Thesis title:
‘A journey that motivates’: Discovering the
associate student experience

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Declaration

I hereby declare that the work presented in this thesis has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification, and that it is the result of my own independent work.

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10/05/2022

Date

Abstract

Higher education has seen huge growth in the past two decades with degree study becoming an anticipated next step after high school. But access to higher education is still riddled with inequality, and society is calling for equal access for all. The Scottish government have introduced policies to address this imbalance with a focus on working class backgrounds, students with disabilities and specific black minority ethnic groups. Under-represented groups are more likely to access college education and routes from college into university are recognised by the Commission on Widening Access (CoWA) as being fundamental to helping address this imbalance. In 2013, the SFC introduced additional funded places for students taking this route. The students are known as associate students.

This thesis presents empirical work exploring the transition experiences of associate students into computing degrees in Scotland. Students on this journey face transitional barriers as they adapt to the change in culture, come to terms with their altered student identity, and overcome academic and social integration issues. This work explores their experience.

Although several studies (Harris et al., 2013; Jansen & van der Meer, 2012; Polach, 2004) have examined transition into university, no studies have focused on associate students. This thesis provides unique insight into the lived experiences of associate students within the School of Computing and employed the graphical research method of photo-elicitation to gather and document perceptions of students during the first stage of their higher education journey, as they prepare to make the transition from college into a university. Further participants share their experience of transition during the first few weeks at university through photovoice and in-depth IPA interviews, providing insight into the usually unseen aspects of transition, moving home, adjusting to a long commute, experiencing loneliness and anxiety, benefiting from peer support and friendship. Through graphical research methods and interpretative phenomenological analysis, the participants have shaped the research through their narrative, their photographs, and their discussion to form a representation of the phenomenon under examination.

Five superordinate themes emerged from the data demonstrating the significance of social aspects, self-concept, the physical environment, academic differences and preparation. Findings are shared which identified this as a 'journey that motivated', one that 'made university possible' and one that combined two 'different worlds'. This thesis found that the students' perceptions and experiences of transition were diverse and highlight the need to understand the key aspects of adjustment. This study explores a theoretical framework adapted from the Model of Organisational Influence on the Development of Learner Identity (Briggs, Clark, & Hall, 2012), that can be applied across institutions for all students in transition. Grounded in the literature, the framework demonstrates the student perspectives before the transition and their experience after the transition. This framework provides a mechanism for improving the transition for students moving into university study and makes a valuable contribution to computing education.

Keywords

Publications associated with this research

Meharg, D., Tizard, J., Varey, A., & Cairncross, S. (2015). Building confidence during transition from college to university. In BERA Conference Proceedings.

Meharg, D., Craighill, S., Varey, A., & Cairncross, S. (2017). Belonging: Blurring the Boundaries. Scottish Educational Review, 49(1), 89-103.

Meharg, D., Varey, A., & Cairncross, S. (2018). Graphical Research Methods: Exploring transitional student identity. In SRHE Conference Proceedings

Meharg, D., Varey, A., & Cairncross, S. (2018). " We're coming from different worlds " : exploring student identity during transition. In SRHE Conference Proceedings

Meharg, D., Cairncross, S., & Varey, A. (2018). " So far back, I'm anonymous " : Exploring Student Identity using Photovoice. In FIE-2018-Proceedings

SRHE Poster winner 2018 – available in Appendix E

Internal Events

Edinburgh Napier Learning and Teaching Conference 2018

Teaching Fellow Conference 2019

Centre for Computing Education – Internal presentation 2019

External Presentations and Events

Articulation Best Practice Event (Scottish Funding Council, 2016), Dundee

SQA Computing Conference, 2018

Northern Ireland FE Colleges Conference, Belfast 2019

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Glossary of terms

Academic momentum:	The importance of the speed with which undergraduate students progress through their studies and its impact on their likely completion.
Additional funded places:	Provided by the Scottish Funding Council in 2013 to support collaboration between colleges and universities to support identified students' progress from college to university degree study.
Advanced standing:	Continuing from college to university study at the next level of study e.g. from HND into year 3 of a degree programme.
Articulation:	Transition from college to university study after completing study at a lower level.
Associate student:	Title given to college students funded through the additional funded places scheme.
Associate student project:	Project group established to support the collaboration with colleges and to develop the interventions to support associate students at Edinburgh Napier University.
Boundary:	The area of difference between the two educational systems that students need to cross in order to be successful.
Bridging:	Support activities and advice to help students fill the void between the college and university systems.
Direct-entry:	A student who is progressing from college study directly into the 2nd or 3rd year of a degree programme.
Dual enrolment:	When a student is matriculated at more than one educational institution e.g. college and university.
Further education (FE):	Any study after secondary school that is not higher education.
Guaranteed articulation:	When a place at university is guaranteed for a student studying at college.

Higher education (HE):	Tertiary education leading to award of an academic degree.
HNC:	Higher National Certification (SCQF Level 7)
HND:	Higher National Diploma (SCQF Level 8)
HNQ:	Higher National Qualification
Outcome agreements:	Set out what colleges and universities have to deliver in return for their funding from the Scottish Funding Council.
Scottish domiciled:	A person who officially has as their permanent home, or has a substantial connection with Scotland, usually where they were born.
SCQF:	The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) is Scotland's national qualifications framework.
SIMD:	The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD). Identifies small areas where there are concentrations of multiple deprivation, the SIMD can be used to target policies and resources at the places with greatest need. The SIMD identifies deprived areas, not deprived individuals.
Transition:	The process or a period of changing from one state or condition to another. In this case 'students in transition from one programme to another'.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1   Introduction

> *'Transition is often depicted as a problematic phase that must be smoothed, bridged and made successful, with the help of staff and institutional initiatives'*
> (Gravett et al., 2020)

Students who join university as direct-entrants often struggle to fit in and experience a lengthy period of adjustment which can see them face challenges both academically and socially. These individuals can feel less worthy, less able, and often initially, do not identify as university students. Coming from college can have a stigma, a lower status. Sometimes these students do not meet the standard first year entry requirements for university study, or they may be the first in their family to follow this path. Their transition can be difficult.

Nonetheless, students that transition from a higher national course studied at further education college into a university degree programme are following a route known to be fundamental in supporting disadvantaged learners to progress to degree study (Scottish Government, 2021). The Scottish Funding Council (SFC) believe that the development of articulation pathways provides a clear widening access route and have set ambitious targets for Scottish universities to increase this provision.

Students taking this route are faced with additional challenges and are more likely to drop out of their studies (Coughlan & Swift, 2011). This thesis explores students on this journey from further education college to higher education who experience transition as *associate students*, a term and identity which is worthy of further exploration due to the limited research with this group of students. Using interpretative and graphical methods, this thesis allows the students following this route to share their experience not only through words but also through photographs.

This research focuses on associate students, an identity and additional route from college into the university which was developed through additional funding in 2013. The background of this development is explored fully in Chapter 2: Research Context. Most researchers in the field agree that identity is socially constructed and formed of our self-belief, our interactions and the social groups we inhabit, which, in turn,

influence our norms, expectations and beliefs (Lindstrom, 1993). Student identity has formed through school experiences and, for the students in this study, through the impact of their college time and how they experience the associate student identity. Listening to the associate student voice involves exploring their lived experiences of adjustment, hearing their expectations and perceptions.

There is now a considerable body of research which suggests that educational transitions are recognised as multiple, multi-dimensional and individual (Brown, Dennis, Gordon, Howden, & Jindal-Snape, 2017; Jindal-Snape, 2015; Kift, 2009; Towns, 2011), providing universities with a difficult challenge in determining appropriate methods of support. Listening to the student's voice offers insight for institutions and provides an opportunity for students to shape the support mechanisms on offer. Models of transition such as the Participation-Identification Model (Finn, 1989), U-Curve Theory of Adjustment (Risquez, Moore, & Morley, 2007); Model of Student Adjustment (Menzies & Baron, 2014), the Student Experience Model (Burnett, 2007), the Model of Organisational Influence on the Development of Learner Identity (Briggs, Clark, & Hall, 2012), the Thriving Transition Cycle (Harris & Barnett, 2014) and Bridges Transition Model (Bridges, 2009) have been created which identify phases of transition, allowing universities, and individuals, to utilise and explore the stages, contributing factors and the impact of this journey. This study examines these models and recommends a framework for supporting students in transition.

Brigg's et al. (2012) Model of Organisational Influence on the Development of Learner Identity, is highly regarded and focuses on the development of learner identity which is underpinned by Tinto's principles which recommend developing a supportive culture for learner development. This study draws upon the first section of the model, exploring imagining, aspiration, expectations and skills and knowledge. The process of adjustment and how students themselves experience this during transition is fundamental to this study. The model is discussed fully in Section 3.5.6 Model of Organisational Influence on the Development of Learner Identity.

Edinburgh Napier University School of Computing (ENU SoC) established the Associate Student Project in 2013 with a focus on examining and addressing the barriers to success faced by articulating students in the different HE environment and developing an appropriate support structure. This PhD study is embedded within the Associate Student Project which supports college students to continue their studies at university by way of guaranteed articulation and dual enrolment. This study will use the Associate Student Project as the focus from which to draw conclusions which could be applied to the wider direct-entry population.

To date, little is understood about the impact of the associate student route and the impact dual identity has on student transition, this is one of the first studies focusing on this particular phenomenon. Exploring the experience of associate students is of interest to other universities who support direct-entrants and more widely within higher education as we explore the student voice. This study examines the perceptions and experience of the associate students and adds to the body of work around educational transitions.

1.2   Overarching aim

The overall aim of this PhD study is to further understand the transition of associate students from college to university. This research seeks to explore the perceptions and lived experiences of associate students before and during the transition to university. This thesis is qualitative and has its roots in phenomenology and hermeneutics, incorporating graphical research methods and interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). The research will focus on the experiences of individual students and will examine the experience of students who have been supported by the associate student route. This study will develop a theoretical framework which can be applied across institutions for all articulating students.

1.3 Research questions

To achieve the overarching aim of this thesis, the research is driven by two research questions:

RQ1: How do associate students at college perceive their transition to university?
RQ2: How do associate students experience transition at Edinburgh Napier University's School of Computing?

Alongside the two RQs stated, the thesis also explores the literature and aims to understand how the associate student experience relates to existing transition models.

1.4 Deficiencies in the evidence

The research literature on transition is dominated by a focus on primary to secondary school (Carmen, Waycott, & Smith, 2011; Ganeson, 2006; Langenkamp, 2009; Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2013; Topping, 2011) and high school to first-year university transition (Burnett, 2007; Hoffman, Richmond, Morrow, & Salomone, 2002; Leese, 2010b; Rhodes et al., 2014; Taylor, Millwater & Nash, 2007). A variety of studies have explored identity development (Briggs, Clark, & Hall, 2012; MacFarlane, 2018; Scanlon, Rowling, & Weber, 2007; Turner & Tobbell, 2018a) during transition and explored the experience of students entering education at various points – primary, secondary, college and university. These studies do not, however, examine the impact of the associate student route on the experience of direct entrants.

1.5 Audience

This study will benefit college and university staff who can ensure appropriate and timely activities are incorporated to aid the successful transition. Universities will be particularly interested in this study and may decide to adopt the 'associate student' route for programmes outwith the additional funded places scheme. The study will also benefit students whose transition experiences will be improved by the findings. Finally,

policymakers will be interested in the impact of the additional funded places scheme and the recommendations for future development.

1.6   Thesis structure

This thesis is presented in eight chapters. Following the Introduction, Chapter Two (Research Context) provides an overview of the Scottish Education landscape and the history of the Associate Student scheme. Chapter Three (Literature Review) provides an overview of the literature that situates this study in the context of previous research relating to transitions from further education to higher education and student identity.

Chapter Four (Methods and Methodology) outlines the research philosophy and methodology, introducing the rationale for this qualitative research. It discusses the data collection methods incorporated, specifically focused on two graphical research methods, photo-elicitation and photovoice. Interpretative phenomenological analysis is incorporated into the research design as a method for data collection and analysis. Following the examination of the data collection methods, the discussion moves on to the methods of analysis, transcription, individual case-analysis and finding patterns. Ethical considerations and the approval process are also covered.

Chapter Five (Implementation) explains the process of data gathering that this research project followed. The different students and staff groups and the three methods used over three different data collection points are explained.

Chapter Six (Research Findings and Discussion) showcases the qualitative methods and reflects on the multiple data collection methods, examining the photographs and captions, transcripts and interpretations. The findings evidence data from all data collection methods, revealing the perceptions before the transition, and experiences after. This gives a real sense of depth to the findings and offers a sense of the experience from the participants' viewpoints. Findings are categorised according to the emergent themes. It also provides an in-depth discussion of the analysis derived from

both the graphical methods and the interpretative interview data. The thesis gives meaning to the themes which emerged during the analysis and attempts to give a voice to the participants by exploring similarities with existing literature.

Chapter Seven (A Framework for Associate Student Transition) proposes a theoretical framework which brings together the analysis and findings, combining existing literature with a new focus on the area of adjustment on the student journey. It sets out the proposed framework to enhance the understanding of student transition from college to university.

Chapter Eight (Conclusions and Further Research) discusses the contribution of the thesis and outlines recommendations from the study and the scope for further research.

Chapter 2: Research Context

2.1 Introduction

the additional funded places scheme, in order to describe the environment and context in which the research is located. The chapter reviews the HE landscape within Scotland with a focus on the widening participation agenda and contemporary educational issues. The chapter also explores the motives and drivers for universities to create opportunities and pathways for articulation routes for direct-entry students.

2.2 Scottish Higher Education landscape

Scotland has a world-class and unique educational system which has been governed by the Scottish Parliament since 1999 (Connelly et al., 2011). The further and higher education system is made up of 45 institutions – 19 universities or Higher Education Institutions (HEI's) and 26 colleges or Further Education Institutions (FEI's). The college sector operates across the 13 regions of Scotland and supports over 116,000 full-time students of which 13% are studying at a higher education level (Colleges Scotland, 2018). HE student numbers rose to the highest number on record in 2019 and this has continued to increase year on year over the last ten years. In contrast the number of students studying at college is falling, down to under 47,000 in 2019, 9% lower than a decade ago (The Scottish Funding Council, 2021). There is an overlap in provision with both universities and colleges offering HE level study (see Table 1).

Table 1: Scottish-domiciled Entrants to Higher and Further Education in Scotland (Scottish Government, 2018)

	University				College			
	First Degree		Sub-degree		HE		FE	
	Full-Time	Part-Time	Full-Time	Part-Time	Full-Time	Part-Time	Full-Time	Part-Time
2016-17	28,945	6,295	2,645	1,795	22,285	5,425	44,295	43,730
2015-16	28,860	5,850	2,715	1,605	22,185	5,915	44,435	41,725
2014-15	28,735	5.040	3,000	1,540	21,935	5,645	45,775	41,825
2013-14	28,400	5,280	2,845	1,455	21,680	5,480	46,415	39,495

HE level study is defined by the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) and begins at Level 7 through to Level 10 for a Scottish Honours Degree. As can be seen from Table 2, the overlap in delivery occurs at levels seven and eight, with Higher National Certificates (HNCs) and Higher National Diplomas (HNDs) delivered at colleges accounting for 41.4% of HE entrants in 2016-17 (Scottish Government, 2018). Whether delivery takes place within a college or university setting, the increased targets and drive to widen participation amongst those from deprived communities is important for all institutions.

Table 2: SCQF Levels and Scottish Qualifications (SCQF Handbook and Principles, 2015)

TITLE	SCQF LEVEL	SCQF CREDIT VALUE	INSTITUTION
National 4	4	24 credit points	High School
National 5	5	24 credit points	High School
Higher	6	24 credit points	High School or FEI
Advanced Higher	7	32 credit points	High School or FEI
Higher National Certificate/1st year of a degree	7	96 credit points/120 credit points	FEI & HEI
Higher National Diploma/2nd year of a degree	8	240 credit points	FEI & HEI
Ordinary Degree	9	360 credit points	FEI & HEI
Honours Degree	10	480 credit points	HEI
Master's Degree (Taught)	11	180 credit points	HEI

2.2.1   Widening participation

Widening Participation can be defined as the interventions and mechanisms put in place by institutions to encourage and support historically underrepresented groups (Barber & Netherton, 2018), those who have had limited exposure to higher education and those who have been 'discouraged by social, cultural, economic or institutional barriers' to enter the higher education environment (Allen & Storan, 2005). In particular students from white working class backgrounds, students with disability and specific black and minority ethnic (BME) groups (Butcher, Clarke, Wood, McPherson & Fowle, 2018).

The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) is the Scottish Government's official tool to identify areas of multiple deprivation in Scotland. The method uses seven indicators (see Figure 1) – income, employment, education, health, access to services, crime and housing – to determine an area's deprivation.
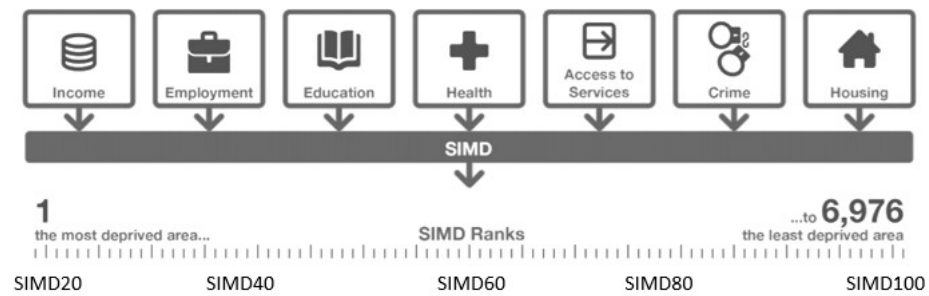
Figure 1: The seven indicators used in SIMD

The SIMD dataset is categorised into five quintiles each containing 20%, with the lowest – SIMD20 – being the area of multiple deprivation targeted by widening participation initiatives in education institutions.

Since 2012, the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) followed an outcomes-based approach to funding and worked alongside colleges and universities to agree targets and priorities in return for their funding from the Scottish Government. Through these Outcome Agreements (OA), colleges and universities are expected to grow their provision for students from the most deprived communities (Horsburgh, 2018b). Despite this emphasis, the SFC's Triennial Review on Widening Access states that 'universities have an under-representation from the most deprived communities in Scottish universities' (MacRitchie & Adesokan, 2017). This denotes the continued requirement to chase the ambition set out by the First Minister in 2014 – that 20% of new entrants to HE in 2030 should come from the 20% most deprived areas in Scotland. Early progress was made with the 2021 target of 16 per cent being achieved ahead of time but this has since slowed and the 2030 target remains ambitious (Scottish Government, 2021).

This ambitious pledge made by the Scottish government in 2014 stated that every child, irrespective of socioeconomic background, should have an equal chance of accessing higher education and led to the establishment of the Commission on Widening Access (CoWA) to take this remit forward. Contrary to the Scottish government's goals to widening participation in higher education, the participation gap is larger in Scotland than in the rest of the UK (Blackburn, Kadar-Satat, Riddell, & Weedon, 2016). Colleges play a key role in widening participation with 47% of HNQ students who continue their studies at university making up 90% of university students from disadvantaged backgrounds.
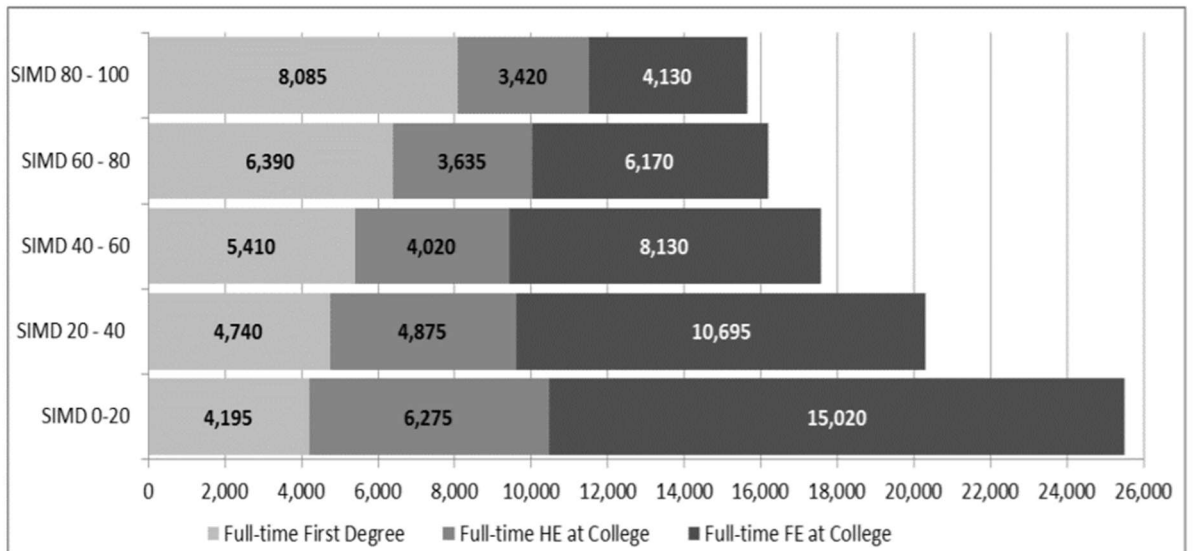
Figure 2: HE entrants by SIMD quintile

Figure 2 demonstrates the significance of the FEIs in providing key routes into education. Within colleges, students can progress from FE level courses, at SCQF levels 4, 5 and 6 into Higher National Qualifications (HNQs) (see Table 2).

2.2.2   Articulation

"Articulation is a pathway that opens university up to thousands of students in Scotland every year. The opportunity to study for a degree upon completion of an HN qualification is a vital way to ensure learners have various routes and pathways into university" (Universities Scotland, 2020). Articulation signifies the process of joining educational systems and is defined by the SFC as 'the movement of students from Higher National Qualifications (HNQs) at college into the second or third year of a university degree' (SFC, 2016). Although a focus for widening participation, issues with articulation are ongoing and require strategic collaboration and sustained partnerships between colleges and universities. It is only with this focus that articulation can become mainstreamed across the Scottish higher education sector (Universities Scotland, 2020). Only half of students continue with advanced standing, with some receiving no credit for the HN qualification, and there is continued resistance to truly open and flexible pathways between colleges and universities (Scott, 2020).

Between 2003 and 2008, the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) provided funding to all universities based on the number of students they had entering with an HNQ,

irrespective of entry-level. This led to students repeating study at the same SCQF level across institutions and arbitrary recognition for prior study. Regional Articulation Hubs were developed in 2008 and, over five years, they worked towards the SFC's aspiration to enable 'better and deeper collaboration to support articulation' (SFC, 2016). The Hubs created collaborations between universities and colleges, working to increase the number of articulating students and importantly, to improve the outcome for articulating students. An improved definition of articulation was agreed:

> *'a student gaining entry into second year of a degree with a Higher National Certificate (HNC) gained at college, or into third year with a Higher National Diploma (HND) gained at college'.*

The Hubs were drawn to a close in 2016 and the funding became embedded in Outcome Agreements (OA). Since then, almost eight thousand students have articulated each year with the emphasis moving beyond student numbers to include requirements on institutions to ensure a smooth transition and the necessary support and seamless progression for these students through course mapping, programme design and relevant support mechanisms (Scottish Government, 2014). In 2016, the Access in Scotland Report (Hunter Blackburn et al., 2016) called for further research into retention strategies for disadvantaged students and appropriate support methods.

This was echoed by CoWA in their report 'A Blueprint for Fairness' which recommended the expansion of articulation to support disadvantaged learners to progress to degree study through more efficient, flexible and learner-centred models of articulation (Commission on Widening Access, 2016). These articulation models pose significant challenges for higher education institutions, particularly the post-1992 institutions which support many articulating students (see Figure 3).

	Ancients	Pre 1992	Post 1992s
Articulation	Very limited articulation activity at present	Some limited evidence but not taken up on a large scale as yet.	Currently account for 90% of articulation.

Figure 3 - Articulation by Institution type (2010/11) SFC, 2016

In 2012, the SFC provided over 1000 additional articulation places (AAPs) supported by the Associate Student Scheme (SFC, 2013). These places were allocated for the growth of articulation numbers and were in addition to the number of capped places, allowing both universities and colleges to increase their student numbers. These AAPs provided students with guaranteed Associate Student Status – 'this meant students on those places received access to university facilities such as libraries, gyms, and associations, as well as information, advice and guidance' (SFC, 2016).

2.2.3   Associate Student Project at Edinburgh Napier University

Under the Additional Funded Places Scheme, Edinburgh Napier University was allocated 105 additional articulation places. These places were split between the Schools of Engineering and Computing. Within the schools, the implementation and design of the projects varied, and the focus of this study is on the School of Computing.

Within the School of Computing (SoC), 53 AAPs were introduced in the academic year 2013/14. The School of Computing has a long-standing tradition of articulation and has successful articulation routes in places following a 1+3 or 2+2 model. In a 1+3 model, the student studies for their HNC at a college and then enters the university directly into year 2. In the 2+2 model (see Figure 4), the student completes the HND at college and articulates into the 3rd year of the degree programme. In both cases, the students continue with 'advanced standing' meaning that there is no loss of time or repeat of study at the same level. The undergraduate honours degree is completed within the standard four years.

SCQF level 7 **SCQF level 8** **SCQF level 9** **SCQF level 10**

College - HNC → College - HND

University - Year 1 → University - Year 2 → University - Year 3 → University - Year 4

Direct-entry Direct-entry
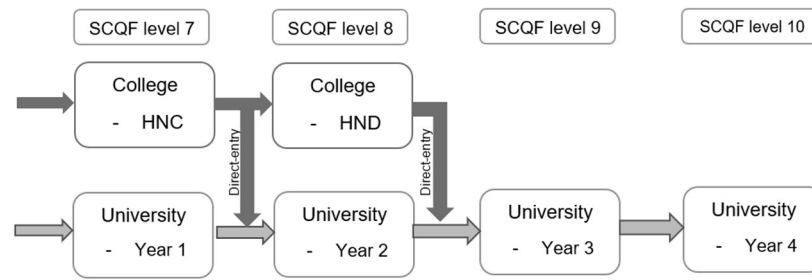
Figure 4 - 1+3, 2+2, 4-year routes

The university and college work in partnership to agree on these standard articulation routes, reviewing their entry requirements and curriculum, examining assessment criteria, teaching methods and tools. Students following these traditional articulation paths have limited interactions with the university and application through UCAS is necessary to secure a place – these are competitive.

The Associate Student Project built on this strong foundation and introduced additional interventions and benefits to support the students. These additionally funded students are known as 'Associate Students' and the SFC funding remit required universities to support these students by way of 'guaranteed articulation' (SFC, 2013). This guarantee provides students with their university place in 3rd year from the first day of their college course, offering dual enrolment at both institutions. All Associate Students matriculate at university and consequently are regarded, by the university at least, as university students from the start of their HNQ studies.

These associate students benefit from access to a range of resources and facilities offered by the university. To date these initiatives have included, familiarisation visits to the university, meetings with staff to explain the embedded workstreams and links between the college course and the university degree, guest lectures from university staff at the college, academic skills workshops in the college, the opportunity to sit in on university lectures, access to the student portal, an app, an early induction event in June, access to resources such as the library, journals and e-books, sports and student union facilities and a buddy programme. These student-focused, targeted learning opportunities are designed to enhance student progression and attainment by creating

opportunities for students to develop their confidence and the academic skills which will help them to succeed at university.

2.3   Transition programmes across the UK

Across the UK transition programmes have been implemented to address the imbalance in participation in higher education. In 2017 the Uni Connect programme was established in England and the National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP) created. The aim of NCOP was to give all young people the chance to benefit from higher education regardless of their background and location. The programme works with 29 universities, colleges, schools and other stakeholders to target outreach activities (Bowes et al., 2019). Similar to the Associate Student Programme the NCOP delivers targeted outreach, strategic outreach and signposting. The targeted outreach focuses on people aged 18 and 19 where there are low levels of participation; the strategic outreach maps 'cold spots' and working in collaboration with partners they agree activity and funding to impact underrepresented learners; and signposting takes place across the board. Evaluation of Uni Connect is on-going and it will not be until 2022 that the first cohort of applicants will have engaged through year 9 to 13 and apply through UCAS (Mollova, 2021). The findings of this evaluation will highlight important recommendations for transition throughout the UK.

2.4   Contemporary Educational Issues

Higher education plays an important role in wider society and brings both social and private benefits, and inclusive access improves social justice and economic efficiency (Salmi & D'Addio, 2021). Education is subject to constant change, through policy drivers, government initiatives and local funding mechanisms. As higher education continues to expand, many disparities and contemporary issues remain. This section will consider four issues which are dominant in the landscape, providing some additional context to this research.

2.4.1   Black Lives Matter

In 2013 black teenager Trayvon Martin was shot in Florida and the Black Lives Matter movement was born out of this tragedy. This global network stands for freedom and

works for justice for all black lives. In 2020, the murder of George Floyd highlighted the continued injustice and protests took place across the world. In the UK universities responded by publishing statements to address the racial injustice within their institutions. The implications for this area are wider and injustice and inequality remain across areas of gender, sexuality and race. Equality, diversity and inclusion leads and practitioners have been appointed across institutions, with policies and practices following. A report by Advance HE has called for institutions to improve the experience for black students and staff through expanded initiatives, but to positions these in a broader context, to work intersectionality, to address inequality and injustice by researching higher education to support marginalised and minoritized students and staff (*Advance HE*, 2021).

2.4.2 Covid-19

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought challenges in all walks of life and the impact on higher education and specifically, the experience of students has been immense. The importance of academic and social integration has never been stronger and the difficulties associated with integrating students into the (virtual) education system (Tinto, 1987) are a grand challenge (Nandy, Lodh, & Tang, 2021). As we all adjust to our new normal, the impact on students, on education and HEI's continues. The pandemic has changed the environment in which we live and learn, it has negatively impacted equality and shaken-up the transition and adjustment journey of student. Within Scotland, exams were cancelled for the first time and teacher offered predictions for pupil grades which were them adjusted in line with previous statistics. This resulted in widespread outcry and grades were reinstated. The new grades based on teacher estimates resulted in around 75,000 pupils seeing their grades adjust up. To cope with this, the Scottish Government made additional funding available for universities to provide additional places and in academic year 2020-21 1,297 FTE places were filled (Currie, 2021).

2.4.3 Decolonising the curriculum
Decolonising the curriculum emerged in 2015 in South Africa when students called for decolonisation of the university through cognitive justice, changes in curriculum,

removal of colonial symbols, right to free education, cultural freedom and a move to being a non-westernised African University (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2016). Higher education institutions must take responsibility for perpetuating coloniality. Shahjahan, Estera, Surla, and Edwards (2021) identified three meanings for decolonisation – recognising constraints, disrupting and making room for alternatives. These three areas all feed into each other. HEI's must continue to question assumptions and to move beyond dominant knowledge, exploring ways of knowing and inclusive curriculum, diversifying and integrating minoritized voices.

2.5   Conclusion to this chapter

This chapter has presented the background information necessary to provide the context of this thesis. It has described the associate student scheme and additional funded places provided by the Scottish Funding Council. In doing so, it has highlighted the drive within the Scottish Higher education system to widen participation but the meaning of widening participation has moved forward. There is now a desire to not only provide fair access for all, but also to ensure, that within our institutions we are removing barriers, stereotypes and coloniality. The following chapter explores the literature relevant to this area of study.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

3.1   Introduction

This chapter examines the existing literature surrounding the area of transition from college into university for full-time students and reviews the current academic conversation. To gain a deep understanding of this phenomenon, the chapter studies transition models and pre- and post-transition studies. The chapter follows a logical structure, firstly, exploring the stage before transition as individuals prepare. This is followed by a discussion of the experience of transition once within the new institution. Throughout the literature models and frameworks provide guidance for researchers and practitioners and depict a visual representation of the stages or events which impact upon transition. Several of these models are explored and this cumulates in the development of a conceptual framework for this study.

There are several studies which explore individual student accounts of transition, many of these focus on the first-year experience (Ballantyne, 2012; Chester, Burton, Xenos, & Elgar, 2013; Harris, 2014; Kift, 2015; Larmar & Ingamells, 2010), with others focusing on non-traditional students such as direct-entrants, commuter students (Bauer, 2019; Husband & Jeffrey, 2016; Pokorny, Holley, & Kane, 2017; Reay, Crozier, & Clayton, 2010; Thomas, 2018a). Some use quantitative methods to explore retention and performance (Knox, 2005; Nicholson, Putwain, Connors, & Hornby-Atkinson, 2013). However, few studies focus on the student voice and experience of the community, with the researcher unable to find any studies exploring associate students themselves. Universities need to gain insight into the experience of associate students during the transition to ensure they are providing appropriate and timely support which increases students' chances of success in their HE studies. Studies by (Harvey, Drew, & Smith, 2006; Leese, 2010) have demonstrated that student transition is an individual experience and that student identity changes through the process (Flum & Kaplan, 2012; Jungert, 2011). For that reason, this study aims to empower associate students by listening to their experiences of their transition, capturing the complexities of their experience and understanding the individual meanings (Maunder, Cunliffe, Galvin, Mjali, & Rogers, 2013).

3.2   Exploring Associate Students

Associate students are students who are studying at college for an HND qualification but who have matriculated with the university. This gives them access to university facilities such as libraries, computer labs, fitness centres etc. Importantly, their place as a direct entrant into third year is guaranteed if they successfully complete their HND programme (Meharg et al., 2017). Associate student programmes run at universities throughout Scotland and important similarities can be drawn with community college programmes in the USA and 2-year associate programmes in England. Community college programmes in the USA allow dual enrolment whereby students can sign up for credit-based transition programmes which allow them to earn college credits whilst still at school (Bailey et al., 2003). Within other parts of the UK these HNC/D level programmes are often termed as 2-year associate programmes (Porr & Acar, 2010) allowing transfer into the traditional four year degree programmes.

3.3   Understanding transition

Understanding the broad area of educational transition can help us recognise the importance of the transition experience for associate students. Bridges (1995) defined transition as psychological, as a process individuals go through as they internalise and come to terms with their new situation. Transitions occur frequently during an individual's lifetime, and educational transitions are part of a broad spectrum which occur predominantly during educational years three to twenty-one. Transitions can be viewed as linear where at predetermined points individuals transition into, out and through various educational establishments, as shown in Figure 5.
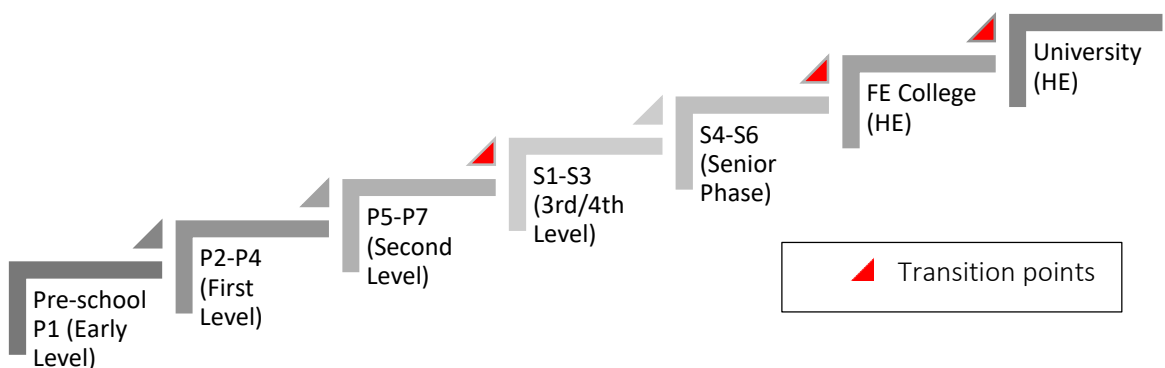
Figure 5 - Educational transition points (Author's own)

These educational transitions were described very eloquently by (Bridges, 2009):

'transitions are processes that start with an ending and end with a beginning.'

The process or journey of transition can start before the physical change in campus or school location, with the introduction of preparation and pre-transition activities. Morgan (2020) defined three phases – pre-arrival, arrival and induction and found that institutions could ease the transition by providing information and guidance early on in the pre-arrival stage.
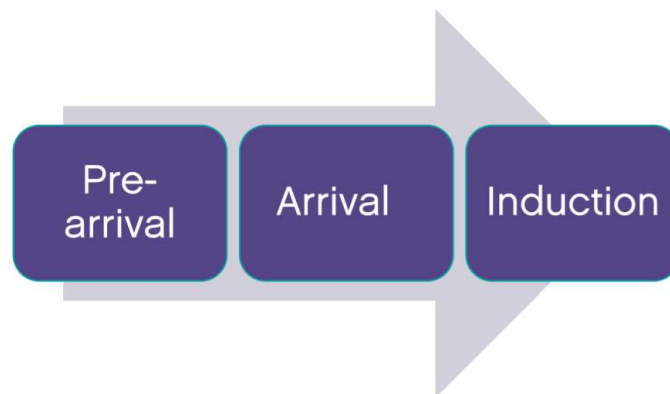
Figure 6: The Pre-arrival, Arrival and Induction Phases (Morgan, 2020)

Students arrive at university from many different pathways, having experienced different educational institutions and with varying perceptions of university and higher education. Research by Tett, Cree and Christie (2017) found that the differences students experienced between their college and university harmed their confidence, causing uncertainty and lowering their sense of belonging. These transitions are, therefore, not linear but complex and chaotic (Palmer, O'Kane, & Owens, 2009; Penn-Edwards & Donnison, 2011). Transition to higher education is frequently cited as causing increased levels of anxiety and stress in students (Christie, 2009; Leathwood & O'Connell, 2003; Rhodes et al., 2014; Thomas, 2018a; Young, Thompson, Sharp, & Bosmans, 2019).

3.3.1   Community college transfer

Akin to the Scottish system, community colleges in America offer a gateway to higher education for students who are from low income or first in family backgrounds. The terminology used varies significantly with 'transfer' being the key description in play.

The community college pathway is seen as a more cost-effective way to earn a four-year degree (Grote et al., 2020) but difficulties have been identified for students following in this route. Elliott and Lakin (2020) found three main areas in which problems arise – help-seeking avenues, dealing with exams and the academic demands which focus on independent learning.

In 2016 the Transfer Playbook was developed by the Aspen Institute to provide best practice advice around three broad themes: make transfer student success a priority; create clear pragmatic pathways with aligned high quality instruction; provide tailored transfer student advising (Wyner et al, 2016). Although the literature documents increased development of articulation agreements from community college institutions, 'transfer students need more support, clarity, and guidance' (Lavinson, 2021). How students prepare for and are supported during transition is considered in the following section.

3.3.2 Preparing for transition

Before transition, students are often encouraged to prepare, and educational establishments at the next level frequently put bridging or access programmes in place to help students cross the 'boundary'. These pre-entry support programmes are found to be a critical element for student participation and success, with authors such as Waters and Gibson (2001) reporting that students are impacted by fear of failure and a lack of confidence which can be improved by preparation activities. Lack of preparation can cause students to under-achieve and subsequently drop-out of university (Coughlan & Swift, 2011). Bridging programmes have been shown to address a range of barriers, 'providing participants with a clear and realistic pathway to admission' (Commission on Widening Access, 2016). These programmes provide a means of familiarisation with campuses, tutors, classmates and teaching styles, increasing aspiration, and removing barriers.

Notions such as 'transition' and 'boundary' are used when trying to understand the nature of the challenges faced by articulating students, and theoretical concepts including 'building bridges', boundary workers and brokers are used to inform strategies to help students address these challenges (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011; Fisher & Atkinson-Grosjean, 2002; Leigh, Griesemer, & Star, 2014). Akkerman and Bakker

(2011) define a 'boundary' as 'sociocultural differences leading to a discontinuity of action or interaction' (p. 133).

