The Student Psychological Contract: A Critical Analysis of EVLN in Managing the Student Experience

By

Julie Hardy

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Type of Award **: DBA**

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ABSTRACT

UK higher education has seen unprecedented fluctuations, particularly within the last decade. Policy developments and government strategies are dramatically altering the sector and irreversibly changing the student-university relationship. Of particular note, a consumerist ethos has become the prevalent mind-set amongst the student body and, consequently, students have developed clear expectations about what they want from their university experience. In order to begin to explore these perceptions and needs, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of first year undergraduate students from across three programmes of study at the University of Central Lancashire: Business Administration, Business and Management, and Business Studies. The structure and content of the interview questions were derived from the results of an earlier focus group meeting held with students from a local 'feeder institution' who were studying Business and who were considering entering university in 2017-2018 (although not necessarily UCLan). The findings from these interviews, along with those from a set of follow up meetings, are in line with the results of other, earlier studies described within the literature which suggest that students enter university with a specific set of expectations, that are, in many cases, unfulfilled. However, the empirical research presented here makes a distinctive contribution to the field in several respects: first, that psychological contract theory is employed as a useful lens through which to investigate the student-university relationship; second, the behavioural responses to dissatisfaction are examined using the Exit-Voice-Loyalty-Neglect (EVLN) framework as a mechanism for exploring these reactions; and third, previous studies employing the EVLN framework in the context of higher education have all taken place overseas and largely used quantitative methods of investigation. Therefore, this research is distinctive in that it takes place in a UK setting and employs qualitative methods. The use of qualitative methods has added to our understanding of the student experience by highlighting some of the underlying causes of dissatisfaction and the ways in which students might respond to the breach of perceived promises. The EVLN framework has demonstrated its value as a conceptual tool in exploring students' reactions and reveals that the expectation-reality mismatch can lead to feelings of entrapment and hopelessness amongst the student body. The outcomes uncovered in this thesis have real-world implications for management practice, not only at UCLan, but for other universities that may be facing similar issues.

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my Grandfather, Godfrey Jack Rundle Collins-Hendry, known to his friends as 'George' and known to me as 'Didan'. He passed away on November 11th 1973, a few weeks before my 10th birthday. In the short years we had together, he instilled in me a love of learning, intellectual curiosity and belief in the transformative powers of education. He has been the greatest influence in my life and would have been so very, very proud of me. Thank you for everything Didan.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Introduction and theoretical underpinnings

The initial impetus for this investigation was prompted by an article published in 2014 in *The Guardian* newspaper which asserted that spending on marketing was increasing exponentially across the United Kingdom's higher education sector as a result of universities competing to attract students. Specifically, it was suggested that 'to put it simply, universities will live or die by the number of fee-paying students they can entice to enrol, or "sign on the dotted line", as one university marketing director put it' (Boffey, 2014). This statement immediately gave rise to a number of questions, not least the extent to which universities are able to meet the expectations that they are engendering across the student body. More precisely, are students, who are now paying fees which increased three-fold almost overnight, receiving the experience they have been 'sold'? Are institutions across the sector over-promising and under-delivering, and is the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) amongst them? Moreover, if students' expectations are unmet, or dashed in some way, how might they react? Would they become increasingly absent, or even leave the institution? Would they complain, in the anticipation of restitution, or simply act passively in the hope that the situation would improve? It is these central questions that are the inspiration for this thesis.

1.1.1 Theoretical underpinnings

New university students, embarking on their journey through higher education, often do so with a mixture of excitement and trepidation (Kandinko & Mawer, 2013; Koskina, 2013). These entrants begin their university life with a range of expectations, beliefs and hopes about what the future might hold. Such emotional anticipation has been the subject of considerable research, particularly amongst employees in workplace settings, and it has become known as the 'psychological contract' (Conway & Briner, 2009; Freese & Schalk, 2008; Guest, 1998; Rousseau, 1989; Wolfe-Morrison & Robinson, 1997). At its heart, psychological contract theory is concerned with expectations, beliefs, perceived promises and reciprocal obligations. Such concepts relate to all manner of organisational characteristics, including company culture, relationships with colleagues and overall working conditions or, essentially, features that are not explicitly stated in a formal, written contract of work. Importantly, these tacitly held perceptions of employees are subjective and based largely on preconceived ideas about what their future working life will be like within a particular context. Moreover, such notions often arise from the perceived 'promises' that the organisation has made, be it through brand image, glossy

promotional materials, or through interactions with existing staff at interviews or induction. In return for promises made, an employee feels beholden to fulfil a reciprocal set of obligations, quite aside from those contained within their written contract, concerning their conduct, treatment of co-workers, respect for the organisation and its property, and the need to put in extra time to finish tasks.

A substantial body of literature has emerged over the last fifty years regarding the formation and content of psychological contracts and, perhaps most interestingly, what happens when expectations go unfulfilled or, putting it another way, when the psychological contract is breached or violated in some way. It is this area of the literature that will provide the theoretical underpinning of this thesis. At the same time, within the broader body of research concerning psychological contract breach, a more specific set of studies examines the behaviour of those who believe that their psychological contract has been damaged. This work is based on the theory that in the face of disillusionment, an individual will adopt one of four behaviours: (i) they will simply leave the organisation (exit); (ii) they will speak up about their concerns in the hope of restitution (voice); (iii) they will wait passively, hoping that the situation will resolve itself and improve (loyalty); or (iv) they will become disenfranchised, take time off work, come in late and generally make less effort than they did formally (neglect) (Farrell 1983; Farrell & Rusbult, 1992; Rusbult, Zembrodt & Gunn, 1982; Turnley & Feldman, 1999; Withey & Cooper, 1989).

The Exit-Voice-Loyalty-Neglect (EVLN) framework is a highly flexible construct which has been applied to the exploration of behaviour in a wide variety of settings and circumstances. It is used in situations where, for one reason or another, reality has either not lived up to prior expectations, or when conditions that were once perceived to be acceptable have subsequently deteriorated. Although primarily applied to a workplace setting, the EVLN framework has been used in an educational context as a conceptual lens through which to examine the relationship a student has with their university (for example, Itzkovich & Alt 2015; Lovitts, 1996; Mahaffey, Neu & Taylor, 1991).

1.2 Personal statement

In the aftermath of the 2007/2008 financial crisis, I was made redundant from a high-paying, high-pressure job in the private sector. After some months of deliberation, and because I had previously taught in higher education, I sought sanctity in a senior lectureship at the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan). On reflection, my first four years in-post now seem like halcyon days. The team I worked within was committed, energetic, innovative and well-regarded across the institution; it was an intellectually stimulating, challenging and extremely rewarding time. Then the upheaval began. In 2013, the University entered into a lengthy consultation period

which resulted in the entreaty that up to 75 academic and 200 support staff put themselves forward for voluntary redundancy. Experienced and highly thought of colleagues left the institution in large numbers and morale was visibly sapped from the workforce. Those of us who remained adopted a 'survivor syndrome' mentality, soldiering on disheartened and demoralised.

Some time later, a few months into my Doctoral studies, a guest lecturer gave a presentation about organisational change in which he touched upon psychological contract theory and its effects on workers whose expectations were not only unmet, but had been breached or violated in some way. Listening to his lecture was an epiphany, as I mulled over the similarities between what he was describing and my own situation. I had joined the university fully expecting to remain here until retirement, carrying out a rewarding and fulfilling job within a stable and safe environment. Instead, I was feeling dispirited, disorientated and insecure. In other words, my expectations had been dashed and my psychological contract broken. With my interest aroused, I began to voraciously consume the burgeoning body of literature related to psychological contract theory in organisations. In the course of this initial investigation, I touched upon a much more slender, associated strand of research, that of EVLN. As described above, the EVLN framework has been used in a myriad of settings to explore how individuals might react if their psychological contract is violated or broken.

In the current climate of heightened fees and fierce competition between UK institutions to attract prospective students, universities are pouring ever-increasing resources into the marketing of their offer. The article I referred to at the beginning of this chapter, regarding institutional 'sales pitches', concerned me, because I believe that there may be a likelihood that universities are unable meet the expectations they propagate. That being the case, and risking psychological contract breach or violation, what would students' likely behavioural responses be to the feelings disappointment that might subsequently arise? Thus, this investigation seeks to gain a greater understanding of students' expectations and their possible behavioural responses if these expectations are unfulfilled.

1.3 Research aims and objectives

The overall aims of the research are:

1. To critically appraise the potential value of the psychological contract in general, and the EVLN framework in particular, in understanding university students' relationships with their institutions.
2. To propose ways of applying psychological contract theory and the EVLN framework in practice in order to enhance student-university relationships.

In order to meet these aims, the research has the following objectives:

1. To systematically investigate previous research into psychological contract theory and EVLN behaviours, both in the employer-employee relationship, and in the setting of higher education, in order to gain a greater understanding of the field
2. To carry out primary fieldwork to investigate student perceptions of their higher education experience at UCLan
3. To analyse the findings of the fieldwork to gain an understanding of the nature of students' expectations, beliefs, perceived promises and reciprocal obligations
4. To investigate students' likely course of action if a breach of their psychological contract were to occur
5. To contribute to the debate through the formulation of a set of conclusions and recommendations regarding the appropriate conditions for applying new methodologies to respond positively to potential student dissatisfaction.

1.4 The context of the research

The University of Central Lancashire is a modern, post-1992 institution which holds membership of the University Alliance and is currently ranked joint 67th in the UK, along with two other regional competitors: Salford University and Manchester Metropolitan University (THE, 2017b). In terms of the overall student experience, UCLan was classified joint 51st in the most recent National Student Survey with a score of 77.1. This is in comparison with Edge Hill University, the highest scoring regional competitor on this metric, at 81.4 (THE, 2017a). In the results of the 2017 Teaching Excellence Framework exercise, UCLan was awarded the designation of silver, comparing it favourably with the other 11 higher education institutions in the north west, three of which were awarded gold, six silver and three bronze (HEFCE, 2017). UCLan is one of the UK's largest universities, having a combined student and staff population of approximately 38,000 (UCLan, 2017a). The university is extremely dynamic internationally and annually welcomes students of more than 130 nationalities. Along with its aspirations to be globally recognised and active, UCLan is firmly committed to the Widening Participation agenda. It is currently leading on the well-funded, 'Future U' country-wide, collaborative project designed to develop opportunities for those from disadvantaged backgrounds who might not normally enter higher education (UCLan, 2017b).

Commensurate with its size, the university offers a portfolio of over 400 programmes of study. Whilst many of these courses are extremely buoyant and recruit well, the numbers of students

enrolling onto Business Administration, Business and Management and Business Studies programmes have decreased in recent years. This trend is in direct contrast with both the national and international picture, whereby numbers of new entrants to these specialisms have increased dramatically over the last decade (UUK, 2017: 24).

Much of the salience of this research, therefore, and its focus on the perceptions of business students, lies both in the decreasing popularity of these subjects at UCLan and in the fact that it is being undertaken at a pivotal point in the history of UK higher education. Policy developments and fluctuations have garnered media attention on an almost daily basis throughout 2016 and 2017, and the pace of change is unprecedented. For many observers, the consequent uncertainty is coupled with the fear that a once highly respected and successful system could be irretrievably broken by poor reasoning and cavalier governmental decisions (Collini, 2017; Nixon, Scullion & Hearn, 2016; Tomlinson, 2017). The implications of these policy developments are examined in greater detail in Chapter 2 which provides an overall context for the study.

1.5 Research question and main themes

The principal questions and themes addressed in this research concern the expectations that students have about their university experience and whether or not these expectations, beliefs, and perceived promises are being met. Moreover, if they remain unfulfilled, or are met initially and then breached in some way, what course of action might a student take in the face of disappointment and disillusionment? There already exists a substantial body of literature associated with the overall student experience and issues around retention and satisfaction (for example, Appleton-Knapp & Krentler, 2006; Longden, 2006; Molesworth, Nixon & Scullion, 2009; Nixon et al., 2016; Redding, 2005). However, this investigation seeks to differentiate itself through the employment of psychological contract theory and EVLN framework as lenses through which to examine the student-university relationship.

The Higher Education Green Paper of autumn 2016 cited the findings from a Student Academic Experience Survey which asserted that only 35 percent of students in England, paying fees of up to £9,000, felt they had received 'good' or 'very good' value for money (BIS, 2016:19). Taken at face value, this figure suggests that dissatisfaction is widespread amongst the student body; the underlying causes, however, remain unclear. The extent to which this disappointment leads to attrition is also unknown. It would appear, therefore, that bridging the gap between university provision and the expectations formed by students increasingly warrants investigation. Hence, this thesis seeks to gain a new understanding of how the student psychological contract

determines responses to dissatisfaction and the possible subsequent predilection towards EVLN behaviours.

1.6 Research paradigm, methodology and methods

A distinguishing feature of empirical research into both psychological contract theory and the use of the EVLN framework is that they have, almost without exception, been dominated by a positivist philosophy and quantitative methods of investigation. Examples include: Bal, de Lange, Jansen and Van der Velde (2013); Herriot, Manning and Kidd (1997); Itzkovich and Alt (2015); Robinson and Rousseau (1994); and Turnley and Feldman (1999). Positivist ontology assumes that the researcher is separate from reality and that epistemologically, an objective reality exists beyond the human mind and our understanding of it. However, this approach seems at odds with the very nature of psychological contracts and EVLN behaviours, in that they relate to subjective perceptions, expectations, beliefs and a range of emotional responses to feelings of disappointment. Bryman and Bell (2011) assert that the results of quantitative enquiry are not necessarily an accurate reflection people's actual feelings and actions. Others, writing on the subject of research design and methodology, voice similar concerns regarding the value of such methods in capturing the subtleties and complexities of human interaction and behaviours (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Lowe, 2002; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009).

The research methodology employed in this thesis adheres to interpretivist ontology in that it assumes that the researcher and reality are inseparable and that epistemologically, any knowledge pertaining to lived experience is subjectively created by our conceptions of it. However, and wishing this study to be divorced from the polemics of the 'paradigm wars', a pragmatic approach has been adopted so that debates concerning the superiority of one objective 'truth and reality' can largely be avoided. As Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998: 21) suggest, 'we believe that pragmatists consider the research question to be more important than either the method they use, or the worldview that is supposed to underlie this method'. It is the 'what works' viewpoint and use of the methodological tools available to addressing the research questions that is employed. In a pragmatic approach, a balance between subjectivity and objectivity is actively sought through the recognition that 'both observable phenomena and subjective meanings can provide acceptable knowledge' (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998: 30).

Therefore, qualitative methods of enquiry within the pragmatic paradigm are employed to meet the research questions, aims and objectives. The goal is to produce rich, thick data that relates to *verstehen* (trying to understand phenomena), rather than with *erklaren* (trying to make explanatory sense of it), (Gill & Johnson, 2010: 188). Understanding the origins of students' expectations and the relationship between these beliefs and subsequent actions, if expectations

remain unfulfilled, are at the heart of this enquiry. Dewey (1920, cited in Morgan, 2014: 1046) states that essentially, one's lived experience centres upon two inextricable questions: 'what are the sources of our beliefs? And, what are the meanings of our actions?'

Clegg, Hardy, Lawrence and Nord (2006: 462) state that:

> In the social sciences at large, there is a growing recognition of the contribution that qualitative studies can make. In the process of generating such recognition, it has been necessary to discard some of the baggage of epistemological debate.

In the same vein, Silverman (2013: 87) suggests that qualitative approaches can more fully address the 'whats' and 'hows' of lived experience and enable the exploration of circumstances and situations that 'escape the gaze of quantitative research'.

1.6.1 Research methods

Two rounds of interviews were conducted, six months apart with first year undergraduate students from three business-related programmes at UCLan: Business Administration; Business and Management; and Business Studies. Twenty-one students were interviewed at stage one and ten were re-interviewed at stage two. The structure and content of the interview questions were largely informed by the results of an earlier focus group meeting held with students from a local 'feeder institution' who were studying Business and considering entering university in 2017-2018 (although not necessarily UCLan). The interviews were transcribed and the data analysed using in vivo, open coding. A number of distinct themes emerged which are presented in detail in Chapter 5. In short however, they concern socialisation, teaching and learning, and all things financial. The findings from the interviews correspond in many ways with those of other investigations described within the literature which suggest that students enter university with a specific set of expectations that are, in many cases, unfulfilled (HEPI, 2017; Kandinko & Mawer, 2013; Koskina, 2013; Neves & Hillman, 2017; Unite Students, 2017). However, the empirical research presented here makes a distinctive contribution to the field in that the behavioural responses to dissatisfaction are explored using the Exit-Voice-Loyalty-Neglect (EVLN) framework as a mechanism for analysing these reactions. Thus, the outcomes revealed in this thesis have real-world implications for management practice, not only at UCLan, but for other universities that may be facing similar issues.

1.7 Significance and contribution to knowledge

This thesis is of significance and makes a contribution to the field for the following reasons. First, and as described in section 1.6 above, one of the limitations of previous studies of psychological contract theory and EVLN behavioural responses is that researchers have largely favoured quantitative methods of enquiry. The use of tools such as self-report questionnaires is regarded by many as unreliable in explaining the complexities and subtleties of human emotions and associated actions (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002; Saunders et al., 2009). Therefore, this thesis employs a qualitative approach. Second, the application of psychological contract theory and the use of the EVLN framework in the context of higher education is acknowledged to be an under-researched area (Clinton, 2009; Itzkovich & Alt, 2015; Koskina, 2013; O'Toole & Prince, 2015). Third, the research presented here makes a distinctive contribution to knowledge, in that the behavioural responses to dissatisfaction are qualitatively and pragmatically explored using the EVLN framework. Fourth, the majority of studies using the EVLN framework have focussed on more general responses to discontent, with only a handful of researchers making explicit links between psychological contract violation and the use of the framework (for example, Rousseau, 1995; Turnley & Feldman, 1999). This paucity of conceptual connection indicates that further investigation into this area of overlap may be warranted. And fifth, studies which have employed the EVLN framework within a higher education context have taken place overseas rather than the UK (for example, Itzkovich & Alt, 2015, Israel; Lovitts, 1996, USA; Mahaffey et al., 1991, Canada; Riaz, Ali, & Riaz, 2013, Pakistan). The purpose of the present study is, therefore, to investigate student perceptions of their higher education experience and employ the EVLN framework to explore possible responses to dissatisfaction, within a UK setting, using qualitative methods.

1.8 The structure of the thesis

Chapter One: Provides an introduction and broad overview of the thesis. It introduces the subject area and makes a case for the significance of this study in furthering our understanding of students' expectations of their academic experience and their potential reactions if these expectations are unmet.

Chapter Two: Establishes the context for the study and maps out the principal changes and events that have shaped the UK's current higher education landscape. The focus of this chapter is upon the key policies, drivers and strategies which have impacted upon the various stakeholders within the sector.

Chapter Three: Examines and critically appraises the literature surrounding psychological contract theory in general and the EVLN framework in particular. It sets out to systematically

investigate previous research, both in the employer-employee relationship and within the setting of higher education, in order to gain a greater understanding of the field. The review concludes with an outline of any gaps in the literature which could potentially provide rich seams for future investigation.

Chapter Four: Considers the research design and methodology and provides a rationale for taking a pragmatic approach to this investigation in order to address the research questions and to meet the principal aims and objectives. Building upon the data gathered from a focus group meeting, semi-structured interviews were conducted in two phases, six months apart, in order to explore students' prior expectations and actual lived experience.

Chapter Five: Considers the findings of the study and provides a general discussion with regard to the implications of the results. Beginning with a review of the research questions, the chapter goes on to analyse and explore the central themes emerging from the data sets in order to gain an understanding of how students' expectations are formed and their likely course of action if these expectations are unmet

Chapter Six: Presents the conclusion of the study and evaluates its position in relation to the extant literature and how far it has been able to make a contribution to knowledge in the field. It aims to add to the debate through the formulation of a set of conclusions and recommendations regarding the appropriate conditions for applying new methodologies to respond positively to student dissatisfaction.

1.9 Summary

This chapter has provided the backdrop for the thesis and indicated that the outcomes from the research are likely to have real-world implications for management practice within higher education. It has introduced the notion that through increased marketing activities, universities might be engendering expectations amongst the student body that they may ultimately be unable to fulfil. The next chapter sets the scene by examining the context of the UK higher education sector and exploring how far recent policy decisions have influenced the current status quo. According to Rousseau (1995: 203), 'all behavior is relative to the setting in which it occurs… context gives meaning'.

Chapter Two

The Context of Higher Education

2.1 Introduction

In his influential book, '*The Great University Gamble*', McGettigan (2013: 2) robustly and eloquently argues that:

> An experiment is being conducted on English universities; one that is not controlled and that in the absence of any compelling evidence for change, threatens an internationally admired and efficient system.

McGettigan's concerns echo those of other academics who believe that the United Kingdom's disproportionately large per capita contribution to world scholarly activity, research and knowledge risks being severely eroded if policy developments continue on their current trajectory (Back, 2016; Collini, 2017). Key governmental strategies, particularly over the last decade, have impacted heavily upon the student-university relationship through the drive towards commodifying and expanding the system. For the majority of higher education institutions (HEIs), this period has been characterised by an unprecedented level of uncertainty and upheaval brought about by heightened competition, volatility in student demand, technological advances, increased globalisation and turmoil in national politics. Changes to the sector's overall appearance, regulation and funding have forced universities to adapt and evolve to meet a myriad of shifting demands. Such developments have led scholars to contemplate and reappraise the value, role and purpose of universities and their relationship with the communities they serve (Collini, 2017; Molesworth, Nixon & Scullion 2009; Nixon, Scullion & Hearn, 2016; Tomlinson, 2017).

The purpose of this chapter, therefore, is to provide a context for the overall thesis by mapping out the principal changes and events that have shaped the current higher education landscape. The focus will be upon developments taking place specifically in England which has perhaps been most acutely affected by the policy changes referred to above. This contextual chapter is divided into three main sections, as follows: first, a descriptive overview is provided to create a 'snapshot' of the present status quo. It is based on data largely derived from government-related sources, along with that from other bodies representing the sector. Second, the policies, drivers and strategies which have together formed this landscape will be dissected and presented. And third, the chapter then goes on to explore critically the ways in which these actions and events have affected the various stakeholders within higher education. Finally, the chapter will conclude with a consideration of the possible implications for the future of the sector.

2.2 The UK higher education sector: an overview in statistics

According to Universities UK (UUK, 2017: 5), a leading representative body for the sector, by the 2015–16 academic year, there were 162 publically funded HEIs in the UK, at which a total of 2.28 million students were enrolled. The composition of the student population has changed considerably between 2006–07 and 2015-16, although the actual total number of students within the system has largely remained unaltered over that period (UUK, 2017: 2). Rather, the main transformation has been the growth in the number of female students, younger students and those from outside the UK. This expansion has been matched by contracting numbers of entrants to part-time undergraduate courses, which has fallen by 28.6 percent during the same span (UCAS, 2017: 9). Of the students who enrolled at UK universities in 2015–16, 82 percent were at a university in England. HEIs in Scotland accounted for 9.8 percent, with Wales and Northern Ireland constituting 5.9 percent and 2.3 percent respectively (UUK, 2017: 9).

Demographically, the number of British 18-year-olds has declined by 4.2 percent since 2006 and is estimated to continue falling until 2021 (ONS, 2014). However, the demand for higher education amongst this group has remained high. As can be seen in Figure 2.1, other than a small dip in 2012–13 following the introduction of £9,000 fees, numbers of entrants to the system have increased year on year.

Figure 2.1

Entry and application rates for UK-domiciled 18-year-olds, 2006 to 2015
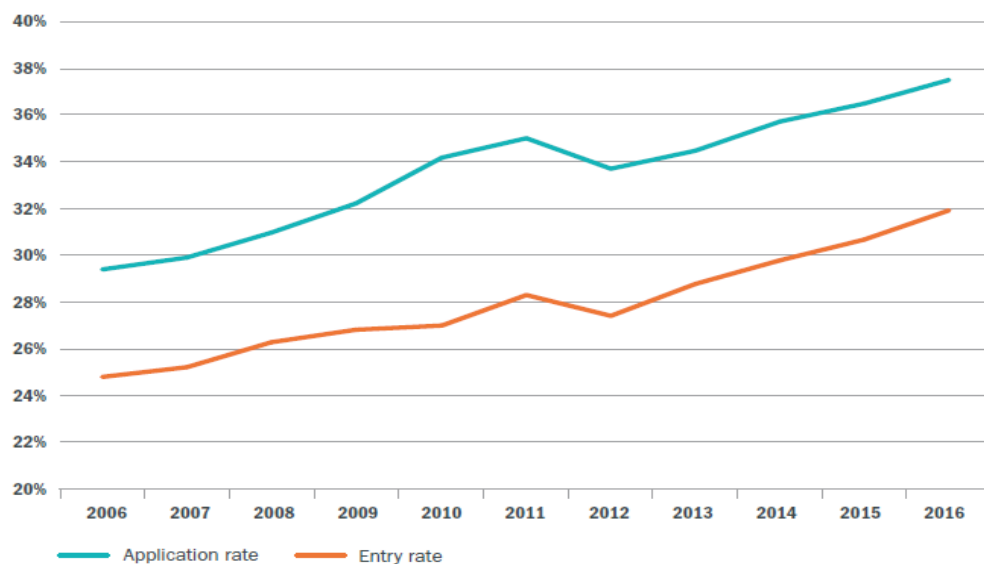
Source: (UUK, 2017: 10)

The data presented in Figure 2.1 shows the application and entry rates for all UK-domiciled entrants and includes significantly increased numbers of participants considered to be amongst the most disadvantaged in society UCAS (2017: 23). The Higher Education Funding Council for

England (HEFCE) has developed the Participation of Local Areas (POLAR) classification to distinguish between advantaged and disadvantaged entrants to the system. POLAR is a measure not of 'absolute' disadvantage but of 'relative' disadvantage and relates only to participation in higher education, not an entrant's socio-economic status (UUK, 2016: 15). According to a UCAS (2016) report, entrants from this section of society are '70 percent more likely to enter university than they were in 2006' (UCAS, 2016: 3). Noteworthy, however, is the fact that most lower income pupils enter a lower tariff group provider and, in 2016, the entry rate of these young people to lower tariff providers decreased (UCAS, 2016: 20).

POLAR3 is the latest iteration and categorises entrants to higher education into five groups, with each group representing approximately 20 percent of the population of 18-19-year-olds. The groups range from quintile 1, considered to be the most disadvantaged, to quintile 5, cited as the most advantaged. It is the quintile 5 group which enjoys the highest participation rates in higher education overall (UUK, 2017: 22). Prospective students from the quintile 1 group are 6.3 times less likely to be accepted to one of the UK's most selective universities and, on graduation, have less chance of going into professional jobs (UUK, 2016a: 4). However, figures from a variety of sources consistently show that graduates from all quintiles are less likely to be unemployed than non-graduates and earn significantly more over their working lives (HEFCE, 2015; UUK, 2016a; UCAS, 2017; UUK, 2017).

