\*\*\*\* so it's just easy to get here. It was a big factor. I did consider other ones but it was nice here and I liked it so I wanted to come back.'* (Carla)

All of the reasons given in the quotes above are on the surface logical choices but also align with research conducted by Reay, Crozier and Clayton (2010) who noted many white working class students stay close to home both geographically and academically which can restrict development as confident academic learners. This can cause the students to remain in their comfort zone where students 'go through University rather than University going through them'. This can be an issue particularly for commuting students who are not immersed in the University experience. Which could be an issue for students such as Hugo.

*'I'm just from \*\*\*\*\* so about 10 minutes away from here so not that far about 10 minutes on the bus.'* (Hugo)

#### Difficulty in transition

Many students find the initial stages of university challenging socially, this is something which has been expressed throughout this action research project and aligns with the literature e.g. Carr, Colthurst, Coyle & Elliott (2013). This is again demonstrated in the quote below from Nathan, this difficulty in the early stages of transition is magnified by being a commuting student. The quote also demonstrates that when friendships and social networks are developed they enhance the University experience and provide opportunity for integration within University life. This is particularly important for this action research project which aims to speed up the development of these social networks and support systems to aid transition to University at a very early stage.

*'It was difficult to start with. It was very difficult to start with. The first week I was here I didn't know anybody I wasn't really making any friends because when I was finished with my lectures I was going straight home. I didn't really have time to stop and talk to people on my course but now I've got into it and we all know each other on the course we talk and then every now and again I stay over with a couple of my mates.'* (Nathan)

#### Perception of traditional fresher's culture – Not always a party

Some people do not fit in with long held perception of traditional fresher's culture. This is usually thought of as alcohol orientated highlighted in Earle and LaBrie (2016). Many of the interviewees described how fresher's parties and drinking were not 'their thing'. This was particularly evident in the commuting students and mature students. In the quote below social integration is developed through existing friendships (from the local area) and through sport. In addition to this the residential provided a way to meet course mates outside of the traditional fresher's setting. The residential helped create an additional social support network which is being utilised academically.



*'Not massively, fresher's I didn't really do anything in fresher's. I went out but it was with people I already knew like from Beckett, I didn't go out with anyone from my course or anything like that because I didn't really know them so I didn't really do anything fresher's. I wasn't really too fussed. The week after I went out with the rugby lot and since then it's been with them really. On this trip as well there was a couple of rugby lads who I got on with on the trip before we had even started rugby, same personalities I guess. One lad ended up being in my group so we're good mates now and do group work together so that's good.'* (Charlie)

### Years of consequence

There was a clear acknowledgment that the early friendships created at University were going to be important for number of years and that the people they meet will be a big part of their lives for the considerable future.

*'So I met quite a lot of people. It was really good to see the people who were on my course who I would be spending time with for the next couple of years, got chatting to them and made friends with them.'* (Hugo)

*'Yeah definitely 100%, it might be a bit daunting but you're going to go off and meet new people and it's going to set you up for uni for 3 or 4 years or however long your course is, it's going to set you up and put you in a good position for the rest of the years so yeah I'd say it's definitely worth doing.'* (Danny)

### Ways friendships are developed

The quote below from Chris shows that being part of a team or society is a great way to secure friendship through sport and activity.

*'Yeah if I wasn't in the (rugby) team I'd probably have a different set of mates because I've bonded with the people on my course and the team as well, there's probably four or five that I was training with before we started the course so without that I would have probably found it more difficult to make friends on my course as well. Three or four of the lads from the rugby team and their friends are now mates so we have an even bigger group.'* (Chris)

What is very positive from the residential is that it provided an opportunity for existing friendship groups such as those developed through sport to grow and expand. It also has given someone who would not usually be with this group a chance to integrate and form relationships. As highlighted in stage 1 of this action research this can be described as the cascade effect of friendship making.

*'I mainly spent most of my time with the people from the rugby team but I didn't know some of them so they kind of integrated into the group so I was with Chris and a couple of other from the team but then some people in his group and some people in my group all came together so that was quite good.'* (Hugo)

Commuting students can have an active flourishing friendship group if they are given the right situations to foster these relationships. A shared interest and shared activity can be a catalyst for friendships. The activity on the residential or sport are the initial thing that can bring people together. From this these relationships can develop in a more organic and natural way.

*'Well I'd say most of them that I've made friends with here commute as well so we mainly see each other while we are here but we have met up at the weekend and every fortnight we have a nines tournament with everyone on the rugby team so it's like all day with them and then we go out afterwards, normally a Saturday so I see the some Saturdays as well.'* (Hugo)

Others believe that not being integrated socially may provide an environment where it is easier to study which may be beneficial to some students.

*'But I agree I do miss out on the social aspect of it by not being there all the time. I don't mind it though. In the house it's a bit quieter, not as much racket and you can get on with your studies a bit more and if you want an early night you can so I don't mind it. I've got a decent balance with what's going on at the moment'*  
(Jon)

### 7.2.2 The type of student at this University

Bean and Metzner (1985, p. 489) define non- traditional students as follows: A non-traditional student is older than 24, or does not live in a campus residence (e.g. is a commuter), or is a part-time student, or some combination of these three factors; is not greatly influenced by the social environment of the institution; and is chiefly concerned with the institution's academic offerings (especially courses, certification, and degrees).

#### Part time work

For some students having to take a part time job is essential to afford University life. Walpole (2003) further found that low socio economic status students studied less, spent more time working off campus, and ultimately had lower levels of involvement and achievement. This holds implications as the student works at home at the weekends. In this case the student lives on campus but still lives close to home. Travelling home every weekend for work allows people to keep old support networks which may contradict what they need to do as a student or academically. They may also miss opportunities to meet likeminded students because they do not feel as much need to make many university friends if they are still regularly interacting with friendship groups at home.

*'Yeah basically so I go back and work Friday and Saturdays because it's only an hour in the car and my mates drive back so I do that then come back here on a Sunday then obviously my studies through the week.'* (Jon)

This 'Part time student life' is echoed in the quote below from Danny. Who again lives on campus but has not immersed in the full university experience. They have not really moved away as they are still close to friends and family. This need to work is especially prevalent for working class students who have less family financial support which this University traditionally attracts.

*'Yes but I commute home at weekends because I work on a Saturday which is in Sheffield but I'm living in halls down at which is good.'* (Danny)

This is in stark contrast to the experience of Sarah who sees University as a home away from home. She is still engaging with friends from home but making it part of the university experience.

*'Not a lot, I've only been back twice since I've been here. I love it here can't get enough of it. I do see my friends from home all the time, they always come up here or when I'm down there we all go out together. Like this weekend when I went home there was a party going on so I surprised them all. I always see them on facetime or something like that.'* (Sarah)

### Commuting Students

Most commuting students are aware that they may find it more difficult to integrate. These initial thoughts and feelings may also create a psychological barrier that they do not 'fit in'. This can be amplified by not having the same social opportunities to bond. This can also affect University attachment (Raey et al., 2010)

*'It's better than I thought it would be to be fair. When I first started the first week was a bit shaky because I didn't know anybody. With me commuting as well I didn't really get chance to meet people who were residents.'* (Nathan)

Some students can arrive with a totally different mind-set of not wanting to fit in. They are at University for functional learning, not wanting the immersive experience, they are there for a qualification in order to further career aspirations. In the quote below it is almost like they have already decided that they won't fit in, therefore not made the effort to try and discover if they could fit in.

*'Erm I don't think that I fit in with them at all but I'm not that fussed about that, I expected it really. I can talk to them about general stuff like TV and like with the residential. In my development group there is a few girls who I will sit and talk to and there are a few people that will come up and talk. Then there is the other half or type of student who you can tell are very immature, I've dealt with all that when I was younger with people like that and of that age. But now if they want to be idiots and mess around I kind of just let them get on with it and try and not get involved with it because I will just try and mother them and it will do my head in.'*  
(Carla)

### Lower socio- economic background

Many of the students this University attracts are from a lower socio economic background compared to the 'traditional student'. Working-class students have been shown to approach university with apprehension and higher levels of uncertainty (Lehmann 2007a).

*'They're different to people from home especially academically, they want to do well whereas people back home like live on a council estate so they all think they are bad.'* (Jen)

In addition to this many are also the first generation of their family to attend University. This can be an issue as families will in general want to support their child while at University, but in some cases they will not have the personal experience to tailor this support accordingly.

*'None of them, I think I'm the first one although my cousins went but not immediate family. My sister went to college on did media and the other did veterinary, she's a veterinary nurse now. My sister who did media did nothing*

*with it, I think they had the option to, they are like 10 years older than me, I was talking to one of my sisters about it and she was like no I never went and I just got a job and that was good enough for me so she didn't need to. My dad does labouring so and joinery so he did it all at collage and stuff like that and that was all he needed to do. My mum didn't but she teaches like disabled people with like pottery so she's always done like vocational stuff so they have always got to a certain level and realised that's all we need and then continued it in their work life.'* (Carla)

*'My mum and dad didn't go, my brother is younger and I don't think he will go. One of 5 cousins went but the others didn't go, my grandparents didn't go either. So for me it's always just been a goal to go to university. I've always just wanted to do it school sixth form then university.'* (Rosie)

### Academic ability

The entry requirements of the University are also at the lower end of the scale which means some of the students are not strong academically. Academic integration can be more difficult for students from state schools as they have to learn the procedures of University as well as course content (Fortin et al., 2016). Meaning support from the University and through social networks is essential if they are going to progress. Some students are in the position of being a first generation student, not academically gifted, with a part time job commuting to University. All these factor exacerbate the risk of dropping out so higher levels of support are required.

*'Making friends is always a worry but it's been alright. I suppose there's the academic side and all the independent work which I'm not used to. You do a bit in BTEC and GCSE. That was a worry though because I thought if I didn't keep up with the work then I wouldn't succeed.'* (Hugo)

*'So really I haven't written proper essays ever. The girlfriend does politics, she got a first in politics at \*\*\*\*\* last year, this year she is doing a masters in foreign politics so she is writing 12000 word essays so she has been looking through my work, she looked at my diagnostic essay and told me to do this and do that.'*  
(Charlie)

*'I suppose if I'm sat in a lecture and I don't have a clue what they are talking about .... I feel like how is this relevant, those days I feel like it's been a waste of time being in lectures.'* (Rosie)

### 7.2.3 Impact of the residential experience

The previous parts of the action research had a focus on refining the residential trip in terms of activities and logistics. The changes were made based on the findings of stage 1 to deliver the optimum residential experience. Therefore the rest of the focus of this analysis will be on what the students believed the impact was of the residential on their transition to University. Hermanowicz (2004) notes that students thinking about leaving the institution where they began their studies generally have little communication with their social peers, therefore a social network can help overcome situations where someone may feel like they want to leave University. The residential experience can provide that

### Magnitude of the effect – best friends

In the following quotes much of the content is similar but the sheer magnitude of effect of the residential is evident in all of them. The aim of the residential was to aid transition to University for first year students. The quote below demonstrate how the trip helped students integrate and build support networks which assisted them through this difficult period.

The first quote below from James is perhaps the most powerful, he states that the residential helped him meet and develop a relationship with someone who he now considers his best friend. Not only that but he also met other people through which he seems to have a full social life in and outside of University. James is a commuting student but is now more integrated in University life. James alludes to the idea that the residential accelerated the friendship making process and how that helped him settle into University life. This has also meant that James now has a group of friends to work with in seminars.

*'They were on the same course, they were really nice. One of them ended up like becoming my best mate so that was definitely good. They were really nice and didn't make a mess which was good. The lad is called Sam. He lives at home in Wetherby which is further than \*\*\*\*\* but a different way. Me and Sam made a few other friends that were on our course like Tara and Johnny, I see quite a few of them outside of uni as well which is good getting into a new group of people. I see Sam the most though. Being friends with them is decent and meeting them on residential really helped. I think if I didn't go on it, it would've been a lot harder to make friends, it would have taken longer and I might have been a bit shy. If we can like choose partners and stuff then we work together in groups and we sit together in lectures but sometimes you are just put in groups so you have to work with them.'* (James)

### Acceleration of friendship making

These following quote again echoes the strength of the residential in making friendships. Charlie mentions how the fact that it was residential meant living with peers for a period of time. Again this is another way in which the trip facilitates this acceleration of friendship making, this is done through placing people in situations which would normally occur much further down the development of relationships. Another way in which the trip helps people meet other students who they might not have otherwise met was through allocated groups to room with and to complete the activities. Charlie believed this was a positive of the residential.