Increasing a student's sense of belonging is recognised as an important part of crossing the boundary. This development requires institutions to have an understanding of the diverse backgrounds from which students are drawn. Lahelma and Gordon (1997) stated that pupils are 'laden with experiences from primary schools where they have been learning to become pupils for many years'. This observation holds of associate students who have experienced only minor changes between high school and college. The direct-entry computing students come from unpredictable educational and personal backgrounds requiring varying degrees of support. Lecturers within universities should be mindful of students' previous experiences, and institutions should consider the differing needs of this diverse student body (Archer, 2007) to integrate them into the new learning environment. Students are intimidated by the size of the space and a lack of confidence which act as barriers to participation (James, 2016). Preparatory activities can help students before transition and ensure a smooth crossing (Barber, 1999), concentrating on familiarisation and study support. Rice (2001) found preparedness to be multi-dimensional, incorporating academic preparedness, independence, industriousness, conformity to adult standards and development of coping mechanisms.

A study by the Higher Education Academy examined pre-entry interventions and emphasised the importance of interventions which nurture the formation of peer group support, both academically and socially (Aynsley & Gazeley, 2012). Black and MacKenzie (2008) contended that peer support aids engagement with the institution through increased motivation and by building a sense of belonging for first-year students. Like first-year students, associate students need to adjust to the new environment offered by university study. This social adjustment is the process by which students become integrated into the campus community, build support networks, and negotiate the new freedoms afforded by university life (Gray, Vitak, Easton, & Ellison, 2013). Tinto (2012) supported the use of peer mentors and confirmed their use in familiarisation, integrating new students with the unfamiliar world of university life in ways that faculty and staff cannot. Unfortunately these mentoring and support schemes often experience low uptake and lack commitment (Beltman & Schaeben,

2012). Other research carried out by the HEA found that students gained additional benefit from speaking with other direct-entry students or students in later years of the university who could advise them and tell real stories of transition (HEA and NUS Scotland, 2013).

As part of the interventions offered by the university, associate students gain dual matriculation, this means they are both a college student and a university student at the same time, being in possession of two student cards. This dual offering gains them access to the university facilities and preparation activities whilst they study at college. The importance of facilities was rated highly amongst students (Mcinnis & James, 1995). Dual enrolment offers many benefits to students who gain from a more streamlined process of enrolment and enhanced academic momentum. This drive forward increases their sense of belonging within the university community, however, research by Kurita and Janzen (2000) recommends that additional support mechanisms must be introduced to build this sense of community.

Looking more broadly at the literature around preparation, lessons can be learnt from all educational years. Early research on primary school transition focused on preparation (Evangelou et al., 2009) and research by Rice (2001) introduced the term 'institutional discontinuities' to identify the problematic breaches that pupils transitioning from middle to high school experience, concluding that students need to be prepared for their transition. Her work found preparedness to be multi-dimensional, incorporating academic preparedness, independence and industriousness, conformity to adult standards and development of coping mechanisms. Understanding if and how students prepare is an important aspect for their transition. If they take part in preparation activities, is their transition experience better?

The emphasis on preparation was perpetuated by Barber (1999) who developed the 'Five Bridges of Transition', recommending that schools should 'build bridges' to allow pupils to make a smooth crossing. Importantly, he highlighted that all five bridges must be crossed at once:

    1.   Bureaucratic (the administration side)

2.   Social and emotional (induction days, visits, sporting activities)

3.   Curriculum (schools exchanged curriculum details – subject-specific coverage)

4.   Pedagogy (schools share how topics are organised and taught)

5.   Management of learning (how pupils should manage their learning)

Bridging within transitions is not a new concept, students' transitioning from college to university are undoubtedly crossing a boundary (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011) – they are bridging the divide between the two systems. Achievement of the entry requirements for articulation into the third year is not adequate preparation alone for the transition into university. Unlike the primary to secondary school pupils, associate students are joining an existing cohort of students which is larger and impacts their sense of responsibility, making them feel anonymous (Finn, Pannozzo, & Achilles, 2003).

Preparedness is also found to be individual and students' levels of motivation and expectations of success are varied. Eccles and Wigfield (2002) argue that 'it is difficult if not impossible to understand students' motivation without understanding the contexts they are experiencing'. Their 'Expectancy Model of Achievement Motivation' (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002) is an appropriate way to consider the likelihood for academic success before a student has made the transition from college to university. Eccles' model has evolved from related theories such as Bandura (1997) 'Self-Efficacy Theory', which makes use of expectancy and efficacy beliefs to forecast achievement capabilities, but is most closely related to Atkinson (1957) 'Expectancy-Value Theories' which link achievement performance, persistence and choice.

This model defines the term 'expectancies' as an individual's ability, beliefs or perception of their competence, potential to perform and the probability of success or failure. While 'attainment value', or motivation, is classified as an individual's perception of the importance of the activity. Eccles and Wigfield posit that, together, expectancies and attainment value 'directly influence' an individual's 'performance, persistence and choice'.

Eccles and Wigfield's 'Expectancy Model of Achievement Motivation' (2000) has been applied widely in a range of international primary and secondary school contexts. For example, Xiang, McBride, Guan, and Solmon (2003) make use of this model to assess children's motivation during physical education, while Wolters (1998) apply it to student motivation in maths, English and social studies. However, some work such as Richardson and Watt (2006) study exploring motivations across three Australian universities does apply Eccles and Wigfield's model to Higher Education learning, these studies are in the minority and the model is yet to be applied to articulating students. The expectancy value theory posits that individual motivation for a task varies depending on perceptions about the chances of success and the value of completing the task:

*Motivation (M) = Perceived Probability of Success in a Task **x** Subjective Task Value*

If a student has positive ability beliefs, i.e. they feel they will succeed at university, and place value on the importance of achieving in this new learning context, they are more likely to choose to articulate and, subsequently, persist and perform during their studies. Understanding the perceptions of associate students whilst they study at college is an important aspect of this research. Preparation is essential before the transition, however, before, during and after, the importance of participation was highlighted in the literature (Finn, 1989); (Rice, Frederickson, Shelton, Riglin, & Ng-knight, 2015);(Lawson & Kearns, 2010).

There is a limited amount of research which examined students' perceptions before their transition to university, rather, the data collection predominantly takes place during their induction or orientation weeks. However, research has shown that students have specific perceptions about university study. Several studies have shown an expectation of independent learning (Archer, 2007; Breeze, Johnson, & Uytman, 2018; Christie, 2009), however, there is a lack of appreciation among students about what this involves (Kitching & Hulme, 2013). Understanding these expectations and perceptions is further

complicated by the diverse student body and their prior experiences (Crisp, Palmer, Turnbull, Nettelbeck, & Ward, 2009; Dalglish & Chan, 2005; Mcewan, 2015).

3.3.3 Making the transition

Transition can be defined as a negotiation between the individual and the social contexts they inhabit (Crafter & Maunder, 2012). For this study, the definition of transition by Gale and Parker (2012) represents the authors' understanding – 'the capability to navigate change' (p. 737). This is not a linear sequence, their use of navigation depicts the journey students take which involves negotiation of unknown structures and resources, and with little control over what the change involves. Brown and Parkin (2020) state "induction is about belonging, connecting with people, beginning a new experience".

Transition is more than a process, and Gale and Parker (2012) discuss three ways in which it is conceptualised in higher education research:

Table 3: A typology of student transition in higher education (Gale & Parker, 2012)

Conceptions of student transition	*Transition metaphors*	*Types of transitional change: from one to another*	*Transition dynamics*	*Illustrative transition activities/emphases/systems*
Transitions as Induction (T₁)	Pathway; Journey; Milestones	• Inculcation: sequentially defined periods of adjustment • From one institutional and/or disciplinary context to another	• Navigating institutional norms and procedures • Linear, chronological, progressive movement • Relatively fixed structures and systems • Crisis as culture shock (contextual familiarity)	• Orientation/familiarisation with campus (facilities) and significant staff • Just-in-time information re procedures, curriculum content, assessment requirements • First-year seminars • Institutionist transition pedagogy (Kift, 2009)
Transitions as Development (T₂)	Trajectory; Life; Stage	• Transformation: qualitatively distinct stages of maturation • From one student and/or career identity to another	• Navigating sociocultural norms and expectations • Linear, cumulative, non-reversible movement • Discrete, singular, consecutive identities • Crisis as critical incident (identity forming)	• Mentoring programmes • Service learning and field placements • Career and research culture development activities/emphasis • Championing narratives of student and career trajectories by successful students and staff • Individualist transition pedagogy
Transition as Becoming (T₃)	Whole of life; Rhizomatic	• Fluctuation: perpetual series of fragmented movements • Lived reality or subjective experience,	• Navigating multiple narratives and subjectivities • Rhizomatic, zigzag, spiral movement • Flexible systems/fluid (ephemeral) identities	• Flexible student study modes, including removal of distinction between full-time and part-time study and min/max. course loads • Flexible student study pathways, including multiple opportunities to change course and enter,

from birth to death	• Crisis as neither period/stage specific nor necessarily problematic	withdraw and return to study throughout life • Curriculum that reflects and affirms marginalised student histories and subjectivities • Connectionist transition pedagogy (Hockings, 2010)

An important point raised in their research is that the terms of the transition are set by others (Quinn, 2009) and not controlled by the students. Literature around transition often focuses on induction activities and these are classed as T_1 (see (Aynsley & Gazeley, 2012; Mayne & Bannerman, 2015; Towns, 2011). In T_2 articles (see (Andrews & Clark, 2011.; Chester et al., 2013; Rhodes et al., 2014) the focus changes to identity and examines the development of the university student identity. Gale and Parker (2012) state that researchers who take a T_2 approach regard time as contributing to an individual's development (p. 742). T_3 research is informed by critical sociology and cultural studies and takes account of the issues and challenges faced by individuals, examining the lived reality. T_3 researchers seek to adjust the systems in place within HE institutions to make them more flexible and open, adapting to the needs of the diverse student body. The focus on research at this level is understanding the multiplicities of students' lived experiences and perspectives, an area which is under-represented in the current literature.

The QAA enhancement theme on student transitions from 2014 to 2017 drove forward research across Scottish institutions (QAA, 2014) and reported on the complex nature of these transitions, fitting with the T_3 categorisation, moving away from the linear learner journey and acknowledging that, for many, these transitions are complex and messy, taking place alongside life and work transitions (Gordon, 2016). UK research has also shown the relevance of student transitions (Abbott-Chapman, 2006; Breeze et al., 2018; Kahu & Nelson, 2018; Knox, 2005; Moodie, 2010). These educational transitions are now understood to be 'multiple, multi-dimensional and individual' (Brown et al., 2017).

Much of the literature discusses how students felt poorly prepared and had limited understanding of the new system and the standards expected of them (Christie et al., 2008). International research carried out by Zarb et al. (2018) found that students

experienced a variety of concerns during transition with course related concerns and the implications and repercussions of failing to rank the highest.

Finding explanations and details of the differences students experienced as a whole was limited in the research with the author only uncovering listed details of differences between primary and secondary schools (Braggett, 1997; Towns, 2011) and much of the research focuses on specific elements. Articles examining transition from college to university found commonalities in the experiences of students who struggled with changes in class size. Research by Greenbank (2007) found that students were used to smaller groups and a more discursive approach. Cook and Leckey (1999) agree with these findings, highlighting the difficulties students face when this environment is not replicated within the university setting. Changes to timetables and the students' understanding of the timetable were highlighted with some students experiencing clashes (Breeze, Johnson, & Uytman, 2020) and a lack of information (Briggs et al., 2012). Moving to a new timetabling system and starting at a new institution without prior sight of the timetable is an obvious cause of anxiety, however, this was not evident in the literature, with authors linking this to induction activities (Barron & D'Annunzio-Green, 2009) or challenges for commuter students (Thomas, 2018). Interestingly, this has been a key theme in literature surrounding primary to secondary transition (Towns, 2011). Similarly, research into the first year transition highlighted the impact of the 'wee stuff' such as changes in terminology (Black & MacKenzie, 2008) but this was only emphasised in a few studies examining the college to university transition (Turner & Tobbell, 2018).

Participants in a study by Tett, Cree, and Christie (2017) discussed the difficulties they faced with assessment methods, timing and delayed feedback, whilst Barber and Netherton (2018) cite these differences in aims, learning and assessment approaches as barriers to a successful transition (p. 601). Work by Thomas (2018) examining commuter students, those who 'continue to live at home whilst studying' (p. 1143), suggesting that a variety of learning, teaching and assessment approaches should be incorporated, and this advice also has relevance for direct entry students. There was little evidence of the actual differences between institutions with many aspects overlooked or discussed only marginally such as differences in deadlines, the faster

pace of content delivery, the number of subjects or modules delivered each trimester, differences in campus availability and facilities. The literature examined did uncover differences in class sizes (Ainley & Allen, 2016; Barron & D'Annunzio-Green, 2009; Fischbacher-Smith et al., 2015; Greenbank, 2007); in timetabled activities (Breeze et al., 2020; Christie, 2009; Clark, 2010; Thomas, 2018b); in the terminology used across the institutions (Black & MacKenzie, 2008; Turner & Tobbell, 2018); and in the assessment methods (Barber & Netherton, 2018; Tett et al., 2017), however, there is a gap in consolidating this literature and producing outputs which are accessible to the student community for guidance and preparation activities. The literature demonstrated an understanding of the importance of students becoming both academically and socially involved in the university to ease transition and develop their sense of belonging. The student voice, however, was underrepresented in the literature.

The social aspect of transition can be developed into a focus of empowerment and three specific components: **capability** (knowledge and understanding), **deciding** (choice) and **achieving** (appropriate actions) (Lawson & Kearns, 2010). Becoming both academically and socially involved in university aids transition and develops students' sense of belonging. Encouraging simple activities such as engaging students in class discussions and allowing them to ask questions during lectures can build their participation levels. Outside of the classroom, joining clubs and societies will further develop their sense of belonging, which is geographically located (Proshansky, Fabian, & Kaminoff, 1983), and student identity. Research by Lawson & Kearns (2016) found there is a current need to shift attention towards the wider array of social contexts wherein agency, identity and empowerment define participation, rather than structures.

Retention and success of students are key indicators for all universities. Widening participation is not simply about widening access but supporting the integration and success of students who gain access. Academic and social integration are the two components of successful integration required for success (Tinto, 2012). New students, particularly those who join existing cohorts, have to make connections with university faculty and academic requirements, i.e. academic integration, and often struggle to fit it, citing specific concerns around making friends, i.e. social integration (D'Amico, Dika, Elling, Algozzine, & Ginn, 2014). Some stick with familiarity, finding safety in their

college cohort even after transition, findings this support mechanism increases confidences (Lizzio, 2006).

Social integration can be defined as the social interactions the student experiences formally through institutionally provided activities, or informally through interaction with fellow students in residential areas or various other places of study (Strahn-Koller, 2012). Social integration can occur naturally when students are living on campus and interacting with the physical space (Dixon & Durrheim, 2004) and their daily lives are encompassed by their student identity. All of the associate students in this study live off campus and these accommodation choices influence their experience of university life with may becoming 'commuter students' (Pokorny, Holley, & Kane, 2017). They are subject to external demands, such as part-time working, child or caring responsibilities, and this has a direct and significant influence on both their academic and social integration (Strahn-Koller, 2012). Understanding the influences on student identity and how identity develops are examined in the following section.

3.4   Understanding student identity

Much of the work around identity stems from the seminal work of Erikson (1968) and Marcia (1966) who conceptualised identity development as a sequential process in which individuals perceive themselves in a comparable way to those around them. Erikson's psychosocial model depicts eight stages which are dominated by a crisis which must be resolved to attain a strong sense of identity. A crisis is not defined as a tragedy but rather a turning point which enables future growth and development.

Marcia (1966) addressed Erikson's notion of 'crisis' and expanded this to consider the extent to which the individual had explored and committed to an identity. He defined four identity statuses – diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium and achievement. Diffusion describes individuals who are yet to commit to a particular path and who exhibit a low level of commitment; they are passive and lack goals and direction. In the foreclosure identity status, individuals have committed to a particular path, but not through extensive exploration; they are accepting of beliefs and values assigned by family, community and culture. From an undergraduate student perspective, these are the

students who apply to university because it is a 'rite of passage' (Giddens, 1991), they are following in familiar footsteps. From a widening participation perspective, these are the students who don't apply because they would be the first in their family to attend. In the moratorium status, individuals have been through extensive exploration and questioning but are still in the midst of identity crisis and have not yet established their identity. These are the students who are studying at university but are not sure why they are there or if this is the right step for them. The final status is achievement and it is here that individuals have achieved and realised 'who they are'; they are capable of prioritising what is important to them and have direction in their lives. These confident and focused individuals are driven and ready for any challenges that cross their path.

During the transition to university, students undergo a significant change in identity as they 'shed' their college identity and replace this with the new university student identity. Bridges (1995) states, 'before you become a different kind of person, you must let go of the old identity'.

Student identity stems from the 'learner identity' formed during early schooling experiences and can be defined as 'the part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership' (Tajfel, 1981). Studies by Harvey et al. (2006) and Yorke and Thomas (2003) examined the experiences of first-year undergraduate students and the onus placed upon the individual students to adapt to their new culture and exhibit their new student identity.

The transition from college to university requires that a new identity emerge, that of a higher education student (Briggs et al., 2012). Student identity is the individuals' sense of self, fluid in nature and influenced by changing contexts and social relationships. These social relationships formed with the student community are fundamental to direct-entry students who are attempting to construct their new identity, after losing their social contacts and connections with college lecturers (Scanlon, Rowling, & Weber, 2007), they are attempting to join in this shared narrative (Wenger, 2000). Strong relationships with academic members of staff can ease adjustment and

build resilience (Koca, 2016). Students are influenced by the groups and values they inhabit, and their participation in activities, whether at primary school, college or university, enhance their identification within that environment. This can be more challenging for direct-entrants and those defined as 'new students' (Haggis, 2006) – individuals who only attend timetabled sessions (Christie, 2005), spending vastly shorter periods of time on campus (Yorke & Longden, 2004) than traditional higher education students. These student may use the campus facilities in a slightly different manner and have an increased need for individual quiet study spaces in which they can spread out their belongings (Bauer, 2019).

Direct-entry students will have identified as higher education students for several years as they worked towards and successfully achieved their HNQ, making the entry requirements and gaining their place on the university campus. This identity, however, can be sent into crisis as they struggle with internal conflicts (Erikson, 1968), their sense of self and the environment around them. Their identity develops and changes over their lifetime, it is not constant or fixed but alters in response to different experiences (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004).

Identity styles were introduced by Berzonsky (1992; 1990) as stable inter-individual differences in short-term processes; in the way individuals construct and revise or maintain their sense of identity. Importantly he does not perceive identity development as a succession of stages, but as a long-term process that has different forms, reliant on an individual's processing style. This succession of stages is echoed in the work of Flum (1994) who built on the moratorium status and defined a distinct group which displayed an 'evolutive style' of identity formation, exhibiting gradual, step-by-step exploration of identity issues. For an associate student, this gradual acceptance of the new identity can be realised through confidence gained after passing the first diet of summative assessment or joining a society or club related to their subject area. 'Identity capital' was introduced by Côté (1996) and 'denotes what individuals "invest" in "who they are"'. Côté posits that modern society requests and encourages individuals to explore and develop their identity, and that the 'capital' describes the resources, both personal and contextual, that they call upon.

3.4.1   The influence of social identity

Identity is also socially constructed and formed by one's own self-belief, social group and interactions in our own social context which form our norms, expectations and beliefs (Lindstrom, 1993). Social identity contributes to a person's self-concept and self-esteem, and is formed through group identification and their associated values and emotional significance (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Social identity is a strong contributor to student identity formation and Hogg, Abrams, Otten, and Hinkle (2004) posit that individuals favour in-group identities over out-group (in-group-out-group bias) and discriminate accordingly. For students, their associate student status may be seen as an out-group, with the university student identity having an in-group preference. Individuals' social identities are mainly derived from group memberships and the influence of work. The group identity within a university context could be thought of as 'student' but this is categorised further by faculties, schools and even specific subject classifications. The definition of one's identity goes beyond the general and is specific and contextualised as 'computing student' or 'engineering student' by most. Students who strongly identify with their subject of study and have a clear achievement identity status can see the long-term establishment of their identity right through to their graduate career.

In 2000, Gee's identity theory viewed a person from multiple facets: nature, institution, affinity and discourse. In *nature* we could consider the genetic predisposition of the student; *institution* considers the influence of formal authorities; *affinity* considers their shared experiences and group affinity, and finally, *discourse* recognised the influence of dialogue with others. This identity framework has been applied in several studies examining discursive identity (Brown, Reveles, & Kelly, 2005) and identity negotiation (Palmer, 2007) and this approach is a relevant reference for identity formation in associate students. An interesting study by Luehmann and Markowitz (2007) examined identity growth in secondary science teachers and students, and allowed students to 'try on' identities such as a scientist. The notion of named identities is enforced by Bernstein's (1998) theory of pedagogic identity. They identified four identity constructs – retrospective, prospective, de-centred and therapeutic. The first two constructs can be identified as of particular relevance in an educational context as they constitute a model of identity formed through the pedagogic practices of schooling.

For associate students there are differences around pedagogic practices, in particular the

amount of self-directed study expected. These differences were classified as 'pedagogical frictions' by Katartzi and Hayward (2019). Like Luehmann and Markowitz (2007), Lee and Bernstein (1997) identify 'official' identities of the student, citizen and teacher and posit that identities are made and remade in classrooms but they are not made in conditions of our own choosing, rather by those imposed by government policies and curriculum measures. Notable studies by Yorke and Thomas, 2003), Harvey et al., (2006), Kaplan and Flum (2012) and Rich and Schachter (2012) have examined identity within academic institutions. Student identity can sit within social identity as it stems from the 'learner identity' formed during early schooling experiences. Research by Flum and Kaplan (2012) postulated that the process of identity formation is also anchored in a sense of 'being part of' – a web of relationships, group solidarity and communal culture. They found three concepts that guide the promotion of identity exploration in an educational context: trigger, sense of safety and scaffold. Similarly, Rich and Schachter (2012) found in a high school study that the institutional identity should be nurturing, encouraging engagement in purposeful activities, promoting positive staff perceptions of the students and establishing a supportive peer environment, mirroring the concepts of scaffold and sense of safety.

Attenborough (2011) found that different kinds of student identity tend to come into conflict as students interact face-to-face and with peers during tutorials. Most notably, the imperative of 'doing education' – as a keen, enthusiastic proto-academic seeking to attain a good final degree classification – often seems to be overridden by the imperative of 'doing being a student' – as an average and/or indifferent student who does not stand out whilst interacting with other students.

In his book *Modernity and Self-identity*, (Giddens, 1991) found that 'a person's identity is not to be found in behaviour, not – important though this is – in the reactions of others, but in the capacity to keep a particular narrative going'. Identity is socially constructed and formed by one's own self-belief, social group and interactions in our own social context which form our norms, expectations and beliefs (Gergen, 1993). Students often experience disparity between their expectations and the reality of study within the university after transition. Jackson et al. (2000) identified four characteristics – optimist, prepared, fearful and complacent. It is these beliefs and expectations which

universities must work to influence, building in-group identities formed around associate students' subject disciplines, offering scaffold to diminish the impact of changes in the environment, social interactions and academic demands, and recognising direct-entry students as fully fledged members of their cohort.

3.4.2   Identity crisis, identity horizons

Interesting and relevant research was carried out by Côté and Bynner (2008); Côté (1996); Côté et al., (2015) which examined identity formation and developed the identity horizons model. This model explores the effect of prior experiences on future education and work horizons and explored the impact of individual self-perception on broadening or narrowing future possible identities and roles (Côté et al., 2015). The results of their studies found that students from backgrounds where university education was not role-modelled, i.e. first in family, reported restricted perceptions of educational horizons.

This type of personal self-perception is fixed in the field of identity, serving to extend or reduce the perception of future possible identities and roles. It considers individuals' apprehensions, whether they aspire in a local or global context and how they perceive the goodness of fit for themselves.

This long-term horizon is not a constant path and the notion of 'fractured transitions' describes these episodes of ending one activity without securing a stable outcome in the next (Coles, 1995; Furlong & Cartmel, 2009). This is the state of a student who has completed their studies but has yet to find employment. Not all students are equipped to manage the transition into work as this assumes that they all have access to high levels of cultural capital, and maximum potential for agency as well as the 'dispositions, subjectivities and attitudes' that are associated with the capacity to be good navigators through new economies (Wyn & Woodman, 2006).

The terms encapsulated marginality and constructive marginality were coined by Bennet (1993) to examine cultural marginality and although the scope of this area of research is out with the realms of this study, there are a few important notions which can be drawn upon. Bennett's work focused on culture in the broadest sense but it can

be applied in this context to the culture within the university and the impact on student identity.

Encapsulated marginality is reflected in alienation and loneliness, resulting in culture shock. This cultural conflict can cause the individual to lose their sense of belonging. Constructive marginality occurs when an individual takes an active role in constructing their identity (Bennett, 1993) and it is here that individuals create their own self-reference and awareness. Direct-entry students may experience encapsulated marginality if they have failed to develop their sense of belonging, experiencing loneliness and feeling out of place on the university campus.

3.5   Models of Transition and Student Identity Development

Several models for student transition into university and identity development have been outlined in the literature and demonstrated that there is no universally accepted student transition model (Harris & Barnett, 2014). These models combine various theories and concepts and demonstrate that there is no one appropriate for all transition situations (Harvey et al., 2006).

Throughout the literature fourteen models were identified which merited consideration for inclusion in the research. The inclusion criteria for the models were as follows: relevant to higher education student transfer, published in an academic peer-reviewed journal, applicable or adaptable for associate students. Accordingly, four models were excluded, leaving ten relevant to this study.

Table 4: Selection of models/frameworks

Model/Framework	Reference	Criteria
Bridges Transition Model	(Bridges, 2009)	Yes
Conceptual schema for dropout (CSD) in college	(Tinto, 1987)	Yes

Framework for student access, retention, attainment and progression in higher education	(The Higher Education Academy framework series, 2016)	No
Model of Organisational influence	(Briggs et al., 2012)	Yes
Model of Student Adjustment	(Menzies & Baron, 2014)	Yes
Participation-Identification Model	(Finn, 1989b)	Yes
Person-in-context model	(DeLuca et al., 2012)	No
Psychological model of college student retention	(Bean & Eaton, 2001)	No
Refined conceptual framework of student engagement incorporating the educational interface	(Kahu & Nelson, 2018)	Yes
Student Experience Model	(Burnett, 2007)	Yes
Student Experience Transition Practitioner Model	(Morgan, 2013)	Yes
The Geometric Model of Student Persistence and Achievement	(Swail, 2004)	No
The Thriving Transition cycle	(Nicholson, 1990)	Yes
U-Curve Theory of Adjustment	(Risquez et al., 2007)	Yes

These models and frameworks have been developed with students in mind and frequently in response to internal or external policy directives. Within the UK students are regarded as customers with an emphasis on improving "the student experience" (Sabri, 2010). In the US, Grote, Knight, Lee, and Watford (2020) examined articulation polices and concluded that although the drive to increase articulation agreements was born out of a need to improve the rates of students transfer, surprisingly, the articulation policies did not focus on this as an outcome. Instead, the policies focused on status, credits and admissions policies. All of the models listed focus on student experience, persistence, adjustment or identity and aim to improve the experience or outcomes for students.

The following section examines ten models which provide insight into transition, either directly for students or indirectly by applying the concepts to students articulating.

These models have been selected based on their relevance to the study and citations in related literature.

3.5.1   Participation-Identification Model

In this chapter we have explored the importance of belonging and Finn's model considers the construct of student engagement which is defined by identification and participation. The 'Participation-Identification Model' (Finn, 1989) stresses the importance of developing a sense of belonging in transitioning students through their involvement in both the behavioural and emotional components of schooling. Finn identified four types of participation which are listed in Figure 7 - Participation-Identification Model . He highlighted that efforts should be directed towards increasing and maintaining students' participation levels to decrease the likelihood of withdrawal.
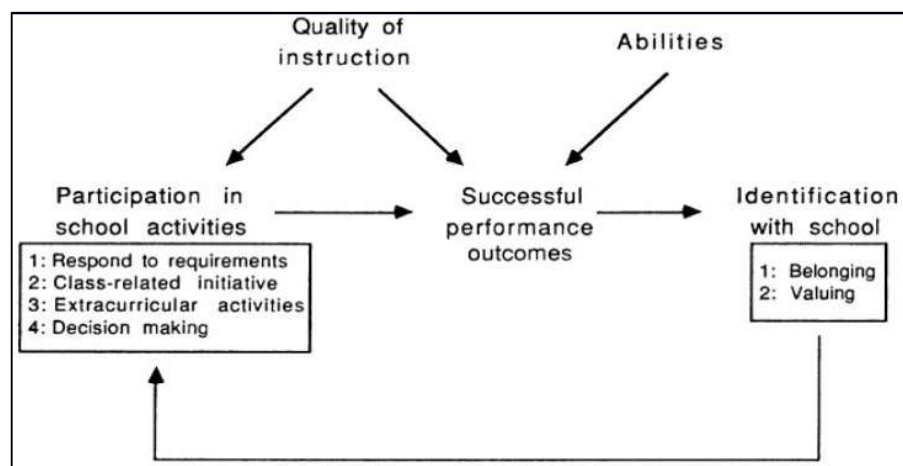
Figure 7 - Participation-Identification Model (Finn, 1989)

This model focuses on school age children and suggests that participation in school activities and identification with school mutually shape each other over time (Beekhoven & Dekkers, 2005) with a focus on extra-curricular activities, successful performance and ability. Although this model is useful for highlighting the importance of participation, it fails to appropriately apply to the experience of transitional students who may be commuting to study, working part-time and have family commitments, meaning, for many, that taking part in additional activities is not an option. It is useful, however, to recognise the importance of belonging and student engagement (Hospel et al., 2016) and to acknowledge the impact this may have on student outcomes.

3.5.2 Bridges Transition Model

Unlike the Participation-Identification Model which considers constructs that impact upon students, other models of transition are broken down into separate phases such as Bridges Transition Model (2009) (Figure 8). Bridges (2009) suggests that managing transitions involves helping individuals pass through three transitional phases; the *endings* phase, the *neutral zone* and the third and final phase, *new beginnings*. In the first stage, *endings,* students have to accept what they are leaving behind and consider what they may keep – classmates, locations, skills. During this time, students may experience homesickness, anxiety, isolation and confusion (Denovan & Macaskill, 2013; Thurber & Walton, 2012). In the second stage, the *neutral zone*, they are caught between the old reality and the new one, this is the 'no-man's land between the old reality and the new' (Bridges, 1991). This neutral zone is fundamental to development and it is here that learning and growth occur.
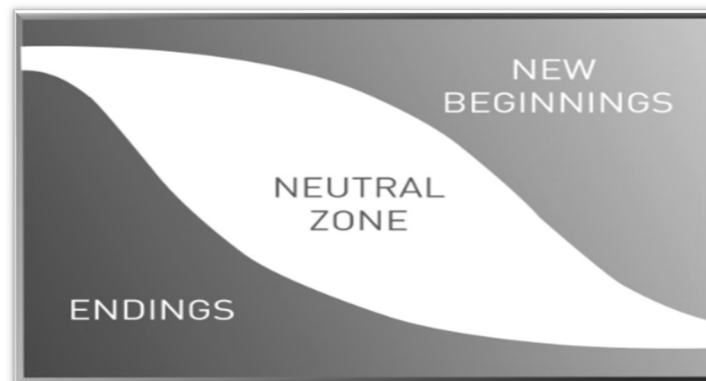
Figure 8 - Bridges Transition Model (Bridges, 2009)

In the final stage, *new beginnings*, individuals can initiate their new identities, discover a new sense of purpose and energy and begin to make the change work. Although Bridges developed this model for an organisational environment, there is no doubt that it is relevant to student transitions (*The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education*, 2015). Enabling students to reach the 'new beginning' stage is fundamental to their success and academics can support this through frequent feedback, which will allow students to navigate their new environment and see the end point (Matheson, Tangney, & Sutcliffe, 2018). As we consider the transition of associate students, it is worth exploring at which point they would move from the neutral stage to new beginnings. Could the interventions and dual matriculation offered by being an associate student allow this to take place earlier within their studies?

3.5.3 U-Curve Theory of Adjustment

The U-Curve Theory of Adjustment (Figure 9) is another model worthy of discussion for its relevance to students in transition. This model was originally depicted in organisation literature by (Oberg, 1960) and adapted for education by Risquez et al., (2007) where three phases are posited – honeymoon, culture shock and adjustment. In their study, Risquez et al. found the honeymoon stage, where experiencing the initial feelings of excitement and anticipation took place, appeared in only a few cases and was short-lived. The adult learners in their study shared feelings of anxiety and fear of failure as they experienced culture shock in the new institution. During the adjustment phase, students adopt cultural norms and gain confidence (p.195). This model provides a useful overview of transition and is comparable to Bridges Transition Model. Both models depict three phases and posit similarities in student anxiety and adjustment.
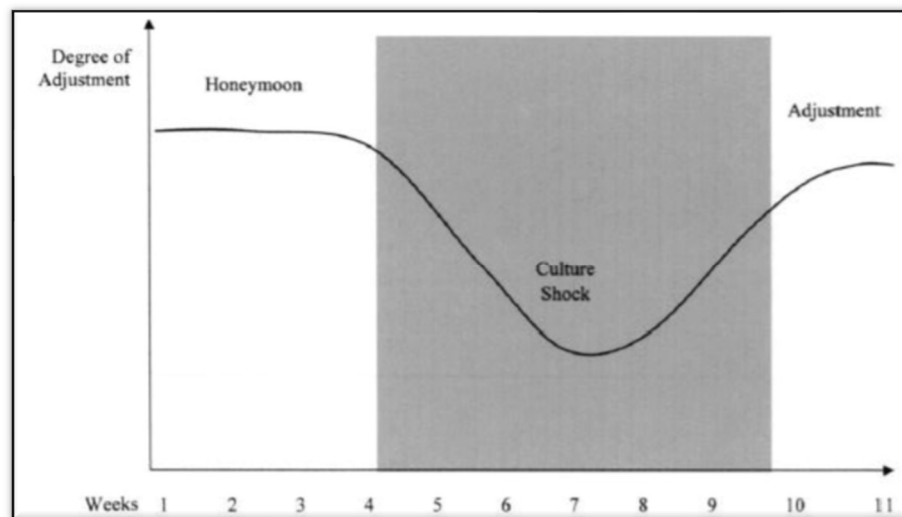
Figure 9 - The U-Curve Theory of Adjustment (Risquez et al., 2007)

What this model demonstrates is that transition is a journey, it takes time, and adjustment has a large part to play. Other models exist in the literature which examine postgraduate transition such as the Model of Student Adjustment (Menzies & Baron, 2014) which explores transition for international students over five stages starting before they leave their home country.

3.5.4 Model of Student Adjustment

Menzies and Baron (2014) drew on work by Cieri et al., (2006) to develop the Model of Student Adjustment (Figure 10) which illustrates five phases – pre-departure, arrival, honeymoon, party's over and, healthy adjustment.
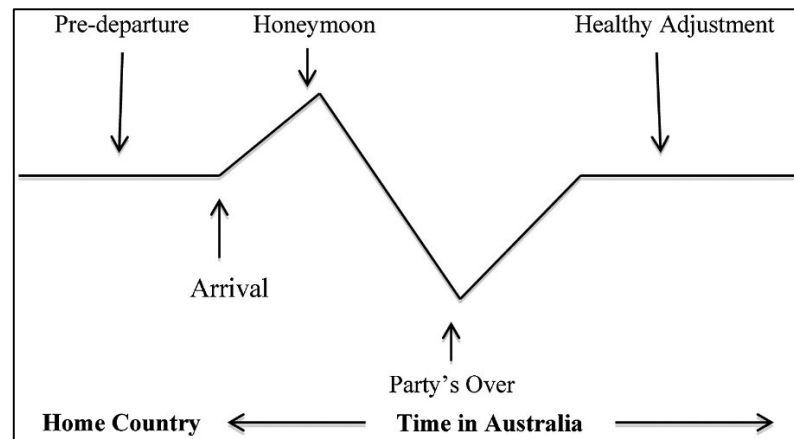
Figure 10: Model of Student Adjustment (Menzies and Baron, 2014)

The first phase is characterised by positive feelings as students prepare for their journey to begin. This is followed by arrival and the honeymoon phase in which feelings of happiness and excitement can be short-lived, as the party's over phase starts and students experience the shock of their new environment. In line with the U-Curve Theory of Adjustment, culture shock is experienced, and students expressed feelings of depression, confusion, and isolation. The final stage of healthy adjustment is supported by interactions with other students through orientation and mentoring programmes, societies and social events (Menzies & Baron, 2014). Although this model includes pre-departure, no insight is given into the students' preparation activities during this time. The final three stages align with those in Bridges Transition Model and the U-Curve Theory of Adjustment. This gives a strong indicator that students in transition experience this rollercoaster of emotion as they adjust to their new learning environment.

3.5.5   Student Experience Model

Many transition models focus on the experience during the first few weeks which is recognised as being of particular importance for transition success (Wilson et al., 2014). In 2007, Burnett acknowledged that transition is holistic and developed the Student Experience Model (Figure 11) which views the transition process as a continuum of cohesive experience from first to final year (*The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education*, 2015) through six phases – pre-transition, transition, orientation week, first year student induction programmes, the middle years and Capstone or Final year experience. Her model has been designed to identify key phases leading up to, and including, the first semester of study (Burnett,2007).
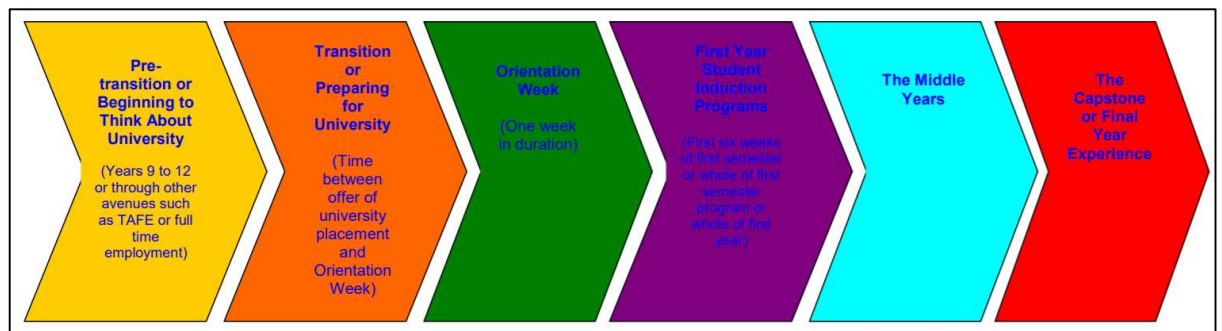
Figure 11: The Student Experience Model (with a focus on First Year Experience) (Burnett, 2007)

This model builds on work by Ellis (2002) who stated that successful transition starts at secondary school and the pre-transition stage is supported by activities such as information sessions at high schools, outreach library programmes and careers and guidance information days. Students are also influenced by their personal situations such as family and work commitments alongside their financial situation and, importantly, they are influenced by their own preconceptions of university life. Burnett acknowledges that this section of the model would benefit from further research.

Burnett's work explores the impact of offers from university and the second phase examines the period between having a firm offer and waiting on the orientation week. This phase is highlighted as an area for potential development; one where students could access information and networking events, allowing them to become familiar with the university before induction and orientation events. During orientation week, universities provide a plethora of activities and events to welcome and induct new students into the university. It is during this time that the familiar emotions of homesickness, isolation and depression appear.