Over the last decade, there have been large increases in the number of students from all quintile groups enrolling onto science, technology, engineering and mathematics programmes (STEM subjects), as well as onto business and administrative studies. Other subjects have seen steep declines, particularly education (down 26.6 percent) and languages (down 20.6 percent) (UUK, 2017: 24). The growth in numbers onto the STEM programmes is largely the result of government intervention. However, the increased numbers of students enrolling onto business-related courses has partly been fuelled by an increased proportion of overseas students studying these subjects. This phenomenon could make such programmes vulnerable to the dangers of further immigration restrictions and volatility in the global student market and could account, therefore, for the increased drive by UK universities to open campuses overseas.

The expansion of international activities, both on and offshore, has been a strategy embraced by the vast majority of UK universities. Approximately 13.5 percent of students studying at UK institutions in 2015-16 were from non-EU countries, a four percent increase from 2006-7 (UUK, 2017: 49). More than half of all non-EU students at UK HEIs in 2015-16 were from the following five countries: China (including Hong Kong SAR); USA; India; Nigeria; and Malaysia. Of these, China is the only country currently experiencing severe decreases in its youthful population. Conversely, the number of Nigeria's young is set to surge by 52.3 percent from 20.5 million in 2010 to 31 million in 2025 (2017: 50). In 2015-16, EU nationals constituted 5.5 percent of the

total student population at UK universities, although the number fell in 2017 by five percent (UCAS, 2017: 15), possibly due to concerns about the impact of Brexit.

2.2.1 The funding of higher education in the UK

As stated by Universities UK (2017: 40), British HEIs reported income approaching £35 billion in 2015-16. Of this, just under a quarter of the total came from government funding, down from 45 percent in 2006–2007. This shift is largely the result of the financial burden being reallocated away from central government onto students (via student loans) for tuition fees. Following recommendations in the Browne Report (2010), fees, for students in England, were increased from £3,375 to a level between £6,000 and £9,000 per annum for the 2012-13 intake, with the vast majority of HEIs pitching their fee structure at the higher end of this envelope. The sustained reductions in direct funding from the government have been coupled with increased dependence throughout the UK higher education sector on international subsidies for both research and teaching provision (UUK, 2017: 63). Alongside these changes, universities are beginning to rely more heavily on income generated through knowledge-exchange activities, the commercialisation of market-ready products and services, and by providing businesses with opportunities for continuing professional development for their staff. Universities are also offering their facilities and equipment to the wider community and generating revenue from consultancy work and intellectual property rights in an attempt to bridge the shortfall in government funding. The Browne Report (2010) and its impact on the English higher education sector is discussed in detail in section 2.3 later in this chapter.

2.2.2 University Mission Groups

The sector has a number of special interest groups which inform, as well as lobby, the government on issues related to research, teaching and regulation. The most noteworthy of these are the Russell Group, the University Alliance and the Million+ Group. They vary considerably in their mission and vision by placing emphasis on some activities more than on others, for example on business engagement, research, teaching and learning. They also differ in status and in their ability to attract students, staff, research funding and investment from other sources. This is unsurprising in a UK higher education sector that is characterised by its diversity and autonomy.

Members of the Russell Group include the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, the London School of Economics, Warwick and Imperial College London, amongst 19 others. They are considered to be highly prestigious and influential and state that they represent 'twenty-four leading UK universities which are committed to maintaining the very best research, an

outstanding teaching and learning experience and unrivalled links with the business and public sector' (Russell Group, 2017). The University Alliance asserts that 'Alliance universities have been proud leaders in technological and professional education since the Industrial Revolution and are still crucial to the success of cities and sectors today' and go on to state that 'we educate the professional workforce of the future' (University Alliance, 2017). Members include: the University of Central Lancashire; Coventry University; Nottingham Trent; and Sheffield Hallam. They are generally institutions from industrialised areas that were formally polytechnics (with the exception of the Open University and Salford). The Million+ Group's English members include: Anglia Ruskin; Bedfordshire; London South Bank; Middlesex; and Staffordshire universities. They claim to believe in 'a higher education system which supports and responds to the needs of UK and international business, enterprise, professions, commerce, industry and the public and charitable sectors' (Million+, 2017). The 1994 Group, which disbanded in 2013, was also influential and was a coalition of smaller research-intensive institutions which included Lancaster, SOAS and Royal Holloway.

2.2.3 The evaluation and regulation of UK universities

The UK higher education sector is now evaluated in a number of ways, including: employment outcomes, via the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey, and by gauging student satisfaction with their programmes of study and their institution as a whole via the annual National Student Survey (NSS) (HEFCE, 2017a). The quality and world standing of UK universities' research is gauged through the results of the periodic Research Excellence Framework (REF) which replaced the Research Assessment Exercise and is the basis for the allocation of research funding to the sector (REF, 2014). The new Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) does not measure research outputs but aims to measure the quality of institutions' undergraduate teaching and learning environment and student outcomes (HEFCE, 2017b). The introduction of the TEF is bringing student progression and completion fully into the limelight, as the non-continuation rate of students is one of its metrics. The recent publication (HEFCE, 2017) of the results and ensuing controversy is discussed later in this chapter.

HEFCE is currently responsible for the distribution of funding and is the sector's principal regulator. However, this changes shortly with the establishment of the new Office for Students (OfS) which replaces it. Also prominent in the sector, as an 'arm's-length' regulatory body, is the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). This is an independent organisation run on a not-for-profit basis which advises the government on UK higher education policy and strategy, reviews universities' provision, investigates concerns and offers guidance to HEIs (QAA, 2017). The other formal representative body for UK universities is GuildHE. Many of its

members are specialist or arts-orientated institutions including: Arts University Bournemouth; Leeds College of Art; Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts; and Norwich University of the Arts (GuildHE, 2017). The following part of this chapter will now examine the significant policy developments and events that have shaped the snapshot outlined above.

2.3 Policies, drivers and strategies: shaping the sector

Building on the foundations laid by Browne, the Higher Education and Research Bill officially became an Act in April 2017 and will introduce considerable alterations to the sector. For many stakeholders, it represents 'the most significant change to higher education legislation in England since the Further and Higher Education Act 1992' (UUK, 2017: 59). There is no doubt that the 1992 Act had a dramatic impact on the sector, unifying the system by giving polytechnics university status. However, it is the proposals contained within the Browne Report (2010) which have shaped the landscape of English higher education today.

In many ways, the contents of the Browne Report were a culmination of the policy changes which preceded it and, according to McGettigan (2013: 21) 'although the previous Labour administration had commissioned the Browne Review, when it reported in October 2010, many of its suggestions were acceptable to the Conservatives now in government'. The principal recommendations contained in the Report, along with other significant policy developments, are summarised in Table 2.1 below:

Table 2.1

Date	Developments and Events	Significance
1992	Further and Higher Education Act 1992	• Polytechnics were given university status, effectively ending the 'binary system' of higher education • Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) was created
1997	Dearing Report was published	• Widening participation emphasised • Full-time students should contribute to their tuition fees • Recognition of higher education as an economic driver
1997	The QAA was established	• The quality of the teaching and learning provision offered by universities was to come under much closer scrutiny
1998	Publication of the Teaching and Higher Education Act	• Tuition fees were introduced at a rate of £1,000 per year payable upfront

2004	The Higher Education Act legislated the proposals set out in the 2003 White Paper 'The Future of Higher Education'	• Tuition fees would be increased to £3,000 from 2006-07 and would rise with inflation • Students would be able to take out loans to pay for their tuition fees • Means-tested maintenance grants were introduced • Links between universities and businesses were to be strengthened • The target for participation in higher education should increase to 50 percent
2009	Publication of 'Higher Ambitions: the future of universities in a knowledge economy', Department for Business, Innovation & Skills (BIS)	• Explicitly labelled the higher education sector as a principal driver for economic recovery following the financial crash of 2007/2008 • Restated the goal of 50 percent participation through the creation of more part-time, work based and foundation degrees • Industry to become increasingly involved with the sector by contributing to undergraduate programme design and through offering work placements
2010	Publication of 'Securing a sustainable future for higher education: an independent review of higher education funding and student finance' (Browne Report), (BIS)	Proposals included: • No limits on fees charged by universities • Elimination of the block grant administered by HEFCE • Student numbers to be uncapped • Changes to maintenance grants and loans • Deferral of the payment of fees and loans • 'Real' interest rates to be introduced • Detailed course-level information to be available for prospective students • Part-time students to be able to access loans
2012	Publication of 'Business-university collaboration: the Wilson Review' (BIS)	The eight pages of recommendations included: • Stimulation of university-business collaboration • The adoption of lower fees for students undertaking a sandwich year placement • Tax credits or grants for companies hosting students on full sandwich placements • Every full-time undergraduate student should have the opportunity to undertake an internship • Foundation degrees to be a priority development • Sector Skills Council (SSC) Kitemarking of programmes
2015	Publication of 'Higher education providers – advice on consumer protection law: Helping you comply with your obligations' Competition and Markets Authority (CMA)	• Fully framing students as customers, buying a product with consumer rights • Emphasising a contractual and value for money mind-set

2016	Publication of 'Success as knowledge Economy: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice' Higher Education White Paper (BIS)	• The link between teaching and research in higher education is uncoupled • Emphasis on market reform and support for the entry of 'challenger institutions' • Removal of minimum numbers criterion for new entrants • Creation of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) • Simplification of the regulatory landscape
2016	Publication of 'Building on success and learning from experience: An Independent Review of the Research Excellence Framework' (Stern Review). Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS)	Recommendations included: • All research-active staff should submit papers for publication • Outputs should not be portable, but remain with the institution where the author was when the work was published • Peer review should remain as the principal method of assessment • 'Impact' and 'environment' will have both institutional and Unit of Assessment (UoA) components
2017	Education and Research Bill became an Act passed by Parliament (April, 2017)	• The creation of a new Office for Students (OfS) to replace HEFCE which will have statutory responsibility for quality and standards • OfS to monitor the financial sustainability of HEIs • The creation of a register of English higher education providers • Active encouragement by the OfS for alternative providers to enter the sector • Lifting of the restrictions on the minimum size of alternative providers (a pointer towards the encouragement of private providers) • Use of the TEF to assess the quality of teaching in universities • Universities to be able to charge higher fees for 'accelerated degrees'
2017	First results of the TEF published	• Three alternative providers plus 134 HEIs were awarded either gold (45), silver (67) or bronze (25) • Of the 21 Russell Group members who took part, only eight were awarded a gold (including Oxford and Cambridge) • Bronze awards went to London School of Economics; School of African and Oriental Studies (SOAS); University of Liverpool; and University of Southampton

Sources include: (BIS, 2009, 2010, 2012, 2016; BEIS, 2016; CMA, 2015; Collini, 2017; HEFCE (2017b); HoC, 2011; McGettigan, 2013, 2015a, 2015b, 2017)

There have been a great many legislative changes since the Further and Higher Education Act (1992), as Table 2.1 indicates. Owing to the sheer number of developments, particularly over the last decade, a detailed examination of so many policy reforms is beyond the scope of this investigation. However, to summarise, the four principal changes that are likely to have the deepest and most long-lasting effects are as follows: first, the elimination of the block grant administered by HEFCE and the ensuing rise in student fees; second, the active promotion of competition between HEIs and the simplification of the regulatory landscape, thus making it easier for 'challenger institutions' to enter the sector; third, the introduction of the TEF; and fourth, the emphasis upon, and stimulation of university-business collaboration (BIS, 2010, 2016; Brown & Carasso, 2013; Collini, 2017; HEFCE, 2017b; McGettigan, 2013, 2015a). The effects of these developments and actions are discussed in more depth in the next section of this chapter.

As stated, it is the Browne Report (2010) that has arguably been most influential in moulding the English higher education sector that we see today. A year before its release, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) published 'Higher Ambitions' (2009) which provided a vision for the sustainable future of the sector based on decreased central funding and universities involving themselves in entrepreneurial, income-generating activities. Following its publication, the government set up a panel headed by John Browne, former Chief Executive of BP, to review the financing of the higher education system and how it could expand to meet the growing demand for tertiary education. The Browne Report, '*Securing a Sustainable Future for Higher Education*' was published in October, 2010 and contained eight principal recommendations:

1. No limits on the fees charged by universities with the proviso that universities will pay a levy on the income from fees above £6,000 in order to 'deter institutions from transferring costs to the government that do not match the employment returns from their courses' (BIS, 2010: 39)

2. The elimination of the block grant and withdrawal of public spending on higher education through HEFCE, in all but 'priority' courses such as medicine, science and engineering (BIS, 2010: 27)

3. The removal of limits on the number of students that universities can admit (except in medicine and dentistry) (BIS, 2010: 32)

4. All students to be entitled to a non-means tested, flat rate maintenance loan of £3,750 per year and cost-of-living grants to rise to £3,250 (BIS, 2010: 35)

5. Deferral of the repayment of fees and loans until the graduate is working and that repayment should be linked to income. The threshold to rise from £15,000 in 2010 to £21,000 per annum from 2016. Unpaid debts to be 'written off' after 30 years, rather than the then current 25 (BIS, 2010: 35)

6. The introduction of 'real' interest rates on the outstanding balance of inflation plus 2.2 percent (BIS, 2010: 35)

7. Student choice to be increased, through the provision of more detailed information at course level and closer integration between the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) and the Student Loans Company (SLC), plus the introduction of Student Charters (BIS, 2010: 31)

8. Higher education to be 'free at the point of entry for all students regardless of the mode of study'. A step taken to encourage more part-time students into higher education. (BIS, 2010: 36)

In principle, the Browne Report was welcomed by a sector that had lobbied hard over the point that the then current levels of tuition fees (£3,375) were insufficient if the UK Government wanted to maintain an international reputation for quality and excellence. Routes toward additional investment into the sector had to be addressed. However, the increased competition between institutions for 'market share' and the spiralling student debt that we see today are perhaps underestimated consequences of the implementation of the Browne Report. Although the intention was not for students to bear the brunt of the increase in fees, the high level of default experienced by the Student Loan company (SLC) is testament to the inherent difficulties in running this 'system' effectively.

McGettigan (2013: 22) asserts that the majority of the recommendations outlined in the Browne Report were passed in a 'snap vote held in the House of Commons on 9th December 2010', meaning that, essentially, the vote was taken in haste with little opportunity for MPs to debate fully the Report's contents. However, because of the financial crisis in 2007/08 and the subsequent austerity measures placing increased pressure on public spending, it seems likely that most of these recommendations would have been passed anyway.

2.3.1 The Higher Education and Research Act 2017

Building on the foundations laid by Browne, the Higher Education and Research Bill officially became an act in April 2017 and will introduce further significant alterations to the sector. Prior to the Act being given Royal Assent, UUK and GuildHE wrote a joint letter to Ministers signalling their support for Bill. They asserted that 'the current regulatory framework has not kept up with the implications of fundamental changes to tuition fees, with increased competition and with the growth in the numbers of alternative providers' (Holmwood, 2017). As the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) states, 'this is a complex area where there are multiple trade-offs to be managed and where there are no simple or costless reforms available that would unambiguously improve the system' (IFS, 2017: 30).

In short, there are three notable changes central to the Act. The first is the creation of a new Office for Students (OfS). The main remit of this new regulatory body is to promote quality,

provide greater choice and opportunities for students, foster equality in connection with access and participation, and to encourage competition between providers. The OfS has the power to suspend or remove an institution from the register for failing to comply with its benchmarks and is responsible for 'rating the quality of, and the standard applied to, higher education' (IFS, 2017: 17). The utilisation of the TEF as a yardstick for the measurement of teaching quality is the second mainstay of the Act, while the third change is the active encouragement by the OfS for alternative providers to enter the sector. Alternative providers are defined as 'any provider of higher education courses which does not directly receive annual funding from HEFCE' (HEFCE, 2017). In the initial stages of developing the legislation, restrictions were proposed on the minimum size of alternative providers, as well as on having a demonstrable, previously successful track record; these limitations have, however, been removed (McGettigan, 2017a).

2.4 Policies, drivers and strategies: effects on stakeholders

Issues relating to higher education received attention from all sections of the UK media on an almost daily basis throughout 2017. In August, Nick Timothy (2017), former aide to Prime Minister Theresa May, launched a stinging attack in the Daily Telegraph newspaper concerning the government's policies towards student fees. His criticisms resonate with those of many others commenting on the state of higher education in the UK and particularly in England (Adonis, 2017; Collini, 2017; McGettigan, 2017a). Timothy argues a number of points. First, he suggests that only students attending the 'best' institutions (such as those who have membership of the Russell Group) are likely to derive any financial benefit from undertaking a degree programme. Second, he disputes the received wisdom that more graduates in the marketplace are leading to greater economic growth. And third, he argues that over three quarters of all graduates will never fully pay off the debt they have accrued, because of low wages and the relatively high interest rates charged to students (6.1 percent from September 2017). On this point he states that the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) calculates that student loans will add 11.1 percent of GDP to the national debt by the late 2030s (Timothy, 2017).

For students entering higher education in 2012, the government raised tuition fees from £3,375 per year to a maximum of £9,000 and, by doing so, effectively ended the career of Nick Clegg, the then Deputy Prime Minister, leader of the Liberal Democrats and Coalition partner with the Conservatives. In 2010, Clegg had signed an NUS pledge not to raise student fees and was later forced to apologise on camera to the British people, not, it should be noted, 'for the policy, but for signing the NUS pledge' McGettigan (2013: 22). Five years on, the aftermath of the increase in fees led Timothy (2017) to state that 'we have created an unsustainable and ultimately pointless Ponzi scheme, and young people know it'. His views contrast markedly with those of Jo Johnson, the then Minister of State for Universities, who put funding and finance at

the heart of a speech he delivered in July 2017. In it, he refers to a number of 'misconceptions' prevalent throughout the higher education sector and the media:

> First, the idea that interest rates on student loans is excessive, even usurious. Second, the suggestion that because a significant proportion of students do not repay in full, that the system is broken. Third, and most indefensibly, the accusation that the system is deterring the poorest students from University.

Later in the same speech, Johnson (2017), went on to say that as a result of the changes in the way that higher education is financed, 'young people from the poorest areas are now 43 percent more likely to go to university than they were in 2009/10'. Statistically, this may be true. However, findings published in the report by Emmerson, Johnson and Joyce for the IFS (2017: 2) point to a rather bleak future for those from this section of society. According to IFS calculations, students from the poorest backgrounds will accrue debts of approximately £57,000 over the course of an average three-year degree programme. The debt situation for the most disadvantaged has been further compounded, beginning with the 2016-17 intake, by the replacement of maintenance grants with loans. An earlier IFS Report (2013: 27) had warned against such an action as it could be 'politically difficult in light of concerns about the accessibility of higher education for those from disadvantaged backgrounds'. Nonetheless, the abolition of maintenance grants was announced in the Summer Budget 2015, thereby saving the government over £2 billion per year and essentially transferring the financial burden onto those who can least afford it (Emmerson et al., 2017: 129). From September 2017, not only will the interest rates on student loans increase to 6.1 percent (12 times the Bank of England base rate (BoE, 2018), but institutions will be allowed to increase the maximum fees that they charge year-on-year in-line with the Retail Price Index (RPIX), (UUK, 2017: 54).

Despite the potential for future financial hardship for the underprivileged, the government continuously restates its overriding objective of removing 'barriers to access to higher education, especially for prospective students from disadvantaged backgrounds' (Johnson, 2017). This policy appears to be working as the application rate of young people from these backgrounds rose to 22.1 percent in 2017; the highest yet recorded (UCAS, 2017).

The IFS (2017: 3) states that English graduates have amongst 'the highest student debts in the developed world', a situation that many commentators find both unacceptable and unsustainable (Martin, 2016; Wolf, 2016). Indeed, McGettigan (2013: 21) maintains that research commissioned during the Browne Review revealed that the majority of full-time students and parents surveyed thought the government should contribute to at least half the costs of higher education, because its benefits are not only personal also but societal. He goes on to assert that 'this striking finding did not appear in the Report and had to be revealed through a Freedom of Information request produced by Times Higher Education' (2013: 21). The apportionment of

fees was broached in a recent survey of students conducted on behalf of the Higher Education Academy (HEA) and the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) by Neves and Hillman (2017: 50). Of the 14,057 students surveyed, the vast majority believed that the government should contribute most of the funding, although not necessarily all of it.

2.4.1 Higher education as a commodity

Tomlinson (2017) suggests that the commodification and marketization of the sector over the last decade are fundamentally changing the way that higher education is perceived by both the media and its various stakeholders. His views align with those of other critics (Brown & Carasso, 2013; Collini, 2017; Gibbs, 2012; Haywood & Scullion, 2017) and echo the much earlier suggestion by Naidoo (2003: 250) that the sector is gradually being reframed as a 'lucrative service that can be sold in the global market place' and that this mind set 'has begun to eclipse the social and cultural objectives of higher education'. In the same vein, McGettigan (2013: 3) argues that there is an increasing perception that higher education can be offered and run by providers in the same way as utilities, such as gas and electricity. Packaging education as a product or service has prompted Universities UK (2017b) to voice concerns that academics, rather than designing engaging, fulfilling learning opportunities for students, will turn their attentions to meeting targets and key performance indicators, thereby diluting the student experience.

Gibbs (2012: 37) states that 'much of the rhetoric about the value of a higher education market treats students as purchasers, customers or consumers. These terms are an anathema to much of higher education'. He goes on to assert that 'students do not consume knowledge but construct it in a personal way in the context of learning environments that include teaching: they are co-producers and collaborators'. The recent involvement in higher education of the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) further reinforces the wider perception of the sector's offerings as a commodity. Their report (2015: 11) states that:

> It is our view that higher education providers are acting for purposes relating to their trade, business or profession when providing educational services and will be a "trader" or "seller" or "supplier" for the purposes of consumer protection legislation.

The report (2015: 31) goes on to assert that:

> When a higher education provider makes an offer of a place to a prospective student, and the offer is accepted, in our view a contract is made between the higher education provider and student.

Tomlinson (2017: 451) suggests that CMA involvement and statements such as these, along with virtually all, official post-Browne rhetoric, implies that students are now considered to be logical and rational customers who are able to competently evaluate and differentiate between the products and services that they are 'buying'. In this respect, his views align with those of Nixon et al. (2016: 4) who also question the notion of the student-consumers' ability to discriminate between offerings. There is an increasing political requirement for the transparency of university data on metrics concerning: student experience, satisfaction, retention, and employment outcomes which are all aimed at influencing student choice. According to the Browne Report (BIS, 2010: 27), this is because 'students are best placed to make judgements about what they want to get from participating in higher education'. The Report (2010: 27) goes on to state that 'students will decide where the funding should go, and institutions will compete to get it. As students will be paying more, they will demand more in return'. The central assumption being made here is that the provision of detailed, course-level information will lead to more choice being given to discerning student-customers, the consumers of educational commodities.

2.4.2 Students' perceptions of themselves as consumers

It is thought-provoking to explore the notion of 'getting what you are paying for' from the students' point of view and to examine to what extent they see themselves as active consumers of an educational product. A study undertaken by Tomlinson (2014) for the HEA explored this subject, discovering that the participants fell into roughly three categories. He describes the first as 'active service users', stating that the 25 percent of students falling into this category 'typically referred to themselves as "users of a service" or "paying customers"' and that they are very aware of the investment they are making and expect the institution to 'facilitate positive future outcomes' (2014: 29). The second group, approximately half of the sample, Tomlinson labels as 'positioned consumers'. These students hold the view that their university experience is a 'two-way street' and that they have a significant role to play in deriving the most benefit from it. He states that they feel that they have a responsibility to uphold their 'part of the agreement' in the exchange (2014: 33). The final 25 percent, which Tomlinson calls 'resistors', are students who see their academic journey as a means to becoming 'better individuals'. They believe that the prevalent consumerist discourse not only undermines their 'status as learners, but also the process of attaining a degree' (2014: 33).

The results of Nixon et al.'s (2016: 8) study differ in that they found Tomlinson's 'active service users' mentality to be far the most widespread ethos amongst the student body. Their study was, however, conducted in a research-intensive university whereas Tomlinson (2014: 15), gathered the views of students at universities from all the main mission groups (27 from the Russell Group; 14 from 1994 Group; 20 from post-1992; and nine from GuildHE). This may

account for the difference in perceptions, or it may be that in the two years between the studies, a consumerist mind-set has become more deeply entrenched in the psyche of students. Either way, Nixon et al. (2016: 8) suggest that marketization rewards 'student narcissism via the valorisation of demands that stem from infantile anxieties' and undermines opportunities for deep and fulfilling learning experiences. Among the respondents in their study, there appeared to be a wholesale acceptance of 'spoon-feeding' as a method of teaching and that challenging tasks were viewed as both unrewarding and unenjoyable. They also point to increasing instrumentalism coupled with diminishing intellectual curiosity and the love of learning for its own sake. Nixon et al. (2016: 9) provide a telling example:

> And he said [the lecturer], "Oh you'll have to redo it" and I was like "Oh what? I've been here for two hours … is this marked?" and he was like "No" and I was like "Oh well I'm not doing it then …". To me if it's not marked and I hate it, I'm just not going to do it, I might as well turn my attention to something where it's credited … So I was just like, whatever, I don't need to do it, it isn't important to me.

Bunce, Baird and Jones (2016) also studied the relationship between a student-as-consumer mind-set and academic performance and attainment. In their investigation (2016: 7), 608 students from 35 English universities across the spectrum of institutional types completed a short on-line survey. The broad aim of the study was to test the hypothesis that the greater the consumerist mind-set, the poorer the students' academic performance would be. Their measures of consumer orientation were based on an earlier study by Saunders (2014) and required respondents to rate their level of agreement with a number of statements such as 'I am entitled to leave university with a good grade because I am paying for it' and 'I think of myself primarily as a paying customer of the university' (Saunders, 2014, cited in Bunce et al., 2016: 4). Their findings confirm their initial hypothesis and suggest that students who have an elevated sense of entitlement and a consumerist ethos, who adopt instrumental approaches and who do not immerse themselves in their academic experience are more likely to perform badly in their studies (Bunce et al., 2016: 13). Yet, and in-line with Tomlinson's (2014) outcomes, it is this section of the student body that is most likely to disparage their university experience.

2.4.3 Student experience, engagement and satisfaction

A myriad of factors impact upon students' experiences of university life, including their relationships with academic staff and with each other; issues concerning finance and funding; curriculum design and delivery; universities' vision, mission and values; and students' own mental health and wellbeing (Barnett, 2017; Douglas et al., 2015; Thomas 2012, 2017; Woodall, Hiller & Resnick, 2014). The literature surrounding student engagement, satisfaction and overall

experience is vast and far beyond the scope of this investigation. However, there are three noteworthy areas of study which are complex and intertwined, yet merit separate attention and inclusion: (i) the role, purpose and mission of universities in today's ever-changing higher education sector; (ii) HEIs' attempts to manage students' expectations by means of formal 'Charters'; and (iii) the subtle shift within the literature away from identifying students as 'consumers' towards them being framed as 'partners' and 'co-producers'.