*'So I was happy about that. I did think that it would be a good way to make friends because you're living with people, I think it really did help socially and got put in a group which was decent. I think the residential overall was positive and I would recommend it to new students, but like I said it was a bit of a shock getting it because we were going like two weeks later.'* (Charlie)

### Platform for friendship making

Another commuting student Jon also believed the residential provided the platform for him to make friends and integrate with course mates. He believed it made the process of making friends easier. He now has a number of people who he can meet up in lectures with and socialise at University.

*'Yeah it's great, I would say on the trip when we went away is the time I made my mates because I didn't know anyone, it was a case of not knowing people. I didn't have a clue who anyone was but by the end of the first day you had all of your mates and we were in a group together. I think the aspect of having the bar which is a student type thing but it was just a nice social aspect to be able to have a pint at the end of the day and have a chat and get to know people yeah, so getting to know all the students round here can be a little bit harder because I don't live here and I'm not with them all the time but when I do see them in lectures we make a point of going to get something to eat on our breaks or whatever or making a point of going to do something nothing major but just a little social activity that keeps you involved with everyone.'* (Jon)

This is further strengthened by the quote from Hugo who states that he made a number of friendships that make him feel very comfortable at University, which he now feels is 'homely'.

*'Being able to go away like that I made a lot of friends on the trip. So now I have got friends if I've got a break in lecture I can go back to their accommodation here which saves me going back and forth but as a university its very homely and friendly you know.'* (Hugo)

The idea of the residential helping people to meet course mates is mentioned by Nathan. He goes on to say that the challenging elements of the trip revealed parts of people's personalities which helped develop friendships.

*The obvious one is meet new people that were on your course who you can relate to, suppose you get to see people doing things they are not used to, putting people out of their comfort zones sort of brings out the best of people in different ways if you know what I mean. New friends, new experiences that's what I'd say I got out of it* (Sarah Pg. 4)

This is further supported by Nathan who attributes the residential of helping him make 10 good friends. He now works with these friends in lectures and seminars. This shows the trip has facilitated friendship making which has in turn given Nathan a social support network, aiding integration.

*'Yeah a lad called Harry was in my group and dorm and he's on the rugby team. He's in all my lessons. We are in a group together. Another lad from my room as well. I went out with the girls actually. The girl who I went on the town trail with, with her mates in town with a couple of the rugby lads as well, it was good. Two lads on my course Pat, he's a big character, I'll always chat to him and Amir as well another lad who's in all my lessons and I chat to him as well, Facebook friends as well. There's this lad called Lukas and I've borrowed a shirt off him and has borrowed a hat from me. I made a good 10 friends solely through the trip, I will sit with them in lectures or work with them in seminars.'* (Nathan)

The quote below from Rosie further illustrates that the residential has built relationships that help within University life. Developing what Rosie describes as bonds, which provokes feelings of deep relational ties.

*'People that were in my group and on my course, if I see them I will stand and chat to them and then people I met on residential I sit with in lectures. I also sit with people I live with so it's a bit of both. There is a couple of girls that were in my tutor who I bonded with more on residential who I sit with most.'* (Rosie)

#### Building confidence

Hugo further explained how the residential helped with transition to University. This active process of settling in has been aided by the confidence created through having a wider social support network at University. The comparison is made to his friends at other Universities who found the initial period difficult but also did not have the platform of social support that Hugo had generated through the residential.

*'Confidence within approaching and meeting new people because that made it so much easier I think settling in because it is hard when you're in the classroom for the first time and you don't know anyone but on the residential we got to meet people in a different way so that helps a lot with confidence in meeting new people. It was good because it helped us settle in loads. In know people at other universities that haven't done anything like this who found it really hard at the start and it took them a lot longer to get into it. For me it was straight away after the residential, the day after we were back we all knew each other and had a good laugh. It was really good.'* (Hugo)

He continued on to state how he felt University life started at the residential. This is a powerful statement in which it is clear that the trip left a lasting impression and really set Hugo up for University life. This is an indication of the effect of the residential even though it only took place over a relatively short space of time.

*'Like just the induction week, we didn't have much time to you know make friends and chat to other people it was more like you turned up to the sessions was told what I needed to know and I went home so I didn't really have that other aspect. To be fair it was after the residential that I started proper getting into things really.'* (Hugo)

This is echoed by the words of Rosie, she believes the atmosphere created by the residential helped build self-confidence and reduce her fears in entering University life.

*'I got a bit more confidence in that I could speak to people and it wouldn't bother me or I would sit in the group and I wouldn't be shy but when I came here it was quite big with lots of people here I kind of went back into my shell a bit but as soon as I went on residential I came back out of my shell and I could start being like I was before I came to uni. Just talking to everyone and making sure everyone is alright. So it helped me find the confidence I had. It reassured me, fair enough there was more people at university but it's not really that different to any other situation I've been in.'* (Rosie)

### Expanding friendship groups

The quote below is important in that it shows how the residential has expanded friendships beyond what Charlie expected. It is well known that sports clubs and societies are great places for students to meet like-minded people with similar interests. In this case the residential has grown Charlie's friendship group beyond the rugby team and developed friendships with course mates. These course mate friendships could be considered more beneficial as they have the potential to support each other academically.

*'The social side of it I think more than anything, I guess that's what it's for. Introduce you to people on your course, get you talking to people. If it wasn't for that I would only chat to the rugby lads because I know them from training but now I know all the others and chat to them and are friends with them. The social side was the main reason I went and I got out of it more than I expected.'*  
(Charlie)

Again Carla below indicates that the residential widened her social group while alluding to the idea that it gave her something which would usually just be experienced by students living on campus.

*'So even now in lectures we have that bit of banter and it's good that we have that experience from residential. Without that you would have gone into starting uni with nothing where you would just be restricted to people sat in your lectures so I broadens it up a bit. I'm assuming the people who live on campus make more of it because they will see each other more than me who lives off, they will be around if they live on campus.'* (Carla)

This is also shown in the quote below from Jen who now feels involved in University life through meeting students who live on campus through the residential.

*'Do you ever feel like you might miss out on some stuff?'  
I did at first but after the residential I've just like stayed on people's floors, I go out and people involve me in stuff.'* (Jen)

### Transitioning to University

While Nathan, a commuting student, attributed making friends on the residential the reason that he attends University classes frequently. He also clearly states that without the friendships he made he would have struggled with the transition to University. Being lonely was obviously one of his main concerns coming into University, the residential helped allay that fear.

*'I made friends really, I got to know a lot of people which is quite good because I feel like if I didn't get to know these people I'd still be struggling and I'd probably not want to come to uni as often because I wouldn't know anybody. But now I know people I can come go to a lecture and go get something to eat after that lecture with them not sat on my own then so it's quite good.'* (Nathan)

Nathan went on to comment how he has now settled at University which could be translated to 'transitioned' to University.



*'Would you say you have settled now?*

*I'm definitely settled now, just doing this interview says I'm settled really because if you would have come to me in the first week I wouldn't have even said anything and ignored you because I weren't comfortable at all. I didn't know the place or the atmosphere but now I have proper settled in and I'm happy to do pretty much anything now.'* (Nathan)

### Exceeding expectations

As with the previous stages of the action research project students were asked about their expectations of the residential and whether they were met. In many cases the expectations were exceeded. Again a number of accounts are given to show that the feelings were consistent across many students who attended the residential.

*'Yeah we it exceeded if I'm being honest, I didn't know what to expect really, I've been to like PGL when I was younger but while I've been older I haven't done anything like it at this age. It was a good laugh in all honesty and you can have a good time. You could be that person that sits in the corner or you can talk to people and make friends and that's what I did. I made friends. Met people, had new experiences and going to the Lake District so it's an experience I'll never forget.'* (Jon)

*'Yeah because my expectations weren't amazingly high if I'm being honest. I didn't expect it would be as good as it was, I thought you know gorge walking and kayaking would just be in the lake or gorge walking I expected it to be a walk in the countryside getting wet. We did get wet but in a more fun way if that makes sense like jumping into a gorge I wouldn't have thought we would be doing that reading the letter when we got it so yeah.'* (Danny)

*'Yeah I think it was better than I thought it would be. The hostel was nice and the activities as well. I thought they would be quite tame doing a hike or something. Like the team building an orienteering that's what I expected. But the kayaking and gorge walking I've never done before so it was good to do something that I haven't tried or that I haven't had the opportunity to take part in.'* (Rosie)

*'Yeah, I think even more so because the hostel was so nice and the location was perfect I thought with it being lake Windermere we would be hidden away but to actually be on it and having the bar and restaurant as well was good. Being able to get a coffee and food was great, I really liked having that option. I would've had fun even if I didn't get on with anyone because I like that kind of thing and enjoy the activities for what they are. The whole meeting people was a lot better than I thought it was going to be so that was good.'* (Carla)

*'Well it exceeded them really because I didn't think it would be as enjoyable as it was like what I said about gorge scrambling, I didn't think it would be right good and then we put on a wet suit so I thought we must be jumping in water then so when we were climbing up a river I genuinely enjoyed it. It exceeded my expectations.'* (Nathan)

*'Probably better than I thought it was going to be to be honest. I thought oh yeah I'll go it'll be alright bit of kayaking and this that and the other. But yeah I thought it was brilliant. For me as well not being on campus and not knowing anyone any other fresher's it was good for the friendship thing side of it mainly. It was meeting people, chatting to new people, and people on my course so the group thing was good. I can now happily chat to the 7 other people in my group.'*

(Charlie)

#### 7.2.4 Not attending thematic areas

##### Similar early fears

Students were interviewed who were on a similar sports based course at the same University as the residential attending students. This was done to compare and contrast their early University experiences.

The example below is provided by Henry as it covers many of the thoughts and feelings of students interviewed throughout the action research project. It is included to demonstrate that non-residential attending students were also apprehensive about the start of University life. The worry, stress and self-doubt are common across new students. Dealing with these issues is a major part of the transition to University.

*'I think it has been quite difficult to adapt to uni and be self-sustainable, living on your own there is a great deal to take on. But work wise I have about 14 hours a week contact time which I don't feel has been overly intense, I've not been drowning in assignments, and they have been spaced out equally. Really how much you socialise and other things like that is up to you. I don't think the university could do much more really, I haven't got anything negative to say about the uni as a whole, other than my radiator doesn't work but that is literally it. I've not had an unpleasant experience. It's been stressful but I've come to university so you expect a certain amount of stress. It's all part and parcel of getting where you want to be so I think you need a little bit of stress, I don't know if that's the right thing to say but there needs to be some sort of pressure I think, I've felt it but it's not all the time intense. It's been really good, I've really enjoyed it.'* (Henry)

##### Similar student type

The following quote from Fern is included to demonstrate we are talking about a similar student group to those attending the residential. The students are in general not always the most academically gifted given the entry requirements.

*'It's been a bit challenging especially anatomy and physiology which is mainly based around what people do at A-level which I obviously haven't done. I did biology but I dropped in my first year of A-levels, it's hard. I got U's on it twice so I did find it hard in that module. The nutrition module was ok because that's basic knowledge that other people have from PE so it has been a bit difficult.'* (Fern)

In many cases this group of students chose the University because it was small and local again mirroring the reasons given by the students who attended the residential.

*'Yeah, I liked the size of the campus, the fact that it is quite small which gives off a family type feel that was one of the major reasons for me to pick this university.'*  
(Olivia)

*'An open day at \*\*\*\*\*, it was a bit too big for me, didn't really like it, I went to \*\*\*\*\* and then trekked all the way down to \*\*\*\*\* and it just wasn't really for me. I actually quite liked the cringe slogan that you're a name not a number or whatever they pulled us in with for the open day, it was quite nice actually.'*  
(Henry)

One point mentioned earlier was that sports clubs and societies are good places to make friends at University. The quote below shows that although this may be the case these relationships could be with people who you would not see academically. This means that they may not be able to share in the experience of the course and support each other in a work sense. This would be one of the main strengths of the residential, as it fosters relationships between course mates who can then support one another academically. The quote speaks about the benefits of speaking to other students with more experience about things outside of the course material which is great for Gemma but additional support from course mates could enhance her transition.

*'So what's it like being in the football team?'*

*It's nice, it makes you feel part of the university, we've just recently got our kit, and everyone likes having kit with your name on it. It means you are 100% part of the squad, the team as a whole. I'm not a big fan of going on nights out really but even going out on socials and stuff you get to meet people from other sports and talk to people you never thought you would come across. That time in the team is nice to forget where you are really.'* (Ross)

*'Are any of the people you have met through the athletics club on your course?'*

*No, they are all level 5 and level 6 students because there are no level 4s but it's nice speaking to students who have had more experience at the uni and who are a bit older. It's also been good because I was speaking to them about placements, they are not doing the same course but similar like sporting so it was useful speaking to them about placements and where they did theirs and that type of thing.'* (Gemma)

### Different early experience

The quote below is in stark contrast to the feelings of students interviewed who attended the residential. Fern has had limited opportunity to get to know her course mates, the people she speaks to are best described as acquaintances. There has been no platform or opportunity to meet class mates on a more personal basis. The majority of her friends are from halls but as mentioned about Gemma in the previous quotes these are not on her course so wouldn't be able to directly support each other in academic work.