The fourth phase, first year induction, sees a programme of events which lasts for an extended period over the first year of study. This phase is designed to counteract and ease the stress and anxiety experienced in the new environment including those caused by independent learning, changes to academic assessment. Burnett suggests that continued support from academic staff can overcome fragmented induction activities and ensure on-going student development (Burnett, 2007). This is followed by the middle years where a lack of support is frequently experienced by students as they continue to develop as independent learners. The final phase explores the development of graduate attributes and employment outcomes – an area where universities have

focused attention in recent years (Antcliff et al., 2016; Clarke, 2018; Hinchliffe & Jolly, 2011).

This model is useful for considering the transition experience of associate students and highlights the interventions which can take place to ease transition at each stage. Although this model is aimed at high school students, the importance of activities pre-transition are relevant to this study and the author's acknowledgement of further research in this area highlights the relevance of this study.

The following models and frameworks explore transition from the perspective of learner identity and identity development and posit that interventions to support a strong learner identity increase student persistence and success.

3.5.6   Model of Organisational Influence on the Development of Learner Identity

Briggs et al. (2012) developed the Model of Organisational Influence on the Development of Learner Identity (Figure 12). This model drew on the work of several scholars and the authors believed that establishing a positive learning identity was essential for developing persistence and success as a university student. The studies identified twelve factors that enable the growth of student identity -

1. Aspiration to be a university student, preferably starting early in life.
2. Imagining oneself realistically as a student.
3. Clear, reliable systems of support leading up to higher education application.
4. Support from school, college and university targeted to the individual.
5. One-to-one encouragement.
6. Access to university students and staff pre-entry.
7. Access to a range of pre-university experiences for applicants and their families.
8. Induction activities that combine social and academic purposes.
9. Class activities that encourage interaction with staff and other students.
10. Sustained programme of induction to encourage 'belonging'.
11. Interaction with university staff during the first year.
12. Help in developing independent learning skills, pre- and post-entry.
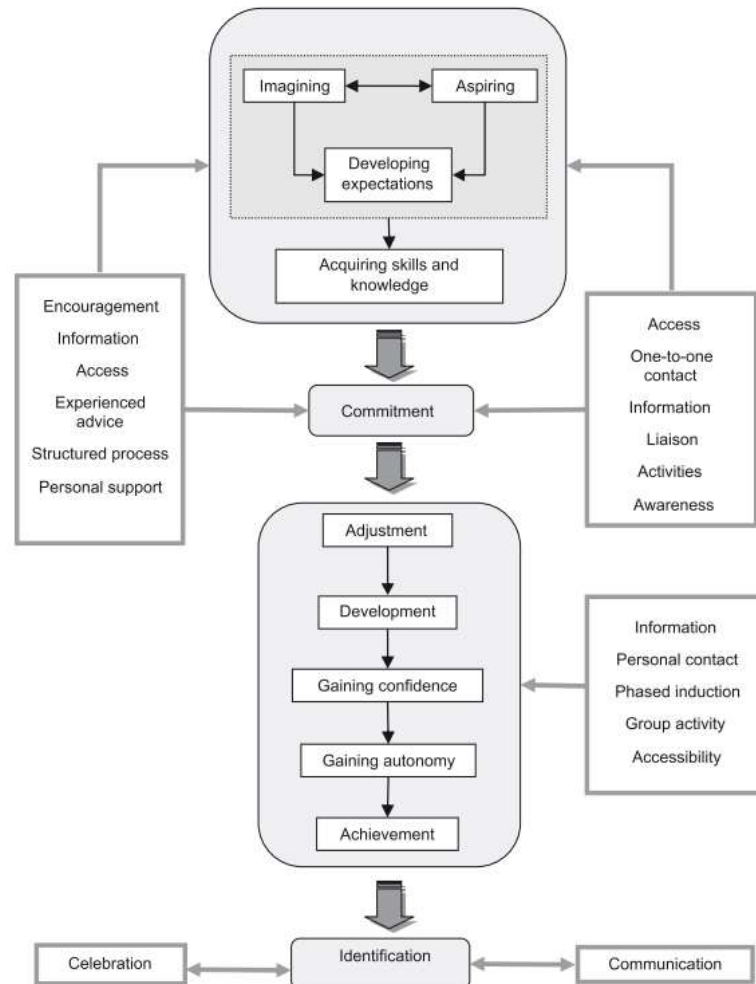
Figure 12: Model of Organisational Influence on the Development of Learner Identity
(Briggs et al., 2012)

The development of learner identity is focused through the central column of the figure and these concepts are underpinned by Tinto (1987) principles which recommend developing a supportive climate for learner development. The model considers organisational influences and this study can draw on the first section of the model which explores the aspiration and expectations the student develops as they begin to consider a future which includes university study. The second stage, commitment, represents the application. In the third section, the student moves through five stages – adjustment,

development, gaining confidence, gaining autonomy and achievement. Finally, the student identifies and achieves success.

The influences of the university, their administrative process, the support offered, the teaching methods, and personal contact are all incorporated in the model through the boxes on either side.

3.5.7 The Thriving Transition Cycle

Nicholson (1990) developed the Transition Cycle (Figure 13) to explain work-role transitions in four successive stages – preparation, encounter, adjustment and stabilisation, exploring the perspective of the organisation and the psychosocial impact on the individual transitions (De Clercq, Roland, Brunelle, Galand, & Frenay, 2018).
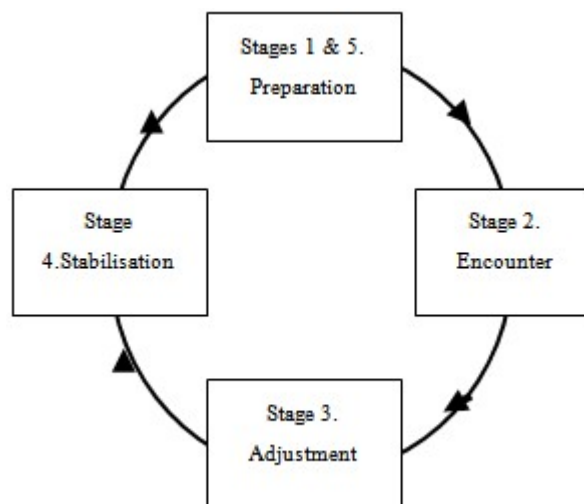
Figure 13: Transition Cycle (Nicholson, 1990)

The model has been adapted and applied to higher education with a focus on the first year experience by several authors (Harris & Barnett, 2014; Jansen & van der Meer, 2012; Polach, 2004). Nicholson's original model emphasised the experience of transition as a journey from the initial point to more strategic adjustments. Based on Nicholson's model, Harris (2014) developed a new transition model (Figure 14) that focuses on transitions 'well resolved' in which challenge becomes the catalyst for change where three outcomes are possible: thriving, surviving, or languishing (De Clercq et al., 2018).

In the adapted model, thriving is a process that is 'forward focussed, clear, ordered, andpurposeful' and where individuals are 'confident, pro-active and self-assured' (Harris et al., 2013).
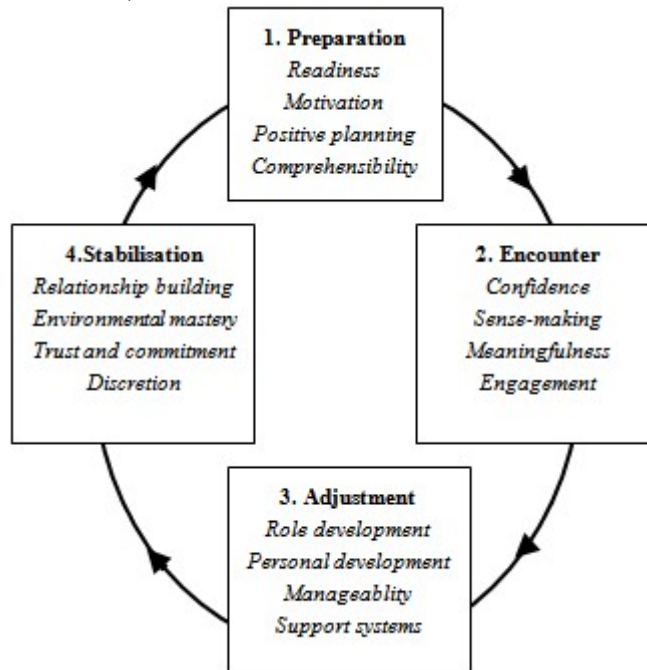
Figure 14: Thriving Transition Cycle (Harris et al., 2013)

During preparation, students prepare to transition to university, and their readiness, motivation, positive planning and comprehensibility determine their success. During the encounter stage, students start to develop confidence and make sense of their surroundings, they find meaning in their new student life and engage. The third stage is adjustment and it is here that students develop new roles and experience personal development. They expand their support systems and learn to manage the changes. Lastly, stabilisation sees students building relationships and mastering their new environment, exercising discretion to suit their skill level. They exhibit trust and commitment to the system and in those around them.

During each of these stages, students in the study by Harris et al., (2013) were identified as –

(a) **Thriving**: where it recognised the adaptive processes of recovery and growth, including the mastery of strategies to account for the disparity between expectations and experience;

(b) **Languishing**: where it indicated a lack of mastery, a lack of understanding of process and a failure to learn from the experience; and

(c) **Surviving**: where it placed the participant between these two polarised positions and where movement is possible in both directions, depending on the resolution of the tasks of the transition.

The thriving model is a useful means for considering the transition from college to university, however, it lacks details of student experience.

3.5.8 Student Experience Transition Practitioner Model (Morgan, 2013)

Morgan (2013) developed the Student Experience Transition Practitioner Model (Figure 15) in response to the massification of education and argued that the Student Lifecycle Model developed by HEFCE (2001) was no longer capable of supporting practitioners to improve and enhance the student experience.
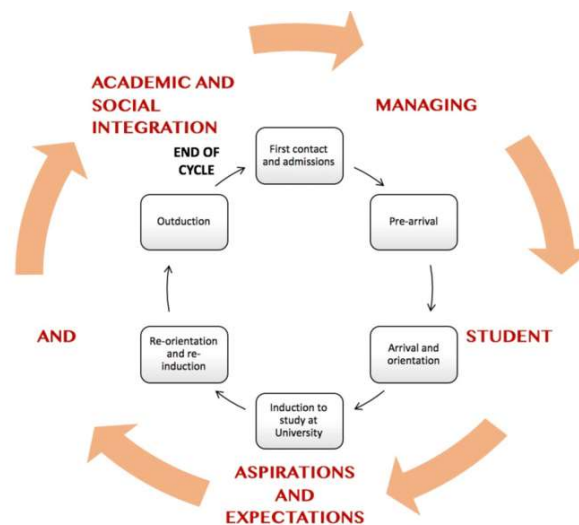
Figure 15: The Student Experience Practitioner Model (Morgan, 2008)

This model depicts six stages from First contact and admissions through to Outduction. These stages are not linked to level of study to reflect differences in modes of study such as part time or short courses.

- **Stage 1 First contact and admissions:** It is here at aspirations and expectations are established during the application stage. Work around academic and social integration should also begin with newsletters and emails encouraging uptake and building familiarisation.

- **Stage 2 Pre-arrival:** Collaborative activities should take place across the university at this stage to provide comprehensive, coordinated information around guidance and support, and academic and personal advice.

- **Stage 3 Arrival and orientation:** This stage should not be confused with induction. The first few weeks are covered by this stage as the students find their way around the campus, make friends and settle into life at university.

- **Stage 4 Induction to study:** This stage covers a full cycle of studying for a module, submitting coursework and sitting exams. It extends over a longer period of time and is about the academic demands of study.

- **Stage 5 Reorientation and reinduction:** This stage takes place at the beginning of the academic year and supports returning students. It reaffirms the support mechanisms available, alongside the regulations and procedures within the university.

- **Stage 6 Outduction:** Here students are supported for life after university whether employment, further study or volunteering.

The outside of the model shows five themes which are central to a successful student experience. Through the six stages these themes need to be covered – managing student aspirations, expectations and social and academic integration.

3.5.9   Refined conceptual framework of student engagement incorporating the educational interface

The Kahu and Nelson (2018) model (Figure 16) focuses on the central column – the education interface which is the location of students experience of higher education. This is influenced by their background and skills, along with the impact of the institution and wider context. Four constructions are highlighted as influential – self-efficacy, emotions, belonging and wellbeing. This model highlights the increasing importance of academic engagement and the development of a relationship, a partnership, between the student and the institution. It builds on the contextual, interconnected and dynamic elements which impact the student experience (Brown, Lawrence, Basson, & Redmond, 2020).
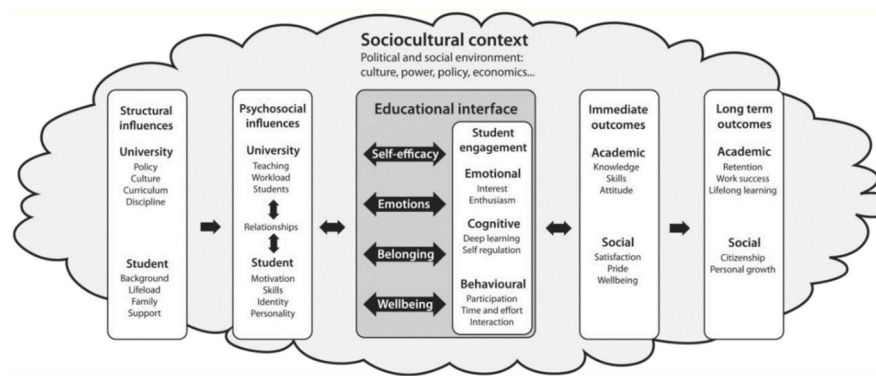
Figure 16: Refined conceptual framework of student engagement incorporating the educational interface (Kahu & Nelson, 2018)

This model identifies the importance of wellbeing as a key ingredient of the educational interface and an outcome. Several activities represent this construct such as making friends, joining clubs and societies and other leisure activities (Chadha et al., 2021).

3.5.10 Student Integration Model

Since 1975 Tinto's Student Integration Model (Figure 17) has dominated the discussion surrounding student persistence in higher education. This model maps the student journey from pre-entry to departure and focused on the factors which lead to student withdrawal or early departure. The model has been adapted over time to include external factors and has been validated by multiple researchers (Braxton & Mundy, 2001; Brooman & Darwent, 2014; Mannan, 2007). The model highlights the complexities of motivations, experiences and demographic factors which influence students' academic and social integration.
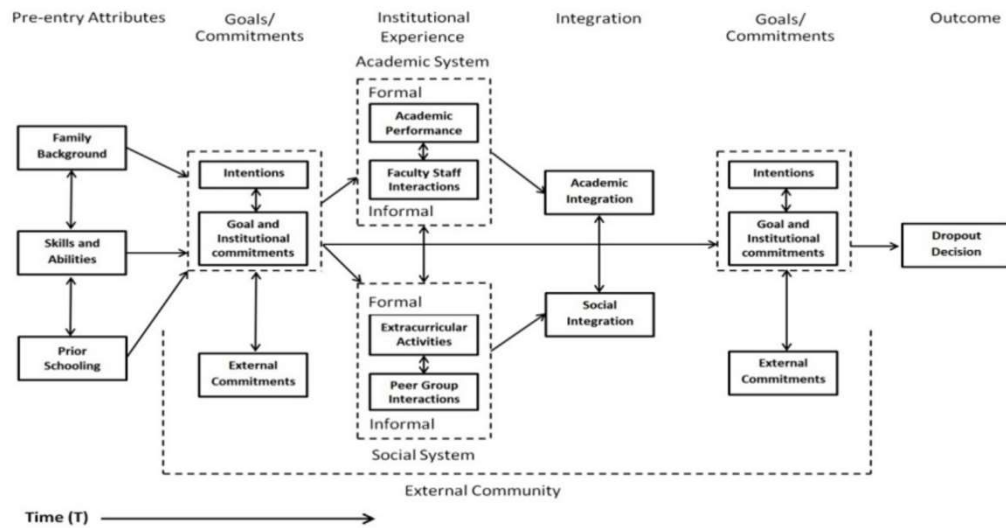
Figure 17: Student Integration Model (Tinto, 1987)

3.6   Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework is the system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs and theories that support and inform the research (Huberman & Miles, 1994). When following an interpretative study, it is important to acknowledge that it is impossible to be completely free from bias. Following a framework brings informed insight to the research by listening to the body of work surrounding the topic under study and can ensure the researcher has surfaced any biases and preconceptions she may have.

The Briggs et al. (2012) Model of Organisational Influence on the Development of Learner Identity demonstrates twelve factors which influence the growth of student identity. For this study, it is perceived that associate students may have already achieved some of these factors by registering as associate students during their time in college. They are exposed to interventions which seek to inspire and prepare them for the transition. How the students perceive, adjust and experience transition is the focus of this study.

The Briggs et al. (2012) Model will be used to provide a conceptual framework providing the scope and appropriate research questions for the study.
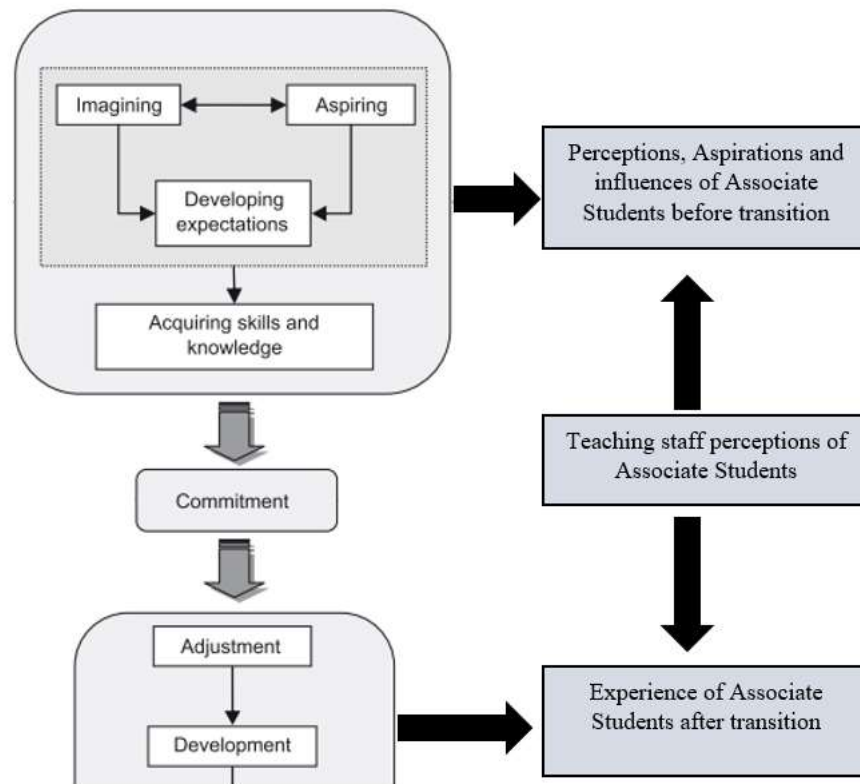
Figure 18: Conceptual framework for the study (adapted from Briggs et al. (2012))

Figure 18 demonstrates the area of focus from the Briggs Model which examines the area before transition and immediately after, during the first few weeks of term. The boxes on the right hand side show the gap in the literature – examining the perceptions of associate students before transition, the experience of associate students after transition and the perceptions of staff at both college and university.

3.7   Conclusion to this chapter

Articulation plays a fundamental role in helping Scotland to achieve the widening participation targets set by the Scottish government and the Associate Student Project may help to ease the transition of these students. By examining the transition literature, common themes have emerged around preparation (Barber, 1999), boundaries (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011), preparedness (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Rice, 2001), belonging (Lawson & Kearns, 2010) and adjustment (Gray et al., 2013). The literature has demonstrated that educational transitions are complex and messy (Gordon, 2016), multi-dimensional and individual (Brown et al., 2017). As students adjust to their new surroundings, new friends and new expectations and realities, they adjust and form

new identities. Understanding the experience of students in transition allows us to explore identity development in learners.

The literature around identity development is vast and this study has focused on the area of social identity. The author believes that identity is socially constructed, formed from experience in groups and of one's own self-belief, forging our own expectations and beliefs (Lindstrom, 1993). This chapter identified models which examine identity development and apply to students in transition. Associate students are influenced individually by their personal situation, their resilience and self-belief. On a sociocultural level, students are influenced by family and peer support, university expectation and the student community they are part of.

Chapter 4: Methods and Methodology

4.1   Introduction

This chapter introduces the research framework used for this study by first examining the research philosophy and detailing the stages and decision-making process for the research design. This framework describes the researcher's philosophical position regarding the nature of reality (ontology), how they can know about it (epistemology) and the different values (axiology) that reinforce the study. This research investigation incorporates a qualitative approach utilising graphical research methods alongside interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) and the approaches and fundamental concepts of these methods are considered.

The purpose of the study is to add to the limited research on the transition experiences of associate students in their transition from college to university. Although there are several studies which explore individual student accounts of transition, many of these focus on the first year experience (Ballantyne, 2012; Chester et al., 2013; Harris, 2014; Kift, 2015; Larmar & Ingamells, 2010) or use quantitative methods to explore retention and performance (Knox, 2005; Nicholson et al., 2013). Few studies focus on the student voice and experience of the community, with the researcher unable to find any studies exploring associate students themselves. Universities need to gain insight into the experience of associate students during the transition to ensure they are providing appropriate and timely support which increases their chances of success in their HE studies. Studies by (Harvey et al., 2006; Leese, 2010a) have demonstrated that student transition is an individual experience and that student identity changes through the process (Flum & Kaplan, 2012; Jungert, 2011). For that reason, this study aims to empower associate students by listening to their experiences of their transition, capturing the complexities of their experience and understanding the individual meaning (Maunder et al., 2013).

4.2   Research philosophy

The term research philosophy refers to the system of beliefs and assumptions about the development of knowledge. Researchers must explore research philosophy, their own beliefs and perceptions about the phenomenon under study and the influence this plays

in their selection of research methods and the analysis process. Throughout their study, researchers will make assumptions:

– about the realities they encounter (ontology)

– about human knowledge (epistemology)

– about the impact of their own values upon the research (axiology)

These parameters influence the way the research is undertaken from design right through to conclusion.

4.2.1 Ontology

Ontology is the study of being (Crotty, 1998) and can be described as the researcher's *worldview* (Creswell, 1998, or *paradigms* (Kuhn, 1970; Lincoln & Guba, 2009; Mertens, 2010). Key ontological questions examine social reality and whether or not this exists independently of human conceptions, and, whether this reality is shared, or if multiple, context-specific realities exist (Ormston, Spencer, Barnard, & Snape, 2013). There are two overarching ontological positions – realism and idealism.

Realism advocates the belief that there is an external reality which exists independently of an individual's beliefs about or understanding of it (Willig, 2013). In contrast, idealism asserts that reality is fundamentally mind-dependent and that it is only knowable through the individual mind and meaning is, therefore, socially constructed. This study follows an idealist approach, exploring the experiences of individual associate students. It does not propose that an overarching 'true' account of this experience can be produced. Rather, the researcher seeks to understand how associate students perceive and interpret this phenomenon from their subjective position. This research, therefore, sits within a constructivist/interpretative paradigm and follows the belief that there are multiple socially constructed realities.

Constructivism

Constructivism has been adopted as the theoretical framework for this study. Constructivism is a theory of knowledge that argues that humans generate knowledge and meaning from an interaction between their experiences and their ideas (Mogashoa, 2014). The constructivist approach can be traced back to Edmund Husserl's philosophy

of phenomenology and to Wilhelm Dilthey's philosophy of hermeneutics (Neuman, 2014). A constructivist researcher believes that knowledge is subjective, it is socially constructed and mind-dependent, influenced by individual human experience (Kawulich & Chilisa, 2012). As individual researchers, we must realise that we are value-laden by nature, subject to values and biases that relate to the topic under study, that may interfere with neutrality. The researcher's interpretation comes from their own personal, cultural and historical experience. This is discussed further in the Role of the Researcher section later in this chapter.

The methods selected underpin this paradigm with interpretative phenomenological analysis examining the individuals' lived experience and their understanding of their lives (Storey, 2007) and graphical methods prompting reflective consciousness and self-discovery (Herbert et al., 2018).

4.2.2   Epistemology

Epistemology enquires into the nature of knowledge and truth; it includes what we need to do to produce knowledge (Neuman, 2014). There are two main philosophies – positivism and interpretivism. Positivists believe that the world exists independently of our knowledge of it; studies adopt a deductive approach and researchers concentrate on facts. By contrast, interpretivists believe that the researcher is part of the process, exploring the phenomenon through the participants and their own perspectives. Interpretivists consider knowledge to be socially constructed (Creswell, 2003; Mertens, 2008) and ponder that there are as many intangible realities as people constructing them.

Interpretivism

The interpretivist tradition rejects the notion that the world exists independently of our knowledge of it but that it is our interpretation and understanding of the phenomena that affect that outcome (Marsh & Furlong, 2002). By following an interpretative stance, this research captures a view of the world through the perceptions and experiences of the participants by interpreting the understanding of individuals (Thanh & Thanh, 2015). Gathering the perceptions of multiple individuals with multiple perspectives leads to a more comprehensive understanding of the situation under study (Klein & Myers, 1999). This is in keeping with the premise of interpretative

phenomenological analysis (IPA) research, focusing upon people's experiences and/or understanding of a particular phenomenon (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Once the researcher has established their epistemological stance, they must then consider a research approach in keeping with their philosophical beliefs.

4.3   Research approach

Research approach considers the relation between data collection and analysis and between theory and data (Flick & Kennedy, 2018). There are three main research approaches for consideration – abduction, deduction and induction. With an abductive approach, the researcher examines how data supports existing theories and will consider whether modifications are necessary for existing understanding. With a deductive approach, a specific theory is used to examine how the data supports this. In qualitative research, this may result in data being analysed according to a particular theoretical framework (Smith et al., 2009).

Interpretivist researchers believe there are multiple realities (Ortlipp, 2008) and aim to make sense of, and draw meaning from, their participants and their experiences in the context of their own experience; this is an inductive process. This qualitative approach to data gathering seeks to understand what people are thinking and feeling, examines how they communicate and is subjective in nature. An inductive research approach looks for this understanding and interpretation to emerge from the data through researcher interactions, without pre-supposing an outcome (Flick & Kennedy, 2018).

The nature of this research, the examination of perception and experience, and the area of transition necessitates that an inductive approach is followed. A deductive approach would require hypothesis testing with an emphasis on causality. The inductive approach calls on research questions to define the scope and is interested in exploring phenomena, primarily within qualitative studies. The research strategy and methods selected are discussed in the following section and align with the interpretivist, inductive approach which allows the research findings to emerge from the data, without the restraints imposed by structured methodologies (Thomas, 2006).

4.4   Research Strategy

This study is interpretative and inductive. By contrast, quantitative methods are based upon truth and validity, with a focus on facts and statistical analysis (Blaikie, 2010). Quantitative measures are frequently used to examine the retention and performance of student groups, but these fail to capture the wide array of intervening factors and complexities of the individual stories. This study explores the individual and diverse experiences of associate students. It does not seek to explore averages, nor datasets. By following a qualitative approach, we can begin to understand this area as 'the researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyses words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting' (Creswell, 2014).

4.4.1   Qualitative methods

Qualitative research is conducted when a problem needs to be 'explored,' and that exploration is needed in circumstances in which variables cannot be easily measured. This study puts silenced voices at the centre by following a qualitative research strategy (Creswell, 2014). Although much research has examined the area of transition into HE, little is understood about the unique challenges and experiences of these associate students, and their voices often go unheard or their journeys pass without exploration. Hearing the student voice will allow us to build a picture and share their experience.

4.5   Research Design

Within qualitative research, (Creswell, 2014) suggests that there are five main approaches – narrative, phenomenological, grounded theory, ethnography and case study. Each of these approaches involves specific research methods, data collection and analysis techniques (Flick & Gobo, 2018). Narrative or life narratives use stories as data and create a first-person account, focusing on the perspective of the storyteller rather than that of society (Manning & Cullum-Swan, 1994). In contrast, phenomenology focuses on the essence of the experience and, although all qualitative research can be described as phenomenological to some degree, phenomenology uses its own tools and techniques to differentiate (Magolda & Cubberley, 2003). With grounded theory, researchers seek to derive inductively from the data a theory that is grounded in the data, accentuating discovery. Grounded theory studies are emphasised

by a constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). For a study to be considered ethnographic it must present a socio-cultural interpretation of the data. Ethnographic studies normally examine the beliefs, values and attitudes that shape the behaviour of a particular group (Merriam, 2002). The final approach for consideration in this research is case-study. Case-study design provides an in-depth description of a phenomenon and it is the phenomenon under study, the unit of analysis, that defines it as a case study. Within the realms of qualitative research, this research will follow the path of phenomenological inquiry. This approach was selected as it aligns strongly with the exploration of individual experience and unlike grounded theory which looks to develop theory, phenomenology tries to understand a phenomenon. Narrative research is focused on telling the story, these are often arranged in chronological order, and, although individuals are given a voice in this research, it is the understanding of their experience that is paramount.

4.5.1 Phenomenology

Phenomenology is a philosophy that examines how individuals make sense of the world and is attributed to the work of Alfred Schutz who was influenced by Weber and Husserl. Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) is credited with developing the modern phenomenological method which was further developed by Martin Heidegger, Alfred Schultz, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Using phenomenology for this study allows the researcher to gather a comprehensive account of the lived experience of associate students and to derive 'general or universal meaning' (Creswell, 1998). Phenomenology is a qualitative research design which focuses on the commonality of a lived experience within a particular group and has been used extensively in research from sociology, psychology, health sciences and education (Creswell, 2014). Merriam states that the defining characteristic of phenomenological research is 'the focus on describing the "essence" of the phenomenon from the perspectives of those who have experienced it' and the method's ability to address questions relating to ordinary, everyday experiences, experiences of phenomenon of social or psychological importance for our time or a group, and transitions that are common or of contemporary interest (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). This research follows the structured approach outlined by (Moustakas, 1994):

- The researcher identifies the phenomenon of interest to the study

- The researcher identifies and specifies the broad philosophical assumptions of the phenomenology
- Data are collected from the individuals who have experienced the phenomenon
- Participants are asked broad, general questions
- Data analysis is organised around 'clusters of meaning' and, from these descriptions of the experience, the 'essence' of the phenomenon is revealed (Creswell, 2014).

The study incorporated three data collection methods, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), photovoice and photo elicitation interviews (PEI) and each of these is now examined along with other methods. A rationale for the selection of IPA, photovoice and PEI is provided.

4.6   Data collection methods

Research methods are the methods used to collect the data for the research and in qualitative studies may include surveys, interviews, case studies, observation and many others. The different methods and extent of their use can vary significantly with the volume and richness of the qualitative data and methods of analysis being of paramount importance (Ormston et al., 2013).

4.6.1   Interviews

Interviews were examined as a possible data collection method. One-to-one, in-person interviews can be highly structured with fixed questions, or they may follow a more relaxed semi-structured format where the topics discussed vary depending on the respondents' answers (Check & Schutt, 2012). Interviews have many advantages including a high response rate, the ability to probe responses and seek clarification which can lead to greater understanding and the complexity of the subject under study is rarely an issue. Interviews, however, require careful consideration and appropriate experience to ensure small nuances are picked up in responses and can be derailed by a social desire to respond in ways which show them in the best light to the interviewer (Check & Schutt, 2012). The researcher was aware of the power dynamic, the critical view of hierarchical relations of power between researcher and participants, who in this instance were the academic and students. This division follows a positivistic view and

would be at odds with the constructivist views held by the researcher who aims to focus on creating an understanding of the perceptions and experiences of participants (Karnieli-Miller, Strier, & Pessach, 2009).

4.6.2   Focus Groups

Focus groups are widely used in qualitative studies and are defined as group interviews which capitalise on communication between participants to generate data (Kitzinger, 1995). The method is recognised for its value in exploring individuals' knowledge and experience and is usually formatted around a series of semi-structured questions for discussion amongst the group. The disadvantage of the group dynamics fostered during focus groups is that, often, the loudest voices can dominate, and the presence of others can inhibit an individual's participation, making participants confirm with popular opinion, expressing socially acceptable responses and stereotypical answers (Acocella & Acocella, 2012). Focus groups are often led by the researcher rather than allowing participants to explore particular issues. As this study examines the perception and individual experience, these disadvantages were seen as possible risks to data collection.

4.6.3   Surveys

A survey is a research method involving standardised questionnaires to collect data about people and typically involves closed-ended questions. It is recognised as a reliable method and has several advantages such as low cost, ease of application and ability to gather data from a large sample (Brewerton & Millward, 2012). Surveys are a popular method in quantitative research. However, they are difficult to implement well, particularly when trying to explore experience. The data that is captured can lack detail and depth (Kelley et al., 2003), but, importantly for this study, a survey would not allow the students to explore their experience with little direction from the researcher.

4.6.4   Case-studies

Case-studies are in-depth investigations into a single or small group of cases in real-world contexts which are descriptive and exploratory in their analysis. The case-study method has many suitabilities for this study, in particular that it allows you to investigate an individual's experience. What it fails to do, however, is to provide insight into the first-person point of view of the individual.

4.6.5 Visual methodologies

The umbrella terms visual methodologies or visual research methods (VRM) have developed over the last fifteen years and describe a range of research methods which make use of photographs, videos, maps, diagrams, collages and other media to gain a detailed understanding and reflexion of the participants' experience (Mitchell, 2008). Not only can a wide array of images or media be incorporated but the source of the images can also vary. Within VRM, images are said to be 'found' or 'made'. 'Found' images are images that already exist distinct from the research project such as family portraits, YouTube videos, and films, whilst, 'made' images may be created by the researcher, or by the participants. Banks (2011) stated that these media are not 'redundant visual representations of something already described in the text' (Banks, 2011) but, rather, they afford the researcher additional insight into the participants' experience. Pain (2012) carried out a literature review examining the choice and use of visual methods. She found that they enhance the richness of data, facilitate communication and enhance rapport between the researcher and the participant (Pain, 2012). Rose (2011) emphasises the researcher's stance, especially concerning interpreting images and argues that VRM are especially effective at generating evidence that other methods, such as interviews, cannot (Rose, 2015).

Photo-documentation is a VRM which involves the researcher taking a planned series of photographs to document and analyse a particular phenomenon. Suchar's (1997) study of gentrification in Chicago is often cited for its rigour and the iterative process involved in the photo-documentation method. Suchar uses a shooting script to guide which photographs he takes and, importantly, why, ensuring a close link to the research questions. The next stage involves adding field notes, including factual information and commentary. Photographs are then coded and the process begins again with the development of a second shooting script to define and develop the insight. This method is not widely used in social science or educational research, and if used in the context of this study would risk the development of photographs that were static and served merely as an illustration. Similarly, video-documentation records naturally occurring social situations and have been used in learning science (Derry et al., 2010), in the workplace (Heath, Hindmarsh, & Luff, 2017), examining cycling mobilities (Spinney, 2011) and extensive work by Pink (2014) exploring social identities. For this study, a video

was considered as a possible tool for documenting the experience during transition into the university campus. However, as no one location could be selected to record the experience this was not feasible, and asking participants to wear cameras was felt to be too intrusive.

Photo-elicitation interview (PEI)

Photo-elicitation is 'based on the simple idea of inserting a photograph (or photographs) into a qualitative interview' (Harper, 2002) to elicit data. 'Photo-elicitation refers to the use of a single or sets of photographs as a stimulus during a research interview. It aims to trigger responses and memories and unveil participants' attitudes, views, beliefs, and meanings or to investigate group dynamics' (Meo, 2010). The photo-elicitation method uses photographs to generate verbal discussion (Thomas, 2009) and can help keep the interview structured and stimulating (Heider, Collier, & Collier, 1988). This method enables the researcher to add depth and detail to the participants' accounts (King & Horrocks, 2010) and encourages discussion of more abstract and/or sensitive aspects (Papaloukas, Quincey, & Williamson, 2017).

The process of a photo-elicitation interview (PEI) involves using one or more images during the interview and asking the participants to comment on them (Bignante, 2010). Besides this obvious difference from a conventional interview, differences also occur in the participants' responses. The brain processes visual information differently to verbal information with visual images evoking deeper consciousness (Harper, 2002). (Richard & Lahman, 2013) define four choices of researcher-generated photographs:

1. Current photographs taken of the research topic
2. Previously taken photographs of the research topic (Banks, 2019)
3. Archival photographs of the research topic, also known as 'found' photographs (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006)
4. Previously taken photographs with no contextual or topical connection to the research which is termed 'decontextualised photos'

Photovoice

Photovoice, also known as *photo-novella* (Caroline Wang & Burris, 1994), *auto-driving* (Heisley & Levy, 2012), and *reflexive photography* (Douglas, 1998), is a participatory photography methodology in which participants use a camera to generate data, directly involving them in the research process. Photovoice was developed by Caroline Wang and Mary Burris as a method to enable rural women in Yunnan Province, China, to influence policies and programmes that personally affected them (Wang & Burris, 1997).

Babbie and Mouton (2010) posit that the key factors in this method are 'participation, engagement, involvement and collaboration – with participants involved in the research as equal partners. The participants are co-researchers whose insider 'local knowledge' is valued for sense-making.'

The photographs are used to support critical reflection amongst the participants and provide the researcher with 'direct entry into their point of view' (Radley & Taylor, 2003; Caroline Wang, Burris, & Ping, 1996). This participant-employed photography (PEP) (Hurworth, 2003) asks participants to take photographs to elicit their own narrative which leads to a richer understanding of a particular issue, giving greater insight than traditional interviewing techniques (Gold, 2004). Warne, Snyder, and Gillander Gadin (2013) depicted photovoice as an opportunity and challenge for students' genuine participation. A study by Horwitz (2011) emphasised the meaning students make and the voice they give to their images. 'Once we hear the meaning our students are making, we know where they are coming from and how we can help them move forward. It is incumbent on teacher educators to listen carefully to students' voices as they share their experiences and worlds' (Horwitz, 2011). This was reiterated by Rose (2011) who emphasises the researchers' stance, especially with interpreting images. Rose asserts that the visual researcher takes images seriously, thinks about the social conditions and effects of visual objects and considers their way of looking at images (Rose, 2011).

The photovoice method has three distinct aims for participants:

1. To use photographic images to document and reflect on the needs and assets of their community from their own point of view

2. To promote dialogue about salient community issues through group discussion of photographs

3. To promote social change by communicating issues of both concern and pride to policy makers and society at large (Wang & Burris, 1997; Wang et al., 1996).

Within educational research, photovoice has been used as a research method in many studies (see (Goodhart et al., 2006; Hernandez, Shabazian, & McGrath, 2014; Keeffe & Andrews, 2015; Madden & Smith, 2015; Moss & Pini, 2016; Mulder & Dull, 2014; Popa & Stan, 2013; Shah, 2015), however, it remains underused in the field of transition.

Photovoice affords the researcher many benefits, mainly the ability to gain insight into a phenomenon through the participants who are empowered by their individual ability to select photographs that are important to and representative of their experience. It can raise awareness of issues and allow solutions to be identified (Goodhart et al., 2006) by stimulating ideas, stirring conversations and enhancing capabilities (Wang et al., 1996).

4.6.6   Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA)

IPA is underpinned and influenced by phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography. This theory of interpretation was first discussed by Schleiermacher who suggested that the intentions and techniques of the researcher impress a particular meaning upon the text (Schleiermacher & Bowie, 1998). IPA research is generally pitched at the idiographic level, this third influence is concerned with the particular on two levels. Firstly, on a methodological level, this means that an IPA study typically involves a highly intensive and detailed analysis of the accounts produced by a comparatively small number of participants. Secondly, the key aim of IPA research is to discover how participants experience a particular phenomenon, from the perspective of particular people, in a particular context (Smith, 2004). In simple terms, IPA is a qualitative

research method which examines how individuals make sense of their major life experiences, meaning-focused; it is committed to understanding first-person experiences from a third-person position. As the participants are trying to make sense of their world, the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world (Smith, 2004). IPA is underpinned by phenomenology, the philosophical study of being, and hermeneutics, the study and theory of interpretation.