2.4.3.1 The role, purpose and mission of today's universities

The title of Collini's book (2012) '*What are Universities for?*' poses a question that has frequently been asked, particularly over the last decade, concerning the role, purpose and mission of today's universities. Arriving at an appropriate answer, however, has eluded many of the sector's commentators (for example, Barnett, 2017; Deboick, 2010; McGettigan, 2013, 2015b). Collini (2012: ix) suggests that the complexity of the likely response would be akin to 'the ball of reasoning' rolling 'down the slope of justification', whose probable destination 'is a muddy pond of abstract nouns in which all distinctiveness gets lost'. His view that universities have somehow lost their way echoes that of Barnett (2017: 82) who asserts that universities' raison d'être is being undermined by the forces of 'marketization, commodification, performativity, competition and overweening bureaucracy'. He goes on to argue that the university's position as a place of 'critical dialogue, freedom of thought and expression and unconditioned creativity' is being severely eroded. In a speech of 2010, David Willetts argued for the continuing relevance of Newman's '*The Idea of the University*' published in 1852, in which universities were regarded as 'a community of thinkers, engaging in intellectual pursuits not for any external purpose, but as an end in itself' (Newman, 1852 cited in Deboick, 2010). Willett's assertions have particular resonance in that, as the then Minister for Universities, he was essentially the architect of the increase in tuition fees to £9,000 and, therefore, instrumental in creating the commodified system in place today. Although many university mission statements continue to espouse the love of learning and improvement of the mind as their ultimate goals, the reality of a contemporary marketized and commodified sector means that these lofty statements of intent and value are largely empty rhetoric (Collini, 2012; McGettigan, 2013).

2.4.3.2 Student Charters: managing students' expectations

There is no doubt that the increase in student fees has placed additional pressure on universities to clearly detail their provision and explain how their offering differs from that of other, comparator institutions (Barnett, 2017; Browne, 2010; Nixon et al., 2016; Tomlinson, 2017). The Student Charter Group was established in 2010 and tasked with investigating the use of

Student Charters and other similar agreements in elucidating what students can expect from their institution and reciprocally, what their university expects of them. In the report presented to David Willetts in January 2011, the Group recommended that every HEI should publish a bespoke Student Charter outlining how students will be supported in their learning as well as communicating the 'ethos of the institution' (Student Charter Group, 2011: 8). The recommendations covered all aspects of university life including: 'teaching, learning, research and assessment; diversity, respect and communication; complaints, appeals and discipline; and personal development and employment' (Student Charter Group, 2011: 9). UCLan's Student Charter, for example, informs its prospective and current students that amongst the commitments made by academic staff are: the creation of 'inspiring, engaging and stimulating learning opportunities' and the provision of 'timely academic pastoral support including a named academic advisor' (UCLan, 2018). As will be seen in Chapter 5 of this thesis, there appears to be something of a mismatch between the 'promises' made and the students' actual lived experience.

The Leeds Partnership, first created in 2014, is an especially detailed example of a Student Charter in which a mutually agreed range of expectations of students, academics and members of the wider university community has been drawn up (Leeds Partnership, 2018). The use of language within this 'contract' is of particular interest as it reflects the trend of framing students not as consumers, but as associates embarking on a collaborative educational journey.

2.4.3.3 Students as partners

In her unpublished DBA, Croney (2016: 16), cites the ways in which the student-university relationship has begun to be referred to within the literature. For example: students as 'Co-producers' (McCulloch, 2009), 'Learners' (Acevedo, 2011), and as 'Partners' (Gruber, Reppel & Voss, cited in Regan, 2012). This multiplicity of identities moves away from the idea that students are simply consumers of an educational product and frames them as collaborators within an experiential academic relationship. This concept is explored further within the present study in Chapter 3 where the notion of the student-consumer is examined in more detail. Croney (2016: 17) goes on to assert that in viewing themselves as consumers, students 'become disengaged and lack responsibility for their role in the learning process'. Her views align with those of Healy, Flint and Harrington (2014: 55) who suggest that,

> …the partnership in learning and teaching represents a sophisticated and effective approach to student engagement because it offers the potential for a more authentic engagement with the nature of learning itself and the possibility of genuinely transformative learning experiences for all of those involved.

However, if more recent studies are to be believed, the ideal of partnership loses out to the reality of the consumerist and instrumental mind-sets which have become entrenched in the psyche of many students today (Bunce et al., 2016; Nixon et al., 2016; Tomlinson, 2017).

2.4.4 Value for money and perceptions of quality

The Browne Report (BIS, 2010: 10) makes an explicit link between inter-university competition and heightened quality by stating that:

> Our proposals are designed to create genuine competition for students between higher education institutions, of a kind which cannot take place under the current system. This is in our view a surer way to drive up quality than any attempt at central planning.

However, there is scant evidence to support this assumption and significant data suggesting the contrary. Neves and Hillman (2017: 5) assert, for example, that students increasingly believe that value for money is diminishing. Figure 2.2 below shows the gradual decline in students' belief that their course represents 'good or very good' value for money and an almost corresponding rise in the perception that their course is of either 'poor or very poor' value.

Figure 2.2
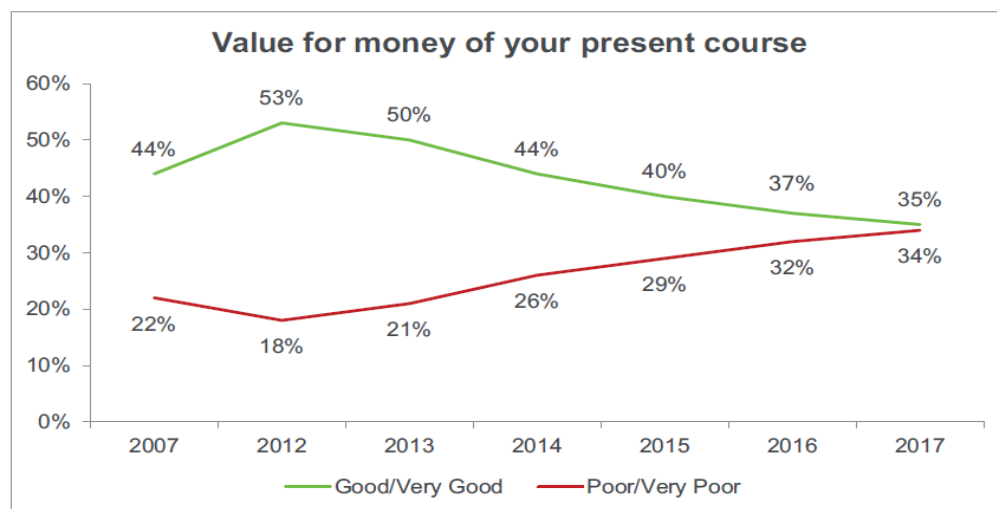
Base: All respondents. 2007 (14,859); 2012 (9,058); 2013 (17,090); 2014 (15,046); 2015 (15,129); 2016 (15,221); 2017 (14,057).

Source: Neves and Hillman (2017: 12)

Figure 2.2 clearly shows a deterioration in students' perception of value for money but, as Neves and Hillman (2017: 7) suggest, the findings 'point towards value being linked to a complex combination of factors, not least a gradual change in what students expect from their experience'. They go on to say that 'key to the overall experience is meeting student expectations, and this is another core measure that appears to be declining'. Universities'

increasing failure to meet students' expectations is discussed in more detail below and also in Chapter 3.

Neves and Hillman (2017: 19) found that only a quarter of students felt that their experience had been better than they had expected it to be. The main sources of dissatisfaction were threefold: lack of support for independent study; too little interaction with staff; and staff being inaccessible (2017: 20). Many of their findings are similar to those presented in the Unite/HEPI survey (2017). The survey's purpose was to gauge the opinions and expectations of applicants to higher education. The report, '*Reality Check*' was the outcome and it summarises the key findings across four areas: 'teaching, learning and employability; mental health and wellbeing; accommodation and social integration; and readiness for student life'. In all areas, the reality of student life fell short of their expectations; what they had anticipated and what they were experiencing were incongruent. There was less support both academically and with regard to mental health issues than expected. They made fewer friends and went out less than anticipated, and were far less prepared for making the transition to student life than they thought they were. Overall the findings show 'significant disparities between what they assume life is like at university, and what it is actually like for most students' (Unite/HEPI, 2017: 5).

Increased dissatisfaction and its underlying causes have been observed by other commentators such as Woolcock (2017), who states that 'there has been growing frustration that undergraduates paying £9,000 a year in tuition fees are not guaranteed high-quality teaching and have poor access to professors'. Perhaps as a consequence, the relationship between quality and value for money is being increasingly challenged in the context of higher education, yet the question arises as to how quality-related value for money can be measured.

When the data presented in Figure 2.2 above were interrogated on a course-by-course basis, medicine and dentistry were at the top of the value-related scale, with 58 percent of respondents indicating that their course represents good or very good value for money. Conversely, second from the bottom was business studies (28 percent) with almost three quarters of these students believing they were deriving either poor or very poor value from their programmes (Neves & Hillman, 2017: 14). This statistic might be linked to students' workload on business studies courses as it appears to be comparatively light, with an average of 10 hours of contact time and 11 independent study hours. Conversely, medicine has an average of 19 hours contact time and 16 independent study hours (2014: 32). Business studies also fares poorly with regard to retention. On this metric, 41 percent of students state that they would have chosen another programme of study if they could choose their course again (2017: 21). Perhaps unsurprisingly, Neves and Hillman (2017: 16) found strong links between perceptions of value and those of teaching quality. Their research reveals that, overall, the level of agreement with statements such as 'teaching staff clearly explained course goals and

requirements' and 'teaching staff motivated you to do your best work' display an upwards trend, possibly reflecting the growing emphasis on teaching quality throughout the sector (2017: 37). However, when the data were broken down by institution type, student responses from the Russell Group showed agreement levels with these statements that were 20 percent and 12 percent respectively, and were the lowest in the table (2017: 38). What is interesting here is that, in this survey, the Russell Group scored most highly on value for money and worst on teaching quality, which might indicate that students at these institutions have a different perception of the concept of value.

Often cited as tangible indicators of value for money are the development of employability skills during a student's academic journey and the ability to obtain a graduate job on completion of their studies (CBI, 2011; Kandinko & Mawer, 2013; Koskina, 2013). There is much evidence to suggest that students, and in particular those who are post A-level and younger, see university primarily as a pathway to advance their careers and believe that that the possession of a degree will significantly enhance their employment prospects. This opinion aligns with the findings of Nixon et al. (2016: 2) who claim that very many young people choose to go to university because their perception is that it will be a passport to a better life, through securing a well-paid job.

Employability and employment outcomes are central to the recommendations in the Browne Report with the assertion that 'courses that deliver improved employability will prosper, those that make false promises will disappear' (BIS, 2010: 33). In addition, a new performance yardstick is being introduced to run alongside the DLHE. The Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEO) data set will look at employment and earnings of graduates one, three and five years after graduation and aims to present a broader picture than the 'snapshot' currently provided by the DLHE (Johnson, 2017).

2.4.5 The Teaching Excellence Framework

One of the pillars of the Higher Education and Research Act (2017) is the introduction and trialling of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), which is intended to provide a new yardstick of educational quality. At its heart is the vision that this mechanism will present prospective students and their families with a more accurate picture of the level of quality that can be expected from the teaching and learning at their chosen institution. However, this concept has been seriously called into question following the publication of the first results in June 2017. Writing in the Times, Woolcock (2017) comments on the ensuing furore in which Sir Christopher Snowden, vice-chancellor of Southampton University, said the rankings were 'irrational, lacked credibility and had needlessly damaged the reputation of British higher education, generating negative headlines across the globe'. The nub of the problem lies in the fact that of the 'elite' Russell Group universities, only eight of the 21 who took part were rated

at the highest level. Formerly, this group of universities were largely measured on their research output and impact rather than on teaching quality. Bennett (2017), amongst others, argues that under that system, 'undergraduates complain that they do not always feel the benefits of research, especially if it means that their tutors are more concerned with getting work published than teaching and assessing students' work'. This assertion reflects one of the principal reasons for the introduction of the TEF. Johnson (2017) states that 'for too long, institutional incentives have led universities to prioritise research performance over teaching and learning outcomes. The TEF puts in place new reputational and financial incentives to correct this imbalance'.

As a consequence of the TEF, teaching quality has, for the first time, been put under the spotlight and the findings appear to be rather uncomfortable for some of England's most venerated institutions. The London School of Economics, along with Goldsmith's, SOAS, and the University of Liverpool, like Southampton, were only designated bronze in the first TEF review. Awarding at this level has effectively put them on a par with low-ranking, low-tariff institutions such as the University of Cumbria, Farnborough College of Technology and the University of Suffolk (HEFCE, 2017b). Writing in the Times, Bennett (2017), accuses these badly performing Russell Group providers of 'short-changing students with poor lectures, aloof tutors or second-rate facilities'. However, the crux of the argument is not necessarily the rating level, but the reliability of the TEF as an accurate yardstick of quality.

According to the Royal Statistical Society (RSS, 2016), two of the measures in particular are cause for concern: the use of DLHE data and the reliance on the NSS results for 2017. In their response to BIS's Technical Consultation (year 2) on the TEF, the RSS noted some potential inconsistencies in the framework, as well as areas of potential bias. They regard the addition of the highly skilled employment metric as being 'premature' stating that there is no discernible evidence that 'employment outcomes are valid indicators of teaching quality' and they also question how far the DLHE survey in its present form is a suitable source of data (RSS, 2016: 2). This echoes Gibbs' (2012: 14) assertion that these statistics are 'extremely difficult to interpret in trustworthy ways' owing to the 'unreliability of the data and institutional variability in the way data is collected'. The RSS were also disturbed by the fact that 'satisfaction' as measured by the NSS, was being equated to teaching quality. They argue that 'we are not aware that there is any evidence of a statistical association between the two concepts. What some research does show, is that there is no reliable association between the two' (RSS, 2016: 1). They also suggest that within the NSS, a certain amount of 'gaming' occurs whereby universities 'incentivise' positive responses and assert that 'this practice is almost always found in situations where "high stakes" assessments are used and the further use of the NSS within the TEF will lead to even higher stakes for institutions and their students' (RSS, 2016: 4).

The decision to use NSS data in the TEF gave rise to many students boycotting the survey in 2017, potentially skewing the results. The reason for their refusal to participate was the government's proposal to allow high performing institutions to increase their fees year-on-year in-line with inflation. In the end, when the Bill became an Act, the link between the two was effectively put on hold until 2020-21, following an independent review of the TEF due to take place in 2018. This means that fees will still rise annually across the board in-line with the Retail Price Index (RPIX), but that these increases will not be linked to TEF performance. Any other upward changes in fees before 2020-21 will need to be approved by both Houses of Parliament. Significantly, universities' participation in the first TEF was on a voluntary basis with the government offering the inducement of differentiated fees to encourage involvement. McGettigan (2015a) suggests that removing this incentive will discourage institutional involvement in future TEF exercises and may ultimately lead to the system's demise.

The issues identified here are complex and intertwined. With fees rising across the board anyway, will prospective students be deterred from applying to institutions that rate poorly in the TEF? Or will the kudos of attending a prestigious, 'world ranking' university and the potential economic advantage that may bring, outweigh what might be perceived as a less than adequate educational experience? With institutions competing more fiercely to attract students, how far is teaching quality an issue compared to institutional reputation? With a lack of any fee-generated incentive, will institutions opt out of future TEF reviews in favour of seeking a higher position in a relevant 'ranking' (Times Higher; QS; Shanghai Jiao Tong, for example) where their national or international position may be perceived as a stronger marketing tool, in a fiercely competitive landscape? Or will other factors emerge as the key indicators that will position a university relative to its competitors?

2.4.6 Competition between institutions

Amongst the principal pillars of the Brown Report (2010), The Higher Education White Paper (2016) and the Higher Education and Research Act (2017) is the encouragement of competition between providers. All three suggest that the provision of more information at course level will enable prospective students to differentiate between programmes of study and so make informed choices as to which provider will best fulfil their academic aspirations. However, as Haywood and Scullion (2017: 11) assert, this might be a counterproductive strategy which overwhelms prospective students and their parents in the decision-making process. The competition for students between institutions will likely intensify as lower-ranked universities lose out to middle and high ranking ones. Writing in the Times Higher Education (THE), Else (2017) suggests that the 5.7 percent decrease in applications in 2017 is a 'continuation of the trend seen in 2016 when lower ranked universities were squeezed by prestigious rivals'.

According to UCAS (2016: 25), 'acceptances to higher and medium tariff providers increased in 2016 to their highest number on record whilst acceptances to lower tariff providers fell for the first time since 2012'. In 2017, the numbers of applications and acceptances of 18-year-olds have risen marginally, but it is the English over-25s bracket that has seen the biggest fall in applications, down 9.7 percent (Else, 2017). It may be that lower tariff providers will simply be forced to exit the market, or to reposition their offering to focus on degree apprenticeships and accelerated, 'fast track' degrees.

Elmes (2015) asserts that in the scramble to attract both students and staff, universities' expenditure on their estates rose by 25 percent across the sector. According to UUK (2017: 46), this type of investment is ultimately unsustainable and voice concerns that the 'net liquidity' for universities has fallen dramatically across the board. Net liquidity relates to a university's ability to meet its financial obligations on a short-term basis and UUK's data show that this is expected to decrease from 126 days in 2014–15, to 67 days in 2017–18. They suggest that this situation is being caused by universities spending heavily on refurbishment and new buildings, meaning that many are now not holding large financial reserves.

When Neves and Hillman (2017: 48) asked their survey participants 'In which areas would you most/least prefer your university to save money?', students responded by ranking 'spending less on buildings' and spending less on sports/social facilities' highly on the 'most prefer' scale. Among the least preferred ways that they wanted their universities to save money, were, unsurprisingly, 'reducing student support services' and 'reducing spending on learning facilities'. This last response is contradictory because an institution updating the teaching environment might well need to spend money on its buildings. Neves and Hillman (2017: 48) assert that:

> This conundrum could be explained by students not wanting to live and study on a building site, although there is clearly a contribution that commissioning new buildings can make to improving the environment and image of the university and its community, as well as improving the learning facilities housed within them.

Nixon et al. (2016: 3) argue that refurbishments and 'make-overs' are only likely to increase as universities race to differentiate themselves and look more attractive to prospective students in the hope of enhancing their market share. However, all of this comes at a price at a time when student numbers are falling, particularly in lower-tariff institutions.

The 2016 Higher Education White Paper makes it clear that if universities are failing for whatever reasons, be it overspending or under recruiting, there will be no financial rescue package on offer. Indeed, as Boxall (2016) argues, their 'exit would be welcomed as a way of freeing up room in the market for more entrepreneurial and innovative new entrants'. He goes on to suggest that although the government may anticipate that there will be a rush of new

providers to plug the gaps, this is improbable because, as he asserts, many of the newly impoverished universities are likely to be in areas of social deprivation and therefore not a potentially lucrative new market for a private institution. Alternative providers have tended to concentrate their activities in highly prosperous areas, offering professionally-focussed programmes to the elite, and charging handsomely for them. One such example is Regent's University, London which was conferred university status in 2013 and which charges £16,400 for a year-long, top up programme in BA (Hons.) Global Management (Regent's University, 2017).

2.4.7 Alternative providers

Neves and Hillman (2017) included a small sample of students from alternative providers, which is the first time that data from these cohorts has been incorporated in the annual Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) survey since it first ran in 2006. This reflects the government policy towards encouraging increased competition in the sector and the relaxation of the stringent regulations which had previously hampered growth (McGettigan, 2015b). According to BIS (2016: 10) 'making it easier for these providers to enter and expand will help drive up teaching standards overall; enhance the life choices of students; drive economic growth; and be a catalyst for social mobility'. On the face of it, alternative providers do appear to be offering an enhanced experience. Neves and Hillman (2017) assert that on all their principal survey measures, which include teaching quality and value for money, the 66 respondents at these institutions report a more positive experience than their counterparts at more established providers. Interestingly, many alternative providers offer less actual contact hours than mainstream institutions, which challenges the conventional wisdom that perceptions of value for money and quality are directly linked to the number of taught hours (2017: 28). This somewhat undermines the worth of the inclusion in the TEF pilot of the 'teaching intensity' metric, which collects data on staff input. It also supports Graham Gibbs' (2010: 22) central argument that essential to good student outcomes is the quality of engagement with the learning process and that there is no discernible relationship between class contact hours and performance. However, and in contrast, Johnson (2017) asserts that teaching intensity is directly related to value for money and that increasing contact time will have a positive impact on outcomes.

2.5 Conclusion

As Neves and Hillman (2017: 53) state, 'the volume and pace of change has never been greater than now', yet the political and social ramifications of recent policy developments are still to be understood. The UK, and particularly the English higher education landscape has profoundly altered within the last decade. Marketisation and the consumerist mind set prevalent amongst contemporary students is beginning to shape curriculum content and even affect the professional identities of academics themselves (Nixon et al., 2016). Government and media rhetoric are fuelling the expectations and demands of a growing student body and universities seem to be struggling to deliver on the promises they are making. New entrants to the sector in the form of alternative providers are exacerbating the pressure for universities to maintain or even grow their 'market share'. And as predicted by Naidoo and Jamieson as long ago as 2005, it is the lower ranking, lower tariff institutions that are the most vulnerable to market conditions. How then will they survive? The answer might lie in repositioning themselves as providers of degree apprenticeships and accelerated degrees, a move that would be tantamount to returning to the binary, pre-1992 higher education landscape. Elite institutions, such as those belonging to the Russell Group have, so far, been least affected by policy changes. The employment and social currency conferred on their students is worth so much in the commercial world that they are likely to remain attractive, no matter how poorly their students rate their teaching and learning experience.

The student body of a post-1992 institution is significantly different from that of the Russell Group. Many entrants are the first in their family to attend university and often come from areas considered to be socially deprived. It is of perhaps little wonder then that they have high expectations of universities' transformative powers in providing them access to a better life. They have a vision, often sold to them by the media, of what their lives could be like if only they had the money. And getting the money, according to the government, is inextricably linked with educational attainment. Universities need to begin to understand, manage and meet students' expectations if they are to provide their students with educational experience that they are 'paying for'. The following chapter contains the literature review which explores the recognition and management of expectations using psychological contract theory.

Chapter 3

Psychological Contract Theory and EVLN: A Review

3.1 Introduction

While Chapter 2 provides the context for the research, this chapter sets out to systematically investigate previous studies into psychological contract theory both in the employer-employee relationship and in the setting of higher education, in order to gain a greater understanding of the field. The origins of psychological contract theory are explored, as well as the distinct strands of research and key themes that have emerged over time. Additionally, the research methodology employed by scholars is examined, compared and contrasted. This literature review builds upon the information provided in the previous contextual chapter which gave a broad overview of the principal policies and strategies which have shaped the higher education sector in Britain today.

The chapter is organised into three main sections. First, it provides a synopsis of psychological contract theory from nascent studies in the field to current thinking on the subject. It examines the three dominant, intertwined strands of literature that have emerged, namely, the formation of the psychological contract, the content of the psychological contract and the breach and violation of it. Additionally, this section contains an overview of the research methods employed by scholars in the field which has been dominated by a positivist philosophy and quantitative methods of investigation. Indeed, quantitative approaches have become a distinguishing feature of research into the psychological contract and have been criticised for their weakness particularly when examining the causes and effects of phenomena. Psychological contract theory, is, by nature, based on perceptions, beliefs, expectations and obligations which are personally held and therefore difficult to quantify. Conway and Briner (2005: 183), in their critical evaluation of psychological contract theory, concisely describe this state of affairs by simply suggesting that 'in most psychological contract research it seems fair to say that method and theory are strikingly mismatched'. The lack of cohesion and agreement in the field is illustrated by the plethora of definitions of what a psychological contract actually is and has led some to voice concerns about the lack of analytical rigour and overall complexity of the construct (Cullinane & Dundon, 2006; Freese & Schalk, 2008; Seeck & Parzefall, 2008).

Second, the review examines in detail the literature surrounding the Exit-Voice-Loyalty-Neglect (EVLN) framework as described by Hirschman (1970) and later by, for example, Bashshur and Oc (2014); Berntson and Naswall (2010); Farrell (1983); Farrell and Rusbult (1992); and Withey and Cooper (1989). The EVLN framework has been used in organisational settings to explore and explain the likely behavioural responses of employees who experience dissatisfaction in the

workplace. The majority of studies using the EVLN framework have focussed on more general reactions to employee discontent with only a handful of researchers making explicit links between psychological contract violation and the use of the framework to predict responses, for example (Rousseau, 1995; Turnley & Feldman, 1999). This paucity of conceptual connection indicates that further investigation into this area of overlap may be warranted.

Third, the chapter sets out to appraise the literature concerning psychological contract theory and the application of the EVLN framework within an educational setting. Scholarly activity in this area is extremely scant, particularly with regard to the use of the EVLN framework to explore possible behavioural responses to dissatisfaction amongst the student body. The studies that do exist are set within overseas contexts rather than the UK (for example, Itzkovich & Alt, 2015, Israel; Lovitts, 1996, USA; Mahaffey, Neu & Taylor, 1991, Canada; Riaz, Ali & Riaz, 2013, Pakistan). The purpose of the present study is, therefore, to investigate student perceptions of their higher education experience and to employ the EVLN framework to explore possible responses to dissatisfaction within a UK setting, using qualitative methods.

3.2 Psychological contract theory

Research into psychological contract theory spans more than fifty years and the construct has been widely embraced as a useful conceptual lens through which to view the employee/employer relationship (Conway & Briner, 2009; Freese & Schalk, 2008; Guest, 1998; Low, Bordia, & Bordia, 2016; Roehling, 2008). Rousseau (1995: 9) defines a psychological contract as referring to 'individual beliefs, shaped by the organization regarding terms of an exchange agreement between individuals and their organization'. Here, 'individual beliefs' refer to the way that an employee interprets both the implicit and explicit promises made to them by their employer. The onus on interpretation by individuals has resulted in fractures within the literature, with some writers adhering to a wholly personal 'in the eye of the beholder' stance (Bal, De Lange, Jansen & Van der Velde, 2013; Nelson & Tonks, 2006; Rousseau, 1989; Wolfe-Morrison & Robinson, 1997) whilst others place greater emphasis on exploring and understanding the employers' perspective (Guest, 1998; Guest & Conway, 2002; Tekleab & Taylor, 2003). Moreover, the fact that the psychological contract is regarded as subjective, tacit and based on 'perceptions, expectations, beliefs, promises and obligations' (Guest, 1998: 651) has prompted some writers to argue that it is too ill-defined and complex to be of real value (Conway & Briner, 2005; Cullinane & Dundon, 2006; Seeck & Parzefall, 2008). For example, Guest (1998: 650) referred to it as an 'analytic nightmare', whilst Thompson and McHugh (2009: 319) labelled it as a 'chimera' and a 'suspect notion'. Nevertheless, despite various misgivings, interest and research into psychological contract theory endure.