*'Who do you sit with in lectures?'*

*I have one good mate on my course who is in my tutor group so probably him, I've met a few others but I don't really talk to them that much on my course, I've only*

*really made one good friend, the rest are in my flat. If we have group work to do I have people I can talk to pretty well but not that I would hang out with outside of uni*

*Is there any reason for that?*

*We haven't really bonded a lot, the only time we see each other is in class so you can't really just chat and get to know each other.'* (Fern)

Many of the students who attended the residential indicated that the trip was where they made their friends or grew their friendship groups. The same question was asked of how non-residential attending students made friends. Henry speaks about how he made friends through sport but again these are not course mates. He also speaks about how he did not attend as many fresher's events as he thought he should. The residential was a compulsory part of the course for students so even the ones who were sceptical about the trip in the start still attended, became involved and felt the benefits. Henry also mentions the price of Fresher's activities, again the residential was free for students.

*'A touch rugby tournament on the Friday, me and my mates took part in that, it was good fun actually, you then got in with the second and third years and started to socialise with them a bit more, I thought there would be a lot more segregation between first second and third years but that proved that they were quite friendly and you realised that they weren't as scary as they could have been. I didn't do an awful lot. I wouldn't use the word regret but I wish I would have done a little bit more in fresher's, there was a lot on and m fresher's band was quite expensive and I didn't use it as much as I should have.'* (Henry)

The quotes below from Gemma and Ross shows that although halls can be a great place to meet people this is not always the case. The residential provided an opportunity to mix with all of their course mates. This large number of people to get to know must increase the chances of finding someone you can get along with and develop closer bonds.

*'I don't really get on with my flatmates that well, they are big drinkers and I don't drink so it's been hard they are not really the type of people I would choose to be friends with but you can't choose who you live with in the first year. There is 9 of us in the flat but none of them are on my course. So I don't really socialise with the people in the flat, I try but I think it's got to work both ways.'* (Gemma)

And

*'Within my flat there isn't a lot of communication. I'm in Whitby halls so it's the low budget one and there is 4 people on my floor out of a possible 8 rooms. Two of them I never see and then one girl is on my course so I speak to her. But other than that I don't really socialise with that lot. I have my friends outside of my living area. They live in the court. There is one lad who I went to college with and then meeting people through fresher's and nights out, sport, when we went to football, meeting people there and things like that. Just making friends as you do.'*  
(Ross)

Also the natural time it can take to make friends can take quite a while, this seems to be the case in the quote below by Olivia. The residential cut down the time it takes to make friends by putting people in situations which accelerate friendship such as group work, physical touch, overnight together in rooms and shared goal.

*'Some assignments we were put into groups so you obviously have to talk to the people you are working with, and otherwise there were two guys who fancied me and I said no but we could be friends, so we're friends so that was a bit awkward. We didn't meet with the intention of being friends, it just happened like a natural process.'* (Olivia)

The quote below illustrates the sometimes clumsy nature of making friends if the right platform is not provided. Someone like Gemma given the right opportunity would have probably built a social network of course mates.

*'When you have a lecture or seminar is there a set group of people you sit with? Yeah I usually sit with the same people, I met them in fresher's week, I went to the fresher's fair but I hadn't really met any people that I'd gelled with yet so I went on my own and started having a walk around, I saw these three girls and I thought they looked really friendly so I asked them if I could tag along with them, they are the people that I hang around with.'* (Gemma)

Fresher's traditionally alcohol based activities are not for everyone as demonstrated in the quote from Holly. Many students would like an environment where they can meet people but not feel they have to drink alcohol. The residential provided this type of opportunity. Even when activities took place in the bar, there was a quiz and other entertainment available making a more inclusive environment.

*'Was fresher's a good introduction to uni for you?'*

*Erm not really because I found a lot of events involved alcohol and the ones that weren't alcohol related not a lot of people turned up to so it made it quite difficult getting out there and meeting people and that kind of thing, I've never really being interested in it, being a gymnast my coaches were quite strict, I followed a strict training programme, I didn't really have time to be going out and doing that sort of thing.'* (Holly)

Again Olivia points to the non-alcohol related activities as the most beneficial ones for her. The residential could have provided this type of experience while introducing her to course mates.

*'I actually went out on nights out and stuff I just didn't drink, I went out to get the feel of the whole clubbing thing. I enjoyed it but I can't see how you can make friends when everyone is just drunk, you're not going to remember them the next day. I do drink occasionally, but I wouldn't in a club I just wouldn't find it safe. I did enjoy fresher's though and I did some of the none drinking events like trampolining, bowling and a few meals out and like quiz nights and things like that which was fun. I went out exploring the city and shopping.'* (Olivia)

For the students who did not attend the residential some thought the University could have provided a better platform to meet people and integrate with fellow course mates. This is exemplified in the quote below from Gemma.

*'So has it been a good start to university?*

*Partly and partly not, I'm not really sure how they would go about it but, I just feel like I could've met more people in that first week if there had been more opportunity to do stuff*

*How would you say you have adapted to uni?*

*I found it hard in the first couple of weeks I wasn't really getting on with the people in my flat but after the first couple of weeks I really found my feet and met more people through the sporting opportunities*

*So do you think it took longer than it should have?*

*Yeah.'* (Gemma)

### 7.3 Summary of the analysis

The statistical analysis of the SAUQ provided the statistically significant result that students who attended the OOP were better adjusted to university compared to a similar control group. This result provides a credible finding but it does not tell us why or how this has occurred. The SAUQ provides scores on four key areas of adaptation to university. They are personal - emotional, social, academic and institutional attachment. In each of these four areas the students who attended the OOP scored significantly higher than the control.

The role of uncovering and discovering why this has occurred was attempted in the qualitative analysis. The personal accounts of individual students are given to illuminate the experience of being a first year student making the transition to university. It is attempted through the qualitative analysis process to demonstrate not only why it has occurred but also to provide a theoretical explanation for what has occurred.

A number of key themes emerged throughout the attending student and non-attending student interviews. The key areas of adaptation to university the questionnaire measures are addressed within the thematic areas presented in the analysis.

The theme 'Staying local - 'at what cost?' provides the discussion around this issue that attending and living on campus at University can be very expensive but the commuting student may miss out on valuable experiences and essential support networks. This stems from feelings of not fitting in and back drop of what the students are experiencing in terms of the transition to university. The feelings found within this theme were generally in line with the literature reviewed in the student experience perspective section. This theme provided a number of challenges that the incoming students especially commuting students who may not have the opportunity to meet as many course mates in a social setting.

The theme 'The type of student at this University' highlights that the type of student who attends this University may not be the 'traditional student'. This is of course a generalisation and not everyone will fit into this assessment and have their own unique personal circumstances. The interviews found many were the first in their family to attend University, white working class from the local area, lower socio economic background, lower achieving academically and many commuted due to financial issues.

'Impact of the residential experience' this theme clearly demonstrated the positives of the residential experience. Many of the quotes powerfully show how the transition to University was greatly enhanced through the trip. Many friendships were made these were also the 'right' friendships, course mates who could not only provide social support but also academic support.

The quotes provided within this theme clearly show for many students their social support network was increased or improved through OOP, this could explain why the students who attended the OOP scored higher on social adjustment in the SAUQ than the comparison group of similar students.

'Non – attending students' provided an alternative view to the attending student's assessment of their transition to University. The students had similar fears, were from a similar background and chose the same University for the same reasons. These students however did not have in general such a smooth transition. Friendship making was clumsier without an engineered platform and also took longer. It could be said that their early experiences were not only different but worse without the residential experience.

The framing and explanation of the research findings built on stage one of the research but this time had an emphasis on the outcomes of the residential experience in contrast with similar students who did not have such provision early in their University life.

Such an environment and activities aid social group development, these relationships were solidified through other activities, sharing living space and free time periods. The environment the students have been placed in almost 'forces' certain behaviours based on the shared goals and common interests therefore completing common challenges in a physical sense facilitates interactions, as does the common goal of making friends.

These social networks can provide peer support when back on campus. These relationships were secured quickly, not only that but they also combined existing friendship groups. The Residential experience provided a platform for all students to make these relationships, it was then up to the student themselves to build the relationships. One of the key points made was these relationships were made with course mates who can provide social, emotional and importantly academic support to each other.

In conclusion the OOP stage 2 has had a positive effect on first year student's adaptation to university. This was achieved through providing a platform which encourages personal growth and social support network formation. The SAUQ provided statistical evidence of the adaptation. The processes of which have been illustrated through illuminative quotes and researcher analysis. These 'right' social networks are particularly useful given the 'non-traditional' who attends this type of University. These students can experience a greater number of barriers to transition to University. The residential experience can provide the platform to overcome these barriers.

## Chapter 8 – Discussion

The overarching aim of the current investigation was to explore student adaptation and transition, they are a key issue for many universities and highlighted as a strategic issue for the researched university. The University tried utilise the perceived strengths and benefits of OOP's to try and meet the goal of improving student experience. The specific research aims were:

- To investigate how an outdoor orientation programme aids transition and adaptation to university for first year students and improve experience for first year university students.
- To investigate the role of OOP's in social integration and personal growth.
- To develop standardised practice for outdoor orientation programmes.

Thus the study asked students and University staff involved in residential programme to describe their experiences of the trip. Analysis used an interpretive phenomenology, thematic analysis and statistical evaluation. This analysis was used throughout the study in an action research style. Research informed changes were implemented throughout the duration of the project which by its completion provided a residential programme which benefited the students who attended it.

This chapter includes a summary of the main findings of the study and a discussion around what is considered to be the main thematic areas. The chapter also includes reflection on the methodology, considers the strengths and limitations of the study, the possible implications of the research and future recommendations.

### 8.1 Summary of main findings

The pilot stage of the action research provided insight into the individual intricate factors at play in residential. The main points raised by students were not evident in the reviewed literature, including the number and length of activities and the type of accommodation and food provided.

The student evaluation feedback forms therefore, provided future residential design points for consideration by the university. Firstly, and most importantly for the students, was that more activities were needed. Organisation prior and during the OOP needed improving, this included meal time structure and type of room allocation. The study also found that the timing of the OOP was well selected by the university.

Overall the student evaluation feedback forms demonstrated the students enjoyed the activities and the OOP in general facilitated the development of friendship for many students which are outcomes frequently cited in OOP literature (Bell et al., 2014). The current study looking at student perceptions of the OOP can be considered a success based on the logistical elements highlighted to improve. These issues may have been thought to be relatively small, yet tweaking these elements served to improve the student experience for stage one of the residential

Stage one of the research explored the potential issues that emerged about all elements of the OOP. These included the issues highlighted in the pilot stage of the research, such as organisation and structure of meal times and the impact accommodation type can have on the OOP experience. These organisational and logistical issues were used to inform stage two of the action research project. This created the optimum blueprint for the residential for this type of student at this University. This blueprint could be tweaked to serve other similar Universities and students.



Stage one SACQ provided statistical evidence that the students who attended the OOP were better adapted to university than the control group. The framing and explanation of the key thematic research findings through psychological theory was also one of the aims of the research process. This was approached in a bottom up inductive approach which was data led. This was chosen to aid in the trustworthiness of the analysis process by reducing the risk of trying to fit parts of the analysis to a particular theory or psychological mechanism. The two main discussion points from stage one of the action research in terms of transition to University were accelerated friendships and building resilience.

## 8.2 Accelerated friendships

The theory which provided the best explanation of the accelerated friendship theme and sub themes was attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969) combined with social penetration theory (Altman & Taylor, 1973). The uncertain period of social upheaval being experienced by first year students, can pose challenges such as being separated from home ties and feelings of loneliness which can be distinctly different from the home environment.

This links to two of the measures proposed by Bowlby (1969) which are stranger anxiety and separation anxiety. The student is experiencing the loss proximity to key social support from home friends and family. The students interviewed expressed how they were faced with a whole host of new 'strangers' such as their peers and university staff.

To overcome these attachment issues students must form new social support networks. Therefore the early delivery of this type of activity is essential (Schofield & Dismore, 2010). This was evidenced throughout the sub themes with students making multiple connections transforming these 'strangers' into meaningful connections and new attachments.