This method is of particular interest to this study given the researcher's background in further education. The reflective nature of IPA necessitates that the current beliefs and views of the researcher must be articulated and reflected upon during all stages of the research. 'The process of continually reflecting upon our interpretations of both our experience and the phenomena being studied so as to move beyond the partiality of our previous understanding and our investment in particular research outcomes' (Finlay & Gough, 2003). This consideration is examined under the Role of the Researcher section later in this chapter. The prior-knowledge, preconceptions and experiences of the researcher will be acknowledged (Smith & Osborn, 2015). IPA interviews are detailed and in-depth, they use open-ended questions to gain rich and detailed descriptions. The question posed is significant and it must mean something to the participant without being leading. Once the data has been collected, analysis can begin using an inductive approach (Patton, 2002) to discover patterns in the data by reading them through several times (transcripts), marking key phrases and categories, coding and grouping into categories.

There is the ongoing discussion surrounding the validity and quality of qualitative data (Lincoln, 2001; Merriam, 2009; Rolfe, 2004) and IPA comes under added scrutiny with (Willig, 2013) identifying three areas of concern – the role of language, the suitability of accounts and the explanation versus description. By using language to describe a particular experience, in a particular way, the language adds meanings that reside in the words themselves and, therefore, the expression is more than just the experience. Secondly, it is important to consider the suitability of participant accounts as IPA relies on their description which requires individuals to communicate the richness of this experience to the researcher and not all participants will be comfortable or used to expressing their thoughts and feelings in words (Willig, 2013). Thirdly, IPA examines

the phenomenon based upon the relational unit of self/world, focusing on the description (O'Connor & Hallam, 2000). It does not explore the 'why', why the experiences take place and, importantly, why they differ.

4.6.7 Selected methods

The phenomenological nature of this research and the philosophical principles of the researcher have influenced the choice of methods adopted in this study. After an in-depth analysis of their philosophical beliefs and the examination of possible data collection methods, the visual methodologies of photo elicitation interviews (PEI) and photovoice were selected along with interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). These were felt to be the most suitable for the research questions posed.

4.6.8 Combining methods

Each of the research methods adopted focused on one research question, concentrating on a participant group and allowing for the different voices to be heard. The methods were split between pre-entry associate students who were currently studying at college and post-entry associate students who have recently made the transition into the university.

Table 5: Breakdown of research methods by RQ

Research Question	Method
RQ1: How do associate students at college perceive their transition to university?	Photo elicitation interview (PEI)
RQ2: How do associate students experience transition at Edinburgh Napier University's School of Computing?	Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) interviews and Photovoice

Photo-elicitation is a simple process, involving the incorporation of an image or photograph into the interview to stimulate discussion. This method is particularly relevant for students who are perceiving an experience and where there could be a power dynamic with the researcher. Associate students may see the researcher as an authority figure and hide their true feelings; importantly, this method allows the participants to be active in the research (Clark, 1999).

Interpretative phenomenological analysis allows the experience to be told from the individual's perspective. There are no pre-planned questions to answer and, importantly, there is no direction, or predetermined themes to follow. Allowing the participants to explore their experience in their own way adds value and validity to the research. The interpretative and graphical nature of the methods selected allows the participants to share their experience and reflections, giving valuable insight into the phenomenon of associate students in transition. Combining photovoice, photo-elicitation and IPA has added strength to the research process. Photo-elicitation and photovoice provide a way for the participant to reflect on their experience and share this in an inclusive environment, using images as the focus of discussion. For the photovoice participants, additional control was available as they selected the images to share and provided the structure and format to the discussion. As the participants shared their photographs with the group, they increased awareness of the experience of associate students for themselves and the researcher, developing their own understanding (Miles, 2011). IPA was used to deepen the understanding of this shared experience and provide greater insight into individual experience (Storey, 2007) and provides a structured method for analysing the data.

4.7   Role of the researcher

This section aims to familiarise the reader with the researcher's understanding of their self, their motivations and their connections with this area of study (Creswell, 2012), providing an insight into the worldview of the researcher, their thoughts, experiences and objectivity, adding credibility to the design (Merriam, 2009). Throughout this study, the researcher has been conscious that they:

- are solution driven and positive in nature
- are an active lecturer in the School of Computing at Edinburgh Napier University
- previously worked as a college lecturer
- manage the Associate Student Project within the School of Computing
- must avoid letting their personal experiences influence what is said

- use reflective practices to highlight their preconceptions (Storey, 2007) throughout both data gathering and data analysis stages
- stress to participants that their experience, perceptions and feelings were the focus of the study

Throughout this study, the researcher worked as a lecturer within the School of Computing at Edinburgh Napier University and managed the Associate Student Project (ASP). The School of Computing has a large direct-entrant population and the researcher has focused on supporting and preparing this diverse student body. The researcher strongly believes in articulation routes and the role of colleges in providing pathways for students from widening participation and other diverse backgrounds, actively encouraging the university to invest in and celebrate these successes. More broadly, the researcher believes in education for all, in widening participation and in ensuring learning and teaching practices reflect the diverse nature of the student population. The ASP has given focus to direct-entrants and allowed the researcher to develop support mechanisms and preparation activities across partner college campuses. Believing in direct-entrants and the value of college partnerships, the researcher has shared experiences and research at conferences, to college partners and in internal school development activities.

This study's phenomenological position requires the researcher to separate off, what Husserl termed 'bracketing', by acknowledging and setting-aside preconceptions (Husserl, 1982). This reflective and reflexive thinking is important at all stages of this study from the literature review, through to data collection and analysis. Throughout this section, the researcher has attempted to identify their prior knowledge, experience and preconceptions, however, they do not believe that it is entirely possible to fully bracket and aim to gain an understanding of the personal perceptions and experiences of the participants (Smith et al., 2009).

4.8   Conclusion to this chapter

This chapter has outlined suitable research methods for the study and justified the selection of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), photo-elicitation interviews

(PEI) and photovoice (PV). In line with the structured approach outlined by Moustakas (1994) the following methodological choices have been established:

Phenomenon of interest to the study: Associate student transition

Broad philosophical assumptions: Constructivist/interpretative

Methods: Qualitative, interpretative and visual

Participants: Individual Associate Students

Approach: Asked broad, general questions

The following chapter explains the implementation process.

Chapter 5: Implementation

5.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the implementation of the research. The chapter begins by examining the timeline for data collection which started with a pilot study carried out in academic year 2015/16 and the data collection phases of the study. The chapter concludes by detailing the approach to data analysis taken, followed by a discussion on the advantages and disadvantages of the methods used.

5.2 The data collection process

The data collection took place over three distinct years starting with the pilot project during the academic year 2015/16 followed by two further phases in 2016/17 and 2017/18. The participants are summarised in Table 6 below:

Table 6: Summary of participants

Academic Year	IPA	PV	PEI	Totals
2015/16	1	3		4
2016/17	3	2	6	11
2017/18	2	2	7	11
Total	6	7	13	26

There were 26 participants in total; six students took part in the IPA interviews over the three years, there were seven photovoice participants over two years and 13 photo-elicitation participants composed of two groups. Full details of the implementation process can be found in Appendix I: Study Timeline. Throughout the study all interviews and focus groups were recorded using a digital recording device with the files uploaded into NVivo for transcription and analysis.

5.2.1 Recruitment

College participants were recruited during their first trimester. The researcher visited the college in November and explained the research area and process during several

classes. Interested participants were invited to attend the interview in the afternoon and were, therefore, self-selecting.

To recruit the university participants after transition, the researcher visited lecturer theatres during the first week of term where associate students were known to be part of the cohort. A PowerPoint slide was displayed summarising the purpose of the research and methods of data collection. Students were asked to contact the researcher by email or in-person to sign up for the study.

5.2.2   The pilot study 2015/16

A pilot study was carried out during the academic year 2015/16 to test the suitability of the research methods proposed in the study and to gather information to inform decisions regarding the research.

Pilot studies are recognised for their usefulness in allowing researchers to trial their methods (Holloway, 2005) and to test their ability to carry out the study (Bryman, 2012). Kim (2010) noted that pilot exercises can identify 'specific methodological and epistemological issues', allowing the researcher to sharpen their ability to reach their research goals.

Pilot studies are particularly advisable in interpretative research, to practice the interview techniques, to experience the process and to capture a glimpse of the phenomenon under study. For this study, the researcher had no experience of IPA interviews or graphical research methods and testing this method for suitability, and also to ensure the researcher's skills level was adequate, added confidence to the process.

Pilot - Photovoice

The first research method to be carried out in the pilot study was photovoice. Three participants were recruited and this was deemed to be a suitable number for the pilot study. Each participant completed the informed consent form and a training session

was held and handout provided, see Appendix A, covering ethics and consent along with photography advice. The participants were given two weeks to take and submit photographs by email. Following submission of the photographs, the participants were invited to attend a focus group. The sequence of events was as follows:

```
1.                          7. Selection of
Purpose/Target    6. Focus group    representative
   audience                          photographs

2. Recruitment    5. Submission
                  of photographs

3. Training &     4. Participant
   Ethics         Photography
```
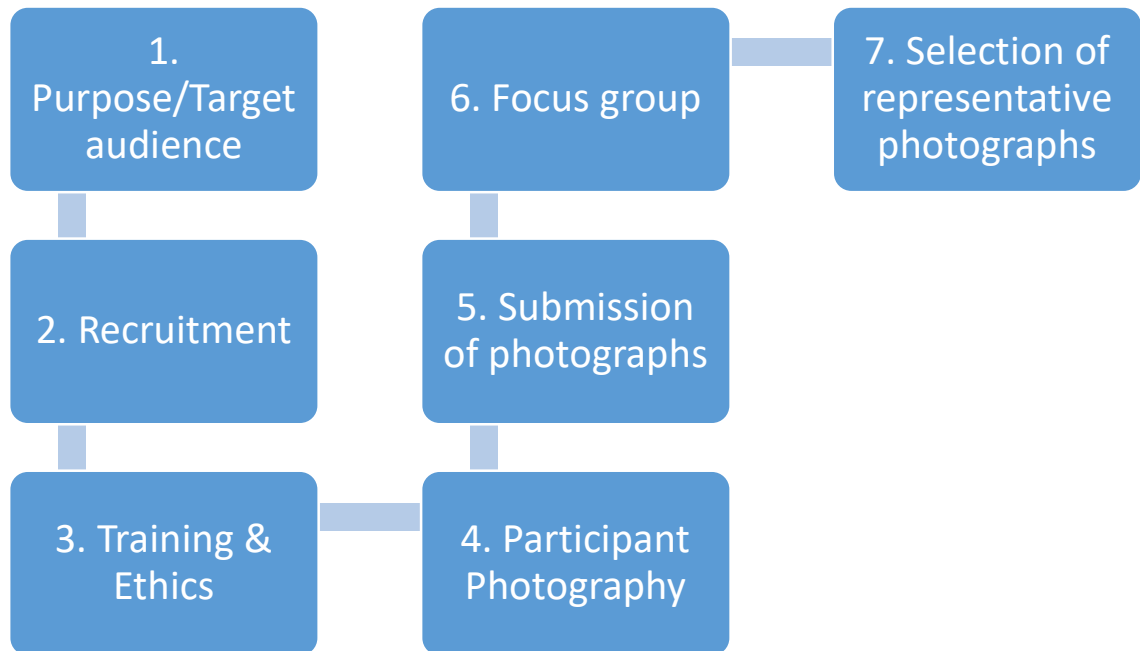
Figure 19: Photovoice Sequence of Events

Unfortunately, none of the participants took part in the focus group so the researcher was unable to complete the photovoice process. Each participant did, however, email captions for their photographs which gave insight into their experience. A selection of the photographs gathered during the photovoice trial and a summary table confirming the number of photographs per participant can be found in Appendix B. Coding of the captions was included in the analysis and helped to provide additional insight.

Without the rich data provided from the focus group, limited value was gathered from the photographic data, however, important lessons were learnt and questions were raised:

- Some students commented that they had taken photographs but didn't send them in.
- The photo gathering stages and focus groups must be conducted promptly.

The pilot helped to develop a greater understanding of the research method and the difficulties faced, not only with participant recruitment but in particular with ensuring they would complete both stages of the photovoice research. Participant attrition is a recognised issue with photovoice research and the time limitations and perceived quality of images are known problems (Sutton-Brown, 2014).

Pilot - IPA

IPA was also trialled in the pilot study. Previous IPA research studies have been criticised due to poor construction caused by the researcher's lack of understanding of the method, particularly regarding the interpretative dimension (BPS, 2015). It was, therefore, important that training was carried out. The researcher attended IPA workshops at the Scottish Graduate School for Social Science (SGSSS). These workshops explored the theoretical underpinnings of IPA but importantly included the practical hands-on experience of interview skills and practice, analysis, coding and theme development, and the presentation of results. This provided invaluable training and experience, raising the researcher's confidence and ability in the method, and confirming IPA to be the most suitable approach.

One participant was recruited to test the suitability of the IPA interview. Although the researcher attempted to recruit others for the pilot, and four confirmed their intention to take part, only one participant attended the scheduled interview. Although the researcher followed up with those who failed to attend, none were willing to reschedule due to other commitments. [P2] had also taken part in the photovoice pilot and was willing to be interviewed for the research study. The participant completed the informed consent form and the interview took place in a meeting room within the host university and was 58 minutes in length. The interview involved one opening question to begin the discussion. This was a broad, open question about their experience of being an associate student. The researcher made notes of their response and revisited areas for further clarification. Coding of this interview can be found in Appendix C. The pilot study also helped to develop a greater depth of understanding around the study topic facilitating understanding of the participant's terms of reference (Smith et al., 2009). Carrying out the interview provided insight into the types of opening questions which were suitable and, importantly, developed the researcher's confidence in the method. The interview was transcribed and loaded into NVivo for analysis.

Through the process of transcription, it was possible to see where improvements could be made in the technique and specifically around the area of active listening. The analysis process was very time consuming and important lessons were learned regarding the whole project timeline and the importance of this complex and challenging section. Findings from the pilot interview confirmed this as an appropriate method for this research topic. The interview provided a depth of experience that the researcher felt would not have been achieved with a standard structured or semi-structured interview.

The experience gained from the photovoice trial gave valuable insight into the use of photographs in research and, although the IPA interview did not include any prompts to aid discussion, the combined experience of both methods increased the researcher's confidence in all of the methods and the ability to carry out the study.

5.2.3   The main study 2016/17 and 2017/18

The main study took place over two academic years – 2016/17 and 2017/18. During the first round of data collection in 2016/17, three IPA interviews were carried out with students, two students took part in photovoice and six students took part in PEI. The total number of participants was 11.

Table 7: Main study participants

Academic Year	IPA students	PV	PEI	Totals
2016/17	3	2	6	11
2017/18	2	2	7	11
Total	5	4	13	22

In the second round of data collection, two students took part in IPA interviews, two students took part in photovoice and seven students attended PEI. In total, data was recorded from 11 participants in the second round. The overall number of participants across the entire study was 22 although one participant took part in both the IPA and photovoice data collection, so there are 21 unique participants.

Participant recruitment and sampling

Qualitative research is interested in depth of knowledge, usually from a small number of participants and favours non-probability sampling (Coyne, 1997). Qualitative research can employ procedures for sampling such as theoretical sampling whereby the researcher collects, codes and analyses the data and this informs what data to collect next to develop a particular theory as it emerges (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This development of theory was not appropriate for this study.

This study employs purposive sampling which groups participants according to preselected criteria relevant to the research questions. The student participants in this study were all associate students, either studying at college (pre-entry) or as direct-entrants (post-entry) into year three of their university degree programme, and, as such, were selected purposively as they offer insight into the phenomenon under study (Smith et al., 2009). These students offer us a perspective. The number of participants is small, in line with the idiographic nature of the methods used, with IPA, in particular, calling for a small sample size (Smith & Osborn, 2015). The topic under investigation in this study examines the experience of associate students and, therefore, this 'identity' defines the boundaries of the sample.

Recruitment of participants for photovoice and IPA interviews in response to *RQ2: How do associate students experience transition at Edinburgh Napier University School of Computing?*, was planned at the researcher's host university which, for pragmatic reasons, allowed the collection of fieldwork to fit around their other complex obligations. The participants were all enrolled in the School of Computing and had entered their programmes as associate students into the third year of the four year programme. Initially, the sample included any direct-entry student who was willing to participate to ensure the recruitment of enough participants. However, as the research progressed, it became obvious that the focus on associate students made the experiences of other direct entry students irrelevant to the study and the data collected from these participants (P10, P19, P20 & P21) was removed from the study. The research questions focused directly on the experience of associate students and there are fundamental differences in their experience. The associate student experience may have been impacted by the additional interventions, dual matriculation and access to

resources offered by the Associate Student Project. Recruits were discarded if they were not associate students and if they did not attend the focus group for the photovoice element. Only four participants took part in the photovoice data collection and, as a result of this, gaps have occurred in the participant coding numbers.

Table 8: Participants removed or not completing

	IPA Recruited	IPA complete process	PV Recruited	PV complete process	Comments
1617	4	3	3	2	1x IPA removed as DE, 1x PV did not complete process
1718	2	2	5	2	3 x PV removed as DE

Participants were recruited during induction week when the researcher visited lecture theatres and explained the purpose of the research, the participant criteria and asked them to sign up if they were interested and met the criteria.

Photo-elicitation interviews
Participants in the PEI, for *RQ1: How do associate students at college perceive their transition to university?*, were recruited through a partner college where associate students were studying. The photographs selected for the interviews fell into two of the categories outlined by Richard & Lahman (2013) – (1) Current photographs taken of the research topic, and (2) Archival photographs of the research topic, also known as 'found' photographs (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006).

Photo-elicitation was used as a method to understand the students' perceptions of university before making the transition and related to RQ1 - *How do associate students at college perceive their transition to university?*. Photo-elicitation interviews were conducted with three groups of students on their college campus. All participants were studying for their HND and planned to articulate into university the following academic year; all had associate student status.

Implementation The photographs were selected by the researcher and used to ilicit feelings and perceptions from the students before their transition. Harper (2002) posits that this method is an ideal model for research. Before the study began, thought was given to the perspective of the photographs and the impact of focusing on 'visually arresting images' (Harper, 2002).

In this part of the study, eight coloured photographs were used to stimulate the conversation with participants. All photographs used in the photo-elicitation interviews can be viewed in Appendix D. The photographs were all 6 x 8 inches (15.2 x 20.3cm), they were protected by lamination and organised in a folder. This 'photo interview kit' (Cappello, 2005a) was carefully collated and related to the research area. Each photograph was coded and numbered for easy reference during transcription. The photographs did not contain captions.

The photo interview kit (see Appendix D: Photographs from PEI – Photo Interview Kit) contained three previously taken photographs of a railway track, a lecture theatre and a page of notes; three archival photographs of a set of stairs in the library, a college campus and a graduation ceremony; two current photographs of the computer centre and university campus.

The other option - Previously taken photographs of the research topic (Banks, 2019) was rejected as no previously taken photographs of the research topic specific to associate students existed and, therefore, this method was not available. Finally, decontextualised photographs were not seen as appropriate for the participants under study as this method had been selected to encourage greater insight into the perceptions of these students. It was felt that selecting photographs outwith the study area would reflect more of the researcher's reality than that of the participants (Samuels, 2004).

Existing 'found' photographs depicting college and university campuses, and student groups were used as the archival photographs in the first round of photo-elicitation interviews. In the subsequent data collection rounds, photographs were added from the photovoice participants representing the research topic. The photographs were selected

after careful thought and planning and organised into a 'photo interview kit' (Cappello, 2005b).

2016/17 saw six participants take part in the research as a group and, in 17/18, seven. It was important that the participants felt at ease during the process so all interviews were conducted at their college campus in a classroom familiar to them.

5.3   Data analysis

This section explores the process of data analysis which in this study will focus on text as the most important feature (Flick, 2013). In most qualitative research, the analysis is frequently of transcripts and this study is no different. The analysis will follow a hermeneutic perspective, that is, the meaning is negotiated, is based on the community and has only one possible interpretation (Patton, 2002).

5.3.1   Transcription

Focus groups and interviews were audio-recorded using a digital recording device. Verbatim transcription was undertaken by the researcher and this involved typing each word spoken by the participants, however, focus was given to the length of pauses or other prosodic aspects as IPA aims to interpret meaning from content, unlike conversation analysis (Smith et al., 2009). The transcription process afforded the researcher greater knowledge and understanding of the data and allowed the thought process necessary for analysis to begin at this early stage (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999). For the graphical methods of photovoice and photo elicitation the digital photographs were embedded within the transcription file at the appropriate point (Arthur, Waring, Coe, & Hedges, 2012).

Each transcription had the individual page and line numbers added and columns were added to allow exploratory comments and emergent theme to be written. A sample PEI transcript can be found in Appendix F:PEI transcript sample and a sample photovoice transcript in Appendix G:Photovoice transcript sample.

5.3.2 Individual case analysis

IPA starts with a standard thematic analysis but goes beyond this (Brocki & Wearden, 2006) to explore in detail how participants make sense of their world (Ciolan & Manasia, 2017). Researchers in higher education who employ this research methodology agree that there is no single method for analysing data (Smith et al., 2009). Although this study has a phenomenographic focus and aims to explore the meanings within the participant group by interpreting the meaning for the group as a whole (Åkerlind, 2012), the IPA process begins by first developing a detailed understanding of each individual case.

The first step involves listening to the recording several times and reading and re-reading the transcripts. Immersing oneself in the data in this way ensures the participant becomes the focus of the analysis (Smith et al., 2009). This is followed by the initial level of analysis where initial exploratory notes and comments are made upon the transcript. This stage involves the use of descriptive, linguistic and conceptual comments. Descriptive comments describe the contents of the data and during this stage the researcher identifies phrases, explanations, descriptions and emotional responses (Cooper, Fleischer, & Cotton, 2012). Linguistic comments explore the language used by the participants, looking for repetition, metaphors, pauses and even emotional responses such as laughter or sighs (Reid et al., 2005). Conceptual comments begin the process of interpretation by questioning the meaning and developing insight.

The final part of the initial noting involves deconstruction where the transcripts are read backwards, allowing the researcher to focus on the participants' words and meaning. Following this, the transcripts are then re-read and emergent themes are noted. Each interview was analysed individually in this way to allow the individual experience to come through in the data.
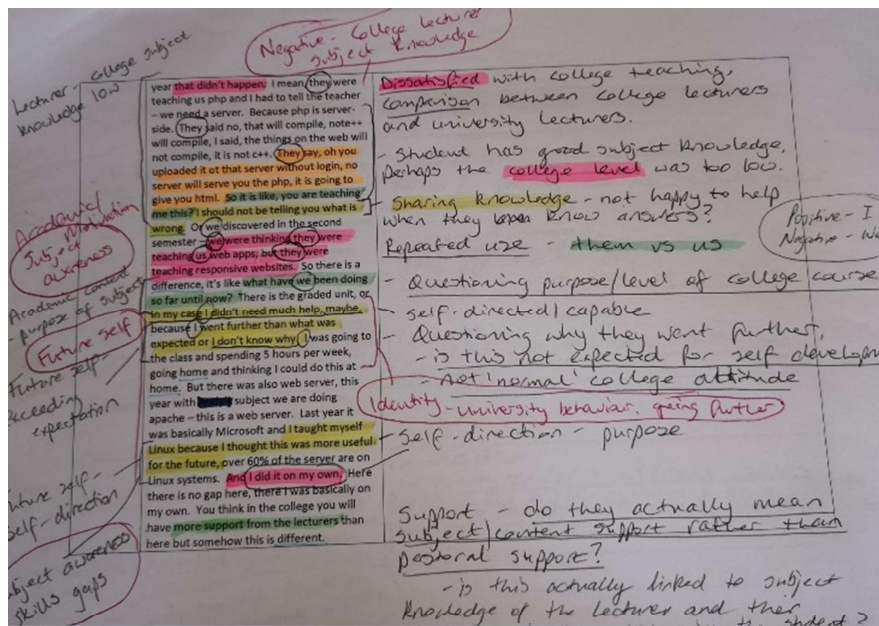
Figure 20: Sample hand-coded transcript

After the initial round of coding connections are sought across emergent themes, Post-it Notes were used to cluster emergent themes where themes with similar understanding were placed together.

Figure 21: Clustering emergent themes using post-it notes

After completing the process for one participant the researcher moved on to the next case. Each case was examined on its own terms in keeping with the idiographic commitment of IPA (Smith et al., 2009). The researcher continued to examine their own preconceptions and was aware that another researcher would develop different themes.

5.3.3   Looking for patterns

Looking for patterns across cases is the final stage. Here, themes were reconfigured and relabelled, and superordinate themes emerged. To ensure the process was robust and methodical the researcher followed guidance from (Moustakas, 1994) regarding the focus and use of bracketing and (Colaizzi, 1978) phenomenology data analysis model (Morrow, Rodriguez, & King, 2015). The data analysis model follows a seven step process:

Table 9: Steps in Colaizzi's descriptive phenomenological method (Morrow et al., 2015)

Step	Description
1. Familiarisation	The researcher familiarises him or herself with the data, by reading through all the participant accounts several times.
2. Identifying significant statements	The researcher identifies all statements in the accounts that are of direct relevance to the phenomenon under investigation.
3. Formulating meanings	The researcher identifies meanings relevant to the phenomenon that arise from a careful consideration of the significant statements. The researcher must reflexively 'bracket' his or her pre-suppositions to stick closely to the phenomenon as experienced (though Colaizzi recognises that complete bracketing is never possible).
4. Clustering themes	The researcher clusters the identified meanings into themes that are common across all accounts. Again, bracketing of pre-suppositions is crucial, especially to avoid any potential influence of existing theory.
5. Developing an exhaustive description	The researcher writes a full and inclusive description of the phenomenon, incorporating all the themes produced at step 4.
6. Producing the fundamental structure	The researcher condenses the exhaustive description down to a short, dense statement that captures just those aspects deemed to be essential to the structure of the phenomenon.
7. Seeking verification of the fundamental structure	The researcher returns the fundamental structure statement to all participants (or sometimes a subsample in larger studies) to ask whether it captures their experience. He or she may go back and modify earlier steps in the analysis in the light of this feedback.

Diagrams were used to develop the themes and cluster similar thoughts for Step 4.
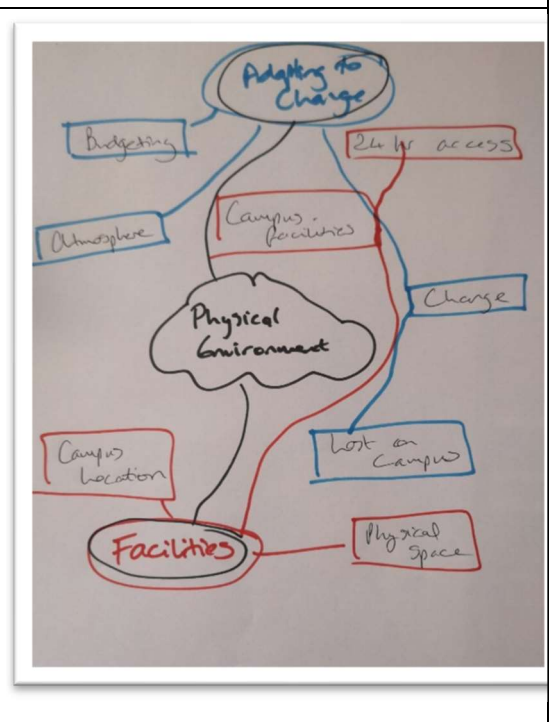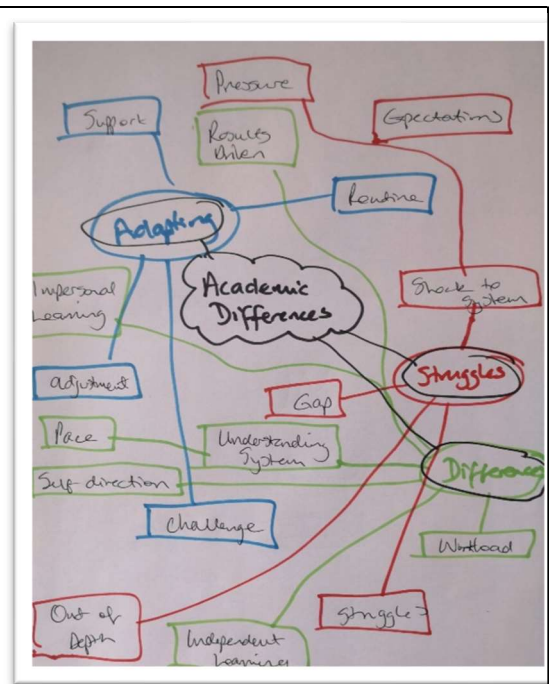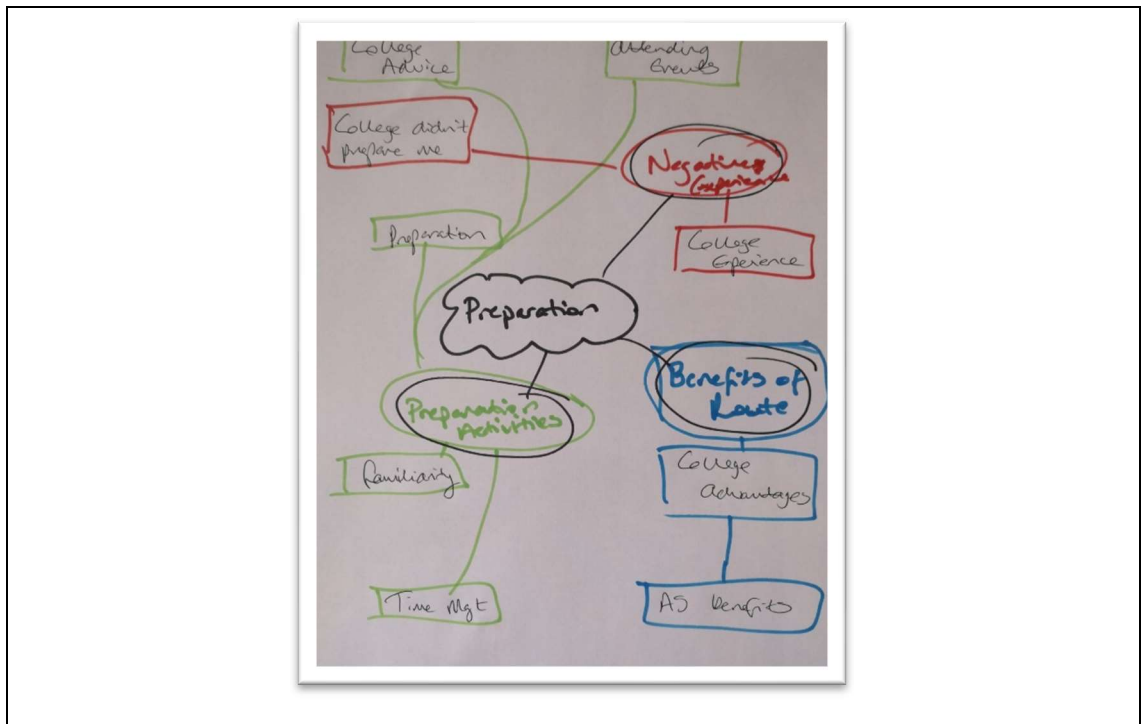
Figure 22: Step 4: Clustering Themes

Five superordinate themes emerged, as detailed in Table 10 Superordinate themes with the breakdown by participants shown in Table 11 Superordinate themes across all participants.

Table 10: Superordinate themes

Social aspects - becoming a different kind of student	Self-concept - we're coming from different worlds	Physical environment - onwards and upwards	Academic differences - it's not the basics anymore	Preparation - I wasn't prepared, I guess everyone feels like that
• Experiences • Adjustments • Peer support • Anxieties	• Feelings • Identity • Confidence • Motivation	• Adapting to change • Facilities	• Adapting • Struggles • Differences	• Negative experience • Benefits of route • Preparation for activities

Table 11: Superordinate themes across all participants

Participant	Social aspects - becoming a different kind of student	Self-concept - we're coming from different worlds	Physical environment - onwards and upwards	Academic differences - it's not the basics anymore	Preparation - I wasn't prepared, I guess everyone feels like that
P2	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
P5	✓	✓		✓	✓
P11	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
P12	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
P30	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
P31	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
P4	✓	✓	✓	✓	
P9		✓	✓	✓	
P13		✓	✓	✓	✓
P14		✓	✓		✓
P15		✓			✓
P16		✓	✓		
P17		✓			✓
P18		✓	✓		✓
P23	✓	✓		✓	
P25	✓	✓		✓	✓
P26		✓	✓	✓	✓
P27		✓		✓	✓
P28	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
P29		✓	✓	✓	
P22	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
P24	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
P32		✓		✓	✓
P33		✓		✓	
P34		✓		✓	✓
P35	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
P36		✓	✓	✓	✓
P37		✓		✓	✓

Step 5: Developing an exhaustive description resulted in the following description for associate students in transition being written:

*'Associate students develop their identity and **self-concept** as they establish themselves as associate students in the college environment. During college and before transition they are encouraged to prepare, and **preparation** activities are provided by the university which aim to address the **academic differences** and to ease the transition by familiarising the associate students with the new **physical environment**. Their self-concept continues to develop through their transition and is influenced by **social aspects** such as peer support and student/teacher interactions.'*

Step 6: Producing the fundamental structure requires the researcher to condense the description above into a shorter more dense state that captures the essence of the phenomenon. The following statement was produced:

'During transition, associate students experience changes in their self-concept. They are influenced by the academic differences, change in physical environment and social aspects at university. Preparation activities aid transition.'

The final step requires the researcher to gather feedback from participants on the accuracy of the statement. This was gathered during the photography display and is detailed in 6.3.6 Photovoice exhibition. The exhibition included 40 photographs and feedback confirmed that the photographs were representative of their experience and views of transition.

5.4   Ethical considerations

Ethical permission for this study was sought from the University's Research Integrity Committee. The process for gaining permission involved completing the University self-assessment form and submitting this to the member of the committee within the School of Computing. The self-assessment form highlighted the need for appropriate data storage, the anonymisation of participants, and specific issues surrounding the graphical and phenomenological methods in use. According to Wang and Redwood-Jones (2001), the photovoice method raises three unique areas for consideration. Firstly, the safety of the participants whilst taking the photographs,

secondly, ensuring appropriate consent and, finally, ensuring appropriate use of the images generated. To mitigate these issues, training materials were provided to all participants covering privacy, trespassing, illegal activities and consent. Consent forms were produced for photographic approval from any subject in the photographs. Consent was followed up with individuals and photographs were obscured where consent was not explicit.

For the IPA interviews, all participants gave consent to participate fully in the study and they were informed about all aspects of the research. Qualitative research, and in particular IPA, required informed consent not only for participation but also for the analysis of the data. Smith et al. (2009) advise that raw, unedited data transcripts should only be seen by the researcher. Ensuring the researcher was confident in the method was also part of the ethical approval and the training course attended at Stirling University ensured quality of practice. At the start of the interviews, informed consent was revisited and the 'right to withdraw' reaffirmed in keeping with good practice (Smith et al., 2009). The informed consent form stated that data collection was anonymous and that participants were given a number rather than using their names. Identifiable personal information was kept confidential and the researcher was the only person to access this data. Participants were informed that the interviews would be audio-recorded. The consent form was signed by the participant and countersigned by the researcher and the copy securely stored. A data management plan was put in place to confirm the process and stated that MP3 files would be destroyed after transcription to ensure the anonymity of the participants. All transcripts were created in Word format and analysed using NVivo.

For this study, six documents were produced in total; the first being the self-assessment form. Further documents were produced in the form of a data management plan, participant information sheet, photovoice training materials, consent for photographic subjects and, the informed consent form. Copies of these can be found in Appendix A. After submitting through the university ethics committee, no additional queries were raised and permission was granted for the study.

5.4.1 Validity, reliability and trustworthiness

Validity, reliability and trustworthiness are easily defendable in quantitative studies by tried and tested methods but ensuring the quality of qualitative studies is a newer area of study. Yardley (2000) groups suitable procedures into four key dimensions – sensitivity of context, commitment and rigour, transparency and coherence and, impact and importance (Yardley, 2000, 2017). The interpretative approach to this research and the desire to understand participants' lived experiences led to the establishment of rapport, awareness of the phenomenon under study and thoughtful analysis of the data, easily identifiable as sensitivity of context. The use of verbatim extracts within the findings and discussion support this claim (Smith et al., 2009). The use of NVivo and coding reports also ensures the reader of the trustworthiness and credibility of the work by demonstrating how it is grounded in the data (Gibbs, 2004). To ensure reliability in qualitative research, an examination of trustworthiness is crucial (Golafshani, 2003). By biases and influences being earlier stated in the section - Role of the Researcher, this added transparency should help to convince the reader of the trustworthiness of the study.

Commitment and rigour go hand-in-hand with the IPA process where the researcher demonstrates personal commitment and investment in the analysis process over an extended timeframe. This process requires both consistency and transparency. The use of a coding diary throughout the analysis stage defines and defends the decision making when combining themes and developing interpretative analysis. This diary brackets the researcher's values, feelings and ideas (Ortlipp, 2008).

08/09/18	As I continue to code in NVivo using the emergent themes from the paper copies I am continuing to read through the codes and make some small adjustments. Just small changes to the wording of the code for example. I hadn't expected to continue to make changes to the codes for such an extended period of time or so frequently. These minor changes show me that the codes are developing and that I am happy with the emergent themes that I currently have for this participant.
10/09/18	As I continue the coding for I realise that one of the codes for multiple identities – napier student should be university student. I do not feel that the university name in itself is an important aspect of their identity but their differentiation between college and university.
12/09/18	The initial coding of emergent themes has resulted in 27 nodes for one IPA interview transcript. Many of these are similar and can be grouped. Today's task is to search for connections across these emergent themes to develop what will be the super-ordinate themes. To do this I am putting each theme on a post-it note and grouping like with like to develop a cluster.
19/09/18	Codes have been grouped and resulted in 9 emergent themes from the initial 27 nodes. The process of identifying themes and grouping is very time consuming.
20/09	Coding complete on 1st IPA interview. I am hoping some of the pitfalls identified during this process will speed up things going forward.
26/09	Started analysing the second IPA interview. Had a bit of a break between the first one and this which I think is good as the detail of the first interview are no longer at the forefront of my mind. I'm slightly concerned that the nodes identified this time will be dramatically different and am conscious that what is in your head at the time can affect this ie. Latest literature you have read.
27/09	Reading, re-reading and initial commenting are complete. Now to put into NVivo.
08/10	It's been a while since I last had time to look at the data and I feel that I'm having to start again. Am grateful that I have kept these notes as was about to waste time highlighting sections in word! It is difficult to remember what you initial interpretation of the data was so am having to re-read again and ensure I still agree. This has resulted in a few tweaks.

Figure 23: Extract from coding diary

Transparency and coherence examine how clearly the stages are explained, and refers to the fit between the research carried out and the underlying theoretical assumptions (Yardley, 2000). Further details of the reflective coding diary can be found in Appendix H: Reflective Coding Diary (extract). The steps identified in the methods section aim to provide a means of transparency for the reader. The impact and importance of the study have been demonstrated in the publications and presentations carried out throughout the research. These are listed on page iv – Publications associated with this research.

5.5 Conclusion to this chapter

This chapter has illustrated the methods of data collection employed in this study. The focus on IPA, photovoice and photo-elicitation has been explained and justified. The use of IPA for data analysis and the steps followed in this process have been explored. Using this method allowed the researcher to make links between the individual's experience as an associate student and to build a picture of the experience of this

phenomenon as a journey. In the following chapters, the experience of these students is explored.

The combined approach of IPA interviews and graphical methods has allowed the participants to provide a window into their daily experience and gives them the control over what is discussed and highlighted, allowing them to feel confident to express their views. The photovoice methodology has been criticised for a lack of depth in analysis (Horwitz, 2011), however, combining this with the strength of IPA analysis with its structured approach and detailed analysis of the dialogue has deepened the interpretative nature of this study. The following chapter explores the findings.