3.2.1 Early conceptualisations of the psychological contract

Although Denise Rousseau is the writer most commonly associated with psychological contract theory, she is not the originator of the term. There is general consensus throughout the literature that psychological contract theory can be traced back to the work of Argryis (1960) and Levinson, Price, Munden and Solley (1962) (Anderson and Schalk, 1998; Conway & Briner, 2005; Rousseau, 1995). Argryis used the expression 'psychological work contract' to refer to the phenomenon that he was observing in an ethnographic study of the dynamics between a company foreman and group of workers (1960, cited in Anderson & Schalk, 1998: 638). The foreman, having risen through the ranks himself, implicitly understood that by respecting the employees' 'cultural norms' and adopting an informal approach, the employees would perform at a higher level. When the foreman was obligated by senior management to introduce a new system, Argryis noted that this interference led to discontent amongst the workers who felt that their 'work psychological contract' had been violated (1960, cited in Roehling, 1997: 207).

Levinson et al. (1962) are also credited with shaping the initial parameters of psychological contract theory (Anderson & Schalk, 1998; Conway & Briner, 2009; Guest, 1998; Schalk & Roe, 2007). In their book entitled '*Men Management and Mental Health*' (1962), Levinson and his colleagues interviewed almost 900 employees at a large plant in America in order to ascertain the impact of their working lives upon their psychological wellbeing. Central to their findings was that when the employees talked about their work experiences, they frequently referred to their expectations, 'those which they thought were going to be fulfilled, those which had or had not been fulfilled, and those on the basis of which they were operating in the present' (Levinson et al., 1962: 20). They also observed that even when the employees' expectations were inferred or implicit, their employer was still 'duty bound to fulfil them'. This study gave rise to an early definition of the psychological contract by Levinson et al. (1962: 21) as being '…a series of mutual expectations of which the parties to the relationship may not themselves be even dimly aware of but which nonetheless govern the relationship to each other'.

These expectations, according to Levinson et al. (1962), were mutual in that both the employees and the employer had expectations of and obligations towards one another within the working relationship. In this study, they applied an earlier idea developed by Menninger concerning the 'psychotherapy contract' to a workplace setting (1958, cited in Freese & Schalk, 2008: 269). The psychotherapy contract describes the intangible and unspoken expectations between a psychotherapist and their patient, such as trust, confidentiality and to be treated non-judgementally. Schalk and Roe (2007) suggest that Levinson et al.'s work is notable because it not only draws upon Menniger's studies, but that it also incorporates elements of equity theory and social exchange theory which are examined by a variety of writers in later investigations

concerning psychological contract theory. Social exchange theory exhibits conceptual parallels with psychological contract theory. For example, Blau (1964: 89) posits that social exchanges can be observed in every walk of life and that although the exchange of goods, favours, niceties and so on appears to be voluntary, 'in fact they are repaid under obligation'. The notion of obligation is central to social exchange theory. Blau (1964: 93) describes the construct, saying that 'social exchange differs in important ways from strictly economic exchange. The basic and most crucial distinction is that social exchange entails *unspecified* obligations'. As the obligations are likely to be ongoing, a long-term perspective on the relationship is required. Additionally, Blau goes on to state that the fulfilment of these unspecified obligations 'depends on trust because it cannot be enforced in the absence of a binding contract' (Blau, 1964: 113). Here, trust implies that both parties invest in one another, as there is the underlying risk that the investment will not be repaid. Blau, like Rousseau, suggests that the nature of an exchange relationship is defined by the individual's own interpretation of the parameters. Similarly, his emphasis on trust chimes with Rousseau's assertion that trust is the basis of all psychological contracts (Rousseau, 1989: 128).

Until the publication in 1989 of Rousseau's seminal paper '*Psychological and Implied Contracts in Organizations*', little more was written about psychological contract theory for over twenty-five years, with two notable exceptions, namely, the work of Schein (1965) and Kotter (1973). In his book, '*Organizational Psychology*' (1965, 1970, 1980), Schein stresses the usefulness of the psychological contract in gaining a richer understanding of behaviour within organisations. He defines the underlying concept of a psychological contract as implying 'that the individual has a variety of expectations of the organization and that the organization has a variety of expectations of him'. Furthermore, he suggests that, '…expectations such as these are not written into any formal agreement between employer and organization, yet they operate powerfully as determinants of behavior' (Schein, 1965: 11, cited in Roehling, 1997: 208). Schein, like Levinson et al. (1962), regards the psychological contract as being dynamic and requiring constant renegotiation over time to reflect the evolving needs of both employees and employers. Additionally, Schein's definition of the construct is similar to that of Levinson et al. (1962) in that he emphasises the importance of the matching and fulfilment of both parties' needs in the employer-employee relationship. Kotter (1973) was also mindful of the employer's interests within the employment relationship and his empirical study focussed on the significance of parity between the expectations of both parties. He found that the smaller the discrepancy, the more likely employees were to be satisfied, productive and remain with the organisation (cited in Roehling, 1997). Notably, these nascent studies were almost all 'bilateral' in their focus and, therefore, reflected the views of both employees and their employers.

3.2.2 Rousseau's conceptualisation of the psychological contract

Unlike these early works, Rousseau (1989) does not support the bilateral position as her conceptualisation is largely predicated on the idea that the psychological contract is an idiosyncratic construct formed by an individual with regard to their affiliation with their employer. Rousseau's paper of 1989 has been widely cited and used as the foundation for virtually all subsequent investigations (Anderson & Schalk, 1998; Conway & Coyle-Shapiro, 2011; Cullinane & Dundon, 2006; Freese & Schalk, 2008; Johnson & O'Leary-Kelly, 2003). In it, she attempted to describe the psychological contract as well as deductively formulate a number of hypotheses concerning contract violation, job tenure and organisational culture, and their impact on the construct. She views the psychological contract as being developed in the 'eye of the beholder', whereby no two people's contracts will be the same because individuals possess different, often deep-rooted beliefs and expectations (Rousseau, 1989: 123). Furthermore, and important to later research, she questions how far the beliefs and perceptions concerning reciprocal obligations can be shared by the employee and those acting as agents on behalf of the organisation, stating that 'individuals have psychological contracts, organizations do not' (1989: 126). In this work, Rousseau does not explicitly define the psychological contract; rather, she simply makes the statement that the concept refers to:

> An individual's beliefs regarding the terms and conditions of a reciprocal exchange agreement between that focal person and another party. Key issues here include the belief that a promise has been made and a consideration offered in exchange for it. (Rousseau,1989: 126)

Rousseau's statement highlights three principal and highly influential concepts: First, that the psychological contract operates on an individual level and is therefore subjective; second, the construct is essentially promissory in nature, that is, promises have been made either tacitly or otherwise; and third, it contains a set of reciprocal obligations (Rousseau, 1989). The promissory aspect of psychological contracts marks a departure from previous works in that Rousseau placed more emphasis on the individual's belief in promises, rather than expectations, and differentiated between explicit and implicit promises.

Explicit promises refer to those that are clearly stated, possibly observed by witnesses, and are verifiable 'e.g., a commitment to computer training for a new hire made during a selection interview' (Rousseau,1989: 124), whereas implicit promises 'involve shared norms of behavior and expectations for the future' and refer to the way that an employee interprets frequent and uniform patterns of exchange with the employer (Rousseau, 1989: 130). For example, if an employee is receiving developmental company training, his or her co-workers at the same level

might reasonably expect to obtain commensurate input from the organisation. Interestingly, and central to her notion of implicit promises, Rousseau states that 'although the parties involved might hold common expectations, they need not agree on the contract's specific terms for mutual obligation and patterns of reciprocity to exist' (Rousseau, 1989: 131). Therefore, her conceptualisation focuses on a specific kind of obligation: those that are based on perceived promises.

Roehling's (2008) study sought to empirically investigate whether there were, in the minds of respondents, specific differences between the terms and beliefs corresponding to promises, expectations and obligations and whether they implied differing levels of psychological engagement with the employer. His initial findings, however, suggest that there is little discernible difference between the three terms and asserts that this might explain why other researchers have used them interchangeably. Conversely, Bal and Vink (2011) found definite distinctions between them and argue against substituting one for another. Other scholars have also investigated whether there are differences between the terms such as, 'promises' (Guest & Conway, 2002; Rousseau, 1989, 2000); 'obligations' (Coyle-Shapiro & Neuman, 2004; Shore & Barksdale, 1998; Rousseau, 1990); and 'expectations' (Herriot, Manning, & Kidd, 1997; Thomas & Anderson, 1998).

Not surprisingly, disagreements in the literature over which terminology is more descriptive and meaningful have led to a plethora of definitions and it would appear that writers largely define psychological contracts in order to best fit with their own research and measures. As Roehling (1997: 214) states:

> Historically, each researcher or writer has defined the psychological contract construct in some way that she or he feels is suitable, or has adopted one of the existing definitions, with little or no explicit consideration of competing views of the construct.

Table 3.1 below provides an overview of definitions of the psychological contract and indicates the varying views of researchers in the field.

Table 3.1 Definitions of the psychological contract

Writer(s)	Date	Definition
Kotter	1973	'An implicit contract between an individual and his organization which specifies what each expects to give and receive from each other in their relationship' (p.92, cited in Roehling, 1997: 210)
Rousseau	1990	'…an individual's beliefs regarding reciprocal obligations. Beliefs become contractual when the individual believes that he or she owes the employer certain contributions (e.g. hard work, loyalty, sacrifices) in return for certain inducements (e.g. high pay, job security)' (p.390)
Robinson, Kraatz & Rousseau	1994	'Employees' psychological contracts specify the contributions that they believe they owe to their employer and the inducements that they believe are owed in return' (p.138)
Rousseau	1995	'Individual beliefs shaped by the organization, regarding the terms of an exchange agreement between individuals and organizations' (p.9).
McClean Parks, Kidder & Gallagher	1998	'… the idiosyncratic set of reciprocal expectations held by employees concerning their obligations (i.e. what they will do for the employer) and their entitlements (i.e. what they expect to receive in return) (p.698)
Guest & Conway	2002	'… the perceptions of both parties to the employment relationship – organisation and individual – of the reciprocal promises and obligations implied in that relationship' (p.22)
Tekleab & Taylor	2003	'…the psychological contract has been conceptualized as only one party's – the employee's – perceptions of the organization's obligations to the employee and the latter's obligations to the organization' (p.585)
Schalk & Roe	2007	'In our view, the existence of a psychological contract implies that the employee is in a certain state of commitment; he or she is willing to accept work roles and tasks offered by the organization and to carry them out in accordance with certain standards' (p.168)
Colquitt, Baer, Long & Halvorsen-Ganepola	2014	'A psychological contract reflects an exchange partner's belief that certain benefits are promised by another, in exchange for certain contributions on his or her part' (p.603)
Kraak, Lunardo, Herrbach & Durrieu	2016	'Psychological contracts refer to individual beliefs, created by the organization, that relate to the terms of an exchange agreement between employees and their organization' (p.109)
Mai, Ellis, Christian & Porter	2016	'A psychological contract represents an employee's perception of a reciprocal obligation between themselves and the organization' (p.1068)

Despite the variances summarised in Table 3.1 above, most writers agree it is the individual's perceptions and interpretation of the relationship that are at the heart of the psychological contract. Moreover, papers published within the last decade (for example Bal and Vink, 2011; Laulie and Tekleab, 2016; Low et al., 2016), have largely tended to adopt and use as a foundation Rousseau's definition of 'individual beliefs shaped by the organization, regarding the terms of an exchange agreement between individuals and organizations' (Rousseau, 1995: 9). Indeed, Conway and Briner (2009) suggest that Rousseau's (1995) definition is in fact the most commonly used. However, as can be seen in Table 3.1, there continue to be many exceptions.

3.2.3 Rousseau's influence on research methods

Rousseau's (1990) work set the trend for the use of quantitative research methods of investigation into the psychological contract. Indeed, the fact that subsequent studies have, almost without exception, favoured a quantitative approach over qualitative methodologies has become a distinguishing feature of investigations into the psychological contract. Examples include: Bal et al. (2013); Herriot et al. (1997); Robinson and Rousseau (1994); and Turnley and Feldman (1999). Short summaries of researchers' quantitative approaches are presented in Table 3.2 below.

As Table 3.2 illustrates, this reliance on quantitative methods, and the use of surveys in particular, seems at odds with the very nature of the psychological contract which is subjective, tacit and emotionally rooted, and deals with such issues as 'perceptions, expectations, beliefs, promises and obligations' which are difficult to quantify, define or deduce generalisations from (Guest, 1998: 651). This echoes Bryman and Bell's (2011) suggestion that surveys using questionnaires do not accurately reflect people's actual behavioural responses. Easterby-Smith et al. (2002) also question the value of quantitative methods as they doubt their effectiveness in capturing the significance people attach to their own actions and behaviours as well as those of others. These assertions do indeed raise questions regarding the appropriateness of instrument choice in many of the studies relating to psychological contract theory.

Within many of the surveys, the researchers have constructed their questionnaire by combining items from previously developed psychological contract questionnaires and thus completely new items seldom appear. In their evaluation of research into the psychological contract, Freese and Schalk (2008: 273) assert that the majority of writers have not clearly accounted for 'where the items they use in their questionnaire theoretically stem from'. Furthermore, they suggest that some items have been added to or removed from questionnaires with little analysis of the data. Guest (1998) had suggested that the complexity of the construct may be problematic a decade

earlier when he explored how well the psychological contract stood up to critical scrutiny and asserted that investigations may be flawed due to lack of rigour, thereby devaluing the concept.

3.2.4 Later conceptualisations and strands of research

Overall, three principal strands of research have emerged in the literature surrounding the concept of the psychological contract, namely: how it is formed (Rousseau, 1990; Rousseau & McLean-Parks, 1993; Shore & Barksdale, 1998); its content (Guest, 1998, Guest & Conway 2002; Herriot et al., 1997; Rousseau 2001; Rousseau & Tijoriwala, 1998); and the breach and violation of it (Bal et al., 2013; Robinson & Rousseau, 1994, Turnley & Feldman, 1999; Wolfe-Morrison & Robinson, 1997). The strands are distinct, yet intertwined and a common feature, as stated previously, is that no single definition of the psychological contract has been agreed upon.

Table 3.2 Examples of research methods

Researcher(s)	Date	Method
Rousseau	1990	A self-complete questionnaire administered via campus mail was completed by 224 graduating MBA students from an American management school
Robinson & Rousseau	1994	A longitudinal study of the Rousseau (1990) MBA students (only those who had submitted the first questionnaire were eligible). A second self-complete mailed questionnaire was completed by 128 respondents
Turnley & Feldman	1999	Data was collected via self-complete mail surveys from a total 804 managerial-level personnel using four different sample groups
Guest & Conway	2002	A two-stage mixed-methods study. Stage one consisted of qualitative interviews with a total of 80 managers. In stage two, a self-complete questionnaire was completed by 1,306 senior members of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD)
Tekleab & Taylor	2003	A self-complete questionnaire was mailed out using the internal mail system of a large state university in America. It was completed by 298 employees and 151 managers
Nelson & Tonks	2006	A self-complete questionnaire was completed by 313 undergraduate management students. The survey was administered during normal class time
Bal & Vink	2011	A self-complete postal questionnaire was completed by 138 middle managers from schools in the Netherlands

Bal et al.	2013	A longitudinal study (T1 and T2, 1 year apart) within the Dutch division of a multinational risk management company. Only the responses to the online questionnaire of those employees that were in the company at T1 and T2 were counted (240)
Buch, Kuvaas, Shore & Dysvik	2014	A web-based survey was administered at two different points in time (one month apart) to employees in Norway. There were 314 respondents
Kraak et al.	2017	Using a longitudinal, cross-lagged design, the researchers surveyed and obtained responses from 133 individuals at two different points in time (one month apart)

A number of researchers have explored other features of the construct, such as the circumstances under which the contract is 'transactional' rather than 'relational' and whether it is more preferable to examine it from a 'unilateral' or 'bilateral' viewpoint. Rousseau and Tijoriwala (1998), for example, suggest the use of three forms of measurement of the psychological contract which could span the separate strands: feature-orientated measures, content-orientated measures and evaluation-orientated measures. However, Freese and Schalk (2008) note how complex a methodological problem it is to expect any sort of agreement on how the features and content of the psychological contract can be measured and evaluated. Shore and Barksdale (1998: 731) concur that it is extremely challenging to attempt to measure a phenomenon which is so 'idiosyncratic and situation-bound' and produce results that can be generalised across organisational settings.

3.2.4.1 Unilateral approaches in the study of the psychological contract

A notable feature of the literature is the fact that the unilateral viewpoint has become almost the norm (Bal et al., 2013; Conway & Coyle-Shapiro, 2011; De Cuyper & De Witte, 2006; Nelson & Tonks, 2006; Robinson et al., 1994; Wolfe-Morrison & Robinson, 1997). From this perspective, the emphasis is placed upon dissecting the employee's psychological contract, as opposed to that of the employer. Proponents justify their stance by asserting, for example, that what is at stake here is an individual's:

> *Perception* of reality, not any so-called "objective reality" that shapes their expectations, their attitudes and their behaviours. Consequently, to understand employee attitudes and behaviours, it is necessary to understand their perceptions – *their* reality. (McClean-Parks et al., 1998: 697)

As discussed earlier, psychological contract theory has its conceptual foundations rooted in exchange theory in which the considerations of both parties are taken into account. Indeed, Rousseau's (1989) initial statement about the psychological contract had at its core the notion of some sort of an exchange relationship where the expectations and obligations of both parties are considered. However, as Anderson and Schalk (1998) suggest, the 'bilateral view of the psychological contract is problematic because the side of the organisation consists of many actors who do not necessarily communicate a uniform set of expectations'.

This view is not in-line with the findings of a later study by Guest and Conway (2002: 28) in which almost three quarters of senior-level staff felt either 'very confident, or believed that to a "very great extent" that their opinions and expectations were representative of their organisation as a whole'. Guest (1998: 652) conceptualises this dichotomy as the 'agency problem'. He argues that by adopting a unilateral approach, Rousseau and others, although noting the dangers of 'anthropomorphizing the organization by turning it into an individual', do not provide an adequate solution. Furthermore, he states that, by doing so, they ostensibly reject the conventional view and traditional underpinnings of the psychological contract which is rooted in social exchange theory.

3.2.4.2 Bilateral approaches: the voice of the employer in the study of the psychological contract

Although the majority of the research into the psychological contract takes the views of only the employee into consideration, there are, however, notable exceptions (for example, Herriot et al., 1997; Guest, 1998; Guest & Conway, 2002, Roehling, 2008; Tekleab & Taylor, 2003). These researchers have attempted to address what they perceive to be an imbalance in the literature by seeking the organisational perspective, asserting that their studies add value to the discipline because the employers' voice has hitherto been largely unheard. However, there is significant debate as to who represents the organisation and also, if the organisation has multiple representatives, there is a danger that opposing messages might occur (Conway & Briner, 2009; Coyle-Shapiro & Shore, 2007; Rousseau, 1995). Nevertheless, Tekleab and Taylor (2003) suggest that in order to develop a thorough and valid comprehension of the employment relationship, consideration must be given to both the organisation's and the employees' expectations and obligations. They investigate the determinants of the agreement between employers and employees and the ensuing reciprocal exchange of obligations. While Tekleab and Taylor (2003) present a cogent argument, the potential flaw in bilateral investigations of the psychological contract remains the notion of who actually speaks for the organisation (Anderson & Schalk, 1998; Conway & Coyle-Shapiro, 2011; Robinson et al., 1994). Some researchers believe it is an employee's immediate line manager (Tekleab & Taylor, 2003), while others

suggest whole groups, such as human resources personnel, may act as agents on behalf of the company (Rousseau, 1995; Wolfe-Morrison & Robinson, 1997).

3.2.4.3 The formation of the psychological contract

Researchers investigating the formation of the psychological contract broadly agree that a range of theories have been usefully employed to enhance understanding of how the contract develops (Johnson & O'Leary-Kelly, 2003; Shore & Barksdale, 1998; Turnley & Feldman, 1999). These have included: socialisation theory; control theory; social exchange theory; and especially the work of Blau as discussed earlier. However, Guest (1998) questions whether the outcome of a new recruit's socialisation process and the formation of assumptions about reciprocal behaviours and expectations can simply be labelled a 'psychological contract'. Nevertheless, the socialisation period is considered by many to be highly important in the construction of an individual's psychological contract. Johnson and O'Leary-Kelly (2003: 630) refer to the weight of what they call the 'person specificity characteristic' of the extent to which the employee holds beliefs about perceived promises made by the employer versus the formation of a more generalised set of expectations. It is the development of the perceived promissory element that is of significance here.

In contrast to stressing the promissory element, Robinson et al. (1994) place greater emphasis on the notion of balance in the development of the psychological contract. Shore and Barksdale (1998) also examine the overall pattern of exchange in terms of balance and level of obligation. They suggest that when the relationship between an employer and employee is balanced, there exists a similar level of obligation on both parties. However, if an unbalanced relationship develops, one party is substantially more obligated than the other. In a somewhat different yet related vein, Turnley and Feldman (1999) assert that individuals generally develop the expectations underlying their psychological contact in two ways: firstly through their interactions with 'representatives' of the organisation and secondly through their perception of the organisation's culture. They refer to this development period as 'anticipatory socialization' during which those acting on behalf of an organisation (human resource personnel, line-managers etc.) make promises about what the employee can expect during their tenure (1999: 899). Additionally, the way that the organisation is run operationally and the culture it engenders also impact on the way that an individual's psychological contract is shaped.

3.2.4.4 The content of the psychological contract

Those commentators focussing on the content of the psychological contract suggest that it is related to the actual work conditions that the employee finds themselves in and concerns features such as pay, contracted hours, supervision, job security and opportunities for career development (Guest, 1998; Guest & Conway 2002; Herriot et al., 1997; Rousseau 1990). Based on the relative importance of these features, scholars agree that, in terms of content, the psychological contract may be considered transactional or relational. Relational contracts, with their emphasis on trust, security, longevity, commitment and the expectation of fairness, are regarded as being the stronger of the two. Conversely, transactional contracts are characterised by little more than the exchange of labour for monetary rewards and are viewed as being comparatively weak (Guest, 1998; Guest & Conway 2002; Herriot et al., 1997; Rousseau 1990). There is general agreement that once healthy relational contracts can, through mismanagement, deteriorate into relationships that are more transactional in nature. Furthermore, Herriot et al. (1997) suggest that employers could be in danger of underestimating how strongly transactional many work relationships are, particularly when the organisation fails to keep its side of the contract. Although transactional and relational psychological contracts are often presented in the literature as being polar opposites on a continuum of engagement and commitment, researchers such as Tekleab and Taylor and (2003) suggest that, in reality, most psychological contracts will contain elements that are both transactional and relational and that it is these areas of crossover that are of interest rather than the continuum itself.

Within the transactional-relational debate, the component features which make up the psychological contract are important. Rousseau and McClean Parks (1993: 11) originally put forward five dimensions which could be used to differentiate transactional from relational contracts: 'focus, time frame, stability, scope and tangibility'. In transactional contracts, the focus will be on monetary rewards, the timeframe will be specific in duration (possibly a fixed term contract or temporary assignment) and the terms and conditions with remain static over time with little opportunity for renegotiation. Scope refers to how far the employee's role encroaches on their personal life and, in transactional contracts, they assert that scope is limited. To clarify this concept, McClean Parks et al. (1998: 707) provide the example of the differences between the psychological contracts of a factory worker and that of a police officer. A factory worker, they suggest, has narrow scope so, when their shift is over, they no longer have any residual obligation to the organisation. Conversely, however, a police officer is likely to have obligations which 'spill over' into their home life. And 'tangibility' refers to psychological contracts which are easily observable with elements that are publicly and unambiguously stated (1998: 708).

In contrast, relational contracts will have a socio-emotional focus, an open-ended timeframe, be dynamic in nature with a scope that is broad and may encroach on the individuals' personal life. Furthermore, the tangible elements will not necessarily be objectively knowable, but will instead be subjective and tacitly understood by the employee (Rousseau & McClean Parks, 1993). Guest (1998: 653), questions how Rousseau and McClean Parks arrived at these dimensions mooting that 'the list seems to be intuitive rather than theoretically derived' and suggests that further dimensions may need to be added. Indeed, other researchers have supplemented these dimensions, often without clear rationalisation. For example, McClean Parks et al. (1998: 704) suggest the addition of 'particularism, multiple agency and volition' as suitable adjuncts. Yet, Freese and Schalk (2008: 271) assert that '… owing to all these refinements, the results of empirical research still remain inconclusive and the results do not cross-validate'. In a similar vein, Guest (1998: 658) states that parsimony is at risk by the random addition of 'unqualified' items. Nonetheless, despite criticism, scholars continue to explore the content of the psychological contract both theoretically and empirically, producing a substantial body of research.

3.2.4.5 The breach and violation of the psychological contract

The strand of the literature which has received the most academic attention concerns the breach and violation of the psychological contact. Much has been written about what actually constitutes breach and violation, how to quantify the magnitude of a transgression and how, if at all, the psychological contact can be repaired once a contravention has occurred, (for example, Bal et al., 2013; Nelson & Tonks, 2006; Rousseau & Robinson, 1994; Turnley & Feldman, 1999). The concepts of breach and violation have largely been investigated from the point of view of the employee which is, therefore, consistent with Rousseau's 'eye of the beholder' perspective (1989: 123). Within the overall subject area of breach and violation, there are a number of sub-genres and lines of enquiry, for example: lack of trust (Rousseau & Robinson, 1994); age-related differences in perceptions of violation (Bal et al., 2013); performance of employees (Turnley & Feldman, 1999); and cynicism towards the organisation (Johnson & O'Leary-Kelly, 2003).

Throughout this thread of literature, many of the terms are used interchangeably. In view of this, Wolfe-Morrison and Robinson (1997: 230) attempt to explore the concepts in greater detail in order to make a distinction between breach and violation. Additionally, they introduce 'cognition' and 'emotion' into the frame. Wolfe-Morrison and Robinson (1997) propose a model to show how a violation might develop, suggesting that violations can occur in two principal ways. First, if the employer reneges on an obligation by knowingly breaking a promise and, second by creating an incongruent situation whereby the agents of the organisation and the

employee have different understandings of what promises have been made. Perceived breach, they assert, is the cognitive assessment that the organisation has failed to fulfil its obligation to the employee in a way that is incommensurate with the contribution that the employee has made. Violation, on the other hand, is the affective emotional response towards that perceived breach. The central issue is that violation is an emotional experience arising from the cognitive perception of a breach of the psychological contact and is a combination of disappointment and anger.

Figure 3.1 below illustrates visually how a violation of the psychological contract might develop through an employee's perception of unmet promises and the breakdown of trust.