The OOP experience provided a platform for students to form attachments. Attachment theorist would posit the argument that some individuals in this time of social upheaval would be less likely to seek out social relationships (Carr, Colthurst, Coyle & Elliott, 2013). The indications from the student interviews were that the OOP placed everyone in the same activity and social situations. This inclusive collaborative shared environment may have encouraged the development of these social interactions for people who otherwise may avoid such situations. Providing relational security during university transition may offset these heightened attachment concerns that certain students are prone to experiencing (Macdonald & Gunn, 1997). This is especially important in these early transitional stages of becoming a university student.

The student interviews demonstrate that OOP environment and activities can increase the speed that students move through these stages of friendship. The thematic findings have shown for some students that the environment and activities of the OOP encourages accelerated friendships based on the shared living space, goals and common interests. Each sub theme provides clear examples of friendship development being enhanced through the entire OOP experience. Completing common challenges in a physical sense facilitates interactions, as does the common goal of making friends. Peer support, support from activity staff and university staff helped in both social and personal terms.

These carefully managed situations provide the opportunity for students to quickly move through the stages of friendship outlined in social penetration theory highlighted previously. The interviews demonstrate examples of the activities providing opportunity for initial interaction and functional conversation. The close proximity in accommodation and the multitude of social spaces offered an opportunity to engage in the exploratory affective relationship stage. The activities also required physical contact which would not be normally expected until the affective stage.

Creating an environment where students have access to support networks appears to be an integral factor influencing student adaptation (Tinto, 2006). This may be explained through the support these friendships can provide in academic adjustment at university. These relationships can provide help with practical sessions, group work and a general feeling of ease with their fellow course mates. This aligns with findings previously evidenced in OOP research (Wolfe & Kay, 2011).

### 8.3 Resilience through the residential

Initial feelings of apprehension were described by students regarding the OOP experience. These feelings mirror the feelings of many incoming 1<sup>st</sup> year university students (Leary & DeRosier, 2012). Overcoming this apprehension and challenges to self-confidence and self-worth are therefore important in this transitional period.

The theme 'personal development, building more than a raft' highlights in vivid detail how the OOP process provides personal physical challenges. The activities were challenging and in some instances described as worrying. This level of challenge is widely advocated e.g. (Ewert & Yoshino, 2011) to encourage feelings of achievement and success. A number of the students provided examples of how they 'surprised themselves' with what they achieved. This indicates the activities provided a challenge appropriate experience. These findings align with previous research findings (Allen, McKenna & Hind, 2012)

Therefore it could be said that personal growth was achieved through the platform provided by the OOP to challenge themselves and succeed. By overcoming the challenges the achievement can provide development of self-efficacy and self-worth. Self-worth and self-efficacy are thought to be important factors in developing resilience (Grant & Kinman, 2012). The OOP could enhance resilience in 1<sup>st</sup> year university students. This is especially important given that research into student adjustment found one of the main problems facing transitioning students is challenges to their self-worth (Carr, Colthurst, Coyle & Elliott, 2013). This resilience could be essential in overcoming such challenges.

One aspect of challenge which was an unexpected research finding was 'social challenge'. The students spoke of the pressures of developing friendships, this provided a challenge to self-confidence. The activities were set up in such a way to require team building, trust and communication with others. Such an environment and activities aid social group development. Student relationships were solidified through other activities and enhanced by sharing living space and free time periods. The environment the students were placed in encouraged certain behaviours based on the shared goals and common interests. Completing common challenges in a physical sense facilitated interactions, as did the common goal of making friends. Peer support, support from activity staff and university staff helped in both social and personal terms.

Not all findings were entirely positive. The theme 'The fine line between challenge and fear' highlighted that for some people challenge can go too far and in some instances be debilitating. Some students required assistance from other students to complete the activities. The value in being helped depends on how this is understood by the recipient. Therefore requiring assistance may challenge self-efficacy and self-worth when a positive outcome cannot be achieved. Similarly this may enhance self-worth and self-confidence through being valued, understood and aided by their peers. The students who provided assistance to their peers could further enhance their self-confidence and self-worth through this altruistic behaviour.

#### 8.4 Support for the Universities student demographic – what was achieved

Stage two of the research focussed on the benefits experienced by the students given that most of the logistical issues had been addressed following stage one of the action research project. The research interviews also sought to find out more about the characteristics of the students enrolled on this courses which attended the residential.

According to Higher Education Student statistics there is an increase year on year of students from low participation areas, including first generation of family to attend University and state school educated (HESS, 2019). In the UK, the universities with the most success at widening participation also have the highest drop-out rates (Higher Education Funding Council for England [HEFCE], 2006).

Many Universities claim success in widening participation, despite this there is a big difference between those attracting working-class students and those attracting traditional university white middle class students (Sutton Trust, 2000). Post 92' Universities are much more likely to attract local working class students. Even where young people from disadvantaged groups have obtained the appropriate qualifications they are less likely to attend Russell group Universities, 300,000 university applicants from less affluent translates to just 1% who get into the top 13 universities (Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2010).

These students face additional barriers which can make the transition to University more difficult. Working class students are more likely to attend a local post 92' University, commute and have a part time or full time job. These students are less likely to integrate fully into University life. This is because of a number of reasons such as; keeping close family and friendship groups outside of University, just attending University for the qualification not the experience, not involving in University sports and societies and it is more difficult to make and develop friendships when not around peers except in classes and commuting time.

The residential experience gave students (especially the commuting ones) an opportunity to meet course mates in a social setting, meet other students in an overnight situation, meet other students that they may not have interacted with through pre assigned groups and roommates and combine already defined social groups. It did this in a setting which promoted challenge and collaboration including trust and physical contact, it also took place in a setting that was not alcohol dependant.

This provided a platform for students to make friendships with other students on their course. This is important to provide emotional, social and academic support. It also makes students feel like they belong. The process therefore aids transition to University. This is especially important for the type

of students who attend this University who may experience additional barriers in this already challenging period in their life.

Given the above potential financial

### 8.5 Strengths and Limitations

The current study has a number of strengths and limitations. Firstly, I am a relatively novice researcher which could be highlighted as a weakness. This may be counterbalanced by my active role within the area of study. This experience offered me the type of insight rarely afforded in research of this type. The extensive and wide reading within the subject area and hands on experience of service delivery place me in a position of strength from which to investigate the experiences of the participants of the study.

The findings were very positive about the OOP social experience for 1<sup>st</sup> year university students, despite this the findings were based on one relatively small cohort at a small university. The direct application to other larger institutions with different student demographics could present different results. Although despite possible differences the common feelings of being nervous and requiring a strong social support network are generally found throughout most incoming new students (Rubin & Wright, 2015).

The research also had a focus on explaining how OOP influences social interactions through rich experiential data therefore the data set size was fit for purpose. The cohort under investigation was PE based, as part of their course programme there was an outdoor adventurous activities module in the syllabus. This allowed the OOP to be integrated into their studies seamlessly.

Phenomenology is a philosophy not a methodology (Langdrige, 1997) so using Van Manen's (1990) six research activities helped make the transition of philosophical theory to a methodology. The experience of applying this style of analysis in a Masters degree helped implementing the methodological process and the application to the phenomena under investigation. This experience helped me challenge my interpretations to achieve a level of credibility in my findings.

From the perspective of the students the study captured the experience from the positions of residential attending and non-attending. This offered a more rounded assessment of the residential programme. Student participants, one potential limitation that may be pointed out is that a voluntary participation in the research project may only attract people with a positive attitude towards the residential and therefore their views may be biased towards the positives of this type of experience (Stubbe et al. 2007). The counter to this limitation would be the premise that some may have volunteered in order to voice disapproval of the programme.

One of the main strengths of the investigation was discovering profound benefits to the social networking platform created for 1<sup>st</sup> year students transitioning to University. The effect it had on individual surpassed the expectations of the researcher.

One potential limitation is the small sample size of the interviews, yet small homogeneous participant samples allow an in depth investigation of similar and differing experiences between participants (Smith, Larkin & Flowers, 2009). The study also used a questionnaire to gather statistical information about adaptation to University of the participants and a similar control group.

One potential limitation is the application of the research findings explored in the thematic areas. The participant sample was from a small university in the north of England. This limitation could be countered by research evidence from universities across the world which evidences similar stress and challenges facing students (Conley, Travers & Bryant, 2013; Thomas, 2012). Therefore the themes such as 'Building self-confidence and self-efficacy through shared experience' and 'Challenge building resilience' may resonate with many 1<sup>st</sup> year students.

Another perceived strength of the research is the participant sample group. The selected participant sample were the right people to be selected for the study. The research methods chosen were also the best to discover and unpick a complicated and challenging time for the participant group. Following the interviews many of the respondents discussed how they enjoyed being part of the research process. This enjoyment and engagement with the process can only have helped their openness in sharing their lived experiences.

#### 8.6 Data collection limitations and thoughts on alternative strategies

The research strategy for this project used a number of research methods and data sources. One key omission which may have enhanced the thesis and provided additional evidence on impact of the OOP was University retention statistics.

The length of the research project meant that tracking students to completion was not possible. Students who were in stage one of the action research would be due to graduate one years after the research data collection ceased. This data could have been used to compare the percentage of students who achieved a degree award compared to a similar sports based cohort.

Given the opportunity, resources and time another additional data source would have been collected. This would have been post -University looking at employment outcomes and further education. This tracking and monitoring of students had the potential to demonstrate the effect completing University can have on a person's future career and life.

The research project could also have used continuation data i.e. students who progress from year one to year two of their degree programme. In this case the data was not used due to questions over the robustness of the data. The figures collected by the University would show how many students started their respective courses and how many progress to year two, what the data would not be able to take into account is whether these students attended the OOP. This could result in a situation where students who did not take part in the OOP who subsequently did not progress skewing the results.

Another issue with this data is that the limited student cohort numbers when broken down into individual courses would reduce the power of any inferential statistical tests conducted. This level of granularity would have been very interesting to the research if drop out of students who did not attend the residential could have been accounted for.

An additional data source which could have been used was academic achievement of students year by year. This 'GPA' style data collection would have enhanced any continuation or completion data by allowing a control for academic ability. This regression style analysis would have ensured that the students were similar in terms of academic ability which is an important factor in continuation and completion of University.

### 8.6.1 Cost of the OOP and value to the University

The focus for universities is to retain as many of their students due to the large financial implications of attrition. For example, if a non-residential student studying at a university that charges tuition fees of £7500 per year, left in the first term, the university would suffer £23400 in lost income over the duration of the 3 year course. This figure is increased for the loss of a residential student, which based on £3000 accommodation fees, would result in a loss of income in excess of £33000 per student (The Reddin Survey of University Tuition Fees, 2013–14).

The cost to the University for the OOP was around £150 per student including travel. Over the 3 years the average number of students taken on the OOP was 135 students plus 10 members of staff. The overall cost to the university was just over £21k. Using the above estimates of potential loss of income from a student leaving university and the cost of taking a cohort on the OOP, it could be said that; if one student stays at university because of the early experiences provided by the OOP and completes their degree who would have otherwise left then that would pay for the OOP for the entire cohort. If two stayed on who would have otherwise left university there is a significant financial benefit to the OOP.

This data could have been used in conjunction with the completion of degree data to attribute a net saving to the University based on the number of fee paying students who finished all three years and achieved a degree.

The qualitative evidence presented however does indicate the extent of the positive early experiences of the OOP attending students. This evidence would logically point to more students continuing at University especially through the early difficult transitional period based on improved resilience and larger support networks at University.

### 8.7 Unique contribution

Few studies have approached this research area using mixed methods design. Studies which merge the perspectives attending and a control group of non-attending students are rare in this topic area. The in depth exploration of perceptions, convergences and divergences of these two groups makes the nature of the sample unique.

The research project has shed light on the complex issues involved the transition to University process using a novel intervention. Given the relatively low cost of the intervention per student in comparison to the benefits for this 'at risk' student group the programme should be deemed a success.

#### 8.7.1 Unique contribution - OOP blueprint

The action research project has discovered a number of key elements required for a successful OOP. These elements have been altered over the course of the research to create the best OOP experience for 1<sup>st</sup> year students transitioning to University.

The OOP should be a residential experience with a minimum of two nights and three days. The element of rooming with peers overnight is essential to the OOP, it gives chance for all students but

especially non-traditional students such as commuting and mature students to spend intimate time with fellow students. This environment is particularly conducive to accelerating friendships.

The location should be one which is close to an area where outdoor experiential activities can take place i.e. UK national parks, with a body of water and areas of outstanding natural beauty.

The accommodation was deemed to be important for students. They expected a certain standard of rooms, social areas and location. In addition the food offering should be of a good standard and delivered in a timely fashion.

Using an experienced company to manage the OOP process and deliver the activities is essential to the programme. Designing activities and timetables in collaboration can deliver the optimum experience while meeting budgetary commitments. Their experienced team leaders can deliver great activities and educational opportunities for students. They also manage the timings of activities and transport to activity locations. They also provided all the equipment like wetsuits, kayaks and materials for raft building.