Chapter 6: Research Findings & Discussion

6.1   Introduction

This thesis explored how associate students perceive and experience transition, and how they are perceived by staff. The review of the literature showed that a limited number of studies had examined the experience of associate students and none had taken place in a school of computing. Within this research, the collective images and discussion give valuable insight into the transition experience of students between college and university and two overarching attributes stand out – the significance of experience both inside and outside the university; and the perceptions and expectations of students before transition and what can be learnt from this.

Three research questions were explored:

RQ1: How do college students with associate student status perceive their transition to university?

RQ2: How do associate students experience transition at Edinburgh Napier University School of Computing?

The experience of 22 students was examined, thirteen before transition using PEI and ten after transition through IPA interviews and the use of photovoice focus groups. The data were categorised into 16 clusters and then into five superordinate themes. This chapter brings together the findings and discussion.

6.1.1   Structure of this chapter

This chapter examines each research question in turn, examining the perceptions and experiences of students and staff. It aims to provide a phenomenological and

interpretative narrative for the research findings, providing an understanding of students' lived experiences of transition. To gain insight, this study employed interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to analyse the interview, photovoice and photo-elicitation data. The interpretative nature of this study allowed the researcher to explore the meaning of these individual experiences, however, these individual accounts are inevitably, incomplete, partial, tentative, emergent, open and uncertain (Finlay, 2008). It is, therefore, important to state that this chapter presents one version, synthesised from the analysis, of the transition experience of associate students and this account has been influenced by the researcher's own experiences and preconceptions.

Five superordinate themes emerged from the interpretative analysis:

- Social aspects - becoming a different kind of student;
- Self-concept - we're coming from different worlds;
- Physical environment - onwards and upwards;
- Academic differences - it's not the basics anymore;
- Preparation - I wasn't prepared, I guess everyone feels like that.

Each superordinate theme has a number of related subordinate themes and these are presented in Table 12.

Table 12: Superordinate themes and related subordinate themes

Social aspects - becoming a different kind of student	Self-concept - we're coming from different worlds	Physical environment - onwards and upwards	Academic differences - it's not the basics anymore	Preparation - I wasn't prepared, I guess everyone feels like that
• Experiences • Adjustments • Peer support • Anxieties	• Feelings • Identity • Confidence • Motivation	• Adapting to change • Facilities	• Adapting • Struggles • Differences	• Negative experience • Benefits of route • Preparation for activities

Throughout this section participants are referred to by P and their unique number, for example, participant 12 - P12. Line numbers from the transcripts are included after the participant identifier, for example (P12, 23-26). Quotations are identified by indented and italicised text or by use of quotation marks and serve to provide the phenomenological core for the interpretations. Photovoice photographs are included

where appropriate to illustrate themes, and extracts are included for at least half of the participants to support the claims.

Each of the research questions is considered in turn, starting with the perceptions of associate students whilst studying at college. The findings from the photo-elicitation interviews are shared. This is followed by the associate students who have made the transition and are currently experiencing the phenomenon. The findings from the photovoice and IPA interviews are shared to give an understanding of their experience. Finally, the perspectives of staff from both college and university are examined with data taken from the IPA interviews.

The discussion which follows each section investigates the key findings and adds to the academic conversation around transition. Whilst analysing the data, stories emerged of students' transition which went beyond the university walls and this is of particular interest. The researcher acknowledges that the reader may feel that other themes were worthy of greater exploration, however, the focus here is on the experience pre- and post-transition. The associate student experience is at the forefront of this research and areas for future exploration are suggested in the concluding chapter.

6.2   RQ1: How do associate students at college perceive their transition to university

6.2.1   Introduction

This section provides a summary of the findings with appropriate quotes from the college participants surrounding each photograph shared during the PEI followed by a discussion with reference to the existing literature. Three PEIs were carried out in total, with one focus group in 2016/17 and two in 2017/18. For ease of analysis, these are grouped together with each photograph considered in turn. These focus groups were coded using the same IPA method and the five superordinate themes emerged to provide additional insight into the experiences of associate students.

Table 13: Superordinate themes for photo-elicitation participants

Participant	Social aspects - becoming a different kind of student	Self-concept - we're coming from different worlds	Physical environment - onwards and upwards	Academic differences - it's not the basics anymore	Preparation - I wasn't prepared, I guess everyone feels like that
P13		✓	✓	✓	✓
P14		✓	✓		✓
P15		✓			✓
P16		✓	✓		
P17		✓			✓
P18		✓	✓		✓
P23	✓	✓		✓	
P24		✓	✓		✓
P25	✓	✓		✓	✓
P26		✓	✓	✓	✓
P27		✓		✓	✓
P28	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
P29		✓	✓	✓	

6.2.2   RQ1 Findings

Figure 24: PEI01: Computer centre

Discussion around the computing centre was positive for most of the participants, with three-quarters of participants already having spent time studying there:

>I already spend time there, it's very handy *(P14).*

>*It's near my house so it's really good to have access. Nobody knows who you are so you can just go there, like, as a Napier student (P15).*

>*Going there makes me feel like a real student. You know, like a uni student. It's a much more grown-up environment (P16).*

For P13 and P17 who had not made use of this resource the feelings elicited by the photograph were mixed with P13 stating, *'It's busy and a bit scary',* whilst P17 said, *'I haven't been, but it makes going to uni next year seem more achievable'.*

Figure 25: PEI02: University campus

The campus photograph [Figure 25: PEI02: University] had a motivating effect on the students*, 'I think it's motivating. It feels better to be there than here'* (P16), and having access as an associate student proved beneficial:

> *…once I'd used my student card to get in and it all worked ok, I felt like, yeah that is me, I'm at uni. Being an associate student has let me feel like that for the last few months. I'm ready to move on and for the challenge. I don't feel like a college student anymore, being at Merchiston definitely made a difference, it, like, changed my whole mindset (P14).*

> *Yeah, being at that campus, in that physical building has a really big effect. It's not the same if you go to one of the events because you're part of a group but if you go on your own and go to study then you feel good. I can really focus when I go there (P15).*

One participant, P18, had yet to enter the campus and, although positive about the transition, they were worried about the change in commute and stated, *'There are implications for getting there, it's quite a journey'* (P18).

Several of the participants commented on the familiarity from a tour they had been given during a recent induction event – *'Yeah, we had a little tour around the campus… It was quite interesting'* (P25).

> *It's like a uni environment…. Student life. It's cool (P28).*

I think it will be good to have a different feel to being a student. Getting like a different environment. I think that would be good for anyone (P29).

Discussion around the familiarity with the building also prompted thoughts about how prepared they were for the transition – *'We had a sample lecture and a lot of it seemed more technology orientated. It's different to what we are doing now which is networking but when we go there it will be forensics, security. So it's a different aspect to it, I don't think we're really prepared for it'* (P26).
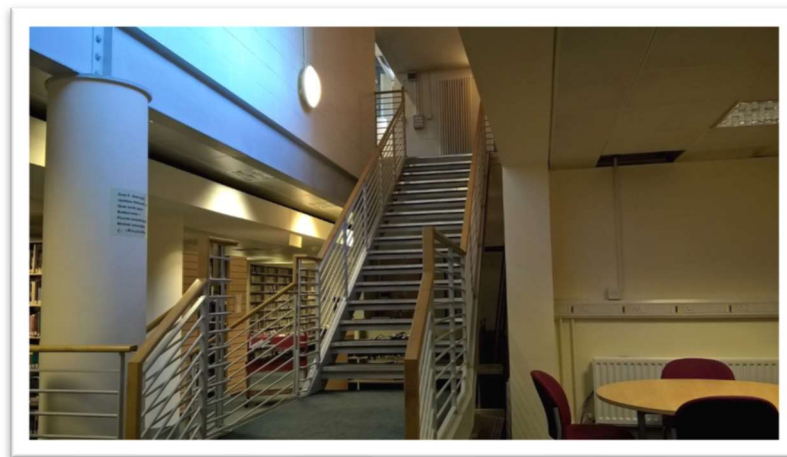
Figure 26: PEI03: Library stairs

Figure 26 had been used to see if the students would pick up on the metaphor of climbing stairs or a journey. This image worked for some and made them consider their future steps:

It makes me think of the uphill challenges we're going to have. I think it's going to be tough, I'm a bit worried (P13).

I can see the path, up the stairs, make the change, become a uni student, work hard, graduate. I'm ready (P15).

However, for others, it was simply a place to study

I already use the library. For when I need it to be for quiet study (P14).

It's another building, another library, another campus (P18).

The library here is useless, it's no use for studying anyway. I'm looking forward to being able to go to a proper library to study around my classes. We can't do that here, there's no quiet space to study. I go to Napier for that (P15).

Figure 27: PEI04: College campus

Their college campus was depicted in Figure 27 and P13 described this as *'a glorified high school. Coming here, I expected to learn and develop myself, it's a bit of a shock to see the standards that are provided. It could do with a lot of improvements'* (P13).

P18 posits the choices they'd made – *'I wish I'd gone to university first….Everyone else seemed to know what they wanted to do and I just didn't know. I suppose college has given me a shot at university, I wouldn't have considered it otherwise. …. they said because I had good grades I could be an associate and by then I was watching all my mates get ready to go to uni and I realised that I wanted to do that, too'* (P18).

I've got a placement next year so it will be completely different. I won't be at the uni either so I'm not sure how I'll feel. That's been the main benefit of being an associate student, that I can do a placement. I don't think it's fair that you miss out on that if you come from college. I'm really excited to get the opportunity but I'm also terrified. I don't think I'm the same as the uni students, probably less prepared. Better than a normal college student, but somewhere in the middle. It think being an associate makes you be in the middle. So it's like college, associate, uni – it's a kind of hierarchy (P15).

Figure 28: PEI05: Graduation

Figure 28 depicted graduation and P14 felt inspired – *'It will be a big moment, to celebrate and have your friends and family around'* (P14), *'We're actually working towards a goal, so we're focused'* (P16). However, the journey was daunting – *'It's gonna take ages to get there!'* (P16).

> *A new chapter of your journey. You'll be looking for work at this point or to move on to a masters (P28).*

Both P15 and P13 weren't able to think that far ahead – *'Got to get through this year first!'* (P15), *'I just see it as another step. The way I'm dealing with this is step by step, next step is to get HND, next step is to start [uni], next step I'm not sure of yet'* (P13).

Being associate students made graduation seem more plausible – *'It feels closer because we're associate students'* (P15), *'I think being an associate student is going to take me further. … But when they said there was the associate degree, it's given me a possibility, I would never have considered a degree otherwise. I'm near the end of year 2 and I can't see why I wouldn't do year 3'* (P13).

> *It's an easier progression (P15).*

> *For me, I don't have highers, so I couldn't get into uni. To have the option to go to university has been fantastic. I wouldn't be going to university without the associate programme. If I get to wear that gown and get my honours degree, it*

will be the proudest day for me and my family. It will give us so many more opportunities (P17).

It's surprising how much it focuses you. It makes you think that you can. Being an associate student has helped. I don't think it's made much difference to what we study but it has changed how I view myself and my future (P16).

For others it prompted feelings of growing up and adulthood – *'I hope to see myself in one of those gowns. It's a reality check. Now I need to do everything for myself, you need to stand on your own, get a job, family. I think after this period life hits you hard and you realise it's not easy being an adult'* (P27).

For others, this wasn't seen as an end goal but the start of their careers – *'It's like getting to the top (as a graduate) and then hitting the bottom again by starting a new job'* (P28).

Again, the experience of the college environment and the ability to prepare the participants became the topic of conversation – *'I feel that teaching in college isn't really helping us to get there. The teaching in the classroom hasn't really been upgraded from school. Even though we're like adults, I feel like it could be improved so that right now it's like big high school kids going to uni. Whereas I think some of the skills I feel, like referencing and reports, they should have taught us that at college. I know that every report at uni you need to do that. It should have been covered in more detail here'* (P29).

Yeah, even the lecturers, it's more like a friend. You just have to email and they'll get back to you, just to give you a wee bit of help (P28).

We almost get spoon-fed in a way. It makes you lazy (P29).

The college environment was considered to be part-time in comparison to the workload anticipated at university:

Most of the time we don't have anything to do outside the classroom. College is more like being a part-time student (P29).

When you're at home you don't need to think about your course at all. When we're at uni we'll have extra work to do and will be thinking about it more and more. Learning more and more (P27).

Whilst some were worried they would struggle with the transition, others were looking forward to it – *'I think I've been a bit lazy and I'm looking forward to having to work hard and really learning new things, new challenges'* (P27).

The journey from college, to university and on to the workplace was at the forefront for many – *'I mean getting on the course was the main start, going to uni is a second obstacle, graduation is the third obstacle'* (P26).

When I get a job that I enjoy then that will be the goal (P26).

The job is the focus (P24).
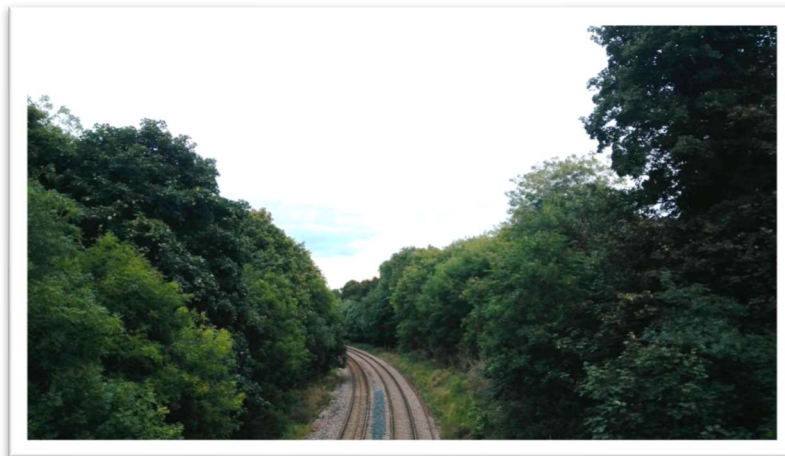
Figure 29: PEI06: New path, new journey

Figure 29 of the train tracks prompted comments of journeys, *'To learn and progress'* (P28) and destinations -

I feel like I'm on a journey, 100%, just going through the steps to where I want to be. To get a job (P28).

A journey – to the course, tracks leading to your profession. Started off with nowhere of getting to somewhere. For me I couldn't go to uni, I didn't do well at school so I came to college. This wasn't where I thought I'd be going so being an associate has given me a different destination. I suppose it's taken me to a new profession if I think of it as a path or a journey. I'm going somewhere now, I wasn't really headed anywhere good before (P25).

The focus for most of the participants was not on the university as their destination but the work opportunities that would come after – *'The end result was originally getting a job but when you go through there are loads of different pathways that you can take. Different places to go'* (P29). Others were less sure of the destination – *'It feels more like an adventure, you're just going somewhere and you're not sure where it's going to end. You're just going with the moment'* (P27).

I suppose going somewhere, not knowing where the tracks lead. Kind of like us but we certainly know what the next step is. Next stop uni! (P26)
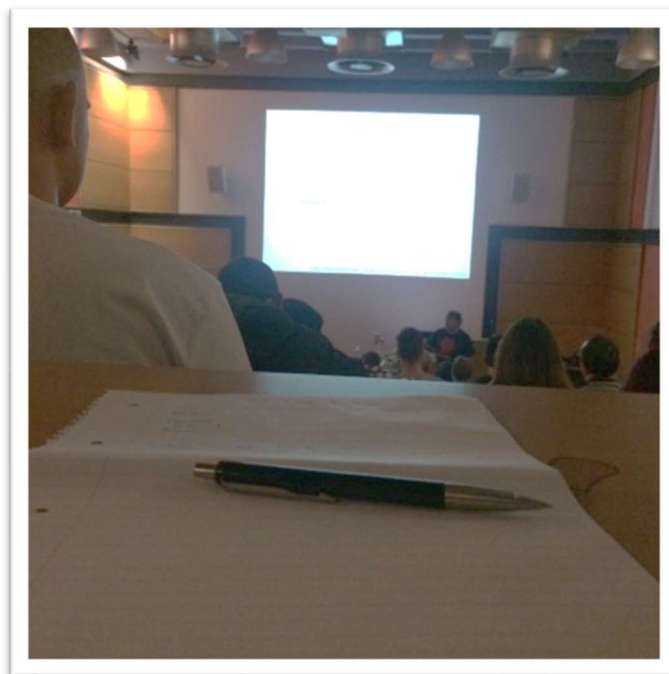
Figure 30: PEI07: So far back, I'm anonymous

The photograph of the lecture theatre in Figure 30 made participants reminisce about a recent visit. P23 commented on the location of the lecture theatre – *'This is the one*

that's hard to find', demonstrating their knowledge of the campus and previous experience during interventions for associate students.

Interestingly others commented on the individual student – *'It doesn't look like the person is very prepared, they have a pen but no notepad just a piece of paper, they've obviously got from someone else. They should be taking notes, we've been told you need to take notes at uni. We don't do that here, we just get handouts of everything we need'* (P25) and *'I think they're too far back to be really interested in the topic. It must be quite hard to read the slides'* (P26).

For others the scale and format of teaching for the discussion point – *'I've been in that room. It's really intimidating'* (P24).

> *I would never ask a question in that place. The lecturer is too far away, I would never put my hand up (P23).*

> *It's like public speaking (P26).*

The difference between college and university was also highlighted – *'It's totally different to here. It's a small class, we all know each other. We don't have to think about it, or even put up our hand. We just talk and ask questions. Its more relaxed'* (P23).

> *It's completely different for us. Like, I've never had this experience. I went to a drop-in session and I found that really interesting. I actually got quite excited. The way lecturers teach is quite different. They speak to you like they expect you to know things and I thought that was, like, really cool (P27).*

Being an associate student and moving on as a cohort was identified as being beneficial – *'I think it will be easier for us because we're all going up together. It will be a lot more comfortable'* (P26).

> *We know most of the people in the class so it's not going to be as intimidating (P23).*

There was a realisation that much of their learning would be self-directed – *'it's up to you if you look at it if you want to progress your own learning'* (P29).

> *What I like is the fact that if you don't do well, you really can't blame anyone apart from yourself. Whereas in college you would be like, well if the teaching had been better, but like at Uni if you get told to do something then you have to. If you don't then it's your fault. I like challenges like that, I think that's quite interesting, yeah (P27).*
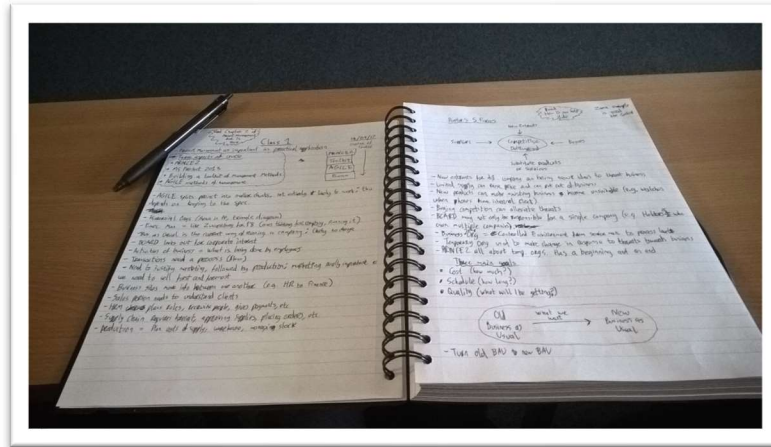
Figure 31: PEI08: Note-taking

The final photograph portrayed a notebook full of lecture notes Figure 31 and the participants considered the skills necessary – *'I think I'll struggle 'cause I find if I'm writing stuff down then I'm not listening'* (P24) and the practicalities – *'I need to get a laptop'* (P28), *'I actually prefer writing in a notebook'* (P29).

And the different format in college – *'We don't really take notes. We use computers. Sometimes I scribble on the chapters [handouts]'* (P23), *'I've two notepads in my bag and they're empty'* (P25).

> *Those are much more structured notes than anything I've taken. Mine are more like 'notes to self', like read this part, or listen to this, or do this bit of the practical. Stuff like that (P23).*

> *I don't think it's the same. Here is more about teaching you, whereas from what I understand, at uni, its more. They will give you a rough idea or what to look at and then the majority of the stuff is your own work. There is a difference in that sense, it's more tutor-led here than it is in uni (P25).*

Following this discussion around the focus groups and participants reactions to the shared photographs, what follows is the themes coded onto the transcripts. The transcripts were coded using IPA to identify emergent themes – these were then grouped around the five superordinate themes and are discussed below.

6.2.3 RQ1 Discussion

Listening to the voices of the associate students and their perceptions of transition whilst studying at college has provided additional insight and areas for discussion. This section will interpret the student voice, eliciting understanding and linking with relevant literature. All five superordinate themes are explored in turn.

Social aspects - becoming a different kind of student

The associate students have yet to make their transition and, therefore, haven't experienced settling in and the new friendships and social aspects that accompany this. However, there was an awareness of the adjustment that would be necessary to integrate into the campus community, build support networks, and negotiate the new freedoms afforded by university life (Gray et al., 2013).

The college setting provides the students with a small class environment, following the same timetable and providing little opportunity to expand beyond this cohort. The structure of the college day usually means that teaching finishes around 4.30pm with the college buildings themselves closing around 6pm. This provides little opportunity for extended study or self-direction on-campus. The university campus is open 24/7, with group study spaces, numerous societies to join and an advertised social life to join in with. The students in the study had an awareness of the differences – '*It's totally different to here. It's a small class, we all know each other. We don't have to think about it, or even put up our hand. We just talk and ask questions*' (P23).

Previous literature demonstrated a gap between expectations and reality after transition to university with Jackson et al. (2000) identifying four types – optimist, prepared, fearful and complacent. The participants in the study appear to have a realistic view of university study and optimistic awareness of the adjustment necessary.

As associate students, they gained confidence from the knowledge that they would continue their studies with individuals from their current class -

> *We know most of the people in the class so it's not going to be as intimidating (P23)*

This was in keeping with the literature which highlighted the benefit of peer support, not only for academic success but also for social integration and building a sense of belonging (Aynsley & Gazeley, 2012; Black & MacKenzie, 2008; HEA and NUS Scotland, 2013).

Many of the participants in the study had perceptions of sticking with their existing classmates after the transition and this was also confirmed by those reflecting on the transition that they had experienced. Sticking with their existing peer groups provides comfort through agreed expectations and beliefs (Lindstrom,1993) but also in the familiarity, the safety of friends, which increases confidence and encourages identification with the university (Lizzio, 2006). The social aspects and connection with the university have been found in the literature around retention (Tinto, 2017). As students experience feelings of loss in the physical spaces, they also lose social contacts (Scanlon et al., 2007) particularly the connection with their college lecturers. The relationship with the university lecturers is frequently cited as distant.

What this theme has identified is the participants' awareness of the changes in social interaction between each other and their lecturers. The participants are comforted by the knowledge that they will transition with familiar faces, into a campus they have

already visited and, importantly, they demonstrated an awareness that it was going to be '*totally different*'.

Self-concept - we're coming from different worlds
When considering their identity, many of the participants discussed the benefits of having access to the university campus and identifying as a university student:

> *Nobody knows who you are so you can just go there, like, as a Napier student (P15).*

> *Going there makes me feel like a real student. You know, like a uni student. It's a much more grown-up environment (P16).*

This is in keeping with Marcia's (1996) concept that identity is developed as a sequential process in which individuals compare themselves to those around them. Being an associate student allowed the participants to build their sense of identity as a university student.

This access also allowed them to settle into the environment, to realise their potential and added to the feeling of preparedness:

> *Being an associate student has let me feel like that for the last few months. I'm ready to move on and for the challenge. I don't feel like a college student anymore, being at Merchiston definitely made a difference, it, like, changed my whole mindset (P14).*

Bridges (1995) posited that individuals must let go of, or 'shed', their old identity in order to replace it with the new one. Being part of a group, and being accepted develops an individual's self-concept (Tajfel, 1981) and allows them to join in a shared narrative (Wenger, 2000).

For one participant, having associate student status afforded them the opportunity to take a one-year placement during the third year. Rather than moving with their peer group, they will be starting a full-time placement -

> *I'm really excited to get the opportunity but I'm also terrified. I don't think I'm the same as the uni students, probably less prepared. Better than a normal college student, but somewhere in the middle. I think being an associate makes you be in the middle. So it's like college, associate, uni – it's a kind of hierarchy (P15).*

Identifying the hierarchy, with associate students in the middle, gives an interesting perspective of their transition. They feel more prepared than a regular college student but not yet at the university level.

Others highlighted the opportunity presented from the associate student route; for some university wasn't seen as a possibility due to missed entry criteria – '*For me, I don't have highers, so I couldn't get into uni. To have the option to go to university has been fantastic. I wouldn't be going to university without the associate programme*' (P17).

The opportunities provided through associate student status and the motivation this provided were also expressed:

> *I think being an associate student is going to take me further (P13)*

> *It's surprising how much it focuses you. It makes you think that you can. Being an associate student has helped. (P16)*

Work by Flum (1994) highlighted identity formation as an 'evolutive style' whereby identity is formed gradually and influenced by step-by-step exploration. Having the opportunity to be an associate student of the university has allowed the participants to gradually explore this identity within the university environment.

For some, the varying levels of confidence were an issue and perceiving how they will react in the university environment – '*I don't think I can see myself there yet*' (P23).

> *I mean getting on the course, was the main start, going to uni is a second obstacle, graduation is the third obstacle (P26).*

This links with self-belief and self-esteem which is influenced by group identification, their associate values and emotional significance (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The focus on the end goal was echoed by several participants but not as graduation, rather that of employment – *'When I get a job that I enjoy then that will be the goal' (P26), 'The job is the focus'* (P24).

> *I feel like I'm on a journey, 100%, just going through the steps to where I want to be. To get a job (P28).*

The changes in social life and free time were also highlighted – *'Most of the time we don't have anything to do outside the classroom'* (P29). Several of the participants referred to their college course as a part-time study – *'We become a full-time student. College is like part-time, we're moving on to full-time'* (P29).

Being an associate student allowed them to try on the identity of a *'real student'* (P16) and experience the environment. Work by Gee (2000) highlighted the benefits of engaging with a new identity and being recognised as a 'different kind of person'.

Their associate student status allowed them to identify with the University and to discuss their studies in the long-term, four-year timeframe. During their college studies, this identity provided an additional source of pride. Unfortunately, the participants' self-concept was impacted by prejudices and expectations, giving feelings of inadequacy and of 'being less' than students who had studied at university since the first year. This lower self-confidence was highlighted in several studies with (Barron & D'Annunzio-Green, 2009) highlighting direct entry students' fear of failure or of falling behind.

An interesting observation from this study is that universities portray the image of the perfect student and highlight the stereotypical traits; that of a keen, enthusiastic proto-academic seeking to attain a good final degree classification ((Attenborough, 2011). The image portrayed is a confident, able individual; never the unsure, young adolescent.

This work has allowed us to see the real students and is invaluable in adding to this discussion.

Physical environment - onwards and upwards

The perception of a campus that is *'busy and a bit scary'* (P13) was felt by some, whilst others were motivated by the buildings – *'I think it's motivating'* (P16). For some, the access granted by their associate student status gave the campus a familiarity – *'I already use the library'* (P14).

The change in how this environment would make them feel was also important:

> *It's like a uni environment…. Student life. It's cool (P28).*

> *I think it will be good to have a different feel to being a student. Getting like a different environment. I think that would be good for anyone (P29).*

The accommodation choices of the associate students may influence their experience of university life, with many taking on the status of 'commuter students' (Pokorny et al., 2017) and one stating, *'There are implications for getting there, it's quite a journey'* (P18).

Many of the students in the study had already visited the campus and commented how just being on campus made them feel like university students – *'I think it's motivating. It feels better to be there than here'* (P16). For most, their understanding of the physical environment was limited due to their limited exposure to life on campus. Their impressions were that it would be motivating and more akin to 'student life' with the library and social spaces offering additional opportunities not available within the college, *'I already use the library. For when I need it to be for quite study'* (P14). Several studies have examined how commuter students make use of campus facilities and their need for individual quiet study spaces in which they can spread out their belongings (Bauer, 2019). The findings of this study suggest that college campuses would benefit from quiet study spaces for students to use. None of the students in the

study perceived challenges with the physical spaces available, however, research by (L. Thomas, 2018b) found that there were practical issues with a lack of space to store belongings and informal space to spend with peers.

The large lecture theatres gave feelings on anxiousness with P24 stating, *'It's really intimidating'*: this is in line with research by (James, 2016) which found that the size of the space and confidence of the students were the two main barriers to student participation. This also links with research exploring student identity which states that the physical world and feelings of belonging are geographically located (Proshansky, Fabian, & Kaminoff, 1983).

The associate route is important for widening participation and providing a way into university for those that did not possess the standard entry requirements for university. Affording these students access to the university campus allowed the students to experience university life and to feel like university students. For some, the difficulties in commuting and using public transport were at the forefront of their thoughts. The time and resources needed to make the transition were more practical in nature. Although the campus was found to be large and scary, it was also thought to be inspiring and provoked talk of their future beyond the university.

Academic differences - it's not the basics anymore
Much of the literature has examined the differences between studying in a college environment versus a university environment with a general focus on academic differences, social integration and belonging. What isn't discussed is the implication for these differences on the individual – what does it mean for them and how are these differences accounted for? This research has highlighted the experiences of students in their own words, taking their perspective, their feelings and observations. By linking with personal experience, student experience and the literature, we can develop an overview of what these changes and transitions actually are and how they are experienced.

The participants in this study had a strong awareness of the challenge ahead of them – *'I think it's going to be tough, I'm a bit worried'* (P13).

> *There will be an initial pain barrier as we adjust. I don't think the way we write and work is the same, there are different levels. At university there is a standard of education, at college, there are different levels (P13).*

When considering the physical environment of a large lecture theatre there were perceptions that sitting at the back showed a lack of interest – *'I think they're too far back to be really interested in the topic'* (P26).

The participants also demonstrated a lack of confidence in asking questions – *'The lecturer is too far away, I would never put my hand up'* (P23), *'It's like public speaking'* (P26), and identified skills that were lacking –

> *We don't really take notes. We use computers. Sometimes I scribble on the chapters [handouts] (P23).*

> *I've two notepads in my bag and they're empty (P25).*

The participants also recognised the change in the self-directed study – *'I don't think it's the same. Here is more about teaching you, whereas from what I understand, at uni, it is more, they will give you a rough idea or what to look at and then the majority of the stuff is your own work. There is a difference in that sense, it's more tutor-led here than it is in uni'* (P25).

> *Yeah, they just give you like core information. You have to go back and look into it yourself....So it's up to you if you look at it if you want to progress your own learning (P29).*

The academic challenge identified led to a realisation that the college system was making them lazy – *'In college, it's like you're going round in circles sometimes'* (P28).

> *We almost get spoon-fed in a way. It makes you lazy (P29).*

During their college studies, the students were aware of the academic challenges they would face after transition. There was recognition of the need for note-taking skills – *'we don't really take notes'* (P23), greater self-direction – *'it's more tutor led here'* (P25), difference in skills – *'referencing and reports, they should have taught us that at college'* (P27), the commitment and hours of study – *'College is like part-time, we're moving on to full-time'* (P29), the interactions within lectures – *'I would never ask a question in that place [lecture theatre]'* (P23). These differences were classified as 'pedagogical frictions' by (Katartzi & Hayward, 2019) whose study identified difficulties in relation to teaching, learning and assessment which arise from the prevalence of self-directed study.

There is limited detail in the literature about the specifics of the academic differences, with work focusing on the change required around self-directed learning and their lack of preparedness (Christie, Barron, & D'Annunzio-Green, 2011; Yorke & Longden, 2004). What this study does highlight is the awareness of academic staff within institutions around the change in style of education and the impact this change in pedagogy will have on the student's transitional success. A deficiency in research skills was also highlighted in this study and in the supporting literature.

Preparation - I wasn't prepared, I guess everyone feels like that
It was quite early in the academic year for the participants to feel like they were fully prepared for the transition, however, they had an awareness of this and recognised that the associate student interventions provided would help with this change – *'I haven't been but it makes going to uni next year seem more achievable'* (P17).

Others considered the role the college course had taken in preparing them – *'the college hasn't really prepared us. It should do more to make sure we are really ready. It kind of does a tick box thing on the surface. I'd like to be properly prepared'* (P13).

Knowing that they had a place at university helped – *'we certainly know what the next step is. Next stop uni!'* (P26). However, they were unsure that there was alignment between the module content -

> *We had a sample lecture and a lot of it seemed more technology orientated. It's different to what we are doing now which is networking but when we go there it will be forensics, security. So it's a different aspect to it, I don't think we're really prepared for it (P26).*

> *The only security we've done is network security. We've touched on encryption. That's about it, but then X was saying that that is due to faculty saying 'oh well you'll do that in uni, we want to focus on networking' (P24).*

The similarity with high school and the lack of focus on university preparation was highlighted:

> *I feel that teaching in college isn't really helping us to get there. The teaching in the classroom hasn't really been upgraded from school. Even though we're like adults, I feel like it could be improved so that right now it's like big high school kids going to uni. Whereas I think some of the skills I feel, like referencing and reports, they should have taught us that at college. I know that every report at uni you need to do that. It should have been covered in more detail here (P27).*

This thought was given to the appropriateness of university preparation for the focus of the college programme which offers a standalone qualification and career possibilities.

Associate college students commented that, *'college hasn't really prepared us'* which highlights one of the challenges and links with the students' own self-direction. Taking ownership for their own preparation was missing from the conversation. Some of the participants were aware of differences in course content, *'It's different to what we're doing now… when we go there it will be forensics'* (P26) but there was a feeling that this mismatch was the responsibility of the college to fix. There is a wealth of existing research which explores preparedness.

Although existing research explored the impact of adjustment, and Briggs et al. (2012) stress the importance of allowing applicants to imagine what being a university student

is like before and during transition, the research failed to explore what preparedness means from an individual perspective. This study has shown that students and staff are aware of a lack of relevant knowledge and skills for success.

This study confirms that students in transition from college to university, despite numerous interventions and opportunities to explore and experience the university, preparation takes place before, during and after transition.

6.2.4   RQ1 Summary

Through their participation, associate students studying at college have demonstrated their understanding of transition and of the adjustment necessary. They have a realistic view of university study. For many, this route has provided them with access to future study which might not otherwise have been an option and they are motivated by the challenges that lie ahead. Moving as a cohort, and with friends, provides comfort and eases the 'pain-barrier' of adjustment. There is a realisation that college in itself is not preparation with the teaching environment described as 'spoon-feeding'. However, the associate students understand the skills necessary such as report writing and self-direction. They have an awareness of the campus and teaching changes they will experience and appear ready for the challenge.

There were many similarities drawn with existing literature but it must be noted that much of the literature cited has used participants after transition. The level of understanding of the university environment and sense of motivation garnered from being part of the associate student route is a recognised conclusion for this study in helping to understand the perceptions and experiences of associate students.

6.3   RQ2: How do associate students experience transition at Edinburgh Napier University School of Computing?

The IPA interviews and photovoice data provide a narrative for the students after transition and respond to RQ2: *How do associate students experience transition at Edinburgh Napier University School of Computing?* The experience of transition was

observed through IPA interviews with six participants and through the photovoice data of four participants. This section has combined the data collection methods to organise the findings by theme.

6.3.1 Social aspects - becoming a different kind of student

Participants emphasise changes in their social interactions. They highlight the issues of settling in and adjusting to the social context of the university, stressing the importance of relationships with peers and university staff. The relationships formed with lecturers are different from the previous college experience:

> *That has been one of the biggest changes. For the last two years, I was used to one lecturer to 16 students, so there's a different kind of relationship. You're not as close to your lecturers here (P24, Figure 32).*
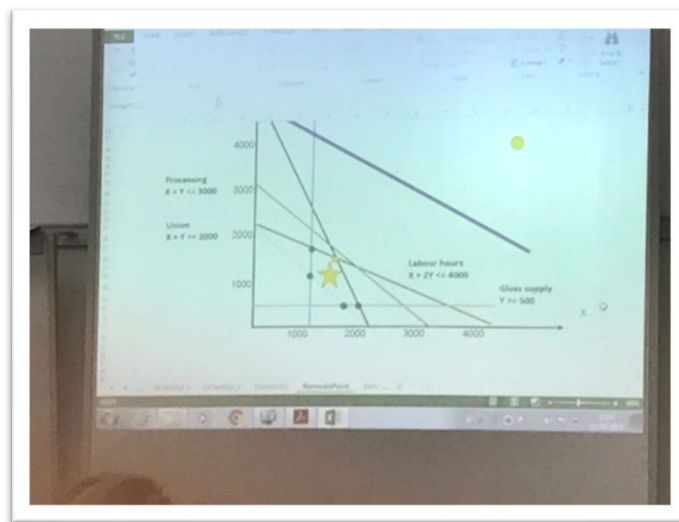
Figure 32: Becoming a different kind of student (Photovoice P24)

> *I think here it is more impersonal than in college. I cross the [Computing Centre] to [Lecturer] and he doesn't know who I am (P2).*

P12 had a more positive experience when a lecturer remembered his name – '*it made me feel like I mattered. It's this kind of reassuring that that person remembered me. It's a really stupid thing. I don't know if they knew I was a direct entrant*' (P12). This was in contrast with P2 who commented on the interaction with lecturers – '*I don't need a friend of my lecturers. That's not going to happen*' (P2).

Forming friendship groups with peers and classmates was also an important social concept. Some participants had moved to university with that supportive peer group still in place, for associate students, moving on as a group provided comfort and support – '*So that was good, knowing that I wouldn't be on my own. I've got a good circle of friends*' (P30).

(Tinto, 2012) highlighted that both academic and social integration were important for success and previous work by (D'Amico et al., 2014) cited specific concerns that new students had regarding making new friends. This concern was not prominent in the findings which suggests that associate students gain from the clear path into university and the friendship group that transition with them. Social integration can be defined as 'the social interactions the student experiences formally, through institutionally provided activities, or informally through interaction with fellow students in residential areas or various other places of study' (Strahn-Koller, 2012) and it is important to recognise that associate students may not integrate into the existing cohort as successfully as academics may hope. However, gaining from peer support is beneficial, whether this comes from existing friendships or new ones.

For some of the participants in the study, the change in interaction was recognised. Being part of a tight group of around 15 to 20 students had allowed the participants to experience close relationships with classmates and lecturers – '*It's a small class, we all know each other*' (P23). Previous studies have examined the effect of class size on teaching and learning (Harfitt & Tsui, 2015) with a focus on belonging and relationships. Smaller class sizes increase interactions between students and lecturers, and afford students greater support, allowing lecturers greater insight into students' knowledge and understanding. The feelings of loss experienced by the students are in agreement with findings by (Finn, Pannozzo, & Achilles, 2003) who argue that being part of a large cohort lessens students' sense of responsibility and renders them largely anonymous. The displacement and loss that students feel results from both loss of social contacts and loss of place (Scanlon et al., 2007).

By allowing the students to tell their story, more is uncovered as to how the nature of their college classroom interactions impact on the student identity at college. Being part of a class group, they were identifiable not only to each other but to their lecturers on college campus. During transition this identity became lost – they were no longer part of a small class, they were part of a large student body and became 'one of many', experiencing feelings of anonymity.

For some, the integration within their peer group was important but difficult, and aspects of being outside the group were highlighted:

> *There are groups but that is normal, we are coming all from different classes. So, we feel more comfortable with people we already know. In class, that gap between different people is getting smaller. You can see how people just go for lunch together or just meet in the [Computer Centre] (P2).*

There were also feelings of loss – '*there is not this sense of unity, kind of. Like, a class or group that you had in college*' (P12).