Figure 3.1 The development of violation
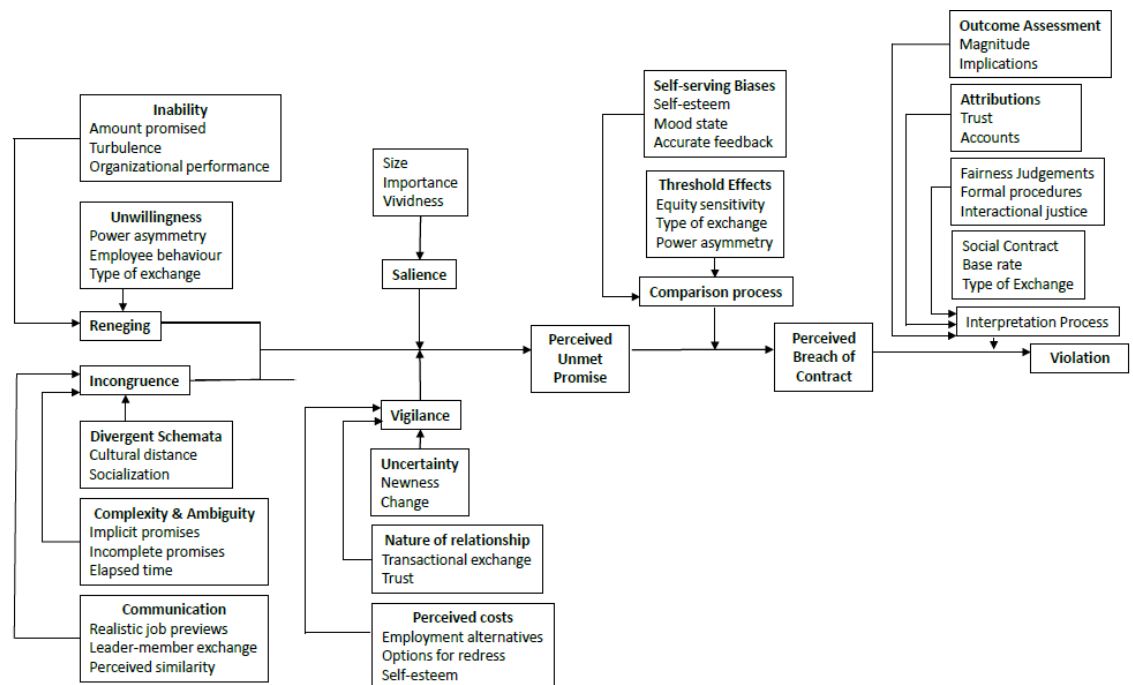
Source: Adapted from Wolfe-Morrison & Robinson (1997: 232)

The model presented in Figure 3.1 above identifies the key components in the breakdown of the employee-employer relationship resulting in a perceived violation of the psychological contract. Despite some criticisms, it is well regarded and often cited in the literature (for example, Bal et al., 2013; Nelson & Tonks, 2006; Tekleab & Taylor, 2003).

Guest (1998), while welcoming Wolfe-Morrison and Robinson's attempt at greater precision and clarity, asserts that the focus on an emotional dimension muddies the waters and risks an overlap with the concept of job dissatisfaction. He goes on to question how unmet promissory obligations differ from unmet expectations and how they, in turn, differ from the underlying causes of job dissatisfaction. He suggests that a possible solution might be to chart reactions

against a range of emotions from 'strong dissatisfaction' (broken promises) as opposed to 'moderate dissatisfaction' (unmet expectations), (Guest, 1998: 656). Rousseau and Tijiorwala (1998) more specifically suggest that unmet obligations would result in a more negative response than unmet expectations, whereas Rousseau and Robinson (1994) state that violation is different to unmet expectations and is likely to produce feelings and responses that are much more intense and damaging. They further assert that psychological contract violation is negatively associated with trust in the organisation, job satisfaction and intention to remain with the employer.

Drawing upon the work of Wolfe-Morrison and Robinson (1997), Nelson and Tonks (2006) sought to examine psychological contract violations in an Australian call centre which was staffed largely by students on casual employment contracts. Their findings reveal that out of the work-related features studied, only one factor, job security, was not considered to constitute a violation of the employees' psychological contracts. The other features included: 'interesting work, training and development, job freedom and decision-making' (Nelson & Tonks, 2006: 29). This research is significant because it indicates that even though the students were unlikely ever to take a permanent job with the organisation, they still had high expectations about the way they would be treated in the workplace. This finding suggests that even a highly transactional and tenuous employee-employer relationship can produce feelings of violation and so lead to disgruntled staff members.

3.2.5 Concluding psychological contract theory

Research into psychological contract theory persists despite fractures within the associated body of literature which has developed over more than five decades. Numerous definitions have been put forward, but the most widely accepted is that offered by Rousseau (1995: 9). In it she states that essentially a psychological contract concerns the beliefs of individuals concerning an 'exchange agreement' between themselves and the organisation they are located within. Consistent within this, as well as other definitions, is that these *beliefs* are derived from *expectations* about the *reciprocal obligations* of both parties within the *exchange agreement*. When these expectations and obligations remain unmet, then the psychological contract is deemed to have been breached, or in more extreme cases, violated. It is the strand of literature surrounding the breach and violation of psychological contracts that has received most academic attention. Researchers have explored the constituents of breach and violation, their magnitude and the extent to which a psychological contract can be restored once a contravention has occurred.

A separate, yet related thread of literature has emerged in parallel to psychological contract theory, one in which the main focus of exploration and discussion has been employee

dissatisfaction (for example, Bashshur & Oc, 2014; Berntson & Naswall, 2010; Naus, van Iterson & Roe, 2007; Si & Li, 2012; Withey & Cooper, 1989). Here, the emphasis is not upon the cause, nature or magnitude of a transgression which leads to discontent, but on the possible response of the employee to that transgression. In attempting to understand this response behaviour, the researchers cited above have all used the Exit-Voice-Loyalty-Neglect (EVLN) topology as a vehicle for their studies. The EVLN framework postulates that individuals in unsatisfactory situations will react in one of four ways: they will leave (exit); they will speak up and complain in the hope of restitution (voice); they will passively hope that conditions will improve (loyalty); or they will take time off, come in late and generally show signs of disengagement (neglect). Interestingly, only a handful of individuals have made the explicit link between the breach and violation of an individual's psychological contract and the use of the EVLN framework to explore the behaviours which might arise once a breach has taken place (for example, Rousseau, 1995; Turnley & Feldman, 1999). Nevertheless, the EVLN framework presents a useful lens through which to view the employee/employer relationship and responses to unsatisfactory situations. The EVLN framework is examined in the following section.

3.3 A review of the EVLN literature

The Exit-Voice-Loyalty-Neglect (EVLN) framework is now an accepted model used for exploring and measuring employees' behavioural responses to dissatisfaction in organisations (Bashshur & Oc, 2014; Berntson & Naswall, 2010; Naus et al., 2007; Si & Li, 2012; Withey & Cooper, 1989). It is a highly flexible construct which has been used to evaluate discontent within an array of settings with diverse populations of respondents, such as in romantic involvements (Rusbult, Zembrodt & Gunn, 1982), in a political context (Clark, Golder & Golder, 2016) and with maternity nurses (Hagedoorn, Van Yperen, Van de Vliert & Buunk, 1999). Consistent throughout this pocket of literature is the focus on the behavioural choices of individuals who are discontented with the status quo. Since the first conceptualisations of the EVLN model in the early 1980s, writers have dissected the construct, examined the 'weight' of and interplay between the elements, and suggested the addition of supplementary components. For example, Hagedoorn et al. (1999: 311) divide the voice construct into 'considerate and aggressive' voice, Naus et al. (2007: 684) add 'cynicism' to the four original elements, and Graham and Keeley (1992: 197) distinguish between 'reformist and passive' loyalty. Although the conceptualisation of exit has remained relatively consistent throughout the literature, there have been areas of significant disagreement concerning the other elements. For example, voice is regarded by some as constructive, especially where employees speak up and suggest ways that the situation can be improved (for example, Luchak, 2003; Bashshur & Oc, 2014). Others adopt the opposite position, considering voice to be a negative feature, particularly in cases where employees

complain bitterly about their circumstances and pervade the working atmosphere with negativity (for example, Turnley & Feldman, 1999). Exit and neglect are largely articulated within the literature as destructive components as these behaviours usually occur when the employees view the relationship to be beyond repair and, therefore, not worth salvaging (for example, Rusbult et al. 1982; Si, Wei & Li, 2008). A recent departure in the literature brings forth an alternative viewpoint to the four mutually exclusive actions regarding neglect as 'simply a form of exit and not a distinct behavioural response category' (Clark et al., 2016: 2).

Commentators generally agree that employees' responses to dissatisfaction can be either self-contained or progressive (Farrell 1983; Farrell & Rusbult, 1992; Withey & Cooper, 1989). For example, workers may simply leave an organisation or transition through a series of responses which may or may not ultimately result in exit. The course of action an employee might take can be determined by a number of factors which will influence their decision. For example, a lack of suitable alternative employment opportunities might result in loyalty or (constructive) voice behaviours (Farrell & Rusbult, 1992; Hagedoorn et al., 1999). Moreover, empirical studies suggest that when employees have enjoyed a long relationship with the organisation, or when they believe the situation can and will improve, they are less likely to display negative and destructive behaviours (Farrell, 1983; Farrell & Rusbult, 1992; Leck, 1990; Rusbult et al., 1982). This emergent body of literature concerning employee responses to dissatisfaction in the workplace is largely predicated on the seminal work of Albert Hirschman (1970).

3.3.1 Hirschman's conceptualisation

Hirschman's book, '*Exit, Voice and Loyalty: Responses to Declines in Firms, Organizations and States*' (1970) is concerned with identifying how customers or workers might react to deteriorating situations where they are experiencing increasing dissatisfaction. He regards the concept of deterioration as being a perfectly normal state of affairs and states that lapses 'are bound to occur, if only for accidental reasons' (1970: 1). His theory suggests that there are three possible behavioural responses to an organisation's failure to live up to the expectations of its customers or workers. The first, 'exit', is defined by Hirschman as when 'some customers stop buying the firm's products or when some members leave the organisation' (1970: 4) and is considered by him to be the 'dominant reaction mode' (1970: 35). He defines 'voice', the second behavioural response, as 'any attempt at all to change, rather than to escape from, an objectionable state of affairs' (1970: 30). Using the voice option, customers or workers take the opportunity to verbalise their dissatisfaction to management or a higher authority in an attempt to bring about improvements in the situation. Much of his book is devoted to discussing the interplay between the two behavioural responses of exit and voice and examining the circumstances when one course of action might be preferable over the other. According to Hirschman, exit and voice

can be sequential or independent. For example, an individual might resort to exit if the voice option did not yield satisfactory results, or he or she might simply leave before employing voice at all. Central though to Hirschman's thinking was, however, the question of how far, if at all, lapses in satisfaction could be repaired by those in authority in order to prevent upheaval to the organisation through exit or voice.

In a later chapter, Hirschman introduces the concept of 'loyalty' as a third possible behavioural response to dissatisfaction. He believed that rather than leaving or verbally displaying dissatisfaction, a customer's or worker's alternative choice was to passively wait, hoping that the situation would improve, and thus remain 'loyal' to the organisation. He introduced the loyalty concept as being important because 'as a result of it, members may be locked into their organisations a little longer and thus use the voice option with greater determination and resourcefulness than would otherwise be the case' (1970: 82). Therefore, customers or workers would be less likely to leave the situation as loyalty would mitigate exit behaviour, or at least stave it off for longer. Later conceptualisations of loyalty have largely framed it as a passive yet optimistic behaviour (for example, Rusbult, Farrell, Rogers & Mainous, 1988). However, some writers have disagreed with this position, regarding loyalist tendencies as reflecting feelings of entrapment and powerlessness (for example, Clark et al. 2016; Farrell, 1983; Withey & Cooper, 1989).

3.3.2 The development of the EVLN model

Throughout his explorations of the concepts of exit, voice and loyalty as response behaviours, Hirschman alluded to but did not explicitly discuss other possible courses of action. Two studies (Kolarska & Aldridge, 1980 and Rusbult et al., 1982) introduce an additional new concept to EVL, that of 'neglect', and provide the foundations of the EVLN model of responses to dissatisfaction prevalent in organisational studies today. Investigating customer dissatisfaction with products, Kolarska and Aldridge (1980: 41), using Hirschman's model as a starting point, found a fourth response; that of 'inactivity and silence'. Rusbult et al.'s later paper (1982: 1231) adds 'declining commitment and divestiture' in romantic involvements to inactivity and silence and termed this overall alternative pattern of behaviour 'neglect'. They define neglect as:

> Ignoring the partner or spending less time together, refusing to discuss problems, treating the partner badly emotionally or physically, criticising the partner for things unrelated to the real problem, 'just letting things fall apart', (perhaps) developing extra-relationship sexual involvements. (Rusbult et al.,1982: 1231)

They further state that, from a theoretical perspective, the EVLN responses differ from each other along two distinct dimensions: constructive/destructive and active/passive. Hirschman

(1970) had already suggested that a distinction could be made between constructive and destructive behaviours but Rusbult et al.'s (1982: 1231) conceptualisation goes further in articulating opposing dimensions for the constructs. Voice and loyalty are viewed as being constructive responses '…that are generally intended to maintain and/or revive the relationship', whereas exit and neglect are deemed to be 'destructive'. On the active/passive dimension both exit and voice are seen as being active, i.e. the individual is doing something about the situation, be it negative or positive. Alternatively, loyalty and neglect are regarded as passive responses. Later writers on the subject have revaluated the dimensional aspects of the construct as well as dissected the significance, meaning and value of each of the four terms. For example, Rusbult et al. (1988) suggest that exit is not simply a matter of leaving the organisation, but can also encompass thinking about leaving and conducting searches for alternative employment.

3.3.2.1 Rusbult et al.'s variables

As well as the four constructs, Rusbult et al. (1982) introduce three variables which help, first, to predict how committed an individual is to the relationship and second, which determine the course of action likely to be taken if dissatisfaction were to arise. The three variables are: '(i) the degree to which the individual was satisfied with the relationship prior to its decline; (ii) the magnitude of the individual's investment of resources in the relationship; and (iii) the quality of the individual's best alternative to the current relationship' (Rusbult et al.,1982: 1232).

Through empirical studies, Rusbult et al. (1982) show that in cases where prior satisfaction is high, individuals will be much more likely to want to restore the relationship to its previous satisfactory state and, therefore, engage in the constructive behaviours of voice and loyalty rather than the destructive actions of exit and neglect. These findings are supported by later research by Rusbult et al. (1988) and by a meta-analysis conducted by Farrell and Rusbult (1992) of five former EVLN studies carried out by a range of contributors to the field. Farrell and Rusbult (1992) consistently found that high levels of job satisfaction inhibited destructive tendencies and promoted the positive responses of loyalty and voice. They suggest that organisations should engage in activities that promote enhanced employee satisfaction even when the organisation itself is experiencing a period of decline. Similarly, Leck and Saunders (1992) establish a positive correlation between prior satisfaction and patience (passive loyalty), whereas Withey and Cooper (1989) suggest a negative association between the two, as loyalty, in their study, was manifested in feelings of entrapment and a general lack of enthusiasm about the organisation.

Rusbult et al. (1982) assert that the size of the prior investment in the relationship also positively correlates with constructive behaviours if the investment is high (voice and loyalty), and destructive responses if the investment is low (exit and neglect). 'Investment' is defined as:

> ...the resources the individual has put directly into the relationship that are then intrinsic to that involvement (for example, self-disclosing, spending time with the partner, investing emotion), or resources that are extrinsic, but have become directly connected to the association (e.g., shared material possessions, shared recreational activities, mutual friends). (Rusbult et al., 1982: 1232)

In other words, individuals who have invested highly in the relationship have much more to lose than those who have not and would be much more likely to want to restore the relationship rather than allow it to fail. Farrell and Rusbult (1992) also found that the greater the employee investment, the greater the tendencies towards voice and loyalty. However, their findings suggest that high levels of employee investment do not necessarily inhibit exit behaviours as they had previously predicted.

The quality of the available alternatives to the relationship was also expected by Rusbult et al. (1982) to be a determining factor that would predict whether the responses would be active or passive. However, the results for this variable are more inconclusive. The authors expected that high quality alternatives would promote behaviours that were active, such as exit and voice, and discourage those that were passive, for example, loyalty and neglect. Farrell and Rusbult (1992), in their meta-analysis of five studies, also found weak links between this variable and EVLN behaviours. They found little evidence to suggest that poor quality alternatives would inculcate loyalty behaviours and suggest that it is just as likely that employees with attractive alternatives would exhibit loyalty because of strong organisational commitment.

3.3.2.2 Withey and Cooper's variables

Withey and Cooper (1989: 522) were also interested in exploring the effects of a number of variables on EVLN behaviours and introduce 'the cost of the action', 'the efficacy of the action' and 'the attractiveness of the setting in which the action occurs' (cost, efficacy and setting). In establishing these constructs, they state that behaviours have both direct costs and indirect costs. The direct costs are 'the time and energy expended in them' and the indirect costs are 'the unpleasant things which flow from the actions' (Withey & Cooper, 1989: 523). For example, the indirect costs of exit might include loss of income or pension benefits, whilst the indirect costs of voice might encompass damaged reputation and the emotional trauma of confrontation with those in authority. They assert that the indirect costs of loyalty and neglect are more

difficult to detect, but might include feelings of personal failure and reputational injury. Their study focusses on the indirect costs of exit and voice in the anticipation that the greater the costs, the less likely an individual would be to take action. With regard to 'efficacy of action', they use the level of prior satisfaction as a measure and by doing so build directly on the work of Rusbult et al. (1988).

Withey and Cooper (1989) predicted that if individuals had at one time been happy within the organisation and if they believed that the situation was repairable, they were much more likely to remain with their employer. In these cases, employees were much more likely to respond positively with loyalty and/or voice behaviours. Those employees who did not have fond memories of equitable treatment, or who did not have hope that conditions would improve, would be more liable to withdraw and respond with neglect and/or exit. Withey and Cooper (1989) also factor in the 'efficacy' variable; that is, an individual's personal locus of control. They suggest that an individual with a strong internal locus of control would tend to engage in behaviours that would directly bring about change, namely, voice and exit. Those employees with an external locus of control, would, they predict, respond more passively with loyalty or neglect behaviours. The last variable is 'attractiveness of the setting'. They state that 'settings in which people feel they belong are more attractive places in which to incur costs' (1989: 524). Additionally, they suggest that a sense of belonging can be measured by gauging an individual's commitment to the organisation and that those employees with a strong sense of commitment would demonstrate constructive behaviours such as voice and loyalty. In contrast to Rusbult et al.'s (1988) investment model, Withey and Cooper (1989) speculate that attractive alternatives may have a negative impact on loyalty and voice and correlate positively with exit and neglect. In their view, an individual who has 'attractive alternatives may feel less positive about his or her present setting and will be less willing to act on the organisation's behalf' (1989: 524). Rusbult et al.'s (1988) model predicts that attractive alternatives will have a negative impact on loyalty and neglect and correlate positively with exit and voice. Therefore, in both models, attractive alternatives are predicted to increase exit behaviours and decrease loyalty. However, there is disagreement concerning voice and neglect behaviours, with Withy and Cooper suggesting that attractive alternatives are likely to decrease voice behaviour rather than encourage it. Withey and Cooper (1989) discovered that the most reliably predicted behaviour is that of exit, which is consistent with the findings of Rusbult et al. (1988). As expected, attractive alternatives increase the likelihood of exit and neglect, but are not shown to have an impact on loyalty and voice. This is in contrast to Rusbult et al. who found attractive alternatives to correlate positively with exit and voice, but did not affect the neglect behaviour.

3.3.2.3 Farrell's conceptualisation

Farrell (1983), building on the work of Rusbult et al., (1982) shows the active/passive, constructive/destructive EVLN behaviours diagrammatically as illustrated in Figure 3.2 below. Exit is deemed to be active/destructive; voice, active/constructive; loyalty, passive/constructive and neglect passive/destructive.

Figure 3.2 Farrell's quadrants

	Active	Passive
Destructive	Exit	Neglect
Constructive	Voice	Loyalty

Source: Adapted from Farrell (1983: 603)

The quadrants in Figure 3.2 above present an overview of the predicted findings of a study designed to ascertain the usefulness of the EVLN model in understanding workers' responses to job dissatisfaction. In this research, the four theoretical constructs were described by 12 different statements concerning behaviour. The respondents were asked to perform a card sorting task, each containing one behaviour-related sentence and asked to group the cards into 'things that seem to belong together' (Farrell, 1983: 600). For example, the possible behaviours relating to exit included 'getting into action and looking for another job', and 'deciding to quit the company' (1983: 603). Voice behaviours contained 'talking to the supervisor to try to make things better' and 'putting a note in the suggestion box hoping to correct the problem'. The referents for loyalty included 'waiting patiently and hoping that the problem will solve itself' and 'quietly doing one's job and letting higher ups make the decisions'. Finally, the three possible neglect behaviours were described as 'calling in sick and not dealing with what's happening', 'coming in late' and 'becoming less interested and making more errors' (1983: 603).

Virtually all of the respondents grouped the 12 possible behaviours into four separate categories which consistently reflected those of the EVLN model. Prior to this study, Farrell had expected the responses to be easily plotted on the two conceptual dimensions previously used by Rusbult et al. (1982: 605): 'active/passive and constructive/destructive'. However, when Farrell charted the results of the study on the above quadrants, no loyalty behaviours featured in the passive/constructive area. Instead, and contrary to expectations, responses to the loyalty cluster located the reactions in the passive/destructive quadrant. Interestingly, in a later study, Farrell and Rusbult (1992: 203), uphold the position that loyalty behaviours are passive/constructive actions 'wherein the individual attempts to maintain or revive satisfactory working conditions' and by doing so, largely negate Farrell's original (1983) findings.

Rousseau (1995) references Farrell's (1983) study and also describes the centrality of the two essential dimensions: active/passive and constructive/destructive (1995: 134). However, as can be seen from Figure 3.3 below, her viewpoint differs in that she regards neglect as being actively destructive and exit as passively destructive.

Figure 3.3 Rousseau's quadrants

	Constructive	Destructive
Active	Voice	Neglect/Destruction
Passive	Loyalty/Silence	Exit

Source: Adapted from Rousseau (1995: 135)

On the other hand, and as can be seen from Figure 3.3, voice and loyalty remain consistent with Farrell's model in that voice is actively constructive and loyalty is passively constructive. Nonetheless, she states that loyalty/silence 'is a form of nonresponse' which 'reflects a willingness to endure or accept unfavourable circumstances', or it can signify that the individual is 'optimistically waiting for conditions to improve' (Rousseau, 1995: 138). This seeming duality of definition could, as Farrell (1983) earlier suggested, be due to 'weak conceptualisation', or that 'Hirschman's definition of loyalty inadequately grasps the subtleties of loyalist behaviour' (Rousseau, 1995: 605).

3.3.3 An examination of the EVLN constructs

3.3.3.1 The construct of loyalty

Later writers also experienced difficulties with Hirschman's conceptualisation of loyalty behaviours, leading to contradictory statements of findings. Withey and Cooper (1989: 522), for example, suggest that Hirschman (1970) only introduced loyalty as a means of explaining why an individual would choose to use voice when they could quite easily leave the organisation instead. They explore Hirschman's at times confusing portrayal of loyalty both as a distinct behaviour, whereby an individual actively supports an organisation, and also as an attitude that 'moderates or conditions the use of exit and voice' (Withey & Cooper, 1989: 522). Regarding the attitude/behaviour dilemma, Leck and Saunders (1992) argue that loyalty should be renamed as patience, as the term patience is descriptive of an attitude, unlike loyalty which more convincingly relates to a behavioural response. Hagedoorn et al. (1999: 311) concur with this conceptualisation and use the term 'patience' throughout their paper in which they redefine the

voice construct to include 'considerate and aggressive' voice. Graham and Keeley (1992: 192), also unpick Hirschman's loyalty construct because, in their view, it had so far 'eluded definitive understanding'. There is general agreement in the literature that loyalty actively and positively binds employees to an organisation and discourages the behavioural option of exit (for example, Farrell & Rusbult, 1992; Rusbult et al. 1982). However, the polemic arises from loyalty's mediating effect on the propensity to use voice, even though Hirschman's work is largely cited as the basis of writers' understanding of the construct. Some researchers agree that loyalty encourages the use of voice (for example, Graham, 1986; Spencer, 1986), while others believe that loyalty supresses voice (for example, Farrell, 1983; Rusbult et al., 1988; Withey & Cooper, 1989). It could reasonably be assumed that those who support loyalty's constructive impact on voice do so because the central tenet of Hirschman's work is the re-establishment of the organisational status quo through positive actions. Hirschman places great emphasis on the restorative qualities of feedback as a means of alerting managers to deficiencies within the organisation, thereby paving the way for restitution.

Of those who regard loyalty as having a negative impact on voice, Farrell (1983: 598), for example, characterises loyalty as 'suffering in silence' and Withey and Cooper (1989: 536) suggest that passive loyalty presents very much like neglect, with individuals simply 'biding their time'. Clark et al. (2016) also take this stance, suggesting individuals who demonstrate loyalty may do so because they are incapable of taking alternative action and not because they are reacting positively to an unsatisfactory situation. Graham and Keeley (1992: 195) assert that loyalty's controversial status in the literature may be due to the 'nature of an interpreter's purpose'. For example, in cases where dissatisfaction has arisen, managers who are keen to repair the situation as quickly and as smoothly as possible may resent unwanted interference and criticisms from individuals who are negatively voicing their concerns. They further suggest that 'voice appears as a threat to the orderly functioning of the organisation'. In these circumstances, loyal behaviour may be regarded as being exhibited by those who passively accept declining situations without complaint, whereas those who voice their concerns may simply be seen as 'troublemakers' rather than loyal employees. Graham and Keeley (1992: 195) go on to moot that loyalty is 'marked by high-intensity voice', but that 'high-intensity voice by *itself* does not denote loyalty'. In their study, they discuss the difficulties of distinguishing between complainers with high-intensity voice who are genuinely concerned with rectifying the situation and those who are simply chronic faultfinders. They go on to distinguish between 'reformist' and 'passive' loyalty, in that reformist loyalty is 'shown by attempting to correct and reverse the process of organisational deterioration while passive loyalty implies remaining silent' (Graham & Keeley, 1992: 197).

3.3.3.2 The construct of voice

Central to Hirschman's (1970: 16) work was the construct of voice, yet he himself acknowledged that it was conceptually 'messy' and may simply consist of 'faint grumbling', or be as unsettling as 'violent protest'. It would appear that it is the very range of voice options that critics have found problematic. For example, Withey and Cooper (1989) found the results for voice to be the most inconclusive and, in this respect, correlated with Rusbult et al.'s (1982) earlier findings, suggesting that this may be due to the complexity of the construct. Furthermore, they state that 'the effectiveness of some forms of voice is dependent on someone else responding to the behaviour' (Withey & Cooper, 1989: 535). For example, in their study, some individuals stated that although they were unhappy with their current jobs, they were disinclined to complain about it because they did not believe that voicing their concerns to those in authority would lead to corrective action. This finding reflects those of Saunders et al. (1992), who assert that the likelihood of employees comfortably voicing their concerns upwards is predicated on the perceptions of how well, or badly, a manager will take and use this information. They further suggest that 'supervisors act as "voice managers" whenever they receive input from employees' (Saunders et al., 1992: 242). The purpose of their research was to explore how employees' perceptions of their supervisors as voice managers determined the likelihood of them voicing their concerns. Saunders et al.'s (1992) study extended the work of Hirschman by examining additional factors other than loyalty that predict whether or not employees will use voice behaviours. They assumed that employees would be more likely to voice their concerns when they:

> Perceive that their supervisor: (a) makes consistent, accurate and correctable decisions; (b) encourages participation by all employees; (c) is fair and unbiased in reaching decisions; (d) is easy to approach; (e) manages employee voice in a timely manner; and (f) is not retributive to employees who voice. (Saunders et al., 1992: 243).