### Groups

Preparation is key for the smooth running of any trip with a large number of participants. Accommodation groups and activity groups should be pre-defined prior to setting off. This will significantly reduce waiting time on arrival to allow activities to go ahead promptly.

Team leaders should be assigned to groups to help manage head counts and more importantly encourage everyone in the group to be an active member.

Groups should be between 7-15 as the optimum number to allow all group members to actively engage in activities and form friendships

Groups should have an academic member of staff or University representative in each group. This allows students to get to know staff in an informal setting and break down perceived barriers. This is also thought to enhance belonging to the University.

### Activities

In each of the days on the OOP there should be at least one 'memorable/ wow factor' activity. This activity should be challenging, something rarely experienced and involve the natural environment. This type of activity can help build resilience and bring people together through shared experience.

One of the activities should take in the local environment/village/town to allow students to explore the area.

Having an academic session with relevance to the OOP was also deemed to be valuable, it reinforces the idea that it is a University trip and encourages the students to reflect on their experiences.

Free time activities were also an essential element of the OOP. This informal timetable of things to do during the evening helped further develop friendships in an inclusive environment. In the research OOP the most successful were a pub quiz and sports tournaments. These naturally place

people in groups, they also help people who may be more reserved join in when they otherwise may be reluctant to approach others.

### 8.8 Implications

The study has demonstrated the benefits this programme can have on student transition. Therefore it is recommended that the residential programme is not only kept running annually but also rolled out to students undertaking a sports based undergraduate degree at this University.

Clear social benefits for students transitioning and adapting to university were demonstrated. Universities may be prepared to adopt such a programme for their future incoming 1<sup>st</sup> year students based on the positive results. The idea of placing a focus on student's social transition and adaptation may be a more effective strategy than their academic transition. The use of mixed methods to explore this subject area is novel, much of the research is quantitative in nature based solely on questionnaire findings. The approach in this research project has allowed explanation of the questionnaire data through rich explanation provided by students facing this potentially difficult period

The research findings could have potential implications for incoming 1<sup>st</sup> year students. Intervention activities that enhance student resilience can provide students with the personal 'tools' to succeed in this difficult transitional period. The OOP experience has provided this enhancement in the participants interviewed for this study.

### 8.9 Recommendations for further research

There are many effects of outdoor orientation programmes that we do not fully understand. Research which can help with understanding these effects can be beneficial to many first year University students. Such research calls for longitudinal, mixed method, pragmatic designs (Morgan & Goldston, 2013). Using a similar model there is potential future application or different student disciplines. For example media students visiting a film festival, psychology students conducting field experiments or English literature students visiting a theatre.

The following topics build on some of the findings of the current study:

The effects outdoor orientation programmes can have with non-sports based students

The effects outdoor orientation programmes can have with red brick University students

Residential subject specific alternatives for transitioning students e.g. film festival for media students

### 8.10 Reflection on the research process

The research process was a steep learning curve for the researcher. There were a number of issues that presented throughout the study. Firstly not having ethical approval in time for the first residential that took place one week after the researcher began the study. This meant the pilot stage was retrospective interviews and an untested questionnaire for feedback. This data was not robust but included some key information about some of the issues affecting students during the residential experience.



Stage one of the research also presented a number of issues, firstly the participant observation in general did not add additional value to what was discovered in the interviews and focus groups. Engaging in participant observation was a great learning opportunity for the researcher but not fruitful in terms of research output.

Secondly the choice of interpretive phenomenology to analyse the research data on the surface seemed the correct choice given that the study was reliant upon the experiences of the interviewees. Many of the interviews despite the prompts and probes of the researcher were very direct and to the point which was excellent for making logistical changes to the residential, this was also good for the study as participants were very frank about their fears coming into University. The depth of some of the interviews did not in all cases lend itself to the existential phenomenological approach championed by Heidegger (1980), and Van Manen (1990). The philosophical ideas discussed around van Manen's (1990) approach to phenomenology around the lifeworld existentials (lifeworld themes) rationality, embodiment (sometimes labelled corporeality), spatiality and temporality require a rich data source. In some instances the interviews did not produce especially rich data.

The researcher was reflexive in approach and therefore decided to use thematic analysis for stage two of the analysis which worked much better with the data set. This seemed to provide a much more natural fit which created thematic areas that were powerful in content and expressed the thoughts and feelings of students in a clear manner.

Stage 2 was also going to include written accounts from students and presentations given by student groups on the residential experience. These were asked of students as part of their course (the work was compulsory while inclusion of the work in the research was not compulsory). What was delivered in the group presentations again added nothing in addition to the interviews while the personal written accounts were only completed by a small number of students, the ones that were completed lacked any real introspection and depth that would have been useful for the study.

### 8.11 Conclusion

In conclusion the OOP has had a positive effect on first year student's social adaptation to university. This was achieved through providing a platform which encourages social support network formation. The SACQ provided statistical evidence of the adaptation. The processes of which have been illustrated through illuminative quotes and researcher analysis and explained through attachment theory and social penetration theory.

The OOP has seemingly provided a platform for accelerated friendship making while enhancing self-efficacy and self-worth for this group of 1<sup>st</sup> year students. This was achieved through providing a platform which encourages personal growth through overcoming challenges such as the physical and social challenges of OOP. Improving self-worth and self-efficacy through a retention intervention such as OOP can potentially build resilience. This resilience could be useful for 1<sup>st</sup> year students in this potentially difficult transitional period. This personal resilience paired with strong social networks with course mates developed through the residential serve to aid the transition to University.

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## Appendix 1 - Focus Group Protocol

### Prior to the start of the Group

Offering thanks, welcome and introduction

Signing of consent form

Explanation of what will be done with the data

Reiterating issues of anonymity and confidentiality

Reiterating that participants have the right to leave the focus group, but any contribution up until that point remains as part of the data set.

Completing name badges

Recap purpose of study

Set the ground rules of the group

Give opportunity to ask questions

### Focus Group Schedule

The focus groups will use a method to generate topics of conversation as proposed by Peterson and Barron (2007). Each participant will be asked to write down on post-it notes, three things that students felt helped them to adapt to university and three things they thought could be improved or done differently. This will enable an intervention and comparison group to be included via both quantitative and qualitative methods. The post-it notes would be collected in and placed on a white board to act as facilitators to the discussion. This method also gives an instant starting point and voice to quiet or unconfident participants. This also ensures all participants contribute information to the focus group. These points can then be referred to by the researcher/moderator to keep the discussion around the subject area and therefore answer the research aims.

## Appendix 2 - Student semi structured Interview Protocol

### Prior to the start of the interview

Offering thanks, welcome and introduction

Signing of consent form

Explanation of what will be done with the data

Reiterating issues of anonymity and confidentiality

Recap purpose of study

Give opportunity to ask questions

The interview schedule will be used as a loose guide; particular areas of interest will be investigated in more detail sometimes moving away from the proposed questions. A combination of prompts and probes will be utilised by the research such as; Why? For example? Can you expand on that?

### Interview Schedule

What were the main things you were looking forward to being a student? (ice breaker/background info)

What were your main concerns? (ice breaker/background info)

What were your hopes of the outdoor residential programme?

What part were you most looking forward to?

What are the main things you got out of the residential programme?

Have you had any past experiences of these types of outdoor activities?

Are there any activities not scheduled which you would have liked to have done?

Did the residential live up to your expectations?

How do you feel about being put in a group with people you don't know?

How did you feel about the programme being residential?

What did you think about the activities on offer in the residential?

How did you feel about the academic part of the trip?

I hope to use these questions as starting points from which further more explorative questions could evolve. Where possible participants will be asked to explore their experiences.

### Appendix 3 - Participant Observation Protocol

#### What will occur prior to observation?

Firstly I will present myself as an observer–researcher to all participants in the research setting.

#### Things that will be observed

Verbal behaviour, physical behaviour and gestures, personal space, human traffic, people who stand out

#### Data collection techniques that will be used

Observation notes, informal interviews, counts of specific observations, lists and categories, process flows and video recording.

#### Things that will be considered during data collection

- What happened at the activity. Including sights, sounds and tactile memories.
- What understanding was gained from participation compared to just observing?
- What was learned from participant observation at this event that a questionnaire or interview about it might miss?

#### General list of topics to be observed

Who instigates conversations and interactions?

How groups develop.

What happens at each activity?

How interaction contrasts between activities and free time.

Topics of conversations.

Development of group leaders.

Any negative interactions.

People being 'left out'.

As the residential progresses so will the range of topics that will organically develop providing shifts in focus and importance based on the interactions of the students involved.

Appendix 4 – Service provider’s semi structured interview schedule.

Prior to the start of the interview

Offering thanks, welcome and introduction

Signing of consent form

Explanation of what will be done with the data

Reiterating issues of anonymity and confidentiality

Recap purpose of study

Give opportunity to ask questions

The interview schedule will be used as a loose guide; particular areas of interest will be investigated in more detail sometimes moving away from the proposed questions. A combination of prompts and probes will be utilised by the research such as; Why? For example? Can you expand on that?

Interview schedule

What is your outdoor activity background? (ice breaker/background)

What experience do you have of providing such activities? (ice breaker/background)

Have you got any qualifications in providing such activities? (ice breaker/background)

What in your opinion are the most successful activities?

Why do you think the programme helps transition students to university?

What do you think are the most important factors in the transition process?

Are there any things the programme doesn’t include that you think would be a good addition?

What do you think is most important, the location, the staff or the activities?

What is the most effective activity for students?

What feedback have you received from students?

What feedback have you received from the universities?

Is there any difference between student groups and other groups you may deal with?

Appendix 5 – Academic staff semi structured interview schedule.

Prior to the start of the interview

Offering thanks, welcome and introduction

Signing of consent form

Explanation of what will be done with the data

Reiterating issues of anonymity and confidentiality

Recap purpose of study

Give opportunity to ask questions

The interview schedule will be used as a loose guide; particular areas of interest will be investigated in more detail sometimes moving away from the proposed questions. A combination of prompts and probes will be utilised by the research such as; Why? For example? Can you expand on that?

Interview schedule

What is your role at Leeds Trinity University? (ice breaker/background)

Have you any previous experience of outdoor orientation programmes or adventure activities personally or professionally? (ice breaker/background)

What in your opinion are the most successful activities?

Why do you think the programme helps transition students to university?

What do you think are the most important factors in the transition process?

Are there any things the programme doesn't include that you think would be a good addition?

What do you think is most important, the location, the staff or the activities?

What is the most effective activity for students?

What feedback have you received from students?

What feedback have you received from the university?

Appendix 6 – Student Interview Participants Consent Form

Title of Project: How does an outdoor residential influence adherence for first year university students?

Name of Researcher: Luke Pickard

**Please initial  
to confirm**

- I have had a chance to ask any questions about the research and information I provide
- I understand that I can withdraw myself from the interview at any point and do not need to provide a reason
- I understand I can refuse to answer any question during the interview
- I understand I can withdraw my information at any time before analysis and know how to do this
- I agree to the interview being digitally audio recorded
- I understand my information will be kept anonymous and confidential
- I agree to the data being transcribed verbatim and the use of some quotes in the final write-up process.
- I give permission for direct quotes to be used in Luke’s project
- I give permission for my interview to be used in Luke’s project report and subsequent dissemination, on the basis that it will be kept completely anonymous.
- I agree to take part in this study

Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Participant

Date

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Name of Researcher

Luke Pickard

Date

Signed

\_\_\_\_\_



Appendix 7 – Student Focus Group Participants Consent Form

Title of Project: How does an outdoor residential influence adherence for first year university students?

Name of Researcher: Luke Pickard

**Please initial  
to confirm**

- I have had a chance to ask any questions about the research and information I provide
- I understand that I can withdraw myself from the focus group at any point and do not need to provide a reason but any contribution up until that point remains as part of the data set
- I understand I can refuse to answer any question during the focus group
- I agree to the interview being digitally audio recorded
- I understand my information will be kept anonymous and confidential
- I agree to the data being transcribed verbatim and the use of some quotes in the final write-up process.
- I give permission for direct quotes to be used in Luke’s project
- I give permission for my interactions and comments to be used in Luke’s project report and subsequent dissemination, on the basis that it will be kept completely anonymous.
- I agree to take part in this study

Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Participant

Date

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Name of Researcher

Luke Pickard

Date

Signed

\_\_\_\_\_

Appendix 8– Service Provider Interview Participants Consent Form

Title of Project: How does an outdoor residential influence adherence for first year university students?