Not all participants stuck with their existing peer group; some made the transition alone and they experienced and gained a sense of a new beginning, the opportunity to gain new friends, to meet new people and experience a new city. Some participants in the study had moved into new accommodation – '*It feels like the start of a new beginning. I'm finding a way to get settled down again and into university life*' (P22). (Dixon & Durrheim, 2004) found that personal development was impacted by interaction with the physical space, and a study by (Chow & Healey, 2008) focused on the new relationships and friendships which were developed through living accommodation and university spaces. Physical space was an important dimension in the literature (Christie, Tett, Cree, & Mccune, 2014; Meharg & Craighill, 2017; Dixon & Durrheim, 2004; Pokorny et al., 2017) and the participants in this study agreed that the university environment afforded them additional social interactions. '*Just to congregate, look out for people and you can all sit there. It's a really, really good, social space*' (P4). Becoming one of many, in a large institution, with a large student body provides opportunities. The participants gained by joining societies and experiencing the social

interactions of a 'typical university student'. *'I joined one of the societies – the video game one…We would never have done that at college'* (P22).

Black and MacKenzie (2008) found that peer support aids transition, and the associate students undoubtedly benefited from the safety of their peer group, but it is worth noting that this peer support did not enhance their integration. The benefits of peer support and peer mentors are covered extensively in the literature (Andrews & Clark, 2011; Aynsley & Gazeley, 2012; Black & MacKenzie, 2008; Chester et al., 2013; Clark, 2010; Mayne & Bannerman, 2015; Rhodes et al., 2014) and this support was offered to all associate students but none of the participants had taken up this opportunity. Low uptake and challenges around non-response and maintaining contact were identified in the literature (Beltman & Schaeben, 2012) but little is understood about why uptake can be low and non-response occurs. This highlights the fact that, although mentoring is known to be beneficial and increases social and academic integration, universities still have much work to do in encouraging students to sign up. One interpretation from the associate student lack of sign up could be that the support offered by their college peers makes them feel a mentor is unnecessary – this would require further investigation.

Not everything that was gained was positive – many of the participants experienced feelings of loneliness, of isolation and of anxiety – *'there is not this sense of unity'* (P12). (Turner & Tobbell, 2018) suggest that a 'successful student in a previous learning community may feel challenged and uncertain about their ability in a different setting'. Their understanding of systems and procedures becomes obsolete and this may cause anxiety, which in turn leads to lower levels of participation. They characterise this transition as an anxiety-provoking time and focus on their weaknesses with P31 highlighting this – *'I have a different skill set and different weaknesses'* (P31).

Participants identified different groups within classes and social spaces on the university campus, some found this difference to be unsettling:

> *I don't come here to have a happier life, to cry because I feel lonely. I come here to improve my knowledge (P2).*

It is a big step and you may feel a bit lonely in the first few weeks but all the services here are perfect… just at the beginning, I found myself on my own, even though there were people there. It's just that the kind of approach – it's a bit of a jump (P12, 30-34).

Others settled in quickly once the initial anxiousness had passed – '*I felt quite anxious. Especially on the first day because I'm always anxious about new things, to be fair. I felt like I settled in pretty quickly. I met people to talk to. So that sort of social anxiety side of it didn't last too long*' (P31, 1-4).

The social spaces provided on campus were beneficial for social interactions:

Figure 33: Sociable learning space (Photovoice, P4)

The importance of peer support and friendship played in enhancing the transition experience was commented on by many. Sticking with people they knew was a common theme for the associate students who benefited from articulating as a cohort.

Figure 34: Enjoying break time (Photovoice, P22)

> *...we all came from college together. I've stuck with the same group of friends. It's has been good, we have good chemistry. We can bounce ideas off of each other, what we have learnt in the lectures (P22, Figure 34).*

Some were encouraged to step outside their comfort zone:
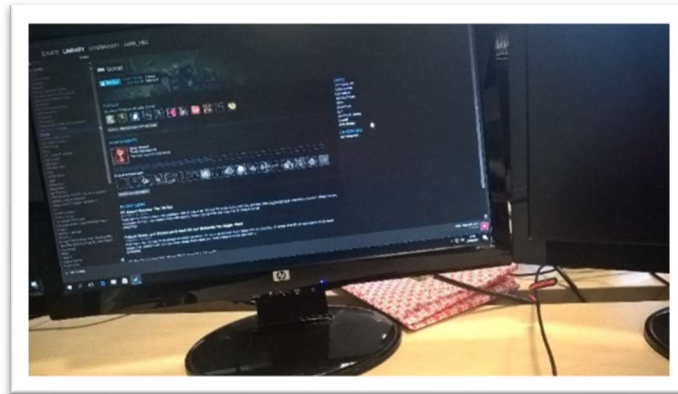
Figure 35: Becoming part of it: Joining a society (Photovoice, P22)

6.3.2 Self-concept - we're coming from different worlds

In this theme, participants discussed their experiences of changes in behaviours and identity, these changes were positive and inspirational for some, whilst scary and unsettling for others. Some were thinking of where they had come from, of their identity as an associate student or a direct entrant, others were looking to their future and the paths they might take or where they might lead. How they identified during their transition varied. One participant commented – '*It is pretty similar, but we are students studying in college, so we didn't go to campus for Napier, we went to Edinburgh College, so we are coming from different worlds as students*' (P2). This description of different worlds contradicts the sameness and the same participant also stated – '*The first days were particularly new, coming here, you are like a new student*' (P2).

P11 didn't identify as an associate student (AS) – '*I didn't really think of myself as an associate student - not actually at college to be honest. Maybe when I'd done my UCAS stuff and was working on my graded unit. I felt more like I was aiming toward university work and at that time I was also using the facilities here. That's when I started to feel like I was a university student – towards the second half of the second year*' (P11). For P2, identifying as a university student whilst studying at college brought additional

pride – '*Some would ask "where are you studying?", I would say "oh, I am a Napier University student but I am going to Edinburgh college", they would be like "how's that?". I argue with people because they say my degree must be lower level because I am going through Edinburgh college, I was like "No!!!!". I will have an honours degree, every single person that finishes the fourth year – we will be on the same level.*' (P2, 146-153). However, this confidence in their identity as a university student dipped during the transition – '*When we arrived in the third year you are a college student coming into the third year. You are not a third-year student*' (P2).

This was confirmed by P12 who agreed that being associated with the University brought additional pride:

> *Being an associate student made a difference, it helped me reach where I wanted to arrive, that was the easy bit. All the support was there. It opened my career aspects and it was much easier than if I hadn't been an associate. I always called myself an associate student, I was quite proud. I would always mention that I was an associate student at Napier. It felt better than saying than I was in college (P12).*

Overall, the participants portrayed a mix of identities and this changed during the transition, it is important to note that none of the associate students identified as direct-entrants and their discussion around being an associate student was positive.

By embracing self-development and self-direction, the students in this study talked of becoming motivated and inspired for their future – '*It's amazing here. It makes me wonder where my future will lead*' (P22). For some, this development took longer than others. A study by (Tett et al., 2017) found that students changed their conceptions of how learning should take place and changed from dependent learners to active and autonomous learners over time. Similarly, a study by Byrne and Flood (2005) stated that approaches to learning are influenced by the environment, personal factors and prior experiences.

For many, they identified as both college and university students or a mixture of both depending on the circumstances, for others their subject of study became the route for

their academic identity – '*I identified with my course of study first, so security and forensics*' (P11). The campus location was synonymous with who they were – '*Computing students – it's not just that [Computing Centre], it's also Merchiston*' (P4).

Figure 36: JKCC – if you're not here, you're not a computing student (Photovoice, P4)

Several of the participants discussed their route into university and the journey into higher education, being an associate student transformed their outlook – '*I'd left school at 16 so university wasn't something that I'd considered. Then doing the HND and getting into the associate programme, coming in, it was that natural step. It made university possible for me and made it something that was an option. It really changed my way of thinking and the way I looked at my future*' (P30, 33-39). The 'second chance' offered by the associate student route was echoed by others:

> *I think being an associate has helped prepare me for most things and definitely given me a great route to university and helped to build my confidence. But it is not the same as being at university from the first year, I'm not the same student I would have been if I'd passed my Highers and gone into the first year. I have a different skill set and different weaknesses (P31).*

Highlighting the differences they felt, and specifically the weaknesses and varying skill levels, shows an understanding of the university and different academic requirements.

For some this was a new beginning:

> *[Figure 37] was taken a few days ago, I've basically moved house completely. Before I lived in a flat but now, I've finally got a front and back door. The picture shows the room which has the computer set up and the bed, it's quite*

important. It has been my focus for the last few days. It feels like the start of a new beginning. I'm finding a way to get settled down again and into university life (P22, 82-86, Figure 37).

Figure 37: New beginnings: moving into a new home (Photovoice, P22)

Personal growth and the development of new behaviours and self-concepts were highlighted by several participants. They identified the changes they had experienced and their self-development:
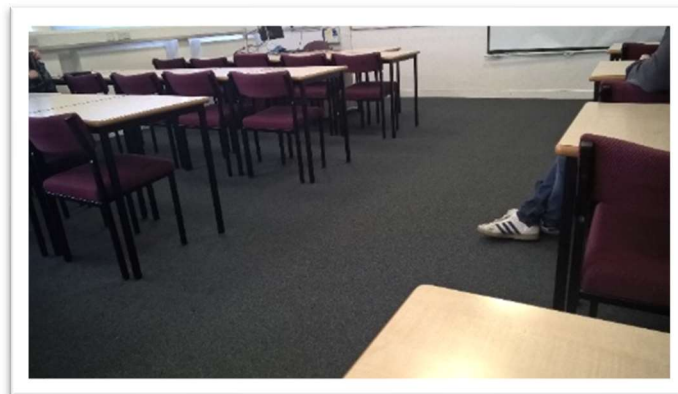
Figure 38: New Me: getting in early (Photovoice, P22)

[Figure 38] is me getting in early…..I have a lot more focus and am a lot more motivated. I'm motivated to be a university student, much more than I ever was in college. It didn't take much effort in college but at uni, you need to work hard to achieve. I'm enjoying the challenge (P22, Figure 38).

This demonstrates the students' commitment to their student identity and recognition of 'who they are'. They have received the final status – achievement, defined by (Erikson, 1968) which considers the extent to which individuals have explored and committed to an identity. It is clear that this associate student has realised who they are and what they want. They are capable of prioritising what is important to them and following the direction they want to take in their life (Erikson, 1968).

This change in focus and motivation was demonstrated by several associate students and the move to independence in their personal lives was also significant:

> *[Figure 39] I took this on my way to uni on my first couple of days and I'd moved from my mum's house… It's like 8.30 am, I'm beside Arthur's Seat which is a place I had barely seen before. Now it's quite close by. That's one of the changes for me – moving out of my house, getting my own space and making my own decisions and stuff (P9, Figure 39).*
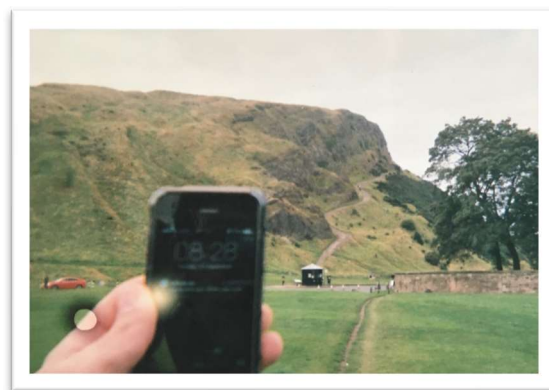
Figure 39: Freedom – a journey that motivates (Photovoice, P9)

Some participants highlighted behaviours that they consider typical of university students in their social interactions both on and off-campus:
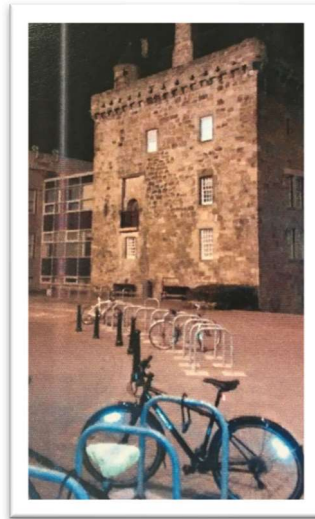
Figure 40: Night-time student (Photovoice, P9)

[Figure 40] is taken in the dark. You can see it's dark out. That's making me think of the night time students. Having an appreciation for the historic building as well. It's something you didn't have, you would do college, do your classes 9 to 4 and then go home. That's where you would be studying for class (P9,Figure 40).

Looking to the future was important, now they had started on this journey, they were interested in what might come next.
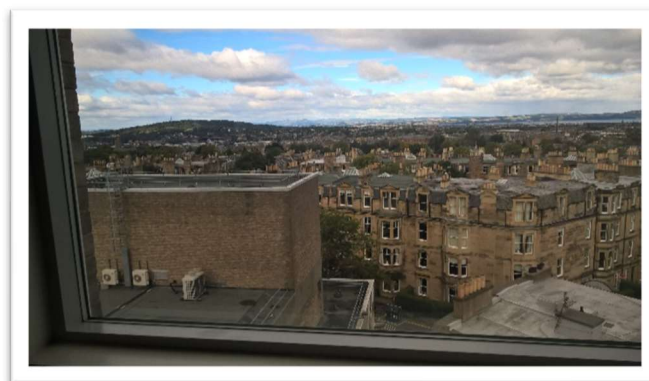
Figure 41: My future is out there (Photovoice, P22)

Whilst some were clear on the future career and progression, others had less direction but were finding inspiration in the university campus: [Figure 41] – *'there weren't any*

views in college… It's amazing here. It makes me wonder where my future will lead' (P22).

6.3.3 Physical environment - onwards and upwards

The size and format of the campus and the physical spaces provided for students played a significant role in the transition experience. Many of the students had visited the campus before, either for interventions provided to associate students or during open days, and for several a campus tour had been provided. Despite this, the scale and confusing layout of the campus was an issue – '*For me, it was like, not the first time because we came two or three times before. But everything was new basically. I get lost three times, [room] A17 is hiding, [room] A55 is also hiding. That was the first ones we had as well!'* (P2).

> *So, it definitely was something different from what I expected. It was a bit confusing at the beginning since the whole structure is bigger, I got lost a few times and it's a bit scary as well (P12).*

The physical presence of the building was highlighted by many of the students:
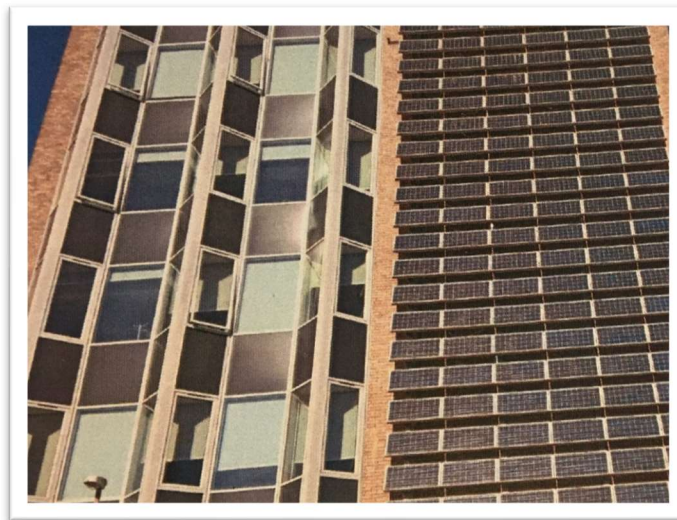
Figure 42 - Onwards and upwards (Photovoice, P9)

> *[Figure 42] The building itself is massive compared to what you would get at your college – it's got all your classrooms and lecture rooms, the cafeteria which is big plus the library and JKCC [computing centre]. The library is huge and has lots of resources (P9).*

The large campus and facilities offered the opportunity to gain new methods of learning and studying, to become a 24-hour student with the ability to study over extended periods of time. *'It is open 24 hours... When you are here, you can keep going'* (P2). They gained a strong work ethic with routine and structure.

Previous studies have shown that students who are positive about their sense of place at their university (Williams & Pepe, 1983) and who have an affiliation with the facilities have an increased sense of belonging. They also rated facilities such as libraries and cafeterias the most important (Mcinnis & James, 1995) – this is echoed by the associate students in this study who undoubtedly value the campus experience.

Having access to a large campus with a large student body also brings advantages in terms of facilities and access. The computing centre was the most commonly cited reference point amongst participants and the 24-hour access a big change, with P9 stating, '*Having the availability [at night], a place where people can come together and work to all hours of the night. You can appreciate the fact that someone has thought of that*' (P9).

> *I came to the JKCC [computing centre], it is easier to come here, it is open 24 hours. It is useful and in Edinburgh college, it closes at 6 or 7 pm. ...So for college, I had to take the bus, go to the library, move back home – it was a waste of time. It is more difficult when you have to take breaks. When you are here, you can keep going. That was helpful, having access (P2).*

> *In college, you're in for a certain amount of time and it's like you'd be doing like 7 hour days at college, going in at 9 and finishing at 4. At university, you go in at nine and finish at midday (P31).*

Alongside the extended opening hours providing additional opportunities, the facilities available inside were also an advantage, with the social study spaces – '*These are really good for group work and projects. ... They [the booths] are just awesome. Especially with space for laptops and stuff. I would definitely recommend using them*' (P4).

Technical facilities and resources were seen to be better at the University, this was highlighted by P4 who called this a '*set up for success'* (Figure 43). Students in this study were complimentary of the facilities and access that they were experiencing. This is at odds with literature that found direct-entrants, or 'new students' (Haggis, 2006) struggling to participate in activities, only attending timetabled sessions (Christie et al., 2005) and spending shorter periods of time on campus (Yorke & Longden, 2004).
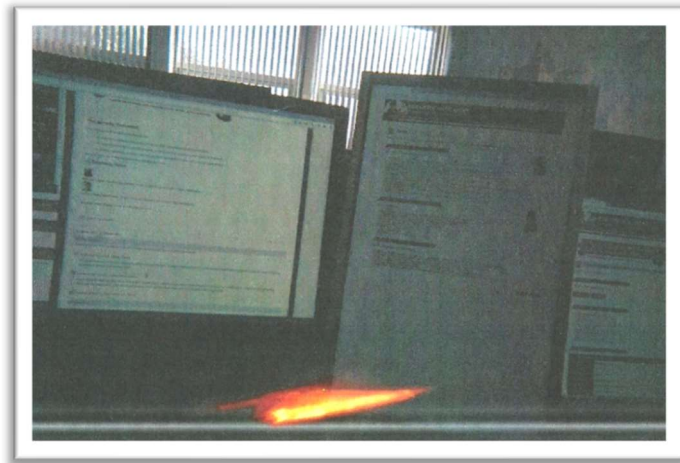
Figure 43 - Set-up for success (Photovoice, P4)

The geographic location of the campus was also discussed and P9 particularly enjoyed the city centre location:

Figure 44 - Chilling in the Meadows (Photovoice, P9)

*At college, there wasn't really any place to sit but, yeah, if you go here, the
University is right next to the Meadows so you can just take your lunch and go
there and relax when the sun is shining (P9).*

6.3.4 Academic differences - it's not the basics anymore

Most of the participants highlighted the difference in teaching methods and the
breakdown of modules into lectures, tutorials and practical sessions. P31 stated that,
'*college lessons were like a lecture and tutorial at the same time. Our lecturer would
talk while we were working, ermm, and that could get kind of hard to keep track of.
Whereas at university it's clearly separated into two things. But I can listen in a lecture
and I can work in a tutorial. It's easier to deal with*' (P31).

> *College is like classwork; you just sit there and just churn it out. But here you
> need to sit down and think. Be constructive, creative with some ideas and you
> wouldn't get that at college (P4).*

> *I mean the format is different. The teaching format – you've got lectures, you
> kind of have to sit and listen for the majority of it (P11).*

The lecture format also impacted on the interactions the students experienced with
lecturers.

P2 focused on the subject knowledge of the lecturing staff within the University:

> *The way of studying the subjects are totally different. Here we have X, he knows
> what he is teaching, you can see him, he knows what he is teaching. X, he
> really, really knows what he is doing. Last year that didn't happen...... Here
> there is no gap here [in lecturer knowledge], there I was basically on my own.
> You think in the college you will have more support from the lecturers than here
> but somehow this is different (P2).*

This change in teaching format required the participants to 'learn' in a different way and
to develop academic skills which had been of less importance during their college
studies:

> *There's a lot more independent learning. Lecturers have loads of students to
> deal with so you don't really have that helping hand all of the time. You've got
> to do it yourself (P9).*

You can't so easily put your hand up, the lecturer won't look to you for an answer, whereas in the past, at college, I would generally have been the person who answered the question. It means I can think more about the class rather than thinking about the answers. It's definitely more independent study which is something I'm not really used to, but again, I'm sure this will come with practice (P24).

The need to develop additional skills in timekeeping and note-taking were also highlighted – '*you get into the kind of routine which I didn't have back in college so that was difficult I would say. And I also improved my timekeeping and stuff like that because it was needed especially, it was tough at the beginning but it got better*' (P12).

They gained an awareness of a faster pace of learning, of a need for higher standards and expectations, consistent with research by Nash, Jones, Ecclestone, and Brown (2008) who found that the college students make slow progress, building incrementally on formative feedback and attempt numerous draft submissions. '*I'm motivated to be a university student, much more than I ever was in college. It didn't take much effort in college but at uni you need to work hard to achieve. I'm enjoying the challenge*' (P22).

A study by Tett, Cree, and Christie (2017) found that the differences students experienced between their FE institutions and the University impacted negatively on their self-confidence and dimmed their sense of excitement about their studies. The format of the teaching within the college classroom changed from one which was personal and supportive, to one in which the participants became anonymous. The slower pace of learning where lecturers would ensure the students' understanding before moving on was also lost. Lessons did not start by ensuring everyone's understanding or making sure they had finished the previous week's work before moving on – they moved on regardless of the students' progress. During the study, one lecturer participant commented – '*They do know the difference, they've been up to Napier. You know here it's a classroom environment and most of their university lectures will be in big lecture theatres*' (P32). But this difference is more than just the physical

environment.

The importance of teacher-student relationships was found in the literature around primary to secondary transitions with research showing that strong relationships support student adjustment to the change, enhance their social skills, increase their academic performance and foster academic resilience (Koca, 2016). Work by Scanlon et al., (2007) explored the transition of 602 first-year university students and found that students made the transition to university with the ideal-type teacher, teacher as friend, modelled on the teachers they had in their previous learning environment. Similarly, the participants in this study highlighted the importance of their relationship with college lecturers, with P24 stating, *'You're not as close to your lecturers here'*. The college lecturer would not only know their name, but they would also know how they were progressing in class and offer additional support if that was required. Once in university and part of a larger student body, this one-to-one support was lost and without this, feelings of anxiety and lower confidence were experienced.

They developed their academic skills with improved time-keeping, report writing and research skills. *'There's a lot more independent learning… You've got to do it yourself'* (P9). The rigorous marking scheme provided them with the opportunity to improve their knowledge, to act on feedback and become independent learners. These findings are in accordance with research by (Tett et al., 2017) who discuss the issues students face during the early stages of their transition, this is termed 'learning shock' by Griffiths, Winstanley, and Gabriel (2005). But, through time, the literature shows that students develop relationships with staff and reconceptualise their understanding of university study (Scanlon et al., 2007).

None of the participants had experienced failure within their college studies. The pass/fail nature of study at HNC/D level with checklists and continuous assessment playing a large part, ensured that students received support from their lecturers, as part of their close relationships, to point them in the right direction, to highlight missing sections of work, to show them individually how to complete specific tasks and, in

short, to ensure they had developed the necessary skills to pass each and every module. This supportive, hand-holding, environment was lost and replaced with final submissions and marking schemes with a 40% pass mark. Overall, these findings are in line with research carried out by the Ivanic, Barton, Edwards, and Mannion (2008) which showed that, driven by targets, FE colleges will help learners to achieve at any cost, using 'coaching' and mechanistic forms of assessment, signing off targets and competences at the cost of real teaching content.

Photovoice participant P22 shared [Figure 45] to highlight their note-taking challenges, commenting –

> *There's a lot there because there is a lot to learn. But at the end of the day, I go back and look at that with the lecture or practical fresh in my mind I reflect on it. I didn't take half as many notes in college, you didn't need them, a lot of the stuff was practical. The content of this course means you need to think a lot more. With college, it was more straight forward (P22).*
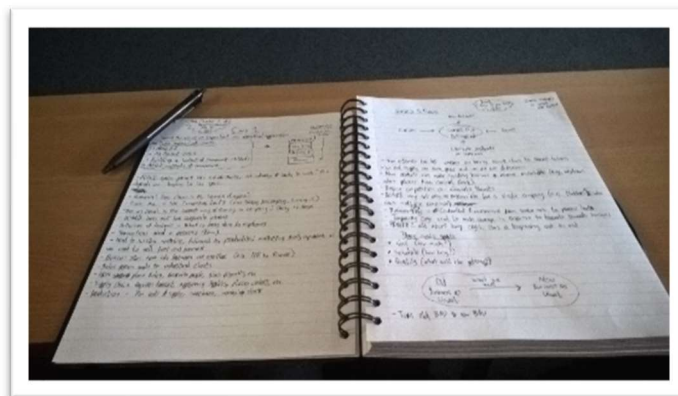
Figure 45: My new normal: regular day of note-taking (Photovoice P22)

The self-directed nature of the study was also a change – '*you need to develop your own ways to get on with it. You can get help if you ask but I feel like in college you are almost given the help before you asked for it. Whereas here it's like if I really needed help but I'm sort of more encouraged to learn independently almost*' (P11).

> *But I didn't understand, like, deadlines do really creep up on you. My first big deadline I had a massive anxiety attack and it wasn't nice but I managed to get it done ….. It required a lot of, well not really a lot of interpretation, more, how, it was more up to us to, sort of, get the information. More self-directed (P31).*

The pace and academic rigour of the content was also a big change, even within the first few weeks, the participants felt the demands of the academic work – *'…it's not the basics anymore. So, it gets deeper and deeper and deeper. Things that you have never seen, it is more difficult'* (P2).

> *The pace of the course was a lot faster. I naively thought we'd have a couple of easy weeks to begin with. But it was straight in, handing stuff in within a fortnight in some modules (P11).*

Along with the changes in teaching styles, the programme timetables were also different:

> *In college, we had three days in a row and here we have gaps of 5 or 6 hours, today we finish at 1, the next class is at 5 o'clock. We have more classes on Fridays than the rest of the week put together. So you have to organise yourself. In college it was easy, here you have one hour here and gaps – you have to make your own way to pass and also what they ask, it goes faster, the progress of the class, it goes faster. They don't say, 'oh you didn't understand that, we will invest another week'…. It is the biggest difference with the college. Here nobody stops because of you. In college, most of the subjects, they were stopping (P2).*

The formal assessment methods and marking criteria also required understanding and adjustment for the participants –

> *…. the biggest difference, well apart from the workload, is the standard of work. I think you know, at Napier, there's quite a high standard on stuff that you submit in terms of like, you have to pay more attention to sort of, is your work related to the context of the assignment, a lot more. It kind of sounds obvious but in college I never, I didn't think as much about that. I just did something and handed it in and hoped that I would get good marks. (P11).*

These academic changes resulted in additional pressure for participants – '*In college everything was, you didn't feel that kind of pressure, instead of in uni the first few weeks everything looks like it is going to be fine and then it just drops on you. Hmm, the kind of routine, everything is scheduled from the beginning and you need to stick to that or you are going to find yourself lost*'' (P12).

Figure 46: Chaos: How my home workstation looks with uni stuff (Photovoice P24)

P24 shared [Figure 46] to summarise their experience – *'[Figure 46] basically represents the mess that your work may get into, 'cause, obviously, you've got an awful lot of it. Trying to prioritise what you are going to do means that your desk may end up just like this. It's organised chaos'* (P24).

The rigorous nature of the University and structured submission deadlines and processes were also identified – '*When I came to university, it was a completely different story, everything was there, everything happened on time. There were no excuses for things not getting done on time which was what had happened at college*' (P5).

The culture within the University was also highlighted, focusing on less positive student behaviour – '*There are a few lectures that I've been to and people have been sitting at the back, and people are watching tv shows. They're not paying attention. I don't understand that, it's distracting. I'm having to work hard and really concentrate and they're watching tv. It's distracting when you're trying to concentrate and not sure what you are doing*' (P30).

6.3.5   Preparation - I wasn't prepared, I guess everyone feels like that

Many of the participants discussed their preparation for university study, however, few mentioned their role in this preparation, preferring to focus on the work of the college or the university to prepare them for study at the next level, with many stating that they were unprepared or shocked by the transition:

> *They [university lecturers] must know we just join from college and are unprepared (P12).*

Participant 31 commented on the interventions they had attended as associate students and the impact this had on their transition.

> *I wasn't prepared, I guess everyone feels like that. Being an associate I came to the Let's Start event and a tour. That made a difference, it was, without it I wouldn't have been able to find my bearings on the first day. If I hadn't have known, I would have been panicking but it helped me to find the directions I needed to go in and I guess so sort of understand the atmosphere of the University (P31).*

Some participants did feel prepared for their transitions – *'Being an associate student, it was still quite a jump in terms of the level of work. But I did feel that by the time I'd gone through the process of the HND years – I was quite prepared. It still took a bit of adjustment but being an associate student and having had that level of involvement meant I had the confidence to take that on'* (P11).

One associate student participant highlighted the benefits of the additional preparation they had received from the University – *'I think being an associate has helped prepare me for most things and definitely given me a great route to university and helped to build my confidence'* (P31). Many, however, felt the negative aspects of this change:

> *Adapting to the new environment and structure has taken time away from my subject-specific studies but I think having been to some of the events for associates made a difference (P31).*

P31 also found that they had a better understanding of the course – '*We knew lots of stuff from college that has been covered in more detail. It really helps your confidence*' (P31, 84-86).

Many were critical of the activities offered by the college to help with preparation:

> *I think within the college there could have been more about planning how to do things and how to look ahead. They didn't plan for coursework and then panicked and scrambled around on Facebook trying to get other people to help them with their coursework. I think there could be more planning (P5,43-48).*

Others were critical of the university:

> *It would have been better if we had had more contact when we were in college. We had some tutorials and we had some lectures and stuff but it was kind of far away (P12).*

Some were critical of themselves:

> *So, my first bus journey I got off down the road opposite the school and I went in completely the wrong direction. Eventually found it. But that made me feel uncomfortable like I didn't know what I thought I knew (P30, 15-20).*

Overall, the participants demonstrated an awareness of the university campus and the differences they would face during their transition. Despite this knowledge, none of the participants discussed how they themselves had prepared for the transition. The discussion talked about problems with the process and the support offered. This highlighted their expectations of preparedness to come from the college or the university, rather than the individual.

6.3.6   Photovoice exhibition
A common part of the photovoice methodology is an exhibition (Latz, 2016) in which photographs are displayed for the wider community to examine. As part of this study,

the photographs collated by the participants were displayed on the wall of a classroom in the host university campus during an induction event (2019) for new direct entrants and associate students. The sharing of these varied experiences is an important part of photovoice activities (Sutton-Brown, 2014), however, the dissemination process is seldom discussed in the literature (Liebenberg, 2018). In her study, Liebenberg stated that there were five important questions that need consideration –

1. How were the images exhibited?
2. How were findings reflected in the exhibited images?
3. Who attended the exhibition?
4. How did the audience respond to the shared content? and
5. How has the exhibition informed change?

The images were exhibited in a traditional manner with them being printed in high colour and displayed on the wall with their corresponding caption. All photographs were displayed in an anonymous manner and no names were associated with them. Photographs from all the participants were displayed. Due to the total number of photographs available, the cost associated with printing and the limited time the viewers would have to examine the photographs prominence was given to the photographs selected by the participants as being most significant to them. These photographs were displayed as in Figure 47 and the others displayed in a slightly smaller format on an opposite wall (Figure 48):

Figure 47: Photographic display - participant selected

*Figure 48: Photographic display – participants'
other photographs*

To gather further insight, during the induction event, students were asked to put a post-it note or tick next to the photograph which they felt most represented transition. This information has fed into the findings. There were 102 people at the induction event and all had the opportunity to view the photovoice exhibit. An overview sheet was displayed which stated, 'These photographs were captured by students who, like you, came from college to university. They represent their experience of the transition. Please take some time to view the photographs and corresponding captions leaving a vote in the form of a mark or post-it next to those you feel best to represent this transition.' In total, 40 photographs made up the exhibition. Feedback during the exhibition was that the photographs were very interesting and were in line with their experiences and views. During the event, 128 votes were made, selecting 18 photographs.
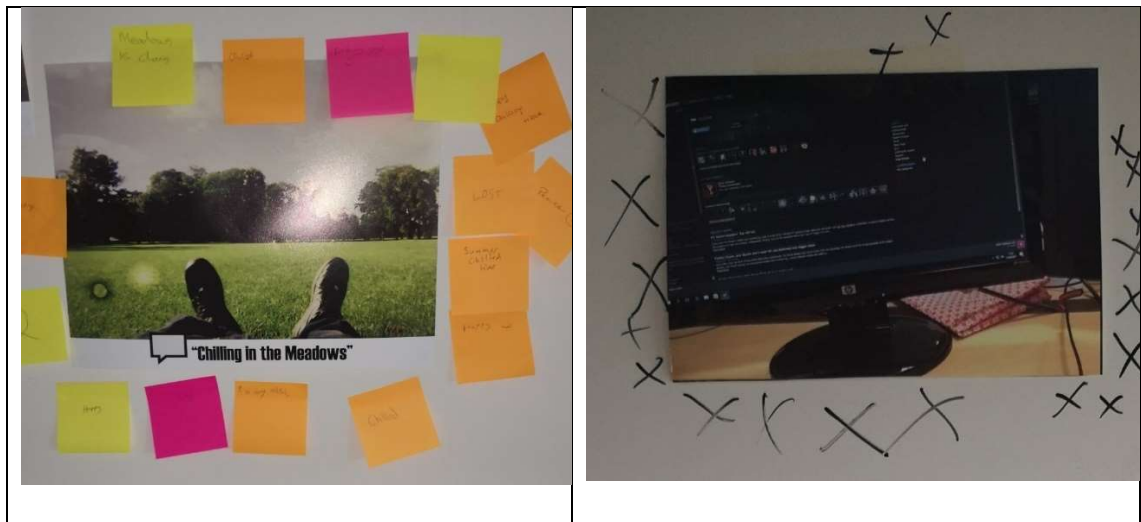
Figure 49: Votes against photographs

Table 14: No. of votes - Top six photographs at exhibition

Caption	No. of votes	Theme
Becoming part of it: joining a society (P22) Figure 35	19	Social aspects
New beginning: start of my journey (P24) Figure 37	13	Physical environment
Chilling in the Meadows (P9) Figure 44	15	Physical environment
New beginnings: moving into a new home (P22) Figure 37	13	Self-concept
My new normal: regular day of note-taking (P22) Figure 45	11	Academic differences
JKCC – if you're not here, you're not a computing student (P4) Figure 36	11	Self-concept
(No photographs to represent **Preparation** theme)		

Figure 37: New beginnings: moving into a new home (Photovoice, P22)
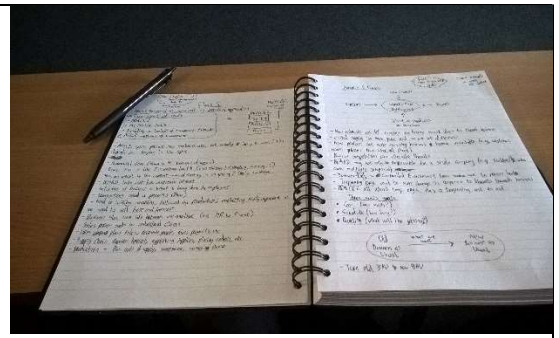
Figure 45: My new normal: regular day of note-taking (Photovoice P22)
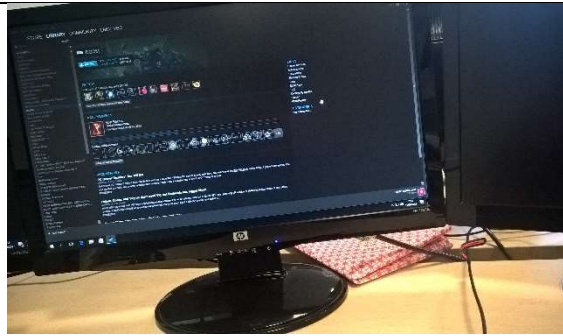
Figure 35: Becoming part of it: Joining a society (Photovoice, P22)

Figure 56: New beginning: start of my journey (P24)
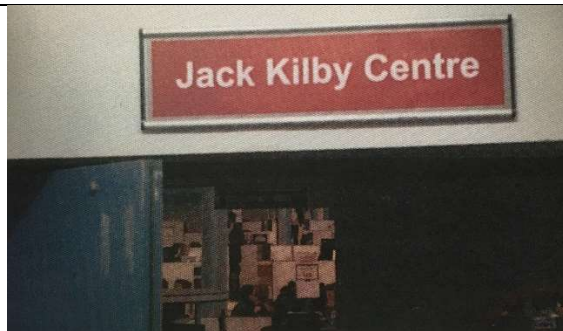
Figure 36: JKCC – if you're not here, you're not a computing student (Photovoice, P4)

Figure 44 - Chilling in the Meadows (Photovoice, P9)

Figure 50: Top 6 photographs at exhibition

Alongside the photography display, the students were also asked if the statement created as part of (Colaizzi, 1978) phenomenology data analysis model (Morrow et al., 2015) accurately reflected their experience. This is Step 7: Seeking verification of the fundamental structure, and the statement read:

'During transition associate students experience changes in their self-concept. They are influenced by the academic differences, change in physical environment and social aspects at university. Preparation activities aid transition.'

Only 9 students ticked next to the statement to confirm their agreement. Unfortunately, there were no responses added on the feedback sheet which could help improve the accuracy.

6.3.7 RQ2 findings summary

The stories and experiences shared by the student photovoice and IPA participants demonstrate their feelings of this change. The photographs chosen as most representative of the associate student community will have an impact beyond this research. The stories told exhibit a wide range of experience and give insight into the often unseen details of this journey. Students were moving house, adjusting to a new commute, experiencing loneliness and anxiety but also peer support and friendship. They struggled with the large campus and large class sizes but embraced the new social spaces, extended opening hours and opportunities to become a night-time student. They reflected on their journey to university and were grateful for the opportunity and additional benefits being an associate student had given them.

The experiences and insight given in the findings will be discussed in the context of the literature in the discussion chapter which follows. This is in keeping with this methodological approach.

6.4   Staff perceptions

6.4.1   Introduction

During the academic year 2017/18 interviews were conducted with six lecturers – three from a further education college and three from the host university. These IPA interviews provide an additional dimension to this research. Although these interviews do not relate directly to the research questions posed in this research, the findings are interesting and worthy of inclusion here. Throughout this section, participants are identified by their unique number followed by college or university for ease of understanding. The findings are considered by theme.

The existing literature has highlighted the link between relationships with staff members and the students' experience of university connectedness. Universities must provide a supportive and caring environment and findings by Leathwood & O'Connell (2003) stated that students require greater, meaningful contact with lecturers. Developing meaningful relationships will undoubtedly be hindered by staff perceptions of associate students as *'below-average'* (P36 university), as *'students who really shouldn't come to university'* (P37 university) or *'either really high flying or scraping through'* (P35 university). These perceptions are damaging and go against research by (Katartzi & Hayward, 2019) who found systematic help from academic staff was of the utmost significance for retention. During transition, associate students are losing the close relationship of the college environment and university staff must play their role in building this relationship.

The university lecturers in this study were also impacted by the influx of new students to later years with one commenting – '*by third year, because the numbers double, I don't know them so well. … that's probably not good for them either because they don't have that relationship*' (P35 university). This increase in workload may go some way to explaining the perceived negatives surrounding associate students.