Additional factors that harmonise with Hirschman's (1970) model were also considered: 'work satisfaction, satisfaction with supervision in general, and organisational commitment' (Saunders et al., 1992: 243). These additional factors, although predicted to have a bearing on employees' likelihood to use voice behaviours, showed no relationship. However, the expectation that there would be a relationship between employees' perceptions of their supervisors as voice managers and the likelihood of engaging in voice behaviours proved to be a 'critical determinant' (Saunders et al., 1992: 251). Saunders et al. (1992) conducted further research in an attempt to develop and reproduce the findings of their initial study. This second investigation was much larger and examined the dimensions of the supervisor as voice manager according to two principal factors: 'responsiveness and approachability'.

The factor items relating to responsiveness included statements such as, 'my boss gives high priority to handling employee concerns' and 'my boss is willing to support me if my concern is valid'. The items loading highly on this factor related largely to 'fairness, effective decisions, promptness and willingness to take action' (Saunders et al., 1992: 252). The factor items concerning approachability were framed negatively and contained statements like 'I don't know what to expect when I take a concern to my boss' and 'it is difficult to take a concern to my boss'. Therefore, items loading highly on this factor 'were related to uncertainty about how to approach supervisors, the stressfulness of voice, and uncertainty about how supervisors would react to employee voice' (Saunders et al., 1992: 253).

The findings from this study suggest that the scale of 'supervisor as voice manager' appears to have two crucial dimensions, those of approachability and responsiveness. In line with their predictions, it was found that supervisors who were deemed to be responsive and approachable create conditions where employees are more likely to voice their concerns regarding unsatisfactory workplace situations. However, their findings indicate that simply providing the means for employees to voice discontent is insufficient. Employees need to believe that they can approach their supervisors, that they will be listened to sympathetically and that positive outcomes will arise from engaging in voice behaviours. This is an important extension to Hirschman's work and that of preceding researchers in that, previously, little consideration was given to how the employee voice is managed by those in authority. Additionally, and in contrast to Hirschman's theory, job satisfaction and high levels of organisational commitment do not in themselves guarantee that employees will voice their concerns.

3.3.3.3 Hagedoorn et al.'s conceptualisation of voice

Difficulties with the conceptualisation of the EVLN voice construct led Hagedoorn and her colleagues (1999) to re-evaluate and refine the concept, particularly in the light of the earlier EVLN topology developed by Farrell (1983). Hagedoorn et al. (1999: 311) suggest that the voice construct, delineated by Farrell, be separated into two opposing forms: 'considerate voice and aggressive voice'. They regard considerate voice to be constructive in that it 'consists of attempts to solve the problem', whereas aggressive voice is essentially perceived as a destructive action which 'consists of efforts to win, without consideration for the concerns of the organisation' (Hagedoorn et al., 1999: 311). Respondents to Hagedoorn et al.'s survey were asked to read a number of statements and to rate their level of agreement on seven-point, Likert-type scales. The statements relating to exit and neglect reflected those of earlier studies (for example, Farrell 1983 and Rusbult et al. 1988), and were phrased such as 'intend to change

employers' (exit), and 'put less effort into your work than might be expected of you' (neglect), (Hagedoorn et al., 1999: 315). The loyalty construct was relabelled 'patience' and contained statements reflecting those previously used by Farrell (1983) and Rusbult et al. (1988) to indicate loyalist behaviours such as 'have faith that something like this will be taken care of by the organisation without you contributing to the problem-solving process' (Hagedoorn et al., 1999: 314). Voice was divided into considerate and aggressive and Hagedoorn et al. provided a statement which described both constructs. For example, considerate voice used statements such as 'discussing the problem with the supervisor' and 'talking with your supervisor about the problems until you reach total agreement'. Examples of aggressive voice were markedly different and were represented by statements such as 'being persistent with your supervisor in order to get what you want' and 'starting a fight with your supervisor' (Hagedoorn et al., 1999: 314).

The results of their study indicate that, in-line with Farrell (1983), employees' responses reflected the constructive/destructive and active/passive dimensions. Significant correlations were also shown between exit, aggressive voice and neglect behaviours. Consistent with previous research, job satisfaction was also shown to have a positive impact on constructive behaviours (considerate voice and patience) and keep destructive actions, such as exit, aggressive voice and neglect, in check (Leck & Saunders, 1992; Rusbult et al., 1988; Withey & Cooper, 1989). However, contrary to prior findings by Withey and Cooper (1989), the items used to measure patience reflected buoyancy and confidence in the organisation, rather than the feelings of entrapment and helplessness found in Withey and Cooper's study. This finding suggested to Hagedoorn et al. (1999) that in a similar vein to voice, the construct for passive loyalty should be divided into two forms namely: constructive and destructive.

3.3.3.4 The constructs of exit and neglect

Rusbult et al. (1982: 1231) deemed both exit and neglect to be 'destructive' responses to dissatisfaction, with exit seen as an active behaviour and neglect a passive reaction. Throughout the literature, the concepts of exit and neglect are intertwined, with many considering exit as the inevitable extension of neglectful behaviours (for example, Bashshur & Oc, 2014; Withey & Cooper 1989). Some even suggest that neglect should not be classified as a separate response category because, in their opinion, it is simply as a form of disengagement and subsequently exit (for example, Clark et al., 2016). This perspective is at odds with that of Withey and Cooper (1989: 525) who assert that the addition of neglect to Hirschman's EVL framework is particularly useful because this adjunct 'might more adequately cover the range of responses to dissatisfaction'.

Rusbult et al. (1988) broadened Hirschman's (1970) original concept of exit which was originally intended as a means of signalling discontent with organisational performance. To them, exit behaviours went beyond the simple act of leaving and encompassed thinking about leaving and conducting searches for alternative employment. As Naus et al. (2007: 689) suggest, 'actually leaving the organisation may not always be a viable option, due to real or perceived barriers to exit, leaving the organisation in a psychological sense is something over which the employee has more control'. Bashshur and Oc (2014) concur with this viewpoint, stating that when employees do not have the option to quit they may instead begin to disengage with the organisation and start to display neglectful behaviours. Their findings are similar to those of Berntson et al. (2010) who explored the extent to which employability moderated EVLN responses. They found that individuals who feel insecure in their job roles lessened their overall involvement with their employers, thus displaying neglect behaviours. However, workers who believed themselves to be more employable simply switched to another company and took the exit option without first engaging in the responses of voice, loyalty or neglect. This returns to Withey and Cooper's (1989) concept of personal locus of control as a determinant of behavioural responses to dissatisfaction. They suggest that individuals with a strong internal locus of control would be much more likely to engage in behaviours that would directly bring about change, that is, voice and exit, rather than the passive behaviours of loyalty and neglect.

3.3.4 Concluding the EVLN framework

A substantial body of literature has emerged surrounding the use of the EVLN framework in exploring, predicting and measuring behavioural responses to dissatisfaction. Within the field, commentators largely agree that the four behaviours may be independent of one another, or represent an escalating continuum of actions if restitution cannot be established. Similarly, there is general consensus that exit and neglect are destructive components, with exit being actively destructive and neglect representing passive destruction. However, disparities around these two elements arise, with some scholars welcoming the addition of neglect to Hirschman's original framework, stating that it more adequately describes the range of responses to discontent (for example, Withey & Cooper, 1989), while others suggest that neglect should not be classified as a distinct behaviour because it is simply a precursor to exit (Clarke et al., 2016). Other fractures concern the use of voice, which is regarded by some researchers as constructive (Bashshur & Oc, 2014) and as destructive by others (Turnley & Feldman, 1999). Further disagreement centres on whether loyalty suppresses voice (Rusbult et al., 1988) or encourages it (Graham, 1986; Spencer, 1986). Additionally, a number of mitigating variables have been introduced in order to more accurately predict behavioural responses. For example,

Rusbult et al., (1982) added prior satisfaction, prior investment in the relationship and the quality of potential alternatives, while Withey and Cooper (1989) suggested personal costs, self-efficacy and attractiveness of the setting as likely indicators of response. However, despite these variances and disagreements within the literature, the EVLN framework has nevertheless shown itself to be a highly flexible construct that is empirically applicable to a wide variety of settings and with diverse ranges of respondents. Its use, in the context of higher education, along with that of psychological contract theory, are considered in the next section of this chapter.

3.4 A review of psychological contract theory and the application of the EVLN framework within the context of higher education

The need to establish and meet expectations, promises and obligations is at the heart of traditional psychological contract theory (Guest, 1998; Rousseau, 1989; 1990; Rousseau & McLean-Parks, 1993; Shore & Barksdale, 1998). Just as a new employee may enter the workplace with a set of hopes, expectations and aspirations, so too might a student embark on their journey through university life with a corresponding array of goals, dreams and desires. Throughout the burgeoning body of literature surrounding psychological contract theory, research suggests that the strength of the psychological contract has a direct impact on retention, performance and satisfaction, issues all highly salient in the higher education sector today.

The Higher Education White Paper '*Success as a Knowledge Economy: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice*' (2016) cites the findings from a Student Academic Experience Survey conducted in 2015. The survey suggests that the majority of students are discontented with the academic offering they receive from their UK higher education provider 'with over 60% of students feeling that all, or some elements of their course, are worse than expected and a third of these attributing this to concerns with teaching quality' (HEA, 2015, cited in BIS, 2016: 8). The commodification and massification of higher education in tandem with dramatic rises in student fees have substantially changed the relationship that universities have with their students and are driving issues such as student choice, teaching quality and the overall student experience to the forefront of current debate. The notion of the student as a paying customer seeking a return on their investment is not new (McMillan & Cheney, 1996; Redding, 2005). However, in a highly competitive marketplace with universities vying fiercely with each other to attract students, psychological contract theory, and more specifically the EVLN framework, may provide valuable tools with which to examine student perceptions of their higher education experience and explore their possible reactions to dissatisfaction.

Although psychological contract theory has received widespread attention in management and organisational literature, the application of this theory within the context of higher education is a largely under-researched area. It has, however, been alluded to indirectly through studies concerning students' expectations, retention rates and overall satisfaction (for example, Appleton-Knapp & Krentler, 2006; Longden, 2006; Molesworth et al., 2009; Redding, 2005; Sander, Stevenson, King & Coates, 2000), yet it has rarely been used overtly as a way of appraising the student experience. Notable exceptions include Clinton (2009), Koskina (2013), and O'Toole and Prince (2015) who have all examined psychological contract theory within an educational setting.

3.4.1 Expectations, obligations and the psychological contract in higher education

Researchers agree that the marketization of higher education is changing the way in which the university is seen both by students and the sector itself (for example, Molesworth, Nixon & Scullion, 2009; O'Toole & Prince, 2015; Redding, 2005). Some, such as Molesworth et al. (2009: 278), decry this neo-liberal agenda and the current market discourse which 'promotes a mode of existence where students seek to *have* a degree, rather than *be* learners'. They further assert that universities should provide a haven for self-reflection and the development of critical faculties with which to question the structure of society and the world around us. The notion of providing a quality service to the student customer, coupled with the now prevalent application of business vocabulary in a university setting, does not sit well in academic circles and generally elicits highly negative responses (Redding, 2005). Despite a marked lack of enthusiasm by researchers and academics alike towards the commercialisation of UK higher education, it is a trend that is unlikely to be reversed.

Coinciding with the striking rise in student fees in 2012, the Quality Assurance Agency conducted a wide-ranging survey to try to ascertain what students' individual experiences of higher education were like and to raise awareness of issues that were particularly salient within the student body (Kandiko & Mawer, 2013: 22). Of the emergent themes, the most overriding was the prevalence of a 'consumerist ethos across all student years and what they expect in return for their investment'. The notion of the student as consumer is not new, but it is certainly gaining a foothold in the psyche of students, their parents and the education sector as a whole. Hill (1995) was one of the first writers to introduce British academics to the concept of the student as consumer and its implications for the management of higher educational service quality in the UK. He asserts that there is a requirement for institutions to understand the expectations of students, not just during their studies, but even before their arrival, and then to

continue to meet those needs right through to graduation. This view is similar to that of Sander et al. (2000: 309) who suggest that 'if teachers in higher education are being framed as service providers, one way to ensure the provision of a quality service is to know the expectations of their customers'.

This assertion is consistent with the views of Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry (1990), who are leading academics on the subject of service quality. They state that 'knowing what customers expect is the first, and probably the most critical step, in delivering service quality' (1990: 51). They believe that it is vital to establish not only an understanding of expectations, but how those expectations are formed and their relationship with perceived service quality. However, as Kandiko (2013: 15) states when referring to student perceptions, it is 'not simply a service quality issue because education is participatory where the experience is shaped to some extent by themselves'. This view is similar to that of Clinton (2009) who disagrees with framing students as customers. He argues that 'students do not simply purchase degrees… but are required to meet certain levels of attainment in order to be awarded a degree, they are not "customers" in the traditional sense' (Clinton, 2009: 23).

The findings of a study conducted by Appleton-Knapp and Krentler (2006) suggest that expectations have a dramatic impact on overall student satisfaction and that the more students' expectations are met and exceeded, the more satisfied they are overall. Nowadays, one might clearly see the relationship between the two, but a decade ago, student satisfaction in higher education was not as high a priority as it is today. Relatedly, Douglas, Douglas, McClelland and Davies (2015) conducted a study in order to ascertain the determinants that underlie student satisfaction. Critical incident technique was used in order to capture the student voice and generate narrative concerning both positive and negative experiences of teaching and learning as well as with the broader university services. Their findings conclude that, for the respondents, a high quality student experience consists of how far they were praised and rewarded, the level of social inclusion they experienced, how far they perceived that they were gaining value for money, and the usefulness of the learning in its application to 'real world' settings.

In an earlier paper, Sander et al. (2000) set out to investigate the distinguishing features between what students *expected* and what they *hoped* for from their university experience. They state that 'perhaps the most striking thing about the results is that some students are entering university with the expectation that they will *not* be taught in the way that they would prefer' (Sander et al., 2000: 319). The study indicates that students expected formal lectures and private study, but actually hoped for more group work, student-centred teaching and interactive lecturing. It is notable that Sander et al.'s study (2000) was conducted 18 years ago, yet little

has changed within the sector, thus supporting the assertions of Longden (2006) who questions both the ability and desire of HEIs to adjust to changing social, economic and political conditions.

In order to establish and meet expectations, promises and obligations, authors such as Pietersen (2014), suggest that teachers should negotiate agreements with their students to determine mutual role expectations and responsibilities within the educational experience. She gathered qualitative data from 25 undergraduate students within a two-hour, face to face group session. She posed the following questions: 'what do you expect from your lecturer?' and 'what can your lecturer expect from you?' (Pietersen, 2014: 30). After answering in writing individually, the students were divided into small groups of four or five to discuss their responses in order to reach a consensus. The findings are presented in the quadrants in Table 3.3 below. As can be seen in Table 3.3, items which are ranked in order of importance from 1 (most important) to 10 (least important). It is notable that the negotiated responsibilities and rights of the students and their lecturer are relatively equal in number and similar in content.

Although Pietersen's study was conducted within a university in South Africa, the students' expectations and ideas about their personal responsibilities correlate strongly with findings of similar investigations in British institutions. The suggestion of negotiating an agreement between students and their lecturers echoes Whitely's (2008: 20) 'blank sheet' approach in which she asked students to write down their expectations of their programme of study and of the university itself, and to indicate the degree to which their experiences in their first week matched their expectations. These methods mark a significant departure from the literature surrounding psychological contract theory in workplace settings, as the very nature of the construct is that it concerns the individual, and is not, therefore, a shared understanding.

Table 3.3 The rankings of the rights and responsibilities of the students and lecturer

Students have the right to:	The lecturer has the right to:
1. Receive quality education 2. Fair and equal treatment 3. Recent and relevant information regarding the subject being presented 4. Consultation 5. Good feedback after assessments 6. Voice opinions 7. Participation in contact sessions 8. Privacy of scripts 9. Negotiate any changes in the program	1. Be respected 2. Cooperation from students in all matters relating to the learning situation 3. A dedicated attitude from students with regard to their own learning and development 4. Demand punctuality in class attendance and submission of assignments 5. Compile lawful and reasonable rules 6. Pose questions and demand answers in class 7. Insist on a medical certificate when a student misses an assessment activity

Students have the responsibility to:	The lecturer has the responsibility to:
1. Work hard and strive for excellence 2. Acquire learning material 3. Contribute to a relationship of mutual respect with the lecturer and co-learners and exhibit good conduct 4. Submit assignments in time 5. Prepare for and attend classes regularly and punctually 6. Obey lawful and reasonable rules 7. Provide acceptable, valid reasons for missing a class or assessment 8. Participate in learning activities 9. Inform the lecturer of problems the students might be experiencing 10. Respect consultation hours	1. Provide students with guidelines and relevant information 2. Provide quality facilitation by preparing well for contact sessions and by using class time effectively 3. Provide effective and fair evaluation of assessment activities 4. Inform students of any changes in the program or learning material 5. Assist students with problems that they may experience 6. Contribute to a relationship of mutual respect 7. Respect consultation hours 8. Provide correct and timely feedback on assessments

Source: Adapted from Pietersen (2014: 30)

Koskina (2013), in her investigation of the psychological contract in a UK higher education institution, agrees that not only is it vital to respond to the expectations of students, but to gain an understanding of how those expectations are formed. Her study reveals that the student psychological contract contains both promissory and well as non-promissory expectations. The promissory expectations, largely formed by the university's brand image and marketing strategy, concern tangible elements such as facilities and resources, as well as intangibles largely relating to the quality of the teaching staff. With respect to the non-promissory expectations, four implicit expectations were identified: social networking; new experiences; development of soft/employability skills; and membership of a positive learning community. Her findings are in line with those of Guest (1998) who views the psychological contract not simply as the fulfilment of expectations, but crucially, of perceived promises. Clinton's (2009: 23) paper does not focus on the promissory elements of the student psychological contract, but instead aims to 'discuss the role of the psychological contract as a mechanism through which mutual expectations may be exchanged'. In it, he asserts that expectations can arise from a multitude of sources and may not necessarily coincide with promises at all. He, like Pietersen (2014) and Whitely (2008), suggests that expectations, promises and associated commitments may be ascertained by conducting a classroom exercise at the beginning of term to tease out what both lecturers and students expected of one another. Consistent here, is that within an academic context, the researchers have sought to explicitly discuss the psychological contract with students in order for it to be developed mutually.

The EVLN framework thus adds an additional dimension to psychological contract theory by exploring the possible behaviours a student might adopt if they perceive a breach or violation to have occurred. The use of the EVLN topology in an educational setting with be examined in the final section of Chapter 3.

3.4.2 Concluding expectations, obligations and the psychological contract in higher education

As presented above, the commodification of higher education in the UK is dramatically altering the relationships that students have with their university. The notion of providing a 'quality service' to student-consumers is an anathema to some academics, but it is a reality that many will have to adjust to. A consumerist ethos has become the prevalent mind-set for a large section of the student body and consequently, their expectations have become heightened. In order to establish and meet these expectations, some authors have suggested that lecturers negotiate a psychological contract with their students, so that a shared understanding can be brokered. This development marks a significant departure from psychological contract theory in workplace settings.

In view of the intensifying competition between UK universities both to attract and retain their students, an understanding of how their expectations are formed and what they consist of, could provide valuable insights into meeting students' needs.

3.4.3 The EVLN framework in the context of higher education

As noted above, limited empirical research has been conducted into the use of psychological contract theory in an educational context, whilst even rarer is the application of the EVLN framework within this setting. The fact that researchers have applied the construct in a variety of environments, as presented earlier, suggests its wide-ranging applicability (for example, Hagedoorn et al., 1999, midwifery nurses; Clark et al., 2016, politics; Rusbult et al., 1982, romantic involvements.

Those who have demonstrated the model's applicability within an educational environment include Itzkovich and Alt (2015); Lovitts (1996); and Mahaffey et al. (1991). Mahaffey et al. (1991) sought to evaluate the semantic validity of the EVLN constructs and how far they were distinct from one another. They hypothesised that the concepts are, in some way, interrelated and state that previous studies have not helped researchers to understand why, when faced with similar sources of dissatisfaction, some students choose to leave the institution, some

complain to their tutor, others avoid coming to class, while some quietly tolerate the situation, hoping that things would improve. Their study indicates that the responses for each of the constructs are largely distinguishable from one another. However, other than overtly quitting the institution, the majority of the exit acts are regarded as being more typical of neglect behaviours rather than those of exit. This mirrors the overlap of the concepts within organisational studies but, as Mahaffey et al. (1991) suggest, students are not simply customers of a service who can readily go elsewhere and, hence, the interrelation of exit and neglect might reflect 'the angst many students experience when contemplating withdrawal' (Mahaffey et al., 1991: 82). Their study was conducted in three phases within a Canadian higher education institution. In phase one, a group of 30 individuals incorporating undergraduates, postgraduates, faculty and support staff were asked to 'try to think of some students you have known. With these individuals in mind, please describe five (or more) acts or behaviors that they engaged in when they were dissatisfied' (Mahaffey et al., 1991: 76). In phase two, a separate panel of judges was provided with definitions of the EVLN categories and asked to rate the responses generated in phase one, from the best to the worst examples of each category. Once the top 25 most prototypical acts for each category had been established, they were combined, randomised and given to a sample of 86 undergraduates to allocate to the four EVLN constructs in phase three. The top two responses for each category are presented in Table 3.4 below, along with similarly classified responses generated by Lovitts (1996) and Itzkovich & Alt (2015).

Table 3.4 below shows that the item descriptors generated in each of the three studies bear some similarities to one another. However, there are also marked differences. For example, within the voice category, the decisions to 'verbally confront others' or 'complain to the department head' (Mahaffey et al., 1991: 81) contrast with respondents who chose to 'talk to faculty and try to make things better' and 'seek help or advice from other graduate students' (Lovitts,1996: 12). This difference appears to support Hagedoorn et al.'s (1999) stance that the voice option can be separated into two distinct forms: aggressive and considerate voice.

Table 3.4 The two principal item descriptors for each of the EVLN components from three separate studies

Item Descriptor	Author(s)
Exit 1. Quit School 2. Decide to quit school	Mahaffey et al. (1991: 81)
1. Explore other graduate schools or graduate programs 2. Start looking for a job	Lovitts (1996: 12)
1. I will take a different course instead 2. I will change the study track	Itzkovich & Alt (2015: 10)
Voice 1. Verbally confront others 2. Complain to department head	Mahaffey et al. (1991: 81)
1. Talk to faculty and try to make things better 2. Seek help or advice from other graduate students	Lovitts (1996: 12)
1. I will personally talk to the lecturer 2. I will talk to other students about this lecturer	Itzkovich & Alt (2015: 10)
Loyalty 1. Wear clothing with university emblem 2. Publicly support the school	Mahaffey et al. (1991: 81)
1. Wait and hope the problem would solve itself 2. Say nothing to others and assume things would work out	Lovitts (1996: 12)
1. I will wait until the course is over 2. I will try not to stand out during the course	Itzkovich & Alt (2015: 10)
Neglect 1. Skip group meetings with classmates 2. Hand in assignments without proof reading them	Mahaffey et al. (1991: 81)
1. Miss classes and stay away from the department 2. Stop doing readings, research or other graduate work	Lovitts (1996: 13)
1. I will write a complaint letter to the management 2. I will initiate a shared complaint letter to the management (petition)	Itzkovich & Alt (2015: 10)

Source: Mahaffey et al. (1991: 81); Lovitts (1996: 12-13); Itzkovich & Alt (2015: 10).

Relatedly, within the loyalty category, 'wear clothing with university emblem' and 'publicly support the school' (Mahaffey et al., 1991: 81) feel very different from 'wait and hope the problem would solve itself' and 'say nothing to others and assume things would work out' (Lovitts,1996: 12). The first example would seem to be a much more active display of loyalty, while the second demonstrates a more passive approach which corresponds to the 'passive-constructive' viewpoints of both Farrell (1983) and Rousseau (1995). Furthermore, Itzkovich and Alt's (2015) neglect behaviours are inconsistent with the EVLN literature which conceptualises neglect as 'inactivity and silence' Kolarska and Aldridge (1980: 41), or 'just letting things fall apart' (Rusbult et al., 1982: 1231); in other words, passive reactions. In contrast, Itzkovich and Alt's (2015) neglect behaviours are active and correspond more closely with voice behaviours. Framing neglect as an active response is in line with Rousseau's (1995) reasoning, but differs to Farrell's (1983) findings which present neglect as a passive-destructive reaction.

Itzkovich and Alt's (2015) exploration centred on three institutions in Israel and studied students' reactions to faculty incivility, that is, incidents where the staff were the perpetrators of uncivil behaviour towards their students. The recorded incidents were divided into 'active incivility', for example when 'the teacher yells at you as a response to misunderstanding' and 'passive incivility', when 'the teacher ignores students' questions during lectures' (Itzkovich & Alt, 2015: 6). Participants were asked to recall an incident that they had either personally been involved in, or they had witnessed and asked to describe either their own response, or that of their fellow student. The response statements were then condensed into shorter versions by two 'experts' and categorised in accordance with the four EVLN constructs. The statements were formulated into a questionnaire and distributed to 744 undergraduate students who provided their own likely reaction to each statement and indicated their level of agreement on a five-point, Likert-type scale (1= strongly agree, to 5= strongly disagree) (Itzkovich and Alt, 2015:8). Overall, their study makes a number of overarching assumptions about the transactional nature of the student-faculty relationship as well as muddying the waters by bringing in elements such as the students' social status, personality traits and religious affiliations in order to support their conclusions.

Lovitts' (1996) study, conducted in America and focusing on Doctoral students, was largely theoretical in nature, although she drew on data from the investigations of other writers spanning more than 30 years. Her goal was to examine the reasons and perspectives of those students who had completed their studies, compared with students who had decided to leave their institution. She supplemented the existing data with those generated from 30, hour-long, semi-structured telephone interviews. She wanted to reveal and contrast the students' prior expectations against their perceptions of lived reality in order to ascertain the extent to which they themselves felt to be at blame, as opposed to failings on the part of their institutions. During the telephone interviews, she found that more than a third of those questioned

unfavourably compared their undergraduate and Doctoral experiences without being prompted to do so. Their spontaneous statements clearly indicated that their expectations had been unmet. Interestingly, however, the students placed the blame squarely on themselves rather than on 'the system in which they were embedded' (Lovitts,1996: 12). They stated that 'they should have had more knowledge about the program before they enrolled', or that they 'should have been more forceful or assertive' when dealing with their tutors and in admitting that they did not understand things (1996: 12). Lovitts (1996: 13) suggests that 'this self-blame… prevents them from voicing their discontent because they have internalized the locus of responsibility'. She goes on to assert that in so doing, they are leaving their studies without ever voicing their concerns, meaning that their institutions are powerless to take corrective measures. Ultimately, Lovitts' (1996: 15) findings indicated that those who had completed their studies were students who had voiced their concerns and discontent in order to seek restitution, rather than non-completers who had exited 'silently and alone'.