Name of Researcher: Luke Pickard

<p><b>Please initial to confirm</b></p>
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- I have had a chance to ask any questions about the research and information I provide
- I understand that I can withdraw myself from the interview at any point and do not need to provide a reason
- I understand I can refuse to answer any question during the interview
- I understand I can withdraw my information at any time before analysis and know how to do this
- I agree to the interview being digitally audio recorded
- I understand my information will be kept anonymous and confidential
- I agree to the data being transcribed verbatim and the use of some quotes in the final write-up process.
- I give permission for direct quotes to be used in Luke's project
- I give permission for my interactions and comments to be used in Luke's project report and subsequent dissemination, on the basis that it will be kept completely anonymous.
- I agree to take part in this study

Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Participant

Date

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Name of Researcher

Luke Pickard

Date

Signed

\_\_\_\_\_

Appendix 9 – Student Questionnaire Participants Consent Form

Title of Project: How does an outdoor residential influence adherence for first year university students?

Name of Researcher: Luke Pickard

**Please initial  
to confirm**

- I have had a chance to ask any questions about the research and information I provide
- I understand that I can withdraw myself from the study at any point up until the analysis has been completed and do not need to provide a reason
- I understand I can refuse to answer a question in the questionnaire
- I understand I can withdraw my information at any time before analysis and know how to do this
- I understand my information will be kept anonymous and confidential
- I agree to take part in this study

Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Participant

Date

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Name of Researcher

Luke Pickard

Date

Signed

\_\_\_\_\_

Appendix 10– Participant Observation Student and Staff Consent Form

Title of Project: How does an outdoor residential influence adherence for first year university students?

Name of Researcher: Luke Pickard

**Please initial  
to confirm**

- I have had a chance to ask any questions about the research and information I provide
- I understand I can refuse to be part of the participant observation
- I agree to field notes of my interactions and behaviour being recorded
- I agree to video recording of the activities during the outdoor programme
- I agree to potentially take part in informal interviews with the researcher
- I understand my information will be kept anonymous and confidential
- I agree to the data being used in the final write-up of the research project
- I give permission for my interactions and comments to be used in Luke's project report and subsequent dissemination, on the basis that it will be kept completely anonymous.
- I agree to take part in this study

Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Participant

Date

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Name of Researcher

Luke Pickard

Date

Signed

\_\_\_\_\_

Appendix 11– Academic Staff Interview Participants Consent Form

Title of Project: How does an outdoor residential influence adherence for first year university students?

Name of Researcher: Luke Pickard

**Please initial  
to confirm**

- I have had a chance to ask any questions about the research and information I provide
- I understand that I can withdraw myself from the interview at any point and do not need to provide a reason
- I understand I can refuse to answer any question during the interview
- I understand I can withdraw my information at any time before analysis and know how to do this
- I agree to the interview being digitally audio recorded
- I understand my information will be kept anonymous and confidential
- I agree to the data being transcribed verbatim and the use of some quotes in the final write-up process.
- I give permission for direct quotes to be used in Luke’s project
- I give permission for my interactions and comments to be used in Luke’s project report and subsequent dissemination, on the basis that it will be kept completely anonymous.
- I agree to take part in this study

Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Participant

Date

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Name of Researcher

Luke Pickard

Date

Signed

\_\_\_\_\_

Appendix 12 - Participants Information Sheet – Focus Groups

On university headed paper

Title of research:

How does an outdoor residential influence adherence for first year university students?

Researcher Name: Luke Pickard

Researcher contact details: 1408012@leedstrinity.ac.uk

Supervisor's name at Leeds Trinity University: Dr Julie Brunton

Supervisor's contact details:

J.Brunton@leedstrinity.ac.uk

0113 283 7364

My name is Luke Pickard and I am a PhD student at Leeds Trinity University. I am conducting a study looking at student's experience of outdoor orientation programmes and its effects on adherence to university. As part of this research, I am planning to use questionnaires, interview students and service providers, conduct focus groups, conduct participant observation during and after the outdoor orientation programme. I would like to invite participants to discuss their personal experiences and opinions around this topic. Before you decide to take part you need to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please read the following information carefully.

If any aspect is unclear, do not hesitate to ask questions or request further information. Take time to decide if you would like to take part.

You have been invited to take part in this research investigating outdoor orientation programmes and its effects on adherence to university. During the focus group you may be asked to discuss:

- a) How you feel you have adapted to university life.
- b) Opinions of how the outdoor orientation programme has affected the start to university life.
- c) Experiences and thoughts regarding the wider issues involved in participation of such a programme

This will help us understand how such programmes can affect people's lives and experiences. This could help with the development of programmes and guidelines on what type of activities and structure provide the best experience for students. When I meet you for the focus group I will check that you understand the aims of the study and if you have further questions. I will ask you to confirm that you have had enough time to consider taking part and then I will ask you to sign a consent form to show you have agreed to take part. Participation in this research is completely voluntary and you can withdraw yourself from the focus group at any point, although any contribution made within the focus group up to the point of withdrawal will remain part of the data set.

**What will happen to me if I take part?**

You will be involved in a focus group with me and some of your fellow students in a private room in Leeds Trinity University. Prior to the start of the group a theme generating activity will take place to raise potential topics for discussion about how you have adapted to university. You will have an opportunity to discuss matters in and around this topic area. The focus group will be digitally audio recorded with your permission and should take no longer than one hour.

**What are the disadvantages of taking part?**

The time it would take to participate in the focus group. Depending on the nature of your responses, the focus group will last no longer than one hour.

**What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

You may enjoy talking about your experiences of the outdoor orientation programme/university. The findings of all the focus groups I conduct will enable me to consider the impact such programmes have on the individual lives of others. In addition, the research hopes to make a contribution of our understanding of what influences retention in students.

**Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?**

Any information you give during the focus group will be kept completely anonymous. This means that only I will know your name or that you have taken part. To keep the research anonymous you will be given a false name (pseudonym) this will be used to protect your identity. The words from your focus group may be used in the study report or for presentation purposes but no one will know these are your words, again because all focus group will be anonymised so no name will be attached to any words.

Any information disclosed which indicates a law has been broken may result in the information being passed to the relevant authorities therefore breaking confidentiality.

Any information you give will be kept as confidential as possible. Only I will listen to the recording of the focus group and whilst people at the university will read my project report, they will not know any names or other personally identifying information of people who participated.

Following the focus group the information received will be transcribed word-for-word in preparation for analysis.

All data will be published as group data apart from non-identifiable quotes. Some direct quotes that you have said may be used in the write-up of the study, although as previously stated your name will not be used alongside the quote and instead the pseudonym will be used.

If you have any further questions please ask me before the start of the focus group.

**What will happen if I don't want to carry on with the study?**

You may refuse to answer any questions during the focus group or withdraw from the focus group at any point. Although any contribution made within the focus group up to the point of withdrawal will remain part of the data set.

**What will happen to the results of the study?**

The focus group will be recorded and transcribed word-for-word as I will need to analyse all our talk. The analysed findings will be reported in my project. The researcher will follow the Data Protection Act and adhere to the university and trust policies/procedures on ensuring confidentiality of personal data is maintained at all times. Paper copies with identifiable information on participants such as contact details forms, interview transcripts and consent forms will be locked securely in the researcher's university office desk drawer which is located in a locked PhD student office. The university regulations state that research data has to be kept for a period of 10 years. They will then be destroyed by the researcher. Audio/video recordings will be destroyed following submission and marking of the research project.

The research data will be kept on the Leeds Trinity University server which is password protected. The entire process of data collection and analysis will only be completed by the researcher. Anonymised transcripts may be kept for further publication purposes and stored in line with the Data Protection Act (1998).

The study will be published in relevant academic journals. The study may also be presented at academic conferences.

If you would like a copy of the final report please inform me after the interview/focus group/questionnaire and I will take your full contact details to later forward you the report.

**Further information**

E-mail- Luke Pickard - 1408012@leedtrinity.ac.uk

Supervisor- Dr Julie Brunton – [J.Brunton@leedstrinity.ac.uk](mailto:J.Brunton@leedstrinity.ac.uk)



Appendix 13 - Participants Information Sheet - Student Interview & Staff Interview

On university headed paper

Title of research:

How does an outdoor residential influence adherence for first year university students?

Researcher Name: Luke Pickard

Researcher contact details: 1408012@leedstrinity.ac.uk

Supervisor's name at Leeds Trinity University: Dr Julie Brunton

Supervisor's contact details:

J.Brunton@leedstrinity.ac.uk

0113 283 7364

My name is Luke Pickard and I am a PhD student at Leeds Trinity University. I am conducting a study looking at student's experience of outdoor orientation programmes and its effects on adherence to university. As part of this research, I am planning to use questionnaires, interview students and service providers, conduct focus groups and conduct participant observation during and after the outdoor orientation programme. I would like to invite participants to discuss their personal experiences and opinions around this topic in a semi structured interview. Before you decide to take part you need to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please read the following information carefully.

If any aspect is unclear, do not hesitate to ask questions or request further information. Take time to decide if you would like to take part.

You have been invited to take part in this research investigating outdoor orientation programmes and its effects on adherence to university. During the interview you may be asked about:

- a) How you feel you have adapted to university life.
- b) Opinions of how the outdoor orientation programme has affected the start to university life.
- c) Experiences and thoughts regarding the wider issues involved in participation of such a programme

This will help us understand how such programmes can affect people's lives and experiences. This could help with the development of programmes and guidelines on what type of activities and structure provide the best experience for students. When I meet you for the interview I will check that you understand the aims of the study and if you have further questions. I will ask you to confirm that you have had enough time to consider taking part and then I will ask you to sign a consent form to show you have agreed to take part. Participation in this research is completely voluntary and you can withdraw at any time up until the interviews are analysed, without giving any reason.

**What will happen to me if I take part?**

You will be involved in a one-to-one interview with me in a private room at Leeds Trinity University. The interview will be in a semi structured style. This means that although I will have prepared a set of questions which every participant will be asked, I may ask you to go further into detail or ask you certain different questions depending on your previous answer and what you may want to add. For example, I may ask 'Are you thinking of joining any Sports clubs or Societies?' followed by follow up questions such as Which? Why? Why not? You will have the opportunity to contribute to the interview and discuss issues I may not have considered that are relevant to the programme in your own life. The interview will be digitally audio recorded with your permission and should take no longer than one hour.

**What are the disadvantages of taking part?**

The time it would take to participate in the interview. Depending on the nature of your responses, the interview will last no longer than one hour.

**What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

You may enjoy answering questions about your experiences of the outdoor orientation programme/university. The findings of all the interviews I conduct will enable me to consider the impact such programmes have on the individual lives of others. In addition, the research hopes to make a contribution of our understanding of what influences retention in students.

**Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?**

Any information you give during the interview will be kept completely anonymous. This means that only I will know your name or that you have taken part. To keep the research anonymous you will be given a false name (pseudonym), this will be used to protect your identity. The words from your interview may be used in the study report or for presentation purposes but no one will know these are your words, again because all interviews will be anonymised so no name will be attached to any words.

Any information disclosed which indicates a law has been broken may result in the information being passed to the relevant authorities therefore breaking confidentiality.

Any information you give will be kept as confidential as possible. Only I will listen to the recording of the interview and whilst people at the University will read my project report, they will not know any names or other personally identifying information of people who participated.

Following the interview the information received will be transcribed word-for-word in preparation for analysis. Some direct quotes that you have said may be used in the write-up of the study, although as previously stated your name will not be used alongside the quote and instead the pseudonym will be used.

If you have any further questions please ask me before the start of the interview.

**What will happen if I don't want to carry on with the study?**

You may refuse to answer any questions during the interview or stop the interview at any point. You have the right to withdraw yourself from the interview and you can ask for your interview not to be used in the study.

In order to withdraw your information you should contact me and your data will then be destroyed. Please note withdrawal of data will not be possible after the analysis process has begun.

**What will happen to the results of the study?**

The interview will be recorded and transcribed word-for-word as I will need to analyse all our talk. The analysed findings will be reported in my project. The researcher will follow the Data Protection Act and adhere to the university and trust policies/procedures on ensuring confidentiality of personal data is maintained at all times. Paper copies with identifiable information on participants such as contact details forms, interview transcripts and consent forms will be locked securely in the researcher's University office desk drawer which is located in a locked PhD student office. The University regulations state that research data has to be kept for a period of 10 years. They will then be destroyed by the researcher. Audio/video recordings will be destroyed following submission and marking of the research project. Anonymised transcripts may be kept for further publication purposes and stored in line with the Data Protection Act (1998).

The study will be published in relevant academic journals. The study may also be presented at academic conferences.

If you would like a copy of the final report please inform me after the interview and I will take your full contact details to later forward you the report.