6.4.2 Academic differences – it's not the basics anymore

All staff participants commented on the area of academic differences, however, there were strong contrasts in the nature of the comments. The university participants were critical of the college culture with P37 (university) referring to this as '*spoon-feeding*' and P35 (university) stating – '*It goes back to the tick-box thing. They seem to do quite a small amount of different topics. They're not covering things in-depth*' (P35 university). All agreed, there were variations in the ability of the students -

> *It's really mixed, they're either really high flying or they are scraping through. We call it the 'college mentality' where they think it's just a tick box (P35 university).*

They highlighted issues in curriculum mapping and criticised the colleges' communication – '*Colleges don't communicate with us, they don't sit down around the table and plan*' (P36 university).

Others discussed differences across colleges and even across college campuses in regard to the quality of resources and teaching:

> *[one campus] They have the equipment and they have expertise. Some other campuses, staff don't have enough technical experience (P36 university).*

University staff participants were also critical of students themselves with direct-entrants being described as 'below-average' (P36 university) and others commenting:

> *We get students who really shouldn't come to university; not because they aren't capable but because it wasn't what they expected, wanted or needed… it's just not right for them. It's not that it's too hard for them, it's just the wrong style of education (P37 university).*

> *I don't think there is that component of self-direction [in college], they seem to think they can do everything in the class [at university] (P35 university).*

Participants highlighted the benefits of college education stating – 'College's main benefit is that if you've messed up, here's your second chance*' (P37 university).

As well as being critical of the college and the students, the university participants were also critical of the support offered within the university –

> *We want them to read everything, but books are usually written for a mass-market and not suitable for the students we have here…we need more [online] sessions that the students can be directed towards, alongside the normal tutorials (P37 university).*

All staff participants agreed that research was an obstacle for all direct-entrants – *'DE struggle more with our expectations for research. They are less sure of what we want. … The honours project magnifies it a little'* (P37 university).

> *That's probably the biggest difference between college and university – the whole research thing is just not even touched on here. Everything is given to them, they don't have to research (P33 college).*

> *It's definitely a shock to them that they are expected to write. At the poster and artefact for the honours project that's all they see, they don't see all of the research behind it, the literature (P35 university).*

The college staff participants demonstrated an excellent understanding of the academic differences – '*well I certainly tell them that our units are levels 7s and 8s, and when they go to university it will be 9s and 10s. Our contact is different from the university, all their classes and all of the staff rooms are on this floor, so they can just walk past the door*' (P32 college).

College staff believed that the link with the university was positive for all parties stating, '*we get a wee bit of kudos for being linked to the uni. You know when you're*

teaching it's like 1ˢᵗ and 2ⁿᵈ year of university and I think we've upped our game to try and reflect that' (P32 college).

6.4.3 Physical environment – onwards and upwards

The physical environment theme was only covered by two of the participants and featured as an aside to the main discussion. P32 discussed the differences in the physical environment of the teaching space stating – *'They do know the difference, they've been up to Napier. You know here it's a classroom environment and most of their university lectures will be in big lecture theatres'* (P32 college).

Participants had a good understanding of the impact living outside the immediate area had – *'they're commuting or living at home and have jobs, so they don't break out of that school group'* (P35 university).

6.4.4 Preparation – I wasn't prepared, I guess everyone feels like that

Participants from the college highlighted the role the associate student route played in preparing the students, not just the associates, but the entire cohort:

> *I think it helps them to prepare. They've got more commitment so they tend to do better anyway. They certainly get a taste of the kind of materials they need to produce (P32 college).*

The college participants also felt an additional requirement to ensure the students were prepared, stating, *'I do try to give them that extra, I would say pressure, but standards. I like to maybe say look if this was handed in at university I wouldn't be accepting this. I'd ask them to go back and maybe change it a little bit, tidy it up, present it better, or just this is the standard we expect. ...I do try to nudge the associates on a little bit more. Obviously you've got to not push them too hard because technically they're not quite at uni. But I think they do expect a little bit more from us. But then they go up to*

Napier and you guys come in here and teach them so they're getting a flavour of what's expected so I think that's a good thing' (P32 college).

The curriculum mapping carried out from college programmes provides additional reassurance which the college participants highlight – *'we'll reassure them that we are preparing them for university'* (P34 college).

College staff were keen to work on joint group projects with college and university students to help prepare their students, but this was met with resistance by university staff who said – '*I don't how I would get my university students to turn up if it's not marked. It's a great idea but the logistics are really tricky*' (P35 university).

College staff in this study were more positive about the experience of the associate students and expressed attempts to raise awareness of the increased academic demands – *'if this was handed in at university, I wouldn't be accepting this!'* (P32 college). They were positive about the aspiration raising and second chance offered to many students who had failed to meet initial university entry criteria. They also valued the attempts to map the curriculum and ensure the students were able to progress.

6.4.5   Self-concept – we're coming from different worlds

Three-quarters of the participants focused on the changes in the students' self-concept. The college staff confirmed that the associate student programme impacted the students' motivations and self-concept – *'I think the students feel that they are part of something a bit bigger… they've got higher status being part of the university, the anxiety of going to university has been removed because they know they've got one foot in the door'* (P32 college).

> *Especially those that have come through from our level 5 and 6s who didn't have highers. Well for them, that was a dream, and they were never going to get there. And all of a sudden they've got one foot in the door (P32 college).*

The staff participants highlighted that those with associate student status are confident in their route to university – *'The other students [non-associates] think "oh, they're associates"... But I think the students see themselves slightly differently because they have expectations – they know they're going to university'* (P33 college).

> *Having the Napier student card also makes a difference – they like the status of having the extra card (P32 college).*

Their dialogue also highlighted the students need to feel equal to the on-campus students – '*They are always interested in placements and not feeling different from the on-campus students'* (P34 college).

P35 (university) was less positive about the direct-entrants they had encountered, finding some passionate but stating that other direct-entrants were '*closed off in terms of expanding their skills, sometimes they just want to focus on what they know. Sometimes there are others who don't attend and some of them just come because they don't know what to do with their HND. So they get the funding and come to see what happens'* (P35 university).

> *Yeah, it's a really horrible thing to say but it's just like, bare minimum, they just want to get through. We're always saying that you should work to your best ability. But there's a lot of them just want to get a pass. You can tell from the way they speak to you, so they'll say 'is this good enough to pass' and you're like well do you just want to pass or do you want to do well? (P35 university).*

6.4.6   Social aspects – becoming a different kind of student

Only one participant commented on the social aspects and shared interesting comments on the interactions they had observed. One of the consequences of direct-entrants joining an existing cohort on the university campus is the impact upon the original group. P35 commented that the existing group *'felt like everything had changed... it is like adding in another class. They were saying it felt like they had to get to know a whole new class'* (P35 university).

The direct-entrants joining the class found safety within their existing friendship groups:

Some of the existing students are sticking in their own groups. They are saying that the DE are scary to them because if they are working in a group then they are an unknown quantity. It's important for them to work in groups but there were definitely a few niggles around that (P35 university).

P35 recognises the difficulties of social integration within the groups but felt this needed to come from the students themselves.

Particularly when there's just a few of them joining a group I think they can feel quite isolated. It's difficult. (P35 university)

6.4.7   Staff Perception Summary

College staff demonstrated their awareness of the differences in academic requirements and gave insight into the difficulties faced with students from different backgrounds and levels. They were wholly positive about the influence of the associate student project. University staff were less positive and highlighted the varying ability and the college culture of spoon-feeding. This is examined further in the Discussion Chapter.

6.5   Conclusion to this chapter

Throughout this chapter, the findings from the data collection with student and staff participants have been revealed. The perceptions of those studying in college who are anticipating the transition showed feelings of motivation and anticipation. They have an awareness of the differences between studying at college and university through the interventions provided by the associate student project. The participants who have experienced the transition and are currently studying within the university shared their feelings of loneliness and how they have coped with the change. The participants have made their way in the campus and become a different kind of student.

The staff participants showed a varying understanding of each side of the journey, with the college lecturers demonstrating an understanding of the university programmes and of what the students would experience. University staff were less optimistic and focused on the problems and issues they had experienced over previous years.

This chapter has discussed the findings of this study by connecting the study data to the literature. It has explored the research questions by considering the perceptions of associate students before transition, the experience of associate students during transition and the perceptions of staff both in colleges and universities. The chapter which follows will continue this discussion and explore the framework of associate student transition.

Chapter 7: A Framework of Associate Student transition

7.1   Introduction

A key aim of this thesis is to explore the gap which has been highlighted in existing knowledge around the associate students' experience of transition. I have applied an interpretative methodology to explore this phenomenon. As discussed in Chapter 6, the transcripts of the IPA interviews and graphical data collected were analysed. Findings were discussed where I made sense of and gave an accurate account of the gathered data.

This chapter seeks to propose a framework to support the transition of associate students from college to university. As a researcher, I need to understand the impact of my work and this chapter allows me to continue to focus on meaning, not causality. This framework aims to illuminate a particular perspective and enhance the reach of this thesis (Larkin et al., 2019).

The framework has been developed through analysis of the literature and the research findings. The proposed framework has broader implications than this study and would apply to students and pupils in transition across all levels of study. In addition, the development of the framework has been informed by exploring the findings of this study in relation to:

-    The Model of Organisational Influence on the Development of Learner Identity (Briggs et al., 2012)

The Briggs model was discussed in 3.5.6   Model of Organisational Influence on the Development of Learner Identity. Importantly, this framework does not assign timescales or priority to these individual components, the associate students have given us an insight into their experience, which is individual and disordered. It does not conform to the confines of a diagram and the framework has been developed to allow application in the wider educational context. The depictions of student transition and how they fit with the framework are shared in section 7.4   Student depictions.

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This chapter will explore the new framework and its development concerning the five themes identified during this study and relevant literature. The framework highlights nine areas which are discussed in turn. The following section begins by exploring the important differences.

7.2   Exploring the differences

The Briggs model begins with a cycle of aspiration, imagining and developing expectations. According to Briggs, during this stage, the student imagines and aspires to be a university student who is developing relevant education-related skills and knowledge. 'This leads to commitment to apply and take up a university place' (Briggs et al., 2012). This study has provided an exploration of the experience of associate students pre- and post-transition. This framework is born out of the recognition that associate students have a different experience, they develop their commitment earlier, and the interventions provided inform their aspiration and expectations. The dual enrolment afforded to them as associate students informs their transition experience, their commitment and the timing and impact of their adjustment. The area of contribution from this study does not cover the entire Briggs model but, instead, focuses on the pre-transition stage at college and the extended adjustment stage during the first trimester at university. This is shown in Figure 51: Area of focus from Briggs Model (Briggs et al., 2012).

This is a continuous cycle where all aspects are interrelated.

They develop an awareness of the skills and knowledge required for success after study, however, few ensure they acquire them post-transition.

Commitment is confirmed through application to their college programme.

Adjustment is an extended period.
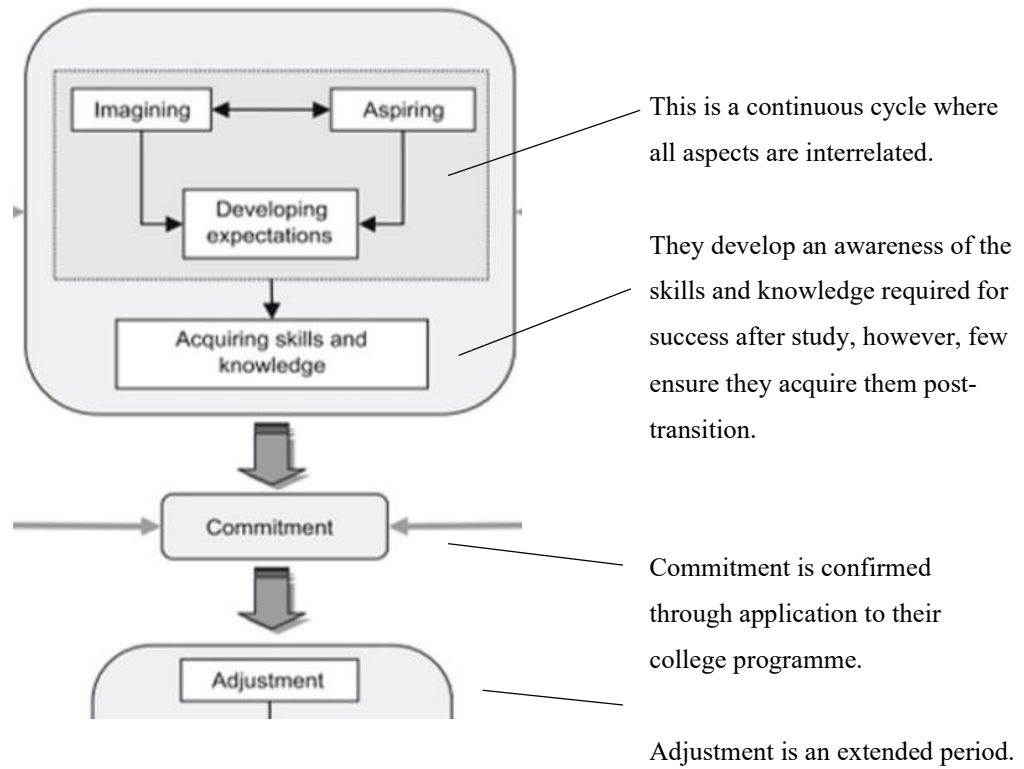
Figure 51: Area of focus from Briggs Model (Briggs et al., 2012)

In recognition of the literature which acknowledges transition as non-linear, complex and messy (Gordon, 2016); (Brown et al., 2017), the linear process has been replaced with a continuous cycle (Figure 52) where, during their college years, the students continually re-assess their motivations and aspirations as they learn more about the university programme and their subject of study. The arrows represent the continuous movement through these areas, they do not flow one after the other but all interrelate and impact upon each other.
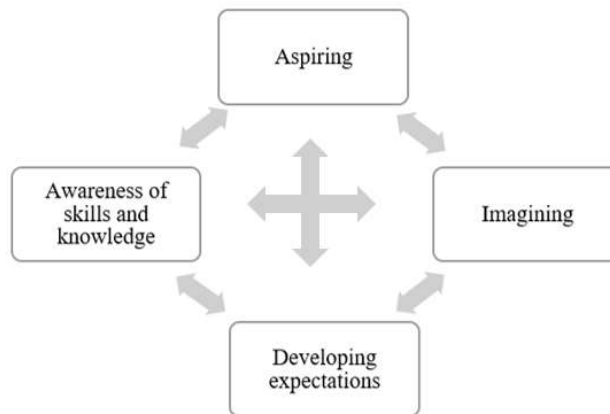
Figure 52: AS at College (Author's own, adapted from Briggs et al., 2012)

Commitment has been removed, as associate students have committed to four years of study at the beginning of their college course. Their place at university is confirmed. The participants in this study did not highlight any ambiguity in their commitment to the four-year study route. Briggs et al.(2012) stated, 'the student imagines and aspires to be a university student and acquires higher education-related skills and knowledge. This leads to commitment to apply and take up a university place'. In Briggs' model, commitment represents the process of applying for university. For associate students, the commitment aspect has occurred long before they begin their transition. As the associate students have a guaranteed place at university from the beginning of their college course, their journey has been pre-selected before entry into college. The value of this clear articulation and removal of barriers to progression is immeasurable. This was confirmed by the students during the photo-elicitation focus groups with P26 commenting '..*we certainly know what the next step is. Next stop uni!*' (P26).

Imagining, aspiring and developing expectations remain in the new framework, however, the context for associate students is fundamentally different. Imagining, aspiring and developing expectations are all influenced by their dual identity as college and university students. The ASP interventions, which take place initially during their time studying at college, develop their awareness and provide the opportunity to experience life as a university student. In the Briggs et al. (2012) model the organisational influences are depicted in the rectangle boxes on each side (see Figure 12). These activities support the growth of learner identity and Briggs et al. (2012) found these influences vital to support transition. These influences are excluded from the associate student transition framework as these activities and influences have been incorporated into the ASP interventions. This has been broken down in Table 15 Organisation Influences in ASP interventions.

Table 15: Organisation influences in ASP interventions

Organisation influences as defined by Briggs et al.	Summary	ASP intervention
– Encouragement – Experienced advice – Structured process	All concern the application process for university	– UCAS workshops – Open days
– Information	Details of course content, timetables, assessment methods.	– All interventions
– Access	Opportunities to meet with academic staff, students and support staff	– Guest lectures – Open days – Workshops – Student mentors
– Personal support – One-to-one contact	Named, experienced support contact	– Articulation advisor – Student mentors
– Liaison	Communication between institutions	– ASP meetings with partner colleges
– Activities	Induction and freshers week activities	– Let's start event – Induction programme – Articulation advisor – All interventions
– Awareness	Awareness of the individual within the process	– Clear communication channels

The activities and interventions offered through the associate student project allow the students to develop their learner identity. The status of associate students allows this process to occur much earlier in the student's academic time at college.

7.3   Exploring the new framework

I will firstly explain the top section of the new framework which has four elements (see Figure 53). These are inter-related, overlapping and carry varying impacts and degrees of importance for each individual student. The arrows represent the fluid nature of these areas and their interrelated dependencies. These elements are now considered in turn.
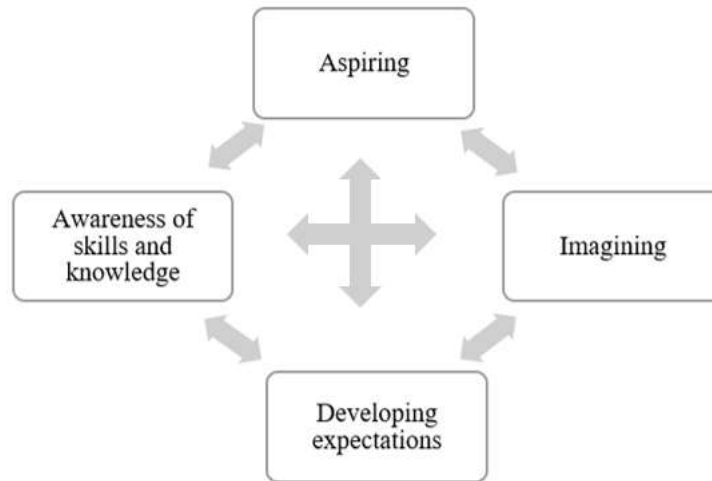
Figure 53: AS at College (Author's own, adapted from Briggs et al., 2012)

7.3.1   Aspiring

This study has shown that, in agreement with Briggs et al. (2012), raising aspiration is important. Aspiration can be defined as hope or ambition of achieving something. The participants were hopeful for their career aspirations and recognised the importance of a degree in helping them achieve their goals. They were motivated and inspired for their future – *'It's amazing here. It makes me wonder where my future will lead'* (P22).

Research by HEFCE (2006) stated that the most effective strategies for increasing aspiration are those that are part of an on-going programme which expose students to all aspects of university life. Aspiration must be accompanied by the necessary skills and knowledge for success (Aynsley & Gazeley, 2012). Many universities have developed bridging programmes to break down barriers, providing opportunities to raise aspiration and providing clear guidance on routes into university (Commission on Widening Access, 2016). These programmes provide a means of familiarisation with campuses, tutors, classmates and teaching styles, increasing aspiration, and removing barriers.

The associate students in this study had raised their aspirations and were '*ready to move on and for the challenge. I don't feel like a college student anymore, being at Merchiston definitely made a difference, it, like, changed my whole mindset*' (P14). Being allowed to experience the university environment, over an extended period clearly increases aspiration and is an important contributor to the positive experience of the associate students. These feelings are linked very closely with their student identity and how they imagine university study to be.

7.3.2   Imagining

Imagining and aspiring are closely linked. Raising aspiration and providing opportunities to imagine and experience higher education has been a key goal of widening participation initiatives across the country, with research demonstrating that students carry over skills and aspirations (An, 2013). Accessing the campus and talking with staff and students allowed the associate students to imagine themselves within the university environment.

Some of the participants described feeling like a 'real' student when they visited the campus and described it as '*a much more grown-up environment*' (P16). They didn't need to imagine, they could experience, and they were university students. Imagining themselves as graduates had a profound impact on some - '*I hope to see myself in one of those gowns. It's a reality check*' (P27).

Throughout this study, the participants demonstrated that their self-image and future aspirations were not fixed. Some experiences motivated and confirmed their confidence in university studies, others overwhelmed and made them question their ability. Allowing these experiences and the consequent impacts to occur early in their college studies, provides space for development and personal growth.

7.3.3   Developing expectations

The associate students develop expectations, and the interventions allow them to experience university life, to meet staff and students and experience the campus. Developing expectations is closely related to preparation activities. This study has

demonstrated that experiencing university life and preparation activities ensures students have a clear path into the third year of the degree programme. For some, the development of this awareness caused levels of anxiety, with one participant commenting on a lecture theatre as being '*really intimidating*' (P24).

This study agrees with Briggs et al. (2012) that learners expect that they will learn more independently at university, with participants confirming that '*the majority of the stuff is your own work*' (P25).

7.3.4   Awareness of skills and knowledge

During college, students were also said to be acquiring skills and knowledge: 'they develop pre-transition the skills and knowledge that support independent undergraduate learning' (Briggs et al., 2012). However, the proposed model deviates from this; the students in this study were found to have an awareness of the skills needed for successful university study but they were less active in acquiring these. For this reason, this was replaced with 'Awareness of Skills and Knowledge'.

This was confirmed by P12 who stated *'[university lecturers] must know we just join from college and are unprepared'* (P12). The participants were aware of academic differences, of differences in programming languages, software specifications and much more. However, there was little evidence that most students acted upon this information. After transition, however, they reflected that both the college and university should have covered these items in more detail – '*some of the skills I feel, like referencing and reports, they should have taught us that at college. It should have been covered in more detail here*' (P27).

7.3.5   Adjustment

In her research, Briggs then showed the student journey as progressing to adjustment. Associate students in this study were found to experience a vital and extended period of adjustment. This research has identified five fundamental influences on an associate student transition and these emerged throughout the study as superordinate themes.
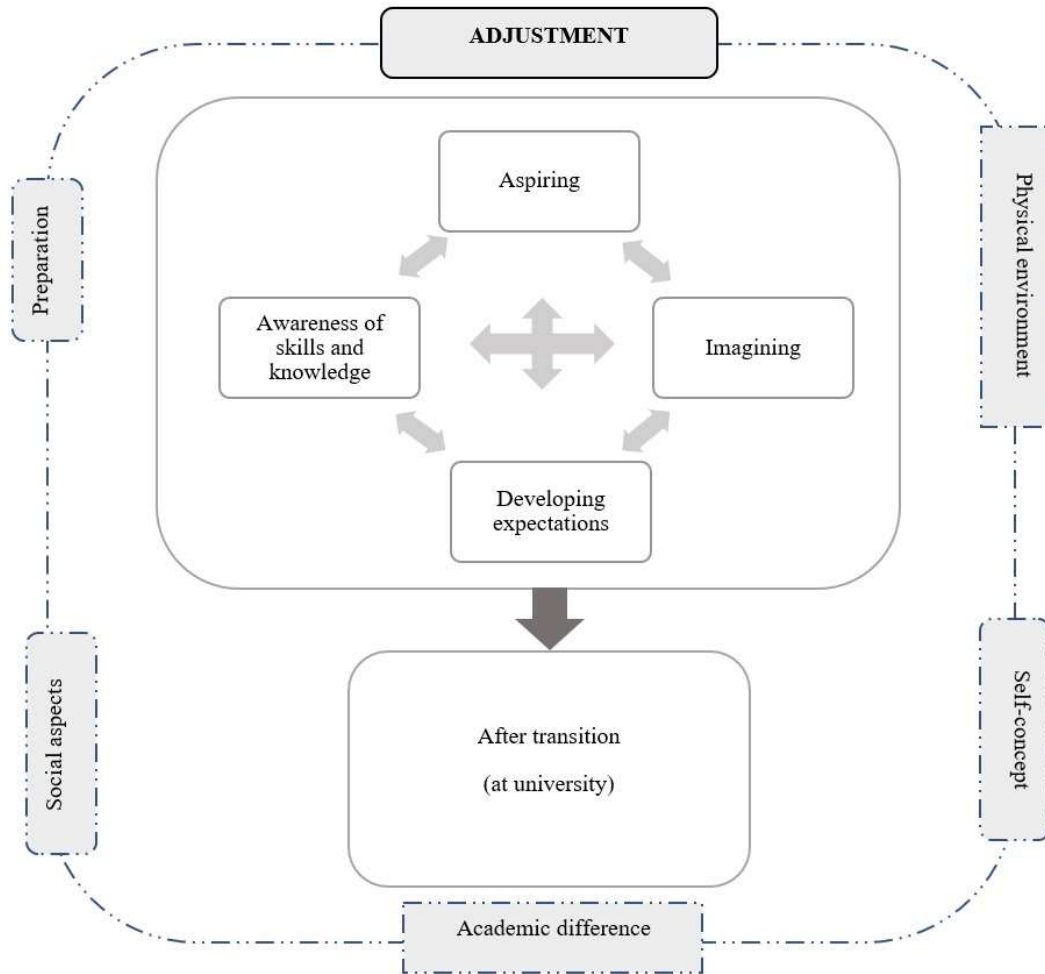
Figure 54: Associate Students Transition Framework (author's own)

Adjustment is not a step in a process, it is a period of time which varies for each individual. For the associate students in this study, adjustment begins during the interventions whilst they study at college before and continues way beyond their transition. In the new framework, adjustment becomes a grey area, represented by a broken line, which envelops all stages – from college into their first trimester and beyond (Figure 54: Associate Students Transition Framework (author's own).

The framework identifies five new areas (discussed below) with each one being informed by the findings of this study and grounded in the literature. Understanding the experience of associate students in transition has identified these components along with key themes and areas highlighted by the literature. Table 16 summarises the contributing literature.

Table 16: The key contributed literature in developing the 'Framework of Associate Student Transition'

Framework element	Contributing literature	Supporting quotes from the study
3rd Space		
Preparation	(Barber, 1999; Breeze et al., 2020; Christie et al., 2014; Connelly et al., 2011; Evangelou et al., 2009; Gale & Parker, 2012; Knox, 2005; Meharg & Craighill, 2015; Nash et al., 2008; Rice, 2001; Strahn-Koller, 2012; Towns, 2011)(Breeze et al., 2020; Christie et al., 2014; Connelly et al., 2011; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Gale & Parker, 2012; Knox, 2005; Strahn-Koller, 2012; Towns, 2011b)	'the college hasn't really prepared us… I'd like to feel more prepared' (P13); 'I don't think we're really prepared for it' (P26); 'I feel like the teaching in college isn't really helping us get there' (P27); 'I wasn't prepared, I guess everyone feels like that' (P31); 'Being an associate student it was still quite a jump…. I was quite prepared' (P11).
Self-concept	(Attenborough, 2011; Brown et al., 2005; Gee, 2000; Giddens, 1991; Harvey et al., 2006; Lindstrom, 1993; Meharg, Taylor-Smith, Varey, Mooney, & Dallas, 2017; Palmer, 2007; Sinai, Kaplan, & Flum, 2012; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Tajfel, 1981; Yorke & Thomas, 2003)	'Nobody knows who you are so you can just go there, like as a Napier student' (P15); 'Going there makes me feel like a real student' (P16); 'I don't feel like a college student anymore' (P14); 'Coming here, you are like a new student' (P2); 'I didn't really think of myself as an associate student' (P11).
Social aspects	(Barron & D'Annunzio-Green, 2009; Bers & Smith, 1991; D'Amico et al., 2014; Gibson, Grace, & Pritchard, 2018; Lawson & Kearns, 2010, 2016; Mannan, 2007; Mayne & Bannerman, 2015; Montgomery, 2017; Pan, 2010; Stage, 1989; Strahn-Koller, 2012; Tett et al.,	'So that was good…. I've got a good circle of friends' (P30); 'We know most of the people in the class so it's not going to be as intimidating' (P23); 'You're not as close to your lecturers here' (P24); 'I think here it is more impersonal than college' (P2); 'There is not this sense of unity,

	2017; Thomas, 2018; Tinto, 2017; Turner & Tobbell, 2018; Wenger, 2000)	kind of. Like a class or group that you had in college' (P30).
Physical environment	(Bormann & Thies, 2019; Hoffman et al., 2002; Leese, 2010b; Strahn-Koller, 2012; Thomas, 2018; Towns, 2011)	'I think it's motivating' (P16); 'I already use the library' (P14); 'It's like a university environment…Student life. It's cool' (P28); 'I got lost a few times and it's a bit scary as well' (P12); 'The building itself is massive compared to what you would get at college' (P9); 'It's really intimidating' (P24).
Academic differences	(Adelman, 2006; An, 2013; Barber & Netherton, 2018; D'Amico et al., 2014; Rickinson & Rutherford, 1996; Tett et al., 2017)	'There will be an initial pain barrier as we adjust' (P13); 'We don't really take notes' (P23); 'In colleges it's like you're going round in circles sometimes' (P28); 'We almost get spoon-fed in a way' (P29); 'The format is different… the teaching format' (P11); 'The way of studying the subjects are totally different' (P2).

7.3.6 Preparation

This research found that associate students at college felt the role of preparing them for the transition to university lay with the college, with several stating that '*college hasn't really prepared us*' (P13) and '*I think within the college there could have been more about planning how to do things and how to look ahead*' (P5). Although existing research explored the impact of adjustment and Briggs et al. (2012) stress the importance of allowing applicants to imagine what being a university student is like before and during transition, the research failed to explore what preparedness means from an individual perspective. This study has shown that students and staff are aware of a lack of relevant knowledge and skills for success.

Associate students shared awareness of academic skills such as report writing and referencing – '*some of the skills I feel, like referencing and reports, they should have taught us that at college. I know that every report at uni you need to do that. It should have been covered in more detail here*' (P27). Despite their awareness of the skills gap, very few of the associate students took personal responsibility for resolving this. Some

looked to the university for adjustments – '*They [university lecturers] must know we just join from college and are unprepared*' (P12). A few of the participants were prepared, stating '*It still took a bit of adjustment but being an associate student and having had that level of involvement meant I had the confidence to take that on*' (P11).

This experience highlights the principles of bridging and boundary crossing (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011). This study confirms that for students in transition from college to university, despite numerous interventions and opportunities to explore and experience the university, preparation takes place before, during and after transition.

7.3.7   Self-concept

The participants in this study had the opportunity to identify as a college student, a university student or an associate student. Some identified as more than one and this varied depending on circumstance and self-esteem. For some, being an associate student allowed them to progress to university – a journey they hadn't anticipated. For others, imagining themselves as a university student increased their motivation and encouraged them to alter their behaviour to increase their chances of success – '*.....I have a lot more focus and am a lot more motivated. I'm motivated to be a university student, much more than I ever was in college*' (P22). Coming from college was seen as a '*different world*' (P2) by others, and their experience during adjustment made them feel like a '*new student*' (P2).

How the participants identified was not found to be significant. The significance and impact of the associate student project lies in the opportunity for progression. To feel worthy and accepted, to realise you have a place. Students adapted to their new self-concept and many thrived in the higher expectations, and the onus placed upon them to adapt and exhibit their university status (Harvey et al., 2006; Yorke & Thomas, 2003). Some struggled in the unfamiliar environment and more can be done to ensure staff work to enforce positive dialogues and expectations from associate students.

College staff commented on the impact on individuals who had worked their way through college programmes at lower levels – '*Well for them, that was a dream, and*

they were never going to get there. And all of a sudden they've got one foot in the door' (P32). Expanding opportunities for students at lower levels and allowing them access to the interventions offered by the associate student project would have positive implications for widening participation programmes.

7.3.8 Social aspects

The framework includes social aspects as fundamental to adjustment. This study showed that associate students who move to university with existing classmates benefited from the comfort this brought – '*we know most of the people in the class so it's not going to be as intimidating*' (P23). Although class size has been highlighted as an academic difference, participants highlighted the significance of the social aspects – '*there's a different kind of relationship. You're not as close to your lecturers here*' (P24). Students also experienced feelings of loss – '*there is not this sense of unity, kind of. Like, a class or group that you had in college*' (P12). Several of the participants discussed feelings of loneliness and isolation, and highlighted the significance of their existing friendship group and sticking with the people they knew.

Social adjustment takes place as students adjust to their new circumstance. Sticking with existing groups during adjustment allows the students to confirm current expectations and beliefs (Gergen, 1993). This safety net can increase confidence and encourage identification with the university (Lizzio, 2006).

Only one of the participants had joined a university society and research has shown that this is beneficial for social integration. Universities must acknowledge the changing demographic of their student body where direct-entrants and those defined as 'new students' (Haggis, 2006) - individuals who only attend timetabled sessions (Christie, 2005) are spending vastly shorter periods of time on campus (Yorke & Longden, 2004) than traditional higher education students.

7.3.9 Physical environment

The study agrees with previous authors that the change in physical location and finding your way around a new campus is '*a bit scary*' (P13) and requires adjustment over time.

Having access to the campus during their college studies provided opportunities for aspiration raising and familiarisation. However, despite previous campus tours and visits to lecture and tutorial rooms, participants got lost and experienced anxiety.

Associate students were inspired by the campus before transition and after transition were complimentary of the enhanced resources and facilities such as library, study spaces and 24-hour access. Outside the campus, a small proportion of the participants had moved to new living accommodation and were experiencing adjustment to a new city and environment. These are significant life changes but none of the academics in the study acknowledged the outside influence which students were dealing with.

7.3.10 Academic differences

It is very important to increase awareness and understanding of the academic differences experienced by associate students. The literature has told us that institutions should build links and continuity (Rice et al., 2015), highlighting the significance of adjustment to the new academic and social demands (Rickinson & Rutherford, 1996). This academic difference is not preparedness, it is understanding, awareness and acceptance of the specific changes in pedagogy and assessment. Research around the specific changes focused on self-direct learning and preparedness (Christie et al., 2011; Yorke & Longden, 2004).

Within this study, academic difference was the only theme identified by both participants. The participants realised '*it's going to be tough*' (P13) and "*I don't think the way we write, and work is the same, there are different levels*' (P13). They realised that self-directed study was important – '*it's up to you if you look at it, if you want to progress your own learning*' (P29).

Important findings from the study highlight the awareness of lecturers in all institutions with university staff positing '"*college mentality" where they think it's just a tick box*' (P35) and '*we get students who really shouldn't come to university, not because they aren't capable but because it wasn't what they expected, wanted or needed… it's just*

not right for them. It's not that it's too hard for them, it's just the wrong style of education' (P37).

A lack of research experience is also a significant barrier to success, with college staff signalling their awareness of the problem – '*That's probably the biggest difference between college and university – the whole research thing is just not even touched on here. Everything is given to them, they don't have to research*' (P33).

These findings have demonstrated that both students and staff, pre- and post-transition, are aware of the difference in skills and knowledge between the educational establishments. What is surprising is that there is little effort, at least from the discussion in this study, of either the students themselves trying to update their skills accordingly, or of academics adjusting the content of their teaching to ease or allow for adjustment post-transition.

7.4 Student depictions

The following student depictions explore the elements of the framework and aim to aid understanding of how this relates to the empirical data collection. The representative images from the photovoice exhibition are also used to highlight significance. Two student depictions have been created – Robin and Alex. These have been created to provide an overview and it is recognised that the experiences represented are positive and may not be representative of all associate students. This is in line with the findings of the study and in acknowledgement that the participants in the study, who were self-selecting, may have brought an unbalanced view of the associate students experience.

7.4.1 Robin

aspiring

Robin started college after looking for a new career in cybersecurity and finding details of the associate student route at their local college. Robin had been out of education for 20 years and college offered the flexibility to fit around family life whilst allowing a clear route to a cybersecurity graduate job.

imagining

The events and visits to the university were insightful, there was a lot to learn. The college course wasn't giving them all of the skills they needed so Robin started studying Python at home.

Skills & knowledge

Robin wanted to spend more time at the university campus, however, this involved a long commute. To make the most of their time, Robin made Wednesday a full university study day. There were no college classes, so Robin made their way to the university campus and spent the day studying in the Library. This was a great facility, and the additional textbooks and resources Robin could access helped them to learn more about cybersecurity. At the start of the second year, Robin joined the Cyber Student Society and never missed the weekly meet-up. It was quite a social event and allowed Robin to meet with likeminded individuals.

preparation

Self-concept

Now when people asked what they did, Robin said they were a university student. Robin couldn't wait to be on campus full-time. The drop-in lectures and online resources had inspired Robin and allowed them to imagine their future life.

Robin slipped into university life easily, the new acquaintances from the Cyber Society became classmates and friends who could relax together between classes.

Social aspects

7.4.2   Alex

Self-concept

aspiring

imagining

Alex applied to study for their HND in Software Engineering at college and was pleasantly surprised when, during the interview, the Lecturer explained the Associate Student route and offered them a place. Alex had never considered going to university before, they didn't have the grades, and this was something other people did. Nobody in their family had ever been a university student.

A few weeks into the college course the whole class took part in an induction event at the university. It was a great experience to go on a tour of the campus, to see the facilities on offer, they met lecturers, support staff and other students. There was so much to take in. Presentations were given on the content of the courses, online resources, and academic skills. Alex was inspired but also a little overwhelmed.

The rest of the first year passed in a blur and Alex didn't find the time to take part in any of the other activities on offer at the university. Before the start of the second year, Alex decided to visit the campus; they were a university student after all and had full access to the campus and all its resources. It was quiet. Alex logged onto one of the computers with their matriculation number and password. A few students were talking in the corner, some walked past and said hello. Alex was one of them.

Self-concept

The second year at college was busy and Alex attended every event offered by the university – during a guest lecture on programming it became clear that Java was the language of choice. Alex didn't know Java as they were using C++ and there were other workshops on notetaking and referencing – Alex didn't use these skills at college.

Skills & knowledge

expectations

Alex now regularly spent time at the university with two of their friends, drinking coffee and working on their college assignments, it was a much more grown-up environment. The year was successful with assignments passed, UCAS applications completed and offers made. The next stop was uni.

Physical environment

Induction week was fun, making new friends, settling into a new flat and enjoying the social aspects of university. However, a few weeks in, things were getting tough. Alex realised they hadn't prepared, the java skills were lacking and writing reports was at a much higher level at university. There was a lot of work to do, the computer centre was like a second home.

Social aspects

Alex settled in and made it through the first trimester, they were going to graduate from university – first in their family.

7.5   Conclusion to this chapter

With a focus on widening participation and inclusiveness across higher education understanding the experience of associate students offers a significant contribution to existing literature. The framework is intended to offer a guide for educational policy, academic leaders and widening participation colleagues from college and university institutions.

This research has identified nine fundamental influences on associate student transition and these are depicted in the framework. The study proposes this framework to provide guidance and insight for academic and support staff to enhance their ability to support students in transition but, fundamentally, the framework will allow future associate students to understand the journey they are undertaking and appreciate the individual contexts and experiences that lie before them. The framework identifies the extended period of adjustment that associate students experience and acknowledges the impact that interventions can play in reducing these.

Chapter 8: Conclusions and Further Research

8.1   Introduction

This chapter concludes the work of this thesis and explores the contribution to knowledge. Each of the research questions specified in Chapter 1 is explored in turn. Recommendations for future work are also provided along with an exploration of the limitations and impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Lastly, the chapter reviews the research and provides an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the entire project.

8.2   Contribution to Knowledge

This thesis adds to the existing body of knowledge on transition by filling a gap in the understanding of the perceptions and experiences of associate students. This is an important area which is under-researched. Addressing this gap can help ensure that the experience of associate students is understood and supported. The thesis can be summarised in the following four contributions:

1. Giving a voice to associate students in transition

This thesis investigated the experience of associate students. It has shown that associate students experience transition in an individual manner which is shaped by the key factors of aspirations, imagining, skills and knowledge and expectations. Their period of adjustment is lengthy and was found to focus on five main themes – the physical environment, their self-concept, the academic differences, social aspects and preparation. This study of the associate student route demonstrated that adjustment takes time and that allowing additional time for students to make this adjustment aided their transition. A gap in the literature was identified and this study explored key aspects of this through IPA interviews and graphical research methods, empowering the students by enabling them to record and reflect on their own experience, from which a deeper understanding of this important group of students was developed. This is a significant contribution to the existing body of knowledge on transition.