3.4.4 Concluding the EVLN framework in the context of higher education

The empirical application of the EVLN framework within the context of higher education has received scant attention by researchers. And the studies that do exist have all been conducted overseas, mainly using quantitative methods of data collection. This research has found that although the four EVLN components are largely distinguishable from one another, there are some areas of overlap. The findings also suggest that some of the constructs can be divided up in order to represent a wider range of responses, for example, loyalty can be passive or active and voice can be either considerate or aggressive. The danger in a higher education setting is that unhappy students will simply exit without ever employing voice, be it considerate or aggressive, meaning that the institution will have no opportunity to rectify the situation and restore harmony.

3.5 Concluding Chapter 3

From its early origins in social exchange and equity theories, the psychological contract has attracted much attention in the management and organisation literature and has become a respected theoretical construct. However, research into the psychological contract in the context of higher education is relatively rare, although there are exceptions including Bathmaker's (1999) study of the psychological contract between the university and academic staff, Koskina's (2013) tripartite study of business school students, their tutors and the university, and Pietersen's (2014) work on negotiating a shared psychological contract with students. Both Koskina (2013) and Pietersen (2014) found that student psychological contracts

contain a mixture of transactional and relational expectations of their institutions. The transactional expectations largely concern performance requirements including lecturer professionalism, the provision of timely feedback and the structure of teaching sessions. Relational expectations, on the other hand, revolve around the approachability of lecturers, help and support from staff in general, and the opportunities for students to freely express their ideas and opinions.

Meeting and satisfying the expectations of students is becoming ever more critical in the highly competitive higher education marketplace. A recent Government White Paper (2016) devotes an entire section to the 'exit' of providers from the higher education system, implying that, in the future, some universities will simply go out of business through their inability to attract either sufficient numbers, or an appropriate calibre of students (BIS, 2016: 38). This is the first time it has been publicly acknowledged that the government might let a university fail. Although the commercialisation of the higher education sector does not sit comfortably with many academics, it is a reality that universities will need to adapt to. The prevalence of the 'consumerist ethos' and the expectation of 'return on investment' as dominant themes in the QAA's research suggests that students in the future will demand an education experience very different from that received today (Kandiko, 2013: 22).

Commentators such as Clinton (2009: 25) assert that 'in the academic context, psychological contracts are practical tools that academics can use to clarify the expectations of students and themselves'. Although this is a valid point, the notion of 'student expectations' is, however, a highly complex and multifaceted concept. Current investigations into the psychological contract within the context of higher education suggest that it should be negotiated and agreed in collaboration with students through open discussion (Clinton, 2009; Koskina, 2013; Pietersen, 2014). This departure from the organisational literature's focus on the development of an individual construct towards the idea of a shared understanding in which the student voice can be heard could potentially represent a promising platform for future investigations.

In conjunction with the use of psychological contract theory, the EVLN framework does appear to be a useful conceptual lens with which to view the university-student relationship and to explore possible responses to discontent. Indeed, the research this far conducted has provided some useful insights; for example, the areas of overlap between the constructs is an area warranting further investigation, as is subdividing the constructs of loyalty and voice in order to present a more nuanced portrait of a given situation.

The findings of the present study's research around the student psychological contract, and the use of the EVLN framework in exploring possible reactions to discontent, are presented in Chapter 5. They have been generated by means of the research methods outlined in the next chapter.

Chapter Four

Research Design and Methodology

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to explain and justify the philosophical position, methodology and methods used to investigate the research problem identified in Chapter 1 and contextualised in Chapter 2. Central to this enquiry is the desire to more fully understand the origins of students' expectations of their university experience, how these ideas and hopes are formed, and the possible relationship between these beliefs and subsequent actions if their expectations go unfulfilled. The principal aims of the research concern the critical appraisal of the potential value of psychological contract theory in general, and the Exit-Voice-Loyalty-Neglect (EVLN) framework in particular, in understanding student relationships with the university. Chapter 3 revealed that the application of psychological contract theory, and specifically the EVLN framework in the context of higher education, is acknowledged as an under-researched area. Hence, this thesis will make an original contribution to the field by investigating whether the student psychological contract influences responses to discontent and the extent to which dissatisfaction leads to EVLN behaviours. The methods employed in this thesis adhere to interpretivist ontology in that it is assumed that the researcher and reality are inseparable and that, epistemologically, any knowledge concerning the 'reality' of lived experience is subjectively created by our understanding of it.

However, and wishing this study to be divorced from the polemics of the 'paradigm wars', a pragmatic approach has been adopted so that debates concerning the superiority of objective 'truth and reality' can largely be avoided. Qualitative methods of enquiry within the pragmatic paradigm are employed to meet the research problem, aims and objectives and are considered to be the most suitable mode of investigation in order to more fully explore students' expectations, beliefs and attitudes. As a Professional Doctorate, the DBA emphasises and encourages applied research. A pragmatic line of enquiry was chosen in order for this investigation to help to solve practical, institutional challenges in the higher education sector and inform future managerial policy.

As Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998: 21) suggest, 'we believe that pragmatists consider the research question to be more important than either the method they use, or the worldview that is supposed to underlie this method'. It is the 'what works' viewpoint and use of the methodological tools available to addressing the research questions that is employed. In a

pragmatic approach, a balance between subjectivity and objectivity is actively sought through the recognition that 'both observable phenomena and subjective meanings can provide acceptable knowledge' Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998: 30).

4.2 Research aims and objectives

As introduced in Chapter 1, the overall purpose of this investigation is to ascertain the extent to which students form a psychological contract with their university, the nature of that contract, and what actions students might take if their expectations go unfulfilled.

The aims and objectives of the research are restated below:

1. To critically appraise the potential value of the psychological contract in general, and the EVLN framework in particular, in understanding university students' relationships with their institutions

2. To propose ways of applying psychological contract theory and the EVLN framework in practice in order to enhance student-university relationships.

In order to meet these aims, the research has the following objectives:

1. To systematically investigate previous research into psychological contract theory and EVLN behaviours, both in the employer-employee relationship, and in the setting of higher education, in order to gain a greater understanding of the field

2. To carry out primary fieldwork to investigate student perceptions of their higher education experience at UCLan

3. To analyse the findings of the fieldwork to gain an understanding of the nature of students' expectations, beliefs, perceived promises and reciprocal obligations

4. To investigate students' likely course of action if a breach of their psychological contract were to occur

5. To contribute to the debate through the formulation of a set of conclusions and recommendations regarding the appropriate conditions for applying new methodologies to respond positively to student dissatisfaction.

4.3 Research strategy and design

At its simplest, a research strategy can be defined as the 'general plan of how the researcher will go about answering the research question' according to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009: 600). This 'general plan' is usually executed through the use of quantitative or qualitative methods which are often portrayed in the literature as polar opposites. Bryman and Bell (2011:

26) assert that, superficially, there is little difference between the two, 'other than the fact that quantitative researchers employ measurement and qualitative researchers do not'. However, they also draw attention to opposing viewpoints about the potential superiority of adherence to one methodology over the other, particularly in organisational settings.

Positivist ontology assumes that the researcher is separate from reality and that epistemologically, an objective reality exists beyond the human mind. In this paradigm, quantitative methods of enquiry are used in order to produce hard, verifiable 'facts' and credible 'truths'. Interpretivist ontology on the other hand, assumes that the researcher and reality are inseparable and that epistemologically, any knowledge pertaining to lived experience is subjectively constructed. In this alternative, competing paradigm, qualitative methods of enquiry are predominantly used in order to produce rich, thick data replete with meaning and connotation (Weber, 2004). Table 4.1 below presents an overview of some of the perceived advantages of one research approach over the other.

Table 4.1 Principal advantages and limitations of qualitative and quantitative research

Qualitative research	
Advantages	**Disadvantages**
Provides detailed perspectives of a few people Captures the voices of participants Allows participants' experiences to be understood in context Is based on the views of participants, not of the researcher Appeals to people's enjoyment of stories	Has limited generalizability Studies only a few people and is subjective. Provides only soft data (not hard data, such as numbers) Studies few people Is highly subjective
Quantitative research	
Advantages	**Disadvantages**
Draws upon conclusions of large numbers of people Analyzes data efficiently Investigates relationships within data Examines probable causes and effects Controls bias Appeals to people's preference for numbers	Is impersonal, dry Does not record the words of participants Provides limited understanding of context of participants Is largely researcher driven

Source: Cresswell (2015: 5)

Denzin and Lincoln (2005: 8), assert that 'positivists… allege that qualitative researchers write fiction, not science and have no way of verifying their truth statements'. This quotation reflects the heated and occasionally savage debate concerning the perceived philosophical, ontological and epistemological extremes. Some writers believe that only quantitative methods can yield valid facts with which to produce law-like generalisations, whilst others believe that only qualitative approaches can truly reflect the subtleties and complexities of the human condition (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Lowe, 2002; Robson 1993; Saunders et al., 2009).

4.4 Philosophical approaches and research paradigms

It is widely acknowledged that the work of Khun ('*The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*', 1962, 1970, 1996) popularised the use of the term 'paradigm' in social science research (Cassell & Symon, 2004; Creswell, 2015; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Easterby-Smith et al., 2002; Mason, 2012). Bryman and Bell (2011: 24) define a paradigm as 'a cluster of beliefs and dictates which for scientists in a particular discipline influence what should be studied, how research should be done, [and] how results should be interpreted'. Any research paradigm, whether it be positivist, critical, interpretivist or pragmatic, has at its heart a peculiar collection of ontological and epistemological assumptions, beliefs and ideas. In other words, the constitution and construction of reality in a specific context or discipline and the received wisdom concerning the perception and description of that reality.

A summary of a selection of the principal paradigms referred to in social science research is presented in Table 4.2 below.

4.4.1 Positivism

Positivistic enquiry has dominated the natural sciences for centuries and even though researchers suggest that its influence has diminished since the 1980s with the more general acceptance of interpretivist methodology, it still retains a steadfast grip on many research practices and procedures (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). In fact, as Robson (1993: 21) notes, 'somewhat paradoxically, adherence to positivist views appear to linger more tenaciously in social science than in natural science'; and this appears largely to be the case today. Gill and Johnson (2010: 188) suggest that at its core, positivism is concerned with *erklaren* (trying to make explanatory sense) as opposed to interpretivist approaches related to *verstehen* (trying to understand phenomena).

Table 4.2 Research Paradigms

	Positivism	Critical Theory	Interpretivism	Pragmatism
Ontology Assumptions made about the nature of reality	Reality is objective irrespective of the researcher's beliefs or viewpoint. It assumes that real world objects exist apart from the human knower	Reality is interactively constructed through language and is inseparable from ourselves. Facts cannot be isolated from values	Reality is multiple and relative. Knowledge is not determined objectively, but is socially constructed	Reality can be objective or subjective and multiple realities exist. Recognition that no single perspective can provide a whole picture
Epistemology The researcher's view of what constitutes acceptable knowledge	Researchers must be independent and human interests and emotions should be irrelevant. Explanations must demonstrate causality. The quest is to generate facts, verifiable truths and time and context-free generalisations	Researchers influence what can be known through the interaction between themselves and their subject(s). The quest is not just to describe, but to change a situation. Imbalance of power is a key theme	Researchers are part of what is being observed. They and their subject(s) are interdependent. The quest is to increase the general understanding of a given situation	Researcher's values are central. Knowledge can be subjectively and/or objectively derived. The quest is to solve problems and to produce research that has practical applications
Methodology Combination of techniques used to enquire into a specific situation	Use of hypotheses and deduction. Generalisations are made through statistical probability. Sampling requires large numbers to be selected randomly	Use of reflective dialogical methods. As neutrality is impossible, transparency regarding one's ideological position is essential	Use of inductive techniques and generalisations through theoretical abstraction. Small numbers of cases are chosen for specific reasons	Use of any tool or framework in order to address and answer the research problem or question. Recognition that all methodology has limitations
Methods Individual techniques for data collection and analysis	Quantitative methods are used such as questionnaires and employing statistical analysis	Reliance on methods which incorporate interviews and reflection. How language is used and defined is central	Qualitative methods such as focus groups, interviews and case studies. The data content are analysed using a number of related approaches	Methods are chosen for their practical value in tackling a specific research problem. Qualitative and/or quantitative methods may be used

Sources include: (Cassell & Symon, 2004; Creswell, 2015; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Easterby-Smith et al., 2002; Mason, 2012; Saunders et al., 2009)

Easterby-Smith et al. (2002: 28) state that central to positivism is the 'idea that the social world exists externally and that its properties should be measured through objective methods, rather than being inferred subjectively through sensation, reflection or intuition'. As can be seen in Table 4.1, positivistic approaches typically employ quantitative methods where data are derived from the use of strict rules and procedures. Bryman and Bell (2011: 167) assert that researchers adhering to the positivistic tradition are mainly preoccupied with: 'measurement, causality, generalization and replication'. All propositions are based on facts and hypotheses are empirically tested against these facts. There is a clear theoretical focus from the outset and it is logical, efficient and enables the analysis of relatively large quantities of data.

The advantages of a quantitative research strategy appear seductive at first sight, in that the researcher aims to be impartial and objective, produce hard data, uncover 'facts' that can be 'proven', utilise solid statistical tools and techniques and obtain sound results that can be 'generalized' across different settings (Bryman and Bell, 2011; Easterby-Smith et al., 2002; Robson 1993; Saunders et al., 2009). However, despite its utility in the quest for certitude, the positivistic paradigm and its related exploratory strategies have been criticised in social science research for their failure to properly reflect the underlying causes of social processes and phenomena (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002).

4.4.2 Interpretivism

Criticisms of positivistic approaches are not new, with such writers as Dilthey suggesting, as far back as the turn of the 20th century, that 'the reductive simplification required for experimentation and causal explanation is inappropriate to the goals of understanding and interpretation required for the study of human experience' (Madison, 1988, cited in Angen, 2000: 385). Interpretivism holds that the social world is distinct from the natural world and that it is socially or discursively constructed. 'Facts' in interpretivism are always context-bound in that they do not apply to all people at all times, in all situations. From this methodological perspective, therefore, knowledge is always relative. Interpretivists tend to employ qualitative methods and rather than embarking on a mission to seek immutable truths, they strive to interpret situations and provide supporting evidence for the validity of that interpretation. Positivists regard this very act of construction as little more than storytelling and that a patchwork of cobbled together information does not stand up either serious scrutiny or possibility of repetition elsewhere (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Saunders et al., 2009). As verification and replication are among the cornerstones of the natural sciences, this lack of generalisability within social science research has left scholars working interpretatively open to harsh criticism. However, positivist and interpretative researchers have a great many traits in common and, according to Weber (2004: iii), the entrenched differences between both camps have become little more than 'folklore… founded on false assumptions and tenuous arguments'.

4.4.3 Validity

Problems of validity are at the crux of the dichotomous debate between positivists and interpretivists. However, it can be argued that the dispute stems not from issues of veracity, but from the methods of evaluation used to compare one paradigm with the other. In any arena, opinions are likely to differ; however, offering one as the ultimate benchmark is misguided. As Guba and Lincoln (1994: 107) suggest, 'paradigms as sets of basic beliefs, are not open to proof in any conventional sense; there is no way to elevate one over the other'. This view is supported by Lin (1998: 171) who moots that 'the standards used by positivists and interpretivists are incommensurable, not better or worse, but different'. In the same vein, Saunders et al. (2009: 108) state that 'it would be easy to fall into the trap of thinking that one research philosophy is "better" than another. This would miss the point. They are "better" at doing different things'.

Ultimately, both positivists and interpretivists have similar goals and desires which include making a contribution to knowledge, enriching their understanding of the world they inhabit and subsequently sharing their new found learning with others by way of publication. However, their respective missions are overshadowed by a deeper, more pressing issue; that of invulnerability. In her somewhat tongue-in-cheek appraisal of writing styles, Rachel Toor (2014: 17) suggests that the overriding concerns of all academics hinge on 'making a convincing case', demonstrating a thorough grasp of their subject, dropping 'enough important names' and whether or not they are perceived to be suitably 'smart'.

In their quest for academic credibility, we are told that positivists seek certainty but, as Rugg and Petre (2007: 40) suggest, the outcome of the theorise/test process and 'hypothetico-deductive' model, is not 'a proven theory, but a theory that hasn't yet been disproved'. This viewpoint reflects what Khun (1996: 2) proposes when he states that 'science has included bodies of belief quite incompatible with the ones we hold today'. His conviction was that scientists, rather than building incrementally on each other's work, make discoveries that are often revolutionary in nature and involve the wholesale rejection of beliefs that were once considered to be scientific fact. As Weber (2004: vi) suggests, 'positivist researchers are acutely aware of the ephemeral nature of the knowledge they construct' and 'recognize the temporary nature and limitations… more keenly than interpretative researchers'. The principal reasons for choosing to follow a pragmatic line of enquiry in this thesis are, first, to avoid such philosophical discussions concerning the superiority of one paradigm over another and, second, to select research methods most appropriate to fulfil the aims and objectives of the investigation with the goal of producing results that will have a practical application. The main tenets of the pragmatic paradigm are outlined in the following section.

4.4.4 The pragmatic paradigm

The research strategies employed throughout the literature concerning both psychological contract theory and the EVLN framework have largely fallen within the positivist paradigm with its objectivist epistemology, realist ontology and favouring a hypothetico-deductive, quantitative approach. In almost all cases, cross-sectional questionnaire surveys have been used as the principal investigative tools (for example: Conway & Coyle-Shapiro, 2011; De Cuyper & De Witte, 2006; McClean Parks et al., 1998; Nelson & Tonks, 2006; Rousseau 1990). This philosophical choice is of significance particularly in view of the nature of the psychological contract and EVLN behaviours which are subjective, tacit and emotionally rooted, dealing with such issues as 'perceptions, expectations, beliefs, promises and obligations' (Guest, 1998: 651) and are therefore difficult to quantify, define or deduce generalisations from.

Qualitative methods of enquiry within the pragmatic paradigm are employed in this thesis in order to meet the research questions, aims and objectives and are considered to be the most suitable mode of investigation in order to more fully explore students' expectations, beliefs and attitudes. Pragmatism is a highly practical and applied research philosophy that, although acknowledging the polarised metaphysical debate of what constitutes 'truth' and 'reality', focuses instead on solving real-world problems. Pragmatism as a philosophy emerged in America in the 19th Century and the literature credits thinkers such as Peirce, James and most notably John Dewey for its development (Hammond, 2013; Morgan, 2014; Rorty, Putnam, Conant & Helfrich, 2004). As a school of thought, pragmatism asserts that the value of an idea is inextricably linked to its practical consequences and that all knowledge is necessarily context-bound. And that knowledge is only meaningful when it is coupled with action. As Hammond (2013: 607) suggests, understandings derived through pragmatic investigation are generated through 'action and reflection on action in order to address particular problems. This means that what we know is tentative or fallible for it has been created in particular circumstances to meet particular ends and to express particular values'. Nothing is, therefore, intrinsically true or false and there is a plurality of acceptable truths. To pragmatists, knowledge is the output of competent enquiry and consequently, truth is essentially the output of what such competent enquiry regards it to be.

Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998: 21) place the researcher's personal values and the research question at the heart of any investigation as opposed to the philosophical paradigm. This view contrasts directly with that of Guba and Lincoln (1994) who believe that the research paradigm is central to any enquiry and that research methods are of secondary significance. When working within the pragmatic paradigm, a principal assumption lies in the fact that it is uniquely associated with mixed-methods research, rather than a mono-method approach. However, as Morgan

(2014: 1045) suggests, 'this confusion is reminiscent of some paradigmatic claims that qualitative methods must be connected to constructivism and quantitative methods to post-positivism'. He goes on to state that 'there may be an affinity between paradigms and methods, but there is no deterministic link that forces the use of a particular paradigm with a particular set of methods'. In other words, there is no concrete association between the pragmatic paradigm and the use of mixed methods as an approach. Pragmatism is, in its own right, a solid philosophical standpoint with which to approach research into the social sciences regardless of the use of qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods.

4.5 Research methodology and methods

'Methods' and 'methodology' are often used interchangeably. This is fundamentally incorrect. Methodology refers to the broad philosophical foundations of the chosen research methods. Essentially, it explains the procedures which researchers use to investigate, describe and interpret various phenomena. Gill and Johnson (2010: 187) suggest that when choosing the overall methodology and methods of investigating certain issues that 'we tacitly employ philosophical assumptions that lead us to comprehend and construct these issues in particular ways' (2010: 187). However, Easterby-Smith et al. (2002: 43) assert that any research activity's primary goal should be that it is conducted in 'ways that are most likely to achieve the research aims'. The data collection methods employed in this investigation are a focus group interview and two phases of semi-structured qualitative interviews. The methods used to analyse the gathered data are open-coding of the transcripts and the creation of a 'codebook' in the form of a spreadsheet.

4.5.1 Data collection: focus group interview

Two rounds of semi-structured interviews, six months apart were conducted with first year university students. In advance of these interviews, a focus group meeting was held with a group of A Level and BTEC Business Studies students from a local 'feeder institution'. The results from the focus group helped to inform the content of the interview questions and highlight issues of particular salience. Bryman and Bell (2011: 503) define a focus group as 'a method of interviewing that involves more than one and at least four interviewees' where, 'there is an emphasis in the questioning on a particular fairly tightly defined topic'. Whereas, Easterby-Smith et al. (2002: 106) simply state that focus group interviews are 'loosely structured steered conversations'. Writers on the subject assert that there are both considerable advantages as well as

disadvantages to employing this method. Despite the oft-cited disadvantages, this technique is widely used, particularly in market research and within the political arena.

Robson (1993: 284-285) suggests that amongst the benefits of focus group interviews is that the researcher is able to easily assess emergent themes and shared views. The participants too can gain from the experience by having the opportunity to discuss a subject of mutual relevance with others. He moots that the shortcomings of the technique include possible bias brought about by one or two members dominating the discussion and that more reserved group members may be unwilling to air their true feelings in public. Most writers agree on the critical role played by the 'facilitator' or 'moderator' in stimulating discussion and exchange of ideas (Bryman and Bell, 2011; Easterby-Smith et al., 2002; Robson 1993; Saunders et al., 2009). And Sim (1998: 351) goes as far to say that 'the skills and attributes of the moderator and the manner of data recording will exert a powerful influence on the quality of the data collected'.

The researcher for this thesis has a background in commercial recruitment and is well used to both managing and driving discussion and quickly establishing rapport and trust, all qualities deemed to be important in a focus group moderator. Easterby-Smith et al. (2002: 106) suggest that sufficient time should be given before the interview begins in order to create an atmosphere in which participants feel confident enough to voice their opinions. In this study, time with the group was limited to a 45-minute period over the students' lunch break. Consequently, a sufficiently relaxed environment needed to be created from the outset. This was aided by the fact that all the students brought food and drink with them and the room, although a classroom, was made to feel less formal in that the chairs were placed in a circle, rather than behind desks.

A possible barrier to feelings of comfort and relaxation was the use of audio recording devices. Two were used, in case of technical failure, and placed in the centre of the circle of chairs. However, they appeared to be quickly forgotten and conversation flowed easily and naturally. The students all contributed much to the discussion and seemed happy to exchange their views with one another. All the students in the group were studying Business and were considering entering university in 2017-2018 (although not necessarily UCLan). Easterby-Smith et al. (2002: 106), assert that 'although the focus group is loosely structured, it should never be entirely without structure' and suggest the use of a 'topic guide' to bring some control over the flow and shape of the proceedings. All the questions related to the students' expectations of their future university experience, both academically and socially. Emphasis was placed on welcoming their opinions that differed from each other, as well as views that were collectively held. Sim (1998: 351) suggests that 'focus group data may be a poor indicator of consensus in attitudes'. However, that was not found to be the case in this instance as there was general agreement over aspects such as financial concerns, making new friends and the ability to cope with a university workload. The selection of participants for inclusion has also been cited as an area

for concern in the validity and usefulness of focus group findings (Bryman and Bell, 2011; Easterby-Smith et al., 2002; Robson 1993; Saunders et al., 2009). This potential disadvantage will be addressed later in this section.

4.5.1.1 Data collection: pilot interviews

Some of the structure and content of the interview questions and prompts were derived from the results of the focus group meeting described above particularly those regarding socialisation, belonging and students' expectations of themselves. Other content drew upon the literature surrounding student expectations, research into psychological contract theory and EVLN behaviours, as well as from the questions contained within the National Student Survey. Table 4.3 below presents the main interview questions which were accompanied by a series of prompts concerning such issues as prior educational background, independent learning, teaching quality, resources, course organisation, and accommodation arrangements.

Table 4.3 Main questions and prompts for pilot interviews

Main questions	Prompts
1. Before you came to university what did you hope it would be like? (Your hopes might be different to your expectations and I'm going to ask you about those in a minute.)	What did you already know about universities? Why did you decide to come to university? Why did you choose UCLan?
2. Differently from your hopes, what did you actually expect university life to be like?	Academically and socially Did you come to an open day here? What did you find particularly attractive about UCLan? How did you think you would be taught? Were you worried about anything?
3. Can you remember where your expectations came from?	Friends, family, college/sixth form, the media, open day?

4.	Now that you are here, is university what you expected?	Are you living in halls, at home, or somewhere else?
		What was your experience of enrolment?
		Did you know anyone else here before you arrived?
		Have you made friends here?
		What was Welcome Week like?
		How did you feel after your first teaching session?
		What is the teaching like generally?
		What makes a good lecturer?
		What is the organisation of your course like?
		What are the learning resources like?
		What are your expectations of yourself as a student?
		Do you ever feel your classmates understand things better than you?
		Have you done any assignments/exams yet?
		Are you struggling with anything?
5.	If you were unhappy, what do you think you would do about it?	Would you tell anyone?
		Who would you turn to for advice?
		Do you know who your personal tutor is?
		Have you met with your personal tutor?
		Would you use the 'suggestion boxes'?
		Have you taken any time off yet?
		What obligations do you think you have towards the university?
		Have you ever thought about leaving your course?
6.	What is your social life like?	Have you joined any clubs or societies at UCLan?
		Do you have a part-time job?
7.	When you think about value for money in your university experience, what does that look like?	What would represent good value for money for you?
		Do you think you will get a good job when you leave?
		Are you considering doing a placement year?

8. Overall, do you feel that you are mainly satisfied, or dissatisfied with your experience at UCLan?	If satisfied, what is the best thing about being here? If dissatisfied, what is the worst thing about being here?	
9. Is there anything else that we haven't covered that you would like to add?		