**Further information**

E-mail- Luke Pickard - 1408012@leedtrinity.ac.uk

Supervisor- Dr Julie Brunton – [J.Brunton@leedstrinity.ac.uk](mailto:J.Brunton@leedstrinity.ac.uk)

Appendix 14 - Participants Information Sheet – Participant Observation

On university headed paper

Title of research:

How does an outdoor residential influence adherence for first year university students?

Researcher Name: Luke Pickard

Researcher contact details: 1408012@leedstrinity.ac.uk

Supervisor's name at Leeds Trinity University: Dr Julie Brunton

Supervisor's contact details:

J.Brunton@leedstrinity.ac.uk

0113 283 7364

My name is Luke Pickard and I am a PhD student at Leeds Trinity University. I am conducting a study looking at student's experience of outdoor orientation programmes and its effects on adherence to university. As part of this research, I am planning to use questionnaires, interview students and service providers, conduct focus groups and conduct participant observation during and after the outdoor orientation programme. I would like to invite participants to agree to be part of the participant observation. Before you decide to take part you need to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please read the following information carefully.

If any aspect is unclear, do not hesitate to ask questions or request further information. Take time to decide if you would like to take part.

You have been invited to take part in this research investigating outdoor orientation programmes and its effects on adherence to university. During the participant observation you may be informally interviewed on subject such as:

- a) How you feel you have adapted to university life.
- b) Opinions of how the outdoor orientation programme has affected the start to university life.
- c) Experiences and thoughts regarding the wider issues involved in participation of such a programme

Further to this your interactions with students, staff and the activities will be observed, the researcher will be taking notes and counts of behaviour of interest. The researcher will also be video recording during the activities. This will enable a more thorough analysis of the data. This will help us understand how such programmes can affect people's lives and experiences. This could help with the development of programmes and guidelines on what type of activities and structure provide the best experience for students. You will be observed throughout the day. You will not be observed after the evening meal time until the following day. When I meet you for the activity programme I will check that you understand the aims of the study and if you have further questions. I will confirm that you have had enough time to consider taking part and then I will ask you to sign a consent form to show you have agreed to take part. Participation in this research is completely voluntary and you can withdraw at any time up until the data is analysed, without giving any reason.

**What will happen to me if I take part?**

The researcher will be taking observation notes asking you questions in an informal interview style, making counts of specific observations. The researcher will also be video recording during certain activities. The researcher will be observing interaction between students and staff, these observations may include sights, sounds, verbal or physical behaviour.

**What are the disadvantages of taking part?**

The time it would take to participate in the informal interviews Depending on the nature of your responses, will last no longer than a few minutes at any one point. You may not feel comfortable being observed.

**What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

You may enjoy answering questions about your experiences of the outdoor orientation programme/university. The findings of all the participant observation I conduct will enable me to consider the impact such programmes have on the individual lives of others. In addition, the research hopes to make a contribution of our understanding of what influences retention in students.

**Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?**

Any information you give during the informal interviews and notes of interactions and behaviour will be kept completely anonymous. This means that only I will know your name or that you have taken part. To keep the research anonymous you will be given a false name (pseudonym), this will be used to protect your identity. The words from your informal interview may be used in the study report or for presentation purposes but no one will know these are your words, again because all interviews will be anonymised so no name will be attached to any words. Any notes on behaviour will also be anonymised.

Any information disclosed which indicates a law has been broken may result in the information being passed to the relevant authorities therefore breaking confidentiality.

Any information you give will be kept as confidential as possible. Only I will watch the recording of the activities, whilst people at the University will read my project report, they will not know any names or other personally identifying information of people who participated.

All data will be published as group data apart from non-identifiable quotes. Some direct quotes that you have said may be used in the write-up of the study, although as previously stated your name will not be used alongside the quote and instead the pseudonym will be used.

If you have any further questions please ask me before the start of the participant observation.

**What will happen if I don't want to carry on with the study?**

You may refuse to answer any questions during the informal interview or stop the informal interview. You have the right to withdraw yourself from the participant observation and you can ask for any notes made about you not to be used in the study.

In order to withdraw your information you should contact me and your data will then be destroyed. Please note withdrawal of data will not be possible after the analysis process has begun.

**What will happen to the results of the study?**

The activities during the outdoor programme will be video recorded. The analysed findings will be reported in my project. The researcher will follow the Data Protection Act and adhere to the University and Trust policies/procedures on ensuring confidentiality of personal data is maintained at all times. Paper copies with identifiable information on participants such as contact details forms, interview transcripts and consent forms will be locked securely in the researcher's University office desk drawer which is located in a locked PhD student office. The University regulations state that research data has to be kept for a period of 10 years. They will then be destroyed by the researcher. Audio/video recordings will be destroyed following submission and marking of the research project. Anonymised transcripts may be kept for further publication purposes and stored in line with the Data Protection Act (1998).

The study will be published in relevant academic journals. The study may also be presented at academic conferences.

If you would like a copy of the final report please inform me after the interview/focus group/questionnaire and I will take your full contact details to later forward you the report.

**Further information**

E-mail- Luke Pickard - 1408012@leedtrinity.ac.uk

Supervisor- Dr Julie Brunton – [J.Brunton@leedstrinity.ac.uk](mailto:J.Brunton@leedstrinity.ac.uk)

Appendix 15 - Participant Information Sheet - OOP Participating Student QuestionnaireTitle of research:

How does an outdoor residential influence adherence for first year university students?

Researcher Name: Luke Pickard

Researcher contact details: 1408012@leedstrinity.ac.uk

Supervisor's name at Leeds Trinity University: Dr Julie Brunton

Supervisor's contact details:

J.Brunton@leedstrinity.ac.uk

0113 283 7364

My name is Luke Pickard and I am a PhD student at Leeds Trinity University. I am conducting a study looking at student's experience of outdoor orientation programmes and its effects on adherence to university. As part of this research, I am planning to use questionnaires, interview students and service providers, conduct focus groups and conduct participant observation during and after the outdoor orientation programme. I would like to invite participants complete the following questionnaire. Before you decide to take part you need to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please read the following information carefully.

If any aspect is unclear, do not hesitate to ask questions or request further information. Take time to decide if you would like to take part.

You have been invited to take part in this research investigating outdoor orientation programmes and its effects on adherence to university. During the questionnaire you may be asked about:

- a) How you feel you have adapted to university life.
- b) How you have coped with university life.
- c) Experiences and thoughts regarding the wider issues involved in being a student.

This will help us understand how such OOP programmes can affect people's lives and experiences. This could help with the development of programmes and guidelines on what type of activities and structure provide the best experience for students. When I distribute the questionnaire I will check that you understand the aims of the study and if you have further questions. I will ask you to confirm that you have had enough time to consider taking part and then I will ask you to sign a consent form to show you have agreed to take part. Participation in this research is completely voluntary and you can withdraw at any time up until the questionnaires are analysed, without giving any reason.

**What will happen to me if I take part?**

You will be asked to fill in a student adaptation to university questionnaire. The questionnaire will be distributed to students who participated in the outdoor orientation programme at the beginning of one of your core lectures. The questionnaire once returned will be anonymised and you will be given a number should you require to withdraw from the study. The questionnaire should take no longer than twenty five minutes.

**What are the disadvantages of taking part?**

The time it would take to participate in the questionnaire. Depending on the nature of your responses the questionnaire will last no longer than twenty five minutes.

**What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

You may enjoy answering questions about your experiences of university life. The findings of all the questionnaires I conduct will enable me to consider the impact such programmes have on the individual lives of others. In addition, the research hopes to make a contribution of our understanding of what influences retention in students.

**Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?**

Any information you give during questionnaire will be kept completely anonymous. This means that only I will know your name or that you have taken part. To keep the research anonymous you will be given questionnaire number, this will be used to protect your identity. Any information disclosed which indicates a law has been broken may result in the information being passed to the relevant authorities therefore breaking confidentiality.

All data will be published as group data. Any information you give will be kept as confidential as possible. Only I will know it is your questionnaire and whilst people at the University will read my project report, they will not know any names or other personally identifying information of people who participated.

The questionnaire data will then be subjected to statistical analysis.

If you have any further questions please ask me before the start of the interview/focus group/questionnaire.

**What will happen if I don't want to carry on with the study?**

You may refuse to answer any questions during questionnaire or withdraw from answering the questionnaire at any point. You can ask for your questionnaire not to be used in the study.

In order to withdraw your information you should contact me and your data will then be destroyed. Please note withdrawal of data will not be possible after the analysis process has begun.



**What will happen to the results of the study?**

The questionnaire data will be statistically analysed. The analysed findings will be reported in my project. The researcher will follow the Data Protection Act and adhere to the University and Trust policies/procedures on ensuring confidentiality of personal data is maintained at all times. Paper copies with identifiable information on participants such as contact details forms, interview transcripts and consent forms will be locked securely in the researcher's University office desk drawer which is located in a locked PhD student office. The University regulations state that research data has to be kept for a period of 10 years. They will then be destroyed by the researcher. Audio/video recordings will be destroyed following submission and marking of the research project. Anonymised transcripts may be kept for further publication purposes and stored in line with the Data Protection Act (1998).

The study will be published in relevant academic journals. The study may also be presented at academic conferences.

If you would like a copy of the final report please inform me after the interview/focus group/questionnaire and I will take your full contact details to later forward you the report.

**Further information**

E-mail- Luke Pickard - 1408012@leedtrinity.ac.uk

Supervisor- Dr Julie Brunton – [J.Brunton@leedstrinity.ac.uk](mailto:J.Brunton@leedstrinity.ac.uk)

Appendix 16 - Participants Information Sheet, Student Not Attending OOP

On university headed paper

Title of research:

How does an outdoor residential influence adherence for first year university students?

Researcher Name: Luke Pickard

Researcher contact details: 1408012@leedstrinity.ac.uk

Supervisor's name at Leeds Trinity University: Dr Julie Brunton

Supervisor's contact details:

J.Brunton@leedstrinity.ac.uk

0113 283 7364

My name is Luke Pickard and I am a PhD student at Leeds Trinity University. I am conducting a study looking at student's experience of outdoor orientation programmes and its effects on adherence to university. As part of this research, I am using questionnaires, planning to interview students and service providers, conduct focus groups and conduct participant observation during and after the outdoor orientation programme. I would like to invite participants to complete the following questionnaire and/or be involved in focus groups. Before you decide to take part you need to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please read the following information carefully.

If any aspect is unclear, do not hesitate to ask questions or request further information. Take time to decide if you would like to take part.

You have been invited to take part in this research investigating outdoor orientation programmes and its effects on adherence to university. During the questionnaire/focus group you may be asked about:

- A) Adaptation to university life
- B) Questions based around academic endeavour
- C) Questions based around your social life

This will help us understand adaptation to university can affect people's lives and experiences. This could help with the development of programmes and guidelines on what type of activities and structure provide the best experience for students. When I distribute the questionnaire or run the focus group, I will check that you understand the aims of the study and if you have further questions. I will ask you to confirm that you have had enough time to consider taking part and then I will ask you to sign a consent form to show you have agreed to take part. Participation in this research is completely voluntary and you can withdraw at any time up until the questionnaire or focus group is analysed, without giving any reason, although any contribution made within the focus group up to the point of withdrawal will remain part of the data set.

**What will happen to me if I take part?**

You will be asked to fill in a student adaptation to university questionnaire, and or take part in a focus group. The questionnaire will be distributed to students who participated in the outdoor orientation programme and a comparison group who were not involved in the outdoor orientation programme at the beginning of one of your core lectures. The questionnaire once returned will be anonymised and you will be given a number should you

require to withdraw from the study. The questionnaire should take no longer than twenty five minutes.

During the focus group you may be asked about:

- a) How you feel you have adapted to university life.
- b) Opinions of how the outdoor orientation programme has affected the start to university life.
- c) Experiences and thoughts regarding the wider issues involved in participation of such a programme

This will help us understand how such programmes can affect people's lives and experiences. This could help with the development of programmes and guidelines on what type of activities and structure provide the best experience for students. When I meet you for the focus group I will check that you understand the aims of the study and if you have further questions. I will ask you to confirm that you have had enough time to consider taking part and then I will ask you to sign a consent form to show you have agreed to take part. Participation in this research is completely voluntary and you can withdraw at any time up until the focus group is analysed, without giving any reason although any contribution made within the focus group up to the point of withdrawal will remain part of the data set.

You will be involved in a focus group with me and some of your fellow students in a private room in Leeds Trinity University. Prior to the start of the group a theme generating activity will take place to raise potential topics for discussion about how you have adapted to university. You will have an opportunity to discuss matters in and around this topic area. The focus group will be digitally audio recorded with your permission and should take no longer than one hour.