2. Creating a Framework of Associate Student Transition

In addition, developing a framework of associate student transition (see Chapter 7: A Framework of Associate Student transition) has created a method for disseminating the findings to the wider HE community. This framework builds on existing work and allows for college and university staff to develop their own methods of support focusing on this key group of students and their specific needs through the stages of transition. Thus, the second contribution is to provide a mechanism for improving transition for students moving into university study.

3. Adding to the understanding of graphical research methods and their use with student populations

The use of photovoice and photo elicitation allowed the participants to share their story, creating meaning in their experiences and allowing deeper insights to emerge. In particular, the methods brought to life the wider aspects of their experience which perhaps would have been left uncovered through traditional methods. The photographic display allows this to be shared with the wider student population and gave a voice to this group of students. This thesis adds to the body of work using graphical methods and provides additional insight into the use of this method within educational establishments.

4. Expectations of preparedness

One of the main findings from the study is that college students expect college to prepare them for transition. None of the participants took on board the part they themselves as individuals should play in their preparation. This is an important finding and one which is worthy of further dissemination and research.

As previously discussed in Chapter 2, there is a raft of literature dealing with transition and student identity, however, little is known about the experience of associate students. This study has made a contribution to filling this gap. It provides a glimpse into the lives of associate students, their perceptions and experiences of university study and the perceptions of staff. The conclusions which follow are derived from the findings and the literature and can be applied to colleges and universities.

8.3   Summary of the Research Findings

A summary of the findings discussed in Chapter 6 is given below. These findings have significant implications for the understanding of how associate students perceive and experience transition. Although this study focuses on associate students, the findings may well have a bearing on not only direct-entry students but transitioning students at all levels.

This study has shown that there is a general awareness among researchers of the differences between college and university study, however, more work is needed to stimulate work to address the imbalance.

8.3.1   RQ1: How do Associate Students at college perceive their transition to university.

This study provides an interesting insight into the perceptions of college students, with associate student status, before transition. Following an intensive literature review, the author is not aware of any work which currently examines this specific phenomenon.

The findings of this investigation have shown that associate students have an awareness of the academic differences and similarities they will experience between college and university. The participants expected to be in large lecture theatres, with lecturers playing a more distant role in their education. They are conscious that assessment methods are more rigorous and fixed, the content requiring greater levels of self-direction and motivation, with a lack of perceived support. They shared feelings of a lack of preparedness, highlighting gaps in skills in areas such as report writing, note-taking, referencing and research skills.

Through the associate student project, many of the participants had experienced the campus either through an organised intervention or by using their student card to gain access as individuals. These findings complement those of earlier studies which show

that familiarisation is key to adjustment. The participants discussed the facilities and accessing quiet study spaces.

The college students in this study identified as college, university, and associate students, however, there was a greater sense of pride in being a university student than a college student. There was also a lack of confidence in their ability and a feeling of 'being less' than students who had started at university in the first year.

8.3.2 RQ2: How do Associate Students experience transition at Edinburgh Napier University School of Computing.

The study identified feelings of loss during transition and this is in keeping with previous studies. The greatest feeling of loss was associated with the class size and relationship with classmates and lecturers. They gained from the peer support offered from the cohort they transitioned with and relied on existing friendships rather than new ones. This study has raised important questions about the nature of mentoring and peer support. Contrary to the wealth of literature around the benefits of peer support, few studies have examined the impact sticking with existing cohorts has on belonging. (Bridges, 1995) stated, 'before you become a different kind of person, you must let go of the old identity', however, this study showed that associate students kept predominantly with their college friends, providing security and easing the anxiety surrounding the initial transition. When comparing these findings to those of other studies, it must be pointed out that the participants were not found to be 'letting go' and moving on, in contrast, they were sticking with the existing social group, their values and significance. P22 stated, '*we all came from college together. I've stuck with the same group of friends*'.

The participants felt additional pride in becoming a university student and enjoyed the larger campus with additional study facilities, particularly those for group work.

This study has provided additional insight into the lived experiences of associate students after transition. The photographs selected as most representative of the group

include only half of the images from the university campus with the others showing their home life, commute and external surroundings. One photograph depicts a new house and allows us to consider the external, additional changes that students are dealing with.

Figure 55: New beginnings: moving into a new home (P22)

Another shows the bus terminal where their commute into university will now start, providing an insight into another challenge in their university day.

Figure 56: New beginning: start of my journey (P24)

Figure 57: Chilling in the Meadows (P9) explores a different strand to their new found freedom and reminds us of the extended space that students find themselves in. Moving

out of their family home and finding their independence are additional challenges faced by their third-year transitional students.

Figure 57: Chilling in the Meadows (P9)

The other images are from on-campus activities and insights. One photograph is taken of a notebook with full pages of writing and represents the student's 'new normal'. This highlights the change in knowledge and skills needed for success in university studies. Note-taking was not a necessary skill during their college course, and it has now become a fundamental part of them, as independent learners. Within the university, the participants also discussed joining a society which was not an action they previously considered. They did, however, cite the support of their existing college friends in encouraging them and providing confidence to venture into the unknown.

8.4   Suggestions for future research and future work

The issues and topics explored in this thesis provide an opportunity for future research. The framework suggested in this study is not definitive but provides insight into the individual participants in this study and represents their perceptions and experience of transition. The Covid-19 pandemic has obstructed education and it is important to recognise the need for future work around the responses of educational institutions and the long term impact on student experience. The findings of this study have brought to light several areas in which additional research is needed to explore the relevant issues:

1. Application of the framework

The framework produced should be applied in alternative transition situations such as primary to secondary school and non-standard routes to understand appropriate support methods and to add to the body of work around student transition. The framework could also be adapted to explore wider educational contexts such as returning to campus after the impact of Covid-19.

2. Commuter students

Further research should examine the impact of travel (commute) for direct-entry students. The participants in this study highlighted this as an important part of their day and it was represented in the final photographic display. Academics and support staff would benefit from an increased understanding of commuting on the experience of students.

3. Policy - Articulation agreements

Articulation agreements are in place for institutions across Scotland but little is known about the impact of these on associate student routes. Research in this area would help to inform education policy and to ensure a continued focus on supporting direct-entry students. Further research into the impact of educational policy on articulation routes and direct-entry students is needed.

4. COVID-19

During the final academic year of this study, 2020/21 COVID-19 dominated the world. This caused learning and support services within universities and colleges to move online. There will be long-term consequences across education at all levels. Future research to examine the impact on students, particularly those in transition, would allow student support to be tailored appropriately and would add to an important area of research. The findings of this study, and in particular the photographs collated, provide a unique view of the associate student experience which could be used to help staff understand their transition during the shift back to campus in the coming academic year.

This transition to campus study will be immense for students who joined the university during the pandemic but have yet to experience on campus teaching. Institutions must think carefully about the support mechanisms necessary for transitional students.

5. Sharing the photographs

This thesis identified photographs which are representative of the participants experience of transition as associate students. These photographs add depth and can promote dialogue to bring about change in transition support. Further work is needed to share these photographs with policymakers, staff and students and to empower the associate student community. This is discussed further in 8.5.1   Value in the Method.

8.5   Review of the Research

8.5.1   Value in the Method
This study incorporated the graphical research methods of photovoice and photo-elicitation to provide a glimpse into the lived experience of the associate students. Using photographs has allowed me to share the issues and experiences which impact upon their transition to university. The photographs taken by the participants helped to tell a story about their university lives and to create a representation of their experience of transitioning into higher education.

Displaying the photographs and allowing the student body to select those which most closely represent them has provided further insight. The photovoice methods have three distinct aims for participants:

1. To use photographic images to document and reflect on the needs and assets of their community from their point of view
2. To promote dialogue about salient community issues through group discussion of photographs
3. To promote social change by communicating issues of both concern and pride to policymakers and society at large (C Wang & Burris, 1997; Caroline Wang et al., 1996)

A successful photovoice project looks to empower participants, and steps 1 and 2 require participants to document issues through the examination of photographs and to promote discussion. The final step, step 3, empowers participants to make a change and this stage has not yet been completed, although the photographs were shared with the community of associate students and they selected the final photographs which most loosely represent their experience. Further work to share the findings with policymakers and to promote change has yet to be carried out. This is one of the focuses of future work.

8.5.2 Lessons Learnt

This study has been primarily concerned with the perceptions and experience of associate students. The nature of this data does not allow the researcher to determine what a true account is, nor does it allow for generalisations to be drawn. One of the main limitations of the study was the small number of participants and the tight window of data collection. Although IPA requires a small number of participants, this, aligned with data collection for each group at one point in time, has only provided a narrow view of the students' transition. The study would have benefited from further rounds of data collection and the researcher believes that although the inclusion of graphical methods added additional insights, perhaps traditional interviews and focus groups could have given as much insight with easier data analysis.

The researcher must also ponder the impact of their status, as a university lecturer, on the study. Participants at college pre transitions discussed their lack of preparedness and pointed to the college as the source. However, if the researcher had been an independent researcher or an academic at the college institution, would their perception have changed?

Time and experience were the major obstacles to the success of this research. Doing a part-time study whilst working full time and raising a family (during a pandemic) brings exceptional challenges. I have learnt to be more realistic in my commitments; to plan my work more carefully and to be considerate of other people's time.

8.6   Reflections on my PhD Journey

Carrying out phenomenological, reflective research allows for reflection on one's own perceptions and experiences. Exploring the reality of one person, in a constructivist way, means recognising that all of our experiences are different. This is influenced by my own experiences, mindset and stance of interpreting the world (Lincoln & Guba,

2009). I hoped to value the student voice, to listen to the individual and to gain an understanding of their associate student journey. Using IPA provided the structure for my analysis (Smith et al., 2009) and allowed the students to keep their voice. Reflection, defined as 'thinking about something after the event' and reflexivity, thoughtful self-awareness (Finlay & Gough, 2003), have been an important aspect of my research. I have learnt that I have biases and preconceptions which have formed from my education, personality and experience. My own experience, particularly as a lecturer who has made the transition from college to university myself, is pivotal in much of the work I do. I was conscious not to 'contaminate' the associate students' descriptions or to blur the boundary between the research and participant. The phenomenon under study was not my experience. However, there were commonalities and similarities in their voices that I also found in my own.

Completing this PhD has been an epic journey, a struggle for the most part. Balancing study with other demands has been a constant battle and the numerous occasions on which I 'dropped' the PhD ball to focus on something else have caused this lengthy part-time process to seem never-ending. Trying to complete final drafts and edits whilst living through COVID-19 has been an additional challenge. Balancing work, home-schooling and writing during several lockdowns has been particularly difficult. I wanted to complete a PhD that was worthwhile and important; for me it has been both of these. I am pleased that I focused on the associate students' journey by listening to their voices and exploring the photographs they took. I have learnt fundamentally that we are all on a journey, experiencing change, preparing and adapting as we go.

8.7   Conclusion

Whilst this study did not confirm an altered and improved experience for associate students, it did highlight several areas for improvement in transition support and the recommendations made will be of value to the community. This project is the first comprehensive investigation of associate students using both graphical research and IPA methods. The insights gained from this study may be of assistance to further and higher education institutions and are a valuable addition to the work on transition.

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Appendix A: Ethics/Consent/Data Management

Ethics: Self-Assessment Form

To be completed by the Gatekeeper[1] and the researcher.

Project Title :	A journey that motivates: Discovering the associate student experience					
Very brief Description:	A case-study of associate students in the School of Computing looking at identity and social integration.					
Type	UG	PG	✓ Research Degree	EU / contract research	Research council	KTP / Commercial

People Involved

Name	Role
Debbie Meharg	PhD student/Lecturer

Issue		If 'yes' give brief details.
Children under 16 involved	Y̶/N	
Interaction with patient groups, disabilities or older potentially vulnerable people	Y̶/N	
Potential impact on physical health and safety of participants, researchers and the general public	Y̶/N	
Potential impact on the mental health and safety of participants, researchers and the general public	Y̶/N	
Data protection, intellectual property and permissions required	Y /N̶	Data protection, participant consent and anonymity
Socially or culturally 'controversial' investigations (e.g. pornography, extremist politics)	Y̶ /N	

[1] A gatekeeper is an experienced member of staff who is familiar with ethical good practice. This gatekeeper will typically be the student's supervisor or module leader. For members of staff this may be the project's principle investigator, centre or Institute director.

Privacy issues (e.g. use of social media, ethnographic studies) • See the assumed consent form	Y/~~N~~	Photovoice & Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) used as data collection method.

If each question has been answered 'No' to every question the project may proceed. This checklist should be retained.

If any of the questions have been answered "Yes" then continue to the next page.

Completed by : …*D. Meharg*…………………………………………………………

Briefly describe the ethical problem:

All data and transcripts need to be stored securely.

Participants provide anonymous information.

Photovoice & IPA methodologies are being employed as data gathering methods by participants.

If this can be satisfactorily resolved by the gatekeeper and researcher, describe the resolution

Data Storage – data will be stored in a password protected folder on the H drive of Debbie Meharg.

Anonymising participants – although participants are selected by their Associate Student or direct-entry status all transcripts and data are anonymous. Participants complete informed consent forms.

Photovoice – training given to all participants covering privacy, trespassing, illegal activities and consent. Consent forms produced for photographic approval from any subject in the photographs. Consent will be followed up with individuals and photographs will be obscured where consent is not explicit.

IPA – Debbie Meharg has undertaken a training course at Stirling University on IPA. All participants will complete informed consent and be anonymised.

Performance and Retention data – all data will be anonymised and stored securely. The data is collected through the university planning department and will be in line with the data published periodically by the university which is available in the public domain.

Review of action taken conducted by :…………………………………………….

Informed Consent Form - IPA
Alternative Routes, alternative identities: implications for student retention and performance

Edinburgh Napier University requires that all persons who participate in research studies give their written consent to do so. Please read the following and sign it if you agree with what it says.

1. I freely and voluntarily consent to be a participant in the research project on the topic of students in transition to be conducted by Debbie Meharg, who is a PhD student in the Edinburgh Napier School of Computing.

2. The broad goal of this research study is to explore the experiences of students in transition from further to higher education within the School of Computing. Specifically, I have been asked to take part in a one-to-one interview which will take place during trimester 1 and should take no longer than one hour to complete.

3. I have been told that my responses will be anonymised. My name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in any report subsequently produced by the researcher.

4. I also understand that if at any time during the interview I feel unable or unwilling to continue, I am free to opt out. That is, my participation in this study is completely voluntary, and I may withdraw from it at any time without negative consequences.

5. In addition, should I not wish to take part in the interview, I am free to decline.

6. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions regarding the research project and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

7. I have read and understand the above and consent to participate in this study. My signature is not a waiver of any legal rights. Furthermore, I understand that I will be able to keep a copy of the informed consent form for my records.

_____   _____

Participant's Signature   Date

I have explained and defined in detail the research procedure in which the respondent has consented to participate. Furthermore, I will retain one copy of the informed consent form for my records.

_____   _____

Researcher's Signature   Date

Informed Consent Form - PEI
Alternative Routes, alternative identities: implications for student retention and performance

Edinburgh Napier University requires that all persons who participate in research studies give their written consent to do so. Please read the following and sign it if you agree with what it says.

1. I freely and voluntarily consent to be a participant in the research project on the topic of students in transition to be conducted by Debbie Meharg, who is a PhD student in the Edinburgh Napier School of Computing.

2. The broad goal of this research study is to explore the experiences of students in transition from further to higher education within the School of Computing. Specifically, I have been asked to take part in visual research which involves attending a focus group to discuss photographs.

3. I have been told that my responses will be anonymised. My name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in any report subsequently produced by the researcher.

4. I also understand that if at any time during the trimester I feel unable or unwilling to continue, I am free to opt out. That is, my participation in this study is completely voluntary, and I may withdraw from it at any time without negative consequences.

5. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions regarding the visual research project and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

6. I have read and understand the above and consent to participate in this study. My signature is not a waiver of any legal rights. Furthermore, I understand that I will be able to keep a copy of the informed consent form for my records.

_____   _____

Participant's Signature   Date

I have explained and defined in detail the research procedure in which the respondent has consented to participate. Furthermore, I will retain one copy of the informed consent form for my records.

_____   _____

Researcher's Signature   Date

Photo Consent Form 1

I am part of a graphical research project investigating what it's like to be a university student in year 3. We are taking photographs of our experiences and talking about them with people in our group.

Please sign this form if you agree to let me take your photograph for this project.

If you would like a copy of the photograph, please tick the box below.

I agree to have my photo taken for this graphical research project:

Name:	
Email address:	
Signature:	
Date:	
Name of photographer:	
☐ Copy of Photograph	

Data Management Plan

PhD Debbie Meharg 40189442

0. Proposal name
Alternative routes, alternative identities: implications for student retention and performance

1. Description of the data

1.1   Type of study

This study examines the experience of associate students in the School of Computing at Edinburgh Napier University.

1.2   Types of data

Qualitative Data from photovoice research, focus groups and IPA interviews.

Quantitative Data examining student performance and retention.

1.3   Format and scale of the data

*Focus Groups and interviews will be audio recorded and these files will be in MP3 format. It is envisaged that approximately 8 to 10 interviews will be recorded and 10 focus groups will be carried out after. After transcription these files will be destroyed to ensure the anonymity of the participants. All transcripts will be in **Microsoft Word format**. Focus group and interview transcripts will be coded in **NVivo**.*

*Retention and performance data will be stored in **Microsoft Excel format and SPSS**.*

2. Data collection / generation

Make sure you justify why <u>new</u> data collection or long term management is needed in your Case for Support. Focus in this template on the good practice and standards for ensuring new data are of high quality and processing is well documented.

2.1   Methodologies for data collection / generation

Consent has only been agreed for this data to be used within the bounds of this PhD study.

2.2   Data quality and standards

Debbie Meharg will be responsible for overall quality assurance. Appropriate notes and metadata will be stored with all data to ensure the quality. To ensure authenticity only a master copy of all data will be kept.

3. Data management, documentation and curation

3.1   Managing, storing and curating data.

Research data will be stored on the University's v:drive. University-managed data storage is resilient, with multiple copies stored in more than one physical location and protection against corruption. Daily backups are kept for 14 days and monthly backups for an additional year.

3.2   Metadata standards and data documentation

All research data will be organized as per the University's metadata standards http://staff.napier.ac.uk/services/research-innovation-office/research-data/Pages/Organising.aspx

3.3   Data preservation strategy and standards

In line with the consent agreed for this research, data will not be stored long-term.

4. Data security and confidentiality of potentially disclosive information

4.1   Formal information/data security standards

Data will be stored securely on the v:drive.

4.2   Main risks to data security

All stored data will be anonymised to remove the risks for data security. Access to data will be restricted to Debbie Meharg and her PhD supervisors as necessary.

5. Data sharing and access

5.1 Suitability for sharing

This data will not be shared. It has been gathered for the purpose of the PhD study only. This is in line with the consent agreed by participants.

6.   Responsibilities

The first point of contact for all queries in relation to this data is the PI – Debbie Meharg. Who will also have overall responsibility for the production and maintenance of metadata. Preparation and upload of the data will be carried out by Debbie Meharg with the support of the University's Information Services staff.

7. Relevant institutional, departmental or study policies on data sharing and data security

Policy	URL or Reference
Data Management Policy & Procedures	*http://staff.napier.ac.uk/services/research-innovation-office/Documents/Research%20Data%20Management%20Policy.pdf*
Data Security Policy	*http://staff.napier.ac.uk/services/cit/infosecurity/Pages/InformationSecurityPolicy.aspx*
Data Sharing Policy	*http://staff.napier.ac.uk/services/secretary/governance/DataProtection/Pages/DataSharing.aspx*

8. Author of this Data Management Plan (Name) and, if different to that of the Principal Investigator, their telephone & email contact details

Debbie Meharg, d.meharg@napier.ac.uk 0131 455 2927

Photovoice Training Materials

Graphical Research Training
Materials by Debbie Meharg

USING GRAPHICS

Today, more than at any other time in history, images bombard and surround us. Television, print and the internet unceasingly present images of people to emulate or help, historical icons to remember, products we 'need' etc.

- Where do our experiences as students fit, what images represent us?

Photo-Taking Tips

➢ Try different angles
➢ Try different points of view
➢ Keep the sun to your back, or to the side
➢ Is your subject in the centre of the photo?
➢ Does your subject fill the photo?

Things to Remember

1. No experience needed! Owning a camera or having experience taking photographs is not necessary, you can use the camera on your mobile phone.
2. Photo quality is **not** important. PhotoVoice is **not** about the quality of your photographs. It is about taking pictures that mean something to you as an associate student.
3. Keep a notebook. Write down ideas of photos in a notebook. Keep notes about why you took a picture.
4. Ask permission to take someone's photo. Always ask permission before you take someone's picture! If they say no, explain briefly what you are doing and why you want to take their picture. Your explanation can simply be: "I'm working on a photography project for students coming from college, would you mind being in one of the photos?" If they still say no, take a picture of something or someone else instead.

PhotoVoice Ethics: Safety and Respect

5. File your photos where you can find them and use the following naming convention: yourname_photoX.jpg (X number of photograph – keep them in order)
6. Email them to me weekly d.meharg@napier.ac.uk

A simple explanation is:

"I am part of a PhotoVoice project investigating what it is like to be a direct entry student. We are taking photographs of our experience and talking about them with other people in our group. Thank you for letting me take your picture."

CONTACT:

DEBBIE MEHARG

d.meharg@napier.ac.uk

Tel. 0131 455 2927

With PhotoVoice, we are visual researchers as we take pictures of our experience as direct entrants and talk about them with others. As a visual researcher, you must keep certain guidelines in mind:

Stay safe! Make sure you are "safe" when you take the picture. For example:

- Stand on a solid surface.
- Look before you step into or cross a street.
- Be aware of things around you, like traffic.
- Ask permission. Always ask permission before taking people's photos for this project.
    o Ask them to sign a photo consent form.
    o If people can be recognized in a photo, ask permission before showing their picture outside your group.
    o Be respectful. If certain people don't want their photo taken, respect their feelings.
- Be prepared. Be ready to explain about the project to family, friends, or strangers, if they ask what you are doing.
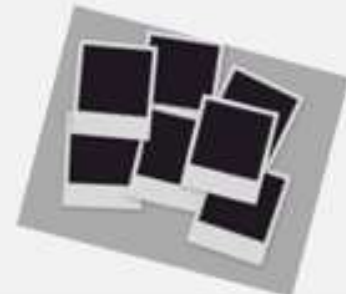
Appendix B: Pilot Photographs from Photovoice (201516)
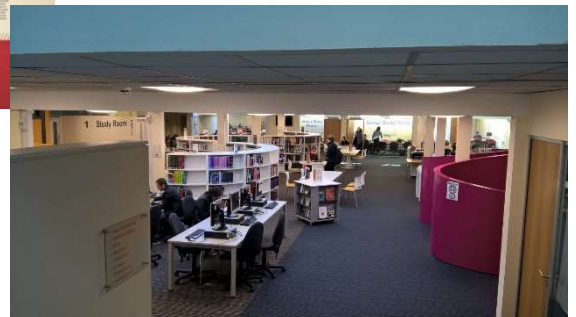
Appendix C: Coding of IPA interview (Pilot)

IPA interview 15/16 – IPA151601

3rd November 2015 – Participant 2 (P2)

Emergent	Line No.	Original Transcript	Exploratory comments
		I: What has being an associate student been like for you?	
Multiple identities – college student Bridging the gap Negative – college didn't prepare me Multiple identities – university student	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	P2:I felt like a college student, there has been a big gap between college and university, this year I consider a useless year, compared with this year, last year could be much more helpful. Just with small changes. All the time we had access to Napier but we have been college students and when we arrived in third year you are a college student coming into third year. You are not a third year student. So we have to bridge in subject, specifically for the guys from the college, to fill the gaps. You came from the college but you were already a Napier student so basically it doesn't change that much.	Dissatisfied with college year prior to entry – Is this personal reflection? Talks of access to Napier but still describing/identifying as a college student in the 3rd year. – My own comparison of college/uni They are a 3rd year student but they do not feel ready Contradiction – not a third year but now doesn't change
		I: Ok so you talked about two different things there, You talked about being a college student and a university student.	
		P2: Yes	
		I: How do you see them being different, or the same? So if we start with the college student. What is a college student?	
Academic differences Motivation for learning Lecturers as experts – visible Negative – college experience	11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22	P2: The way of studying of the subjects are totally different. Here we have Tom, he knows what he is teaching, you can see him, he knows what he is teaching. xxxxx, he really, really knows what he is doing. Last year that didn't happen. I mean, they were teaching us php and I had to tell the teacher – we need a server. Because php is server-side. They said no, that will compile, note++ will compile, I said, the things on the web will not compile, it is not c++. They say, oh you uploaded it to that server without login, no server will serve you the php, it is going to give you html. So it is like, you are teaching me this? I should not be telling you what is wrong. Or we discovered in the second semester – we were	Academic challenge – lecturers as experts in their field. Inspiration for learning. Enthusiasm for subject area – Motivation for learning Dissatisfied with college teaching. Comparison between college lecturers and university lecturers. Student has good subject knowledge, perhaps the college level was too low. Sharing knowledge – not happy to help when they know the answers. Them vs. Us

Ability beliefs – capable of doing more Future Self Ability beliefs – capable of doing more Bridging the gap Differences	23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37	thinking they were teaching us web apps, but they were teaching responsive websites. So there is a difference, it's like what have we been doing so far until now? There is the graded unit, or in my case I didn't need much help, maybe, because I went further than what was expected or I don't know why. I was going to the class and spending 5 hours per week, going home and thinking I could do this at home. But there was also web server, this year with Andy's subject we are doing apache – this is a web server. Last year it was basically Microsoft and I taught myself Linux because I thought this was more useful for the future, over 60% of the servers are on Linux systems. And I did it on my own. Here there is no gap, there I was basically on my own. You think in the college you will have more support from the lecturers than here but somehow this is different.	Questioning purpose/level of college course Self-direction/capable Questioning why they went further <u>Is this not expected for self-development?</u> <u>Not normal college attitude</u> Self-direction, purpose. Support – do they actually mean subject/content support rather than pastoral support. <u>Is this actually linked to subject knowledge of the lecturer and their willingness to share this with the student?</u>
		I: Ok, so that's really interesting. So far you've talked about staff differences.	
Academic Differences Results driven Persistence Negative – college experience Negative – college experience	38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51	P2: Oh the way of teaching is totally different, here it is divided. You have tutorials, and lectures where we can take notes. Also they are helping us. At college it was like the way of teaching was, here are the notes, you have to pass what SQA says. Even you have to learn, but you have to pass, it is more important. And so many times it was like, why do I need this, or we were lost. That was my 3rd HND, it is not my first. I have one in software development and another one in internet companies developing, so the themes were new for me. I couldn't understand how the levels could be lower, I have knowledge from before, so sometimes it is like, we learned java we were using the phones, it's like, don't start walking, run and in the end we were lost. I would go to the project (in java) but not know to load it.	Teaching differences – note taking, help/support during practical. Focus on passing SQA requirements rather than on learning. Persistent in learning despite unhappiness at college Experienced student – they have knowledge of the learning process and how they expect it to be. Dissatisfied with level of content. Contradiction – level is too low, but they are lost.

		I: So how do you feel that makes a college student different from a university student. Do you think they are the same, it was just the teaching that was different?	
Multiple identities – different worlds Physical space - campus	52 53 54 55 56 57	P2: It is pretty similar but we are students studying in college, so we didn't go to campus for Napier, we went to Edinburgh College, so we are coming from different worlds as students. We have our Napier card but we are changing for another place we could be coming from Cumbernauld College, we'd be the same. We are apart already from Napier.	Contradiction – pretty similar and different worlds. Is this linked to their aspiration to be a university student and how they identify Focus on the physical location. Same as other colleges but apart from Napier.
		I: So now that you are here. What was it like on your first day coming here, having been an associate student. How did you find it?	

Appendix D: Photographs from PEI – Photo Interview Kit

PEI01: Computer Centre (Photo-elicitation 1617)

PEI02: University Campus (Photo-elicitation 1617 & 1718)
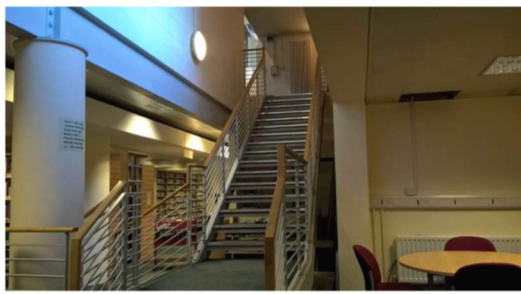
PEI03: Library Stairs (Photo-elicitation 1617)

PEI04: College campus (Photo-elicitation 1617)

PEI05: Graduation (Photo-elicitation 1617 & 1718)

PEI06: New path, new journey (Photo-elicitation 1718)

PEI07: So far back, I'm anonymous (Photo-elicitation 1718)

PEI08: Note-taking (Photo-elicitation 1718)

Appendix E: SRHE Poster

"We're coming from different worlds": exploring student identity during transition

BACKGROUND

- In Scotland, almost 30 per cent of higher education entrants are enrolled in FE college
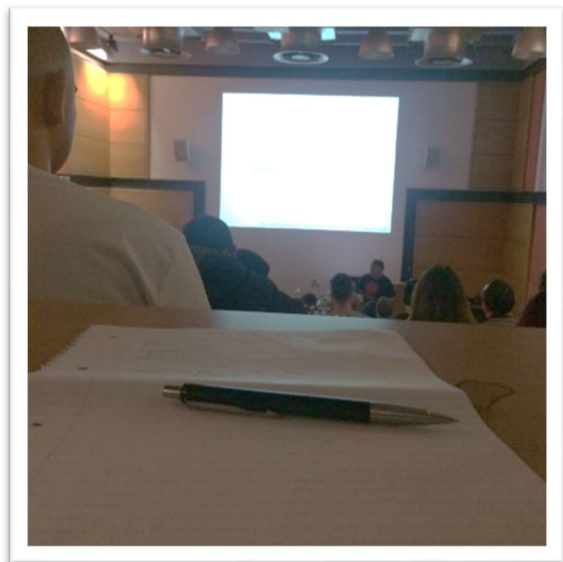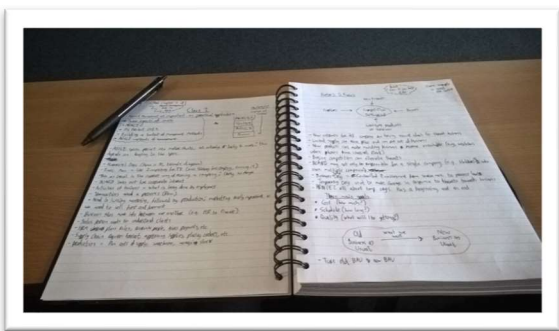- Many of these student continue their journey to degree level qualifications through direct-entry opportunities, joining university programmes in their 2nd or 3rd year
- These rates of entry continue to rise and offer universities opportunities to widen access and enhance the student demographic.
- The barriers these student encounter and how student identify and fit-in during this transition can impact upon their future success.

Scottish universities worst in the UK for admitting poorer students, despite having no tuition fees

Poorest pupils face 'shocking' barriers to university

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METHODS

A new way to see, a new way to learn

New beginnings: moving into a new home

Sea of Shoes

Photo Voice

IPA

scary

exciting

"I would never ask a question in that place. The lecturer is too far away, I would never put my hand up."

"It's totally different to here. It's a small class, we all know each other. We don't have to think about it, or even put up our hand. We just talk and ask questions. Its more relaxed."

Photo Elicitation

EMERGENT THEMES

Academic Differences	Challenge, differences, results driven, expectations, format of teaching, pace of learning, routine, self-direction, workload
Motivation	Aspiration, common goals, motivation for learning, peer insight, sense of achievement,
Persistence	Dedication, persist, won't give up
Physical Environment	Lost on campus, physical space, vastness, learning resources
Preparation	Attending events, college advantages, familiarity, college didn't prepare me, time management
Self-Concept	Ability beliefs, confidence, future self, individual growth, mindset, subject knowledge
Social Aspects	Friendship - relationship with classmates, Friendship - relationship with lecturers, impersonal, isolation, loneliness, settling in, peer support, social integration
Student Identity	Multiple identities, age differences, associate student, college, university, new
Transition	Adjustment, benefits, changes, gap, route, shock, struggle, barriers

CONCLUSIONS

- Graphical research methods were found to be particularly relevant to this study
- Allowing the students themselves to become the agents for change
- Use of photos and IPA surfaced insights into student life beyond the classroom and outside of the campus

SRHE Newer and Early Career Conference 2018

Debbie Meharg, Alison Varey and Sandra Cairncross   Contact: D.Meharg@Napier.ac.uk @dmeharg

Edinburgh Napier UNIVERSITY

Appendix F: PEI transcript sample

P29	Achievement
P27	Goals – you've hit your target.
P28	A new chapter of your journey. You'll be looking for work at this point or to move on to a masters.
P29	At that point from school you've hit your main goal – to graduate. It's kind of a long time coming. What's next. It's the start of the future. That's you just out on your own.
P27	I hope to see myself in one of those gowns. It's a reality check. Now I need to do everything for myself, you need to stand on your own, get a job, family. I think after this period life hits you hard and you realise it's not easy being an adult.
P28	It's like getting to the top (as a graduate) and then hitting the bottom again by starting a new job. But I suppose if you know what you're doing, it will make it a lot easier.

to learn and to see more clearly in some ways.

So how is it difference

P21: We didn't have all of the equipment that there is here. It's a new way to see, to be part of university life.

P21: Six is my friends hiking up to arthurs seat. We know that the path is hard but the destination is going to be worth it. You've got to go with it and try to hike up to the top. It's like study, it's tricky but will be worth it.

I like that

P21: Number 7 is a mix of old and new so the kind of new building in between all of the old buildings that have been there for a long time. So I studied previously and that is the old but here it is new, so things I didn't learn before or that are different here in uni.

P21: Then its graffiti of good times, so even though I have come here to learn I also want to do fun things. So when I saw that I thought – that's what I want from life.

Appendix H: **Reflective Coding Diary (extract)**

Date	Comments
04/09/18	After last week's PhD supervision meeting I've been continuing to work on my coding and thought keeping a note of the process and importantly my thought process would be helpful for reflection. Since working on the first transcript and writing my exploratory comments, I've been struggling with the confidence to commit to the emergent codes. Today I've spent time reading other examples of coding and have decided to type up my exploratory comments in the Word document and also to make some changes to the layout of the document. Adding a column for emergent themes on the far left as well as line numbers to enable me to keep track of all of the codes. I considered whether I should group by paragraph or line number but believe line numbers will give greater clarity.
06/09/18	After spending ages highlighting the sections in the word document to match the emergent theme I then imported the completed doc into NVivo only to find that it has removed all of the highlighting and just kept the formatting and text!! This is very frustrating. I should have realised that this would happen. The highlighting is obviously added as you code in NVivo.
08/09/18	As I continue to code in NVivo using the emergent themes from the paper copies I am continuing to read through the codes and make some small adjustments. Just small changes to the wording of the code, for example. I hadn't expected to continue to make changes to the codes for such an extended period of time or so frequently. These minor changes show me that the codes are developing and that I am happy with the emergent themes that I currently have for this participant.
10/09/18	As I continue the coding for I realise that one of the codes for multiple identities – Napier student should be university student. I do not feel that the university name in itself is an important aspect of their identity but their differentiation between college and university.
12/09/18	The initial coding of emergent themes has resulted in 27 nodes for one IPA interview transcript. Many of these are similar and can be grouped.

	Today's task is to search for connections across these emergent themes to develop what will be the super-ordinate themes. To do this I am putting each theme on a post-it note and grouping like with like to develop a cluster.
19/09/18	Codes have been grouped and resulted in 9 emergent themes from the initial 27 nodes. The process of identifying themes and grouping is very time consuming.
20/09	Coding complete on 1st IPA interview. I am hoping some of the pitfalls identified during this process will speed things up going forward.
26/09	Started analysing the second IPA interview. Had a bit of a break between the first one and this which I think is good as the details of the first interview are no longer at the forefront of my mind. I'm slightly concerned that the nodes identified this time will be dramatically different and am conscious that what is in your head at the time can affect this i.e. the latest literature you have read.
27/09	Reading, re-reading and initial commenting are complete. Now to put into NVivo.
08/10	It's been a while since I last had time to look at the data and I feel that I'm having to start again. Am grateful that I have kept these notes as was about to waste time highlighting sections in Word! It is difficult to remember what your initial interpretation of the data was so am having to re-read again and ensure I still agree. This has resulted in a few tweaks.
17/10	NVivo – know I want to enter the codes into NVivo from the second IPA interview and I'm unsure whether I should do this on paper first to narrow it down to the emergent themes.
25/10	After some research it becomes apparent that I should code each transcript individually through to the end (using post-it notes) to group these. Once this stage is complete I should then enter the codes into NVivo. Otherwise the codes will be influenced by the coding on the other transcripts and not be emergent. The second IPA interview 161701 has 22 emergent themes which I will narrow down using post-its. I am taking photographs of the post-its and saving in a folder for each participant to keep track. Also keeping the physical post-its at the back of

	my notebook. I think they might be useful later on when I'm trying to further understand the data.
29/10	One transcript was very short as the participant had a phone call that ended the interview. This has allowed me to work through this in its entirety today from start to finish. It's a good feeling – achievement! I realise I could be much more productive if I manage to set aside enough time together to complete each IPA interview. It's the breaks in between my research days that are making this take so long. And obviously because it's a difficult and involved process.
08/11	Things have been progressing well and I have completed the initial analysis for the IPA interviews from 1516 and 1617. They are all coded and entered into NVivo. I have saved the codebook after entering each of the codes in the transcript so that I can see how these have developed. I had hoped that the overall grouping of the themes e.g. Academic Differences has challenge, Support. underneath but the overall number of entries for each theme is not totalled for the heading. This will need to be done manually.
12/11	Have managed to analyse one interview in 2 days and am pleased with the progress although I'm slightly concerned that this is being rushed. I am confident that I will continue to explore the comments and to revisit the coding for all of the transcripts in the coming weeks. I am looking forward to discussing the codes I have so far in my PhD meeting on 14th Nov.

Appendix I: Study Timeline

Pilot Study 1516

	Sept 2015			Oct 2015	Nov 2015	Dec – Feb 2016	Feb – Mar 2016	Mar – Apr 2016
PV	Participants recruited during induction week	Training given	Participants take photographs over 2 week period	Photographs submitted by email	Focus groups	Transcription in NVivo		Coding and analysis
IPA	Participants recruited			Interviews			Transcription in NVivo	Coding and analysis

Study 1617

	Sept 2016			Oct/Nov 2016	Nov/Dec 2016	Jan – Mar 2017	March - June	June to Sept 2017
PV	Participants recruited during induction week	Training given	Participants take photographs over 2 week period	Photographs submitted by email	Focus groups	Transcription in NVivo	Coding and analysis	
IPA	Participants recruited			Interviews				Coding and analysis
PEI				Participants recruited at College and PEI focus group took place		Transcription in NVivo		Coding and analysis

Study 1718

	Sept 2017			Oct 2017	Nov 2017	Feb – Mar 2018	Mar – Sept 2018	Sept – March 2019
PV	Participants recruited during induction week	Training given	Participants take photographs over 2 week period	Photographs submitted by email	Focus groups	Transcription in NVivo	Coding and analysis	Merged analysis
IPA	Participants recruited			Interviews	Transcription in NVivo		Coding and analysis	
PEI					Participants recruited at College and PEI focus group took place	Transcription in NVivo	Coding and analysis	