The pilot questions outlined in Table 4.3, along with the associated prompts, proved useful in ascertaining how far the content and organisation would lead to a naturalistic flow of valuable and relevant information in stage one of the interviews as described below. According to the literature on research methods, piloting interview questions is generally more closely associated with quantitative enquiries and in particular before administering self-completion questionnaires (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Easterby-Smith et al., 2002; Robson 1993; Saunders et al., 2009). However, it was felt that conducting two pilot interviews for this research would be beneficial in establishing the effectiveness of the design in gathering data which might provide insights into the research problem and fulfil its aims and objectives.

4.5.1.2 Data collection: interviews, stage one

As stated earlier, the qualitative interview questions were informed by a number of sources. The semi-structured, open-ended questions all have a central question supported and followed by sub questions, or prompts. Cresswell (2015: 70) suggests that the central question should be very general and should contain the words 'how' or 'what' instead of 'why', as 'why' is more closely associated with quantitative research. The ontological and epistemological position adopted in this thesis supports the use of qualitative interviewing as a legitimate way of producing knowledge surrounding the research problem, aims and objectives. Kvale (1983: 174) defines a qualitative research interview as 'an interview whose purpose it is to gather descriptions of the life-world of the interviewee with respect to interpretation of the meaning of the described phenomena'. The social phenomena investigated here consists of people's lived experiences of it, and reality in this context, comprises perceptions, understandings, expectations, interpretations and interactions. However, as Mason (2012: 64) warns, 'it is important not to treat understandings generated in an interview as though they are a direct reflection of understandings "already existing" outside of the interview interaction, as though you were simply excavating facts'.

Conducting qualitative interviews, as with any other research method, has its strengths and limitations. Commentators largely agree that qualitative interviews are valuable for eliciting complex, detailed information, spoken in the interviewees own words and that they are a highly flexible and adaptable way of finding things out. However, there is also consensus with regard to the relative disadvantages of this method, including necessarily small sample sizes, that it is very time consuming both in terms of conducting the interview and in transcribing them, and that biases are difficult to rule out (Cresswell, 2015; Mason, 2012; Rugg & Petre' 2007; Silverman, 2013).

Including the two pilot interviews, a total of 21 interviews were conducted. Each interview averaged between 45 to 50 minutes in length and were carried out in the researcher's office which is a quiet and fairly informal location. The interviews were recorded using two devices, in case of technical failure. Saunders et al. (2009: 341) suggest that one the benefits of using audio recording equipment is that the researcher can fully concentrate on asking the interview questions. However, they also assert that interviewees might not only find such devices off-putting and intimidating, they might also be reluctant to express their true views if they are being recorded. In accordance with good interview practice as outlined in the literature, the interviewees were assured of confidentiality and anonymity, given a clear timeframe and informed that they were free to decline to answer any of the questions (Bryman and Bell, 2011; Easterby-Smith et al., 2002; Robson 1993; Saunders et al., 2009). Silverman (2013: 31), in his critique of qualitative interview techniques, asserts that by selecting a sample of interviewees with the intention of answering a 'pre-determined' research question, such researchers 'manufacture' their data. He further argues that this approach is akin to that of quantitative methods whereby the researcher is attempting to generate data to support a particular hypothesis. Nonetheless, qualitative interviewing represents a popular and credible method of gathering in-depth information about social phenomena.

4.5.1.3 Data collection: interviews, stage two

In order to introduce a longitudinal element into the research, a further round of interviews was conducted six months after the initial meetings. The full interview schedule can be found in Appendix 4. Unlike a cross-sectional 'snapshot', longitudinal studies can be valuable in exploring changes and developments as they take place, and the causal factors that influence those changes. Saunders et al. (2009: 594) define a longitudinal study as 'the study of a particular phenomenon (or phenomena) over an extended period of time'. Robson (1993: 161) states that the principal problem with such studies is that of 'sample attrition'. In other words, participants,

for whatever reason, choose not to be re-interviewed at a later date. This is indeed what occurred in this case, with only 10 of the original 21 participants attending a second interview. Bryman and Bell (2011: 59) suggest that 'those who leave the study may differ in some important respects from those who remain, so that the latter does not form a representative group'. Despite this operational shortcoming, the data gathered from the second round of interviews were both interesting and valuable enough to warrant inclusion. Table 4.4 below presents the main, stage two interview questions and associated prompts.

Table 4.4 Main questions and prompts for the second stage of interviews

Main questions	Prompts
1. You are just about at the end of your first year, how has it been for you?	Highlights? Low points? Has it lived up to your expectations?
2. Overall, what has the teaching been like?	How have you adjusted to independent learning? Have you struggled with anything? What has the organisation of your course been like? Have you had any opportunities to provide feedback on your course? How have you coped with the workload? Have you missed many of the sessions? What have your grades been like? If you could redesign your course, what changes would you make?
3. How has your social life been?	Have you made any new friends as the year has worn on? Have you joined any clubs or societies?
4. How do you feel now about whether your university experience represents value for money?	What has been good value for money? What has been poor value for money?

5. What advice would you give to a new first year starting in September?	
6. Is there anything else that we haven't covered that you would like to add?	

The follow-up interviews were substantially shorter than the stage one meetings, with each lasting approximately 20 to 25 minutes. As with the phase one interviews, those conducted in phase two were transcribed by a third party known personally by the researcher.

4.5.2 Sampling and selection

In order to meet the aims and objectives of the enquiry as presented in Chapter 1 and restated above, careful consideration was given to the constitution of the participant groups. The focus group members were final year A Level and BTEC Business Studies students who were considering entering university in 2017/2018 (although not necessarily UCLan). Over the course of one day (November 8th, 2016), 'recruitment' presentations were given to five different groups of students from a large, local feeder institution. Approximately 80 students were spoken to and of these, 27 agreed to take part in the research. Through the use of systematic sampling, every third student was selected to take part in the focus group. Estimates for the optimum size vary within the literature, but an average of eight seems to be a figure generally agreed upon (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Easterby-Smith et al., 2002; Robson 1993; Saunders et al., 2009). The focus group interview was held a week after the initial presentations, and of the nine students invited to take part, six attended the meeting. Unfortunately, the three invitees who declined were all male which meant that all but one of the final participants was female. The resulting gender imbalance introduced an unwelcome element of bias; however, the information elicited was rich, illuminating and useful in informing the interview questions used in phase one.

In phase one, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a purposive, heterogeneous sample of first year undergraduate students from across three programmes of study at UCLan: Business Administration, Business and Management, and Business Studies. Cresswell (2015: 76) states that sampling in qualitative research is 'the purposeful selection of a sample of participants who can best help you understand the central phenomenon that you are exploring'. Heterogeneous, or maximum variation sampling enables researchers to collect data related to key themes surrounding the research problem, aims and objectives. The reasons for the recruitment and study of students from Business-related programmes were three-fold. First, as

stated in Chapter 1, courses related to business are highly popular and reflect growing student numbers nationally and internationally in this specialism (UUK, 2017: 24). Second, research conducted by Neves and Hillman (2017: 14) suggests that almost three quarters of the Business Studies students they surveyed believed they were deriving either poor or very poor value from their programmes. And third, Business Studies also fares poorly with regard to retention. On this metric, Neves and Hillman (2017: 21) found that 41 percent of students stated that they would have opted for another programme if they could choose their course again.

A total of five separate 'recruitment' presentations were made to 75 Business-related first year students in mid-November 2016 during their seminar sessions. A short PowerPoint presentation was given and students were provided with the opportunity to ask questions about the research. Participant Information Sheets were distributed along with Consent Forms and the students were given adequate time to digest their contents before deciding whether or not to participate. The forms were collected by their tutor at the end of the session and returned to the researcher. Of the 75, 36 declined and 39 agreed to take part. In many respects, bias is introduced immediately by the very act of the students' self-selection but, in order to meet the University's Ethical Guidelines, participation must be entirely voluntary. The researcher, curious to understand why some students had declined to participate, conducted a series of short, follow-up meetings where a small questionnaire was distributed and answered anonymously. The students were asked to state whether they were male or female and to indicate their level of agreement, on a five-point, Likert-type scale, with 11 statements, or to explain their reasons in a space provided. The statements included such items as: 'I wasn't interested in the research'; I didn't like the interviewer' and 'I couldn't be bothered'. Of the 52 students who filled in the follow-up form, 16 had already consented. Of the 33 remaining decliners, 15 were male, 14 were female and 4 had not stated their gender. By far the most prevalent reasons for non-participation were: 'I felt my involvement would be too big a commitment time-wise' and 'I am enjoying the course and it has met my expectations'. These findings were interesting in that incentives, confidentiality and lack of relevance of the research did not garner much agreement.

Once the students had agreed to take part in the study, the researcher e-mailed all 39 to enquire about their prior educational attainment; that is, whether they had undertaken A Levels, a BTEC, or entered university following a Foundation programme. The purpose of this enquiry was to assemble a purposive sample that included students from all three backgrounds, as previous research has indicated differing levels of retention, progression and attainment depending on prior educational experience (Shields & Masardo, 2015). As Bryman and Bell (2011: 442) suggest, 'the goal of purposive sampling is to sample cases/participants in a strategic way so that those sampled are relevant to the research questions being posed'.

4.6 Data analysis: transcription

As with the phase one interviews, those conducted in phase two were captured using two digital recording devices. The files were then transferred to a computer. Each interview was transcribed in full by a third party known personally by the researcher. The decision to use a third party was largely based on the time limitations faced by the researcher. Precise instructions were given to the transcriber with regard to confidentiality, practice and procedure. Outsourcing the transcribing might have resulted in a lack of familiarity with the data on the part of the researcher. However, after the interviews had been transcribed they were listened to again, with the hard copies to hand and any errors in transcription were corrected.

A major challenge with qualitative research is the large quantity of data that are generated which are rich in detail but difficult to navigate through. Authors on the subject of transcription debate the value of including non-verbal cues such as silences, hesitancy, coughs and sighs (for example, Bailey, 2008; Halcomb & Davidson, 2006). Halcomb & Davidson (2006: 40) suggest that when thematic or content analysis is used, verbatim transcription is unnecessary, as is the inclusion of non-verbal cues, because in this method of analysis it is the search for areas of commonality that is of importance. However, according to Bailey (2008: 128), capturing features of speech 'such as emphasis, speed, tone of voice, timing and pauses… can be crucial for interpreting data'. Despite these variances in standpoint, most writers agree that the primary focus of interview transcription should be consistent with the overall research strategy and its theoretical foundations (Bailey, 2008; Bryman & Bell, 2011; Halcomb & Davidson; Robson 1993; Saunders et al., 2009).

4.6.1 Data analysis: coding

The audio files from the first phase of interviews were listened to several times while reading the transcripts, and early thoughts and notes were written directly onto the transcripts. This period of familiarisation was absolutely critical as it led to the generation of the initial codes. Each code was written on a separate piece of paper, laid out on a large work surface and grouped according to the themes emerging from the data. The initial codes all had in vivo titles in order to honour the 'voice' of the participants. Once the preliminary codes had been grouped according to theme, they were renamed and put into a spreadsheet where a description and an example was provided for each code. The coding process identified three dominant themes concerning socialisation, teaching and learning, and all things financial. The themes and related subthemes are presented in detail in Chapter 5. Sunsein and Chiseri-Strater (2012), cited in Saldana (2016: 23) suggest that during the coding process, fieldworkers should ask themselves:

'what surprised me? (to track your assumptions), what intrigued me? (to track your positionality). And, what disturbed me? (to track the tensions within your value, attitude, and belief systems)'. This was particularly sound advice, as there were definite surprises, as well as some quite disturbing findings. Again, the discoveries are presented in detail in Chapter 5.

With the second phase of the interviews, a different approach was taken in coding the data generated. A priori codes were used relating to independent learning, value for money, the impact of friends withdrawing from university, and the advice the respondents would give to a new first year embarking on their academic journey. The decision to use a priori codes with the second data set reflected the desire to focus on some of the specific issues which had emerged as being of consequence to the participants in the stage one interviews. Employing a framework of codes was useful in exploring areas of relevance to the research problem and teasing out meaning. Saldana (2016: 71) suggests that a priori codes are useful in that they 'harmonize with your study's conceptual framework or paradigm, and enable an analysis that directly answers your research questions and goals'. However, a potential drawback of using a priori codes is the danger of overlooking data that do not neatly fit into the scheme. Therefore, it was necessary to be tentative and to refine some of the original codes to ensure that the key themes were fully explored.

4.7 Ethical considerations

In accordance with UCLan's Ethics Policy, participation in the research was on the basis of informed consent and was entirely voluntary. No incentives were given and participants were notified that they could withdraw from the study at any time. All potential focus group members and interviewees were provided with a Participant Information Sheet (Appendix 1) and Consent Form (Appendix 2) and given adequate time to digest the contents. A time gap elapsed between the recruitment presentations and the actual focus group meeting and interviews, allowing the students time to reflect on their decision to participate and right to withdraw. Providing time to reflect was intentional and introduced in order to negate students' feelings of coercion by the researcher. None of the participants were known to the researcher before the study and there had not been any prior personal contact other than that during the recruitment presentations.

Mercer (2007: 2) suggests that text books on research methodology and methods in educational settings 'tend to gloss over the intricacies of insider research conducted at one's place of work'. In the present study, the researcher was fully aware of the potential biases associated with insider research and their possible impact on data collection, analysis and subsequent

recommendations. However, a guiding principle of studies conducted for the award of a Professional Doctorate is that the research has real-world applicability within one's own organisation. A further area for potential bias was that of positionality with regard to the power imbalance between the researcher and the study group. All efforts were made to minimise possible imbalance by interviewing in the researcher's office which is a homely and relaxed environment and by employing interview techniques which were friendly, transparent and respectful. Indeed, during the analysis of the data, it became evident that the participants had felt sufficiently confident and secure to be extremely open and vocal. Hence, it is not felt that the interviewer's position negatively influenced the results or challenged their validity.

Participants were also assured of their anonymity and that the data they were providing would be treated with the strictest confidence. All the recorded information and transcripts were kept securely on a password protected computer and anonymised by coding the participants, rather than using their names. The key to the codes was kept separately from the interviews. All gathered data was treated in-line with the Data Protection Act and in accordance with the university guidelines.

4.8 Chapter summary

Different research paradigms characteristically encompass varying ontological and epistemological perspectives and offer up, therefore, contrasting assumptions of reality and knowledge which lie at the foundations of their specific research approach. These ontological and epistemological considerations are reflected in the methodology and instruments selected with which to conduct an investigation. Positivists largely view their methodology and methods as being value-free. However, even the selection of possible instruments in the research design is essentially value-laden. As John Law (2006) moots in his theoretical paper on research methods, that rather than acknowledging and embracing the chaos and unevenness of reality, we attempt to homogenise and sanitise our findings and observations to fit in with 'accepted', existing practices and methods. In his discussion on the nature of reality, Law (2006: 7) suggests that 'the assumption is that while we may live in multiple social worlds, we live in a single natural or material reality'.

Although Bryman and Bell (2011) and Weber (2004) suggest that a false dichotomy has been created and that, superficially, there is little difference between positivism and interpretivism. Yet, hostilities between the two camps persist. However, rather than simply revisiting the same arguments over and over, a more helpful view might be to assess the success of research not by its adherence to binary, philosophical viewpoints, but whether the researcher has engaged,

enchanted, stimulated and inspired their audience and created a passionate desire for further knowledge and critical debate.

The limitations of positivism stem from its roots in the study of the natural sciences, as the tools and methods employed to explain phenomena in pure science do not necessarily transfer to the study of social events and experiences. Gill and Johnson (2010: 190) put forward that positivism and interpretivism have been regarded as polar opposites 'with regard to the legitimacy of their methodology. However, they share a common belief that their research can be impartial if only the correct methodology is adopted'. This is being challenged. Identifying an approach as either qualitative or quantitative dos not mean that the researcher is denied the use of many alternative methods. Understanding the strengths and weaknesses of contrasting approaches can help to identify the most appropriate methods for the task in hand.

That research into the psychological contract has predominantly utilised quantitative methodologies is significant, especially when considering Bryman and Bell's (2011: 619) assertion that 'survey research based on questionnaires and interviews, have been shown to relate poorly to people's actual behaviour'. Clegg, Hardy, Lawrence and Nord (2006: 462) state that 'in the social sciences at large there is a growing recognition of the contribution that qualitative studies can make. In the process of generating such recognition, it has been necessary to discard some of the baggage of epistemological debate'. Relatedly, Silverman (2013: 87) summarises the call for more qualitative approaches in the social sciences by suggesting that this type of research 'can address the "whats" and "how" of interaction in a way that quantitative research cannot… and access phenomena that "escape" the gaze of quantitative research'. There is little doubt that in many areas of organisational studies the positivistic status quo will persist. However, with subjects such as the psychological contract and EVLN behaviours, so steeped in human emotions and subjectivity, the researcher's intent is to plough a new furrow.

Chapter Five

Findings and Discussion

5.1 Introduction

Psychological contract theory is predicated upon the need to understand and meet expectations, beliefs, promises and obligations (Guest, 1998; Rousseau, 1989; Rousseau, 1990; Rousseau & McLean-Parks, 1993; Shore & Barksdale, 1998). As introduced in Chapter 1, the purpose of this investigation is to ascertain the extent to which students form a psychological contract with their university, the nature and content of that contract, and what actions a student might take if these expectations, beliefs, promises and obligations go unfulfilled. These questions are of contemporary practical relevance as recent surveys suggest that the majority of students are dissatisfied in many ways with their university experience and, in particular, with the quality of the teaching being offered (HEA, 2015, cited in BIS, 2016; Neves & Hillman, 2017; Unite/HEPI, 2017).

The purpose of this chapter is to present and discuss the outcomes of the empirical research in this study. Specifically, it considers the findings from the initial focus group meeting with pre-university students and both phases of the subsequent in-depth, semi-structured interviews with first-year university students, the mechanics of which are outlined in detail in the preceding Methods Chapter. The discussion in this chapter follows these phases of research, commencing with a consideration of, first, the focus group outcomes and second, the interviews. In both cases, the analysis is structured around the themes and subthemes that were identified during the coding process; these are synthesised with existing literature in order to more fully understand the origin and nature of student expectations. Descriptive quotes are used to illustrate the themes and the codes which emerged through the familiarisation and analytical processes. To facilitate understanding and readability, some of the quotes have been edited in accordance with recommendations from Braun and Clarke (2013). However, the titles of the original set of codes are drawn directly from the transcripts, so as to honour the participants' voice and draw attention to their particular use of language when describing their lived experience. According to Charmaz (2014: 135), 'in vivo codes can provide a crucial check on whether you have grasped what is significant' to the individual and can help with establishing meaning.

As will be seen, the findings revealed considerable parity between the students' expectations and perceptions of their university experience, especially in relation to the monetary aspects. However, there was noteworthy divergence concerning their views towards teaching, learning

and academic life in general. Specifically, the coding process identified three dominant themes that are intertwined, yet separate enough to comprise distinctive subthemes which are explored and analysed. The first prevalent theme concerns socialisation, with associated subthemes relating to living arrangements, commuting, widening participation, and balancing a social life and part-time job with university commitments. The second central theme is associated with the students' expectations of their teaching and learning experience. Here, the subthemes include: adjusting to independent learning, student expectations, delivery style, and relationships with peer groups in the academic journey. The students who were interviewed generally had high expectations of themselves, the teaching staff, and of each other. Synopses of these expectations are presented in Tables 5.3 and 5.4 later in this chapter. The third predominant theme relates to all things financial, with subthemes pertaining to fees, relevance of course content, facilities and overall value for money.

The analysis and findings from stage two of the interviews are presented in section 5.4 in which the focus is upon four main topics: (i) adjusting to independent learning; (ii) notions of value for money; (iii) the impact of friends leaving; and (iv) advice you would give to a new first year. Later, in section 5.5, the student experience, as revealed in the data gathered from both stages of the interviews, are mapped against the four EVLN components. As introduced in Chapter 1 and discussed in Chapter 3, the EVLN framework is a highly flexible theoretical model which has been used in a wide variety of settings to explore responses to dissatisfaction.

5.2 Findings and discussion from the focus group interview

As discussed in Chapter 4, in advance of the semi-structured interviews which were undertaken with first-year university students, a focus group meeting was held with a set of A Level and BTEC Business Studies students from a local feeder institution. The purpose of this meeting was to identify issues of particular salience to this age group and to help inform the content of the subsequent interview questions. The benefits of this meeting were numerous and support the assertions of Robson (1993: 284-285), who suggests that the researcher is able to easily assess emergent themes and shared views and that the participants can also gain from the experience by having the opportunity to discuss a subject of mutual relevance with others.

Despite some limitations regarding available time, the debate was fruitful, with all students making a significant contribution. The atmosphere was relaxed and jovial and the students were happy to express their ideas and opinions. Heeding the recommendations of Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe (2002: 106), a 'topic guide' was used to give some structure to the proceedings. The topic guide is shown in Table 5.1 below.

The students were assured of confidentiality throughout and emphasis was placed on there being no 'right' or 'wrong' answers and upon the absolute value of their opinions and contributions (Appendix 3 Focus Group Briefing Notes).

Table 5.1 Topic guide for the focus group interview

1.	**Your 'ideal' university**. If money was no object and your university experience could be absolutely anything you wanted it to be, what would it be like? So think about things like facilities, teaching style, hours of study. Remember, everything is valid, so say what you like
2.	What do you **hope** university will be like? OK, let's change emphasis now. We've looked at your ideal. Realistically, what do you hope it will be like? Both socially and academically
3.	Going beyond your hopes, what do you actually **expect** it to be like? Thinking about what you already know about university life, what are your expectations? For example, how do you think you'll be taught?
4.	Where do these **expectations** come from? How are they formed?
5.	What are your biggest **fears** about going into higher education? Think about this both socially and academically.
6.	When you think about value for money in your university experience, what does that look like? What would represent good value for money for you?

Six principal questions were asked relating to: (i) their notion of an ideal university; (ii) their hopes; (iii) their expectations; (iv) the source of their expectations; (v) their fears; and (vi), what constitutes value for money. Table 5.2 presents a synopsis of the students' responses.

Table 5.2 A synopsis of responses

Question	Response
Ideal university	Gaming Well known restaurants and bars Jobs on site Free bus service Swimming pool Cinema Clothes shops Security One to one sessions with tutors

Hopes	Teachers understand learning style
	Lessons are interesting
	Opportunities to socialise and meet people with the same interests
	Challenging lessons and coursework
	One to one sessions
	Smaller class sizes
	Not just listening, do stuff, not just writing
	Money being paid is worthwhile
	Support – can always ask questions
Expectations	Lectures to be big
	Not to receive much support
	High quality teaching
	Difficult but rewarding
	Expensive
	Emotional and stressful
	To achieve a 1st or a 2:1
	More independence
	Respect
Source of expectations	Open days
	Website
	The news
	Fees are online
	Parents
	Tutors
	Friends
	Media
Fears	Running out of money
	Not being able to make friends
	Not being able to understand topics
	Living on your own for the first time
	Disrespectful housemates (messy members, loud members)
	Failing
	Being homesick
	Not enjoying it as much as anticipated
	Starving
Value for money	Receiving high qualifications
	Year of industrial experience
	Get offered a job at the end of final year
	Top quality teaching
	Top quality facilities
	Discounted transport to and from university
	Free entry to on-campus facilities
	Good friendships
	Adapted and become a better person

The above synopsis is valuable in that it provides a snapshot of issues of importance to contemporary students who are contemplating entry to higher education. Significantly, their actual age is an indicator of their possible values, beliefs and expectations. That is, their notions

about an 'ideal university' were telling, in that more than half of the responses concern leisure activities and, hence, echo the findings of research into the 'Millennial' and 'Year Zero' generations (Espinoza, Ukleja & Rusch, 2010; Tulgan, 2016). According to the literature, there are distinct waves of Millennials: those born between 1978 and 1989 (Generation Y) and those born between 1990 and 2000 (Generation Z) (Tulgan, 2016: xii). There is some debate and overlap with regards to when 'the 0 Generation clock started' ticking; for example, Espinoza et al. (2010: 7) suggest that the era began in '1997 and will continue into the second decade of the twenty-first century'.

Both Espinoza et al. (2010) and Tulgan (2016) agree that 'while Baby Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964) live to work, Millennials work to live… When it comes to salary and wealth, Baby Boomers are convinced they need to work hard to earn it. Millennials simply expect it' (2010: 9). Tulgan (2016: 1) shares an interesting illustrative anecdote:

> Not long ago, the president of a health care consulting firm told me he had just interviewed a twenty-five-year-old man for a job in his firm. The young candidate came to the interview armed with a number of ordinary questions about job duties, salary and benefits. When these questions were answered, he made a request: 'You should know that surfing is really important to me and there might be days when the surf's really up. Would you mind if I came in a little later on those days?

In a similar vein, Espinoza et al. (2010: 10) provide unedited quotes from people managing Millennials, amongst which is this example: 'she asked for an extended lunch hour to go shopping with friends after her third day on the job'. Both excerpts point to a mismatch between the expectations of the parties concerned towards one another and, as Tulgan (2016: 8) suggests, Millennials are the possibly the most 'respected, nurtured, scheduled, measured, discussed, diagnosed, medicated, programmed, accommodated, included, awarded, and rewarded' children ever. Given that the focus group students were of a similar age, and possibly share the same outlook as many of the new entrants to higher education, these claimed characteristics of the Millennial generation provide a useful context for exploring the extent to which they will be satisfied with their overall experience.

The research also revealed a discrepancy between the focus group's students' hopes and their actual expectations, also indicating that they might well be discontented with their future journey through university. They stated that they were hoping for smaller class sizes and one-to-one contact with tutors who would answer questions and generally support them. In contrast, they had a differing set of expectations; they believed that little support would be offered, lectures would be on a large-scale and that higher education would be both emotional and stressful. This disparity between hopes and expectations reflects a much earlier study by Sander, Stevenson, King and Coates (2000: 319), where they assert that 'perhaps the most

striking thing about the results is that some students are entering university with the expectation that they will *not* be taught in the way that they would prefer'. In the current competitive climate with universities vying fiercely with one another to attract potential students, this finding might well be of significance.

5.3 Findings and discussion from stage one of the semi-structured interviews

As described in Chapter 4, two rounds of semi-structured interviews, six months apart, were conducted with first year university students. The results from the focus group helped to inform some of the content of the interview questions and to highlight issues of particular salience. The literature concerning student expectations of higher education, research into psychological contract theory and EVLN behaviours, and questions from the National Student Survey underpinned the rest of the interview questions as presented in Table 4.2. The semi-structured, open-ended questions all had a central question supported and followed by sub-questions, or prompts. Including the two pilot interviews, a total of 21 interviews were conducted at stage one and a further 10 at stage two. Each interview at stage one averaged between 45 to 50 minutes in length and was conducted in the researcher's office. The outcomes from this first round of interviews are discussed at length in the next section.

5.3.1 Deciding to go to university

The findings from the interviews revealed that, for some, making the decision to enter university was simply a matter of seeing it as 'the next stepping stone' (P 6) or feeling that no other viable options were available in terms