#### **What are the disadvantages of taking part?**

The time it would take to participate in the focus group/questionnaire. Depending on the nature of your responses, the focus group/questionnaire will last no longer than one hour/ twenty five minutes.

#### **What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

You may enjoy talking/answering questions about your experiences of university so far and how you are adapting to university life. The findings of all the focus groups/questionnaires I conduct will enable me to consider the impact such programmes have on the individual lives of others. In addition, the research hopes to make a contribution of our understanding of what influences retention in students.

#### **Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?**

Any information you give during the focus group/questionnaire will be kept completely anonymous. This means that only I will know your name or that you have taken part. To keep the research anonymous you will be given a false name (pseudonym)/questionnaire number, this will be used to protect your identity. The words from your focus group may be used in the study report or for presentation purposes but no one will know these are your words, again because all focus groups will be anonymised so no name will be attached to any words.

Any information disclosed which indicates a law has been broken may result in the information being passed to the relevant authorities therefore breaking confidentiality.

Any information you give will be kept as confidential as possible. Only I will listen to the recording of the focus group and whilst people at the University will read my project report, they will not know any names or other personally identifying information of people who participated.

Following the focus group the information received will be transcribed word-for-word in preparation for analysis. The questionnaire data will then be subjected to statistical analysis. Some direct quotes that you have said may be used in the write-up of the study, although as previously stated your name will not be used alongside the quote and instead the pseudonym/participant number will be used.

If you have any further questions please ask me before the start of the interview/focus group/questionnaire.

### **What will happen if I don't want to carry on with the study?**

You may refuse to answer any questions during the focus group/questionnaire. You may withdraw from the focus group at any point, although any contribution made within the focus group up to the point of withdrawal will remain part of the data set.

In order to withdraw your information you should contact me and your data will then be destroyed. Please note withdrawal of data will not be possible after the analysis process has begun.

### **What will happen to the results of the study?**

The focus group will be recorded and transcribed word-for-word as I will need to analyse all our talk. The questionnaire data will be statistically analysed. The analysed findings will be reported in my project. The researcher will follow the Data Protection Act and adhere to the University and Trust policies/procedures on ensuring confidentiality of personal data is maintained at all times. Paper copies with identifiable information on participants such as contact details forms, interview transcripts and consent forms will be locked securely in the researcher's University office desk drawer which is located in a locked PhD student office. The University regulations state that research data has to be kept for a period of 10 years. They will then be destroyed by the researcher. Audio/video recordings will be destroyed following submission and marking of the research project. Anonymised transcripts may be kept for further publication purposes and stored in line with the Data Protection Act (1998).

The study will be published in relevant academic journals. The study may also be presented at academic conferences.

If you would like a copy of the final report please inform me after the focus group/questionnaire and I will take your full contact details to later forward you the report.

### **Further information**

E-mail- Luke Pickard - [1408012@leedtrinity.ac.uk](mailto:1408012@leedtrinity.ac.uk)

Supervisor- Dr Julie Brunton - [J.Brunton@leedstrinity.ac.uk](mailto:J.Brunton@leedstrinity.ac.uk)

Appendix 17- Participants Debrief Form – Questionnaires & Interviews

Thank you for taking part in the study: How does an outdoor residential influence adherence for first year university students?

This research was carried out for the purpose of a PhD project. It is aimed at evaluating the impact of outdoor orientation programmes on student's adherence to university.

If you wish to withdraw your interview/questionnaire data please do so before .....and your interview/questionnaire data will be destroyed and will not be included in the report.

If interviews/focus groups/questionnaire have raised any concerns or caused any distress the Leeds Trinity University counselling team can be contacted on on +44 (0) 113 283 7192 or via email to [s.jack@leedstrinity.ac.uk](mailto:s.jack@leedstrinity.ac.uk).

If you require any further information or would just like know the outcome of the report please do not hesitate and contact me on 1408012@leedstrinity.ac.uk

If you would like a copy of the final report please contact me via email with your postal details or email address and it will be sent out following completion.

Thank you very much for taking part.

Luke

Appendix 18- Participants Debrief Form – Focus Groups/ Participant Observation

Thank you for taking part in the study: How does an outdoor residential influence adherence for first year university students?

This research was carried out for the purpose of a PhD project. It is aimed at evaluating the impact of outdoor orientation programmes on student's adherence to university.

Due to the nature of your participation withdrawal of data will not be possible, although you can be assured that your personal information will remain completely confidential.

If focus groups/participant observation have raised any concerns or caused any distress the Leeds Trinity University counselling team can be contacted on on +44 (0) 113 283 7192 or via email to [s.jack@leedstrinity.ac.uk](mailto:s.jack@leedstrinity.ac.uk).

If you require any further information or would just like know the outcome of the report please do not hesitate and contact me on 1408012@leedstrinity.ac.uk

If you would like a copy of the final report please contact me via email with your postal details or email address and it will be sent out following completion.

Thank you very much for taking part.

Luke

Appendix 19 – Student adaptation to university questionnaire

## Student Adaption to University Questionnaire (SAUQ)

Directions – Please provide identifying information requested below. The 67 statements on this questionnaire describe university experiences. Read each one and decide how well it applies to you at the present time (within the past few days). For each statement circle the asterisk at the point in the continuum that best represents how closely the statement applies to you. Circle only one asterisk for each statement. To change an answer draw an X through the incorrect response and circle the desired response. Be sure to use a hard tipped pen or pencil and press firmly. Do not erase.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

University course enrolled on \_\_\_\_\_

Sex (Optional) \_\_\_\_\_

Date of birth (Optional) \_\_\_\_\_

Ethnic background (Optional) \_\_\_\_\_

← Applies very Closely to me      Doesn't apply to me at all →

- |   |           |           |
|---|-----------|-----------|
| 1. I feel I fit in well as part of the university environment.....                            | * * * * * | * * * * * |
| 2. I have been feeling tense or nervous recently.....   | * * * * * | * * * * * |
| 3. I have been keeping up to date on my academic work.....                                    | * * * * * | * * * * * |
| 4. I am meeting as many people, and making as many friends as I would like at university..... | * * * * * | * * * * * |
| 5. I know why I'm in university and what I want out of it.....                                | * * * * * | * * * * * |
| 6. I am finding academic work at university difficult.....                                    | * * * * * | * * * * * |
| 7. Lately I have been feeling blue and moody a lot.....                                       | * * * * * | * * * * * |
| 8. I am very involved with social activities in university.....                               | * * * * * | * * * * * |
| 9. I am adjusting well to university.....   | * * * * * | * * * * * |
| 10. I have not been functioning well during examinations or assignments.....                  | * * * * * | * * * * * |
| 11. I have felt tired much of the time lately.....  | * * * * * | * * * * * |
| 12. Being on my own, taking responsibility for myself, has not been easy.....                 | * * * * * | * * * * * |
| 13. I am satisfied with the level at which I am performing academically.....                  | * * * * * | * * * * * |
| 14. I have had informal, personal contacts with my lecturers.....                             | * * * * * | * * * * * |
| 15. I am pleased now about my decision to go to university.....                               | * * * * * | * * * * * |
| 16. I am pleased now about my decision to attend this university in particular.....           | * * * * * | * * * * * |
| 17. I am not working as hard as I should at my course work.....                               | * * * * * | * * * * * |
| 18. I have several close ties at university.....  | * * * * * | * * * * * |
| 19. My academic goals and purposes are well defined.....                                      | * * * * * | * * * * * |
| 20. I haven't been able to control my emotions very well lately.....                          | * * * * * | * * * * * |
| 21. I am not really smart enough for the academic work I am expected to be doing now.....     | * * * * * | * * * * * |
| 22. Lonesomeness from home is a source of difficulty for me now.....                          | * * * * * | * * * * * |
| 23. Getting a university degree is very important to me.....                                  | * * * * * | * * * * * |
| 24. My appetite has been good lately.....   | * * * * * | * * * * * |
| 25. I haven't been very efficient in my study time lately.....                                | * * * * * | * * * * * |
| 26. I enjoy living in university accommodation.....   | * * * * * | * * * * * |

(please omit if you do not live in halls; any university housing should be regarded as halls)

	← Applies very Closely to me	Doesn't apply to me at all →
27. I enjoy writing papers on my course.....	* * * * *	* * * * *
28. I have been having a lot of headaches lately.....	* * * * *	* * * * *
29. I haven't had much motivation for studying lately.....	* * * * *	* * * * *
30. I am satisfied with the extracurricular activities available at university.....	* * * * *	* * * * *
31. I have given a lot of thought lately to whether I should ask for help from counselling or chaplaincy services.....	* * * * *	* * * * *
32. Lately I have been having doubts regarding the value of a university education.....	* * * * *	* * * * *
33. I am getting along very well with my roommates at university..... (omit if you don't have any roommates)	* * * * *	* * * * *
34. I wish I were at another university.....	* * * * *	* * * * *
35. I've put on or lost too much weight recently.....	* * * * *	* * * * *
36. I'm satisfied with the amount and variety of courses available at university.....	* * * * *	* * * * *
37. I feel I have enough social skills to get along well in the university setting.....	* * * * *	* * * * *
38. I've been getting angry too easily lately.....	* * * * *	* * * * *
39. Recently I have had trouble concentrating when I try to study.....	* * * * *	* * * * *
40. I haven't been sleeping very well.....	* * * * *	* * * * *
41. I am not doing well enough academically for the amount of work I have put in.....	* * * * *	* * * * *
42. I am having trouble feeling at ease with other people at university.....	* * * * *	* * * * *
43. I am satisfied with the quality of my university course.....	* * * * *	* * * * *
44. I am attending classes regularly.....	* * * * *	* * * * *
45. Sometimes my thinking gets muddled up too easily.....	* * * * *	* * * * *
46. I am satisfied to the extent to which I am participating in social activities at university.....	* * * * *	* * * * *
47. I expect to stay at this university for the duration of my course.....	* * * * *	* * * * *
48. I haven't been mixing too well with the opposite sex lately.....	* * * * *	* * * * *
49. I worry a lot about my university expenses.....	* * * * *	* * * * *
50. I am enjoying my academic work at university.....	* * * * *	* * * * *
51. I have been feeling lonely a lot at university lately.....	* * * * *	* * * * *
52. I am having a lot of trouble getting started on my assignments.....	* * * * *	* * * * *
53. I feel I have good control over my life situation at university.....	* * * * *	* * * * *
54. I am satisfied with my course content this term.....	* * * * *	* * * * *
55. I have been feeling in good health recently.....	* * * * *	* * * * *
56. I feel I am very different from other university students in ways that I don't like.....	* * * * *	* * * * *
57. On balance I would rather be at home than here.....	* * * * *	* * * * *
58. Most of the things I am interested in are not related to any of my coursework at university.....	* * * * *	* * * * *
59. Lately I have given a lot of thought too transferring to another university.....	* * * * *	* * * * *
60. Lately I have given a lot of thought to dropping out of university altogether and for good.....	* * * * *	* * * * *
61. I find myself giving considerable thought to taking time off from university and finishing later.....	* * * * *	* * * * *
62. I am very satisfied with my university lecturers on my course.....	* * * * *	* * * * *
63. I have some good friends or acquaintances at university with whom I can talk about any problems I may have.....	* * * * *	* * * * *
64. I am experiencing a lot of difficulty coping with the stresses imposed upon me in university.....	* * * * *	* * * * *
65. I am quite satisfied with my social life at university.....	* * * * *	* * * * *
66. I am quite satisfied with my academic situation at university.....	* * * * *	* * * * *
67. I feel confident I will be able to deal in a satisfactory manner with future challenges here at university.....	* * * * *	* * * * *



Appendix 20 – Ethical approval letter from University



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**PRIVATE & CONFIDENTIAL**

**Dr Dave Lewis**

Chair of Research Ethics Sub-  
committee

Tel: 0113 343 4233

E-mail: [d.i.lewis@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:d.i.lewis@leeds.ac.uk)

Date: 09 April 2015

Dear Dr Brunton

I can confirm that your research proposal for **'Learning experiences from an outdoor residential programme with first year university students'** (ref no. **SHN 15-001**) has now received full ethical approval. Thank you for submitting the revisions to your research proposal required by the committee.

Approval is granted for the project to take place 9<sup>th</sup> April 2015 - 1<sup>st</sup> October 2017.

Please note that any changes to the proposal or conduct of your research might require further authorisation under the conditions of the approval. Any changes should be submitted to myself as Chair of the Research Ethics Sub-committee.

Please contact me should you have any

queries regarding the above. Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dave Lewis'.

Dr Dave Lewis  
Chair, Research Ethics Sub-Committee

Cc: Ethics committee file; Postgraduate Research Tutor (GR); University of Leeds co-supervisor (Dr Andrea Utley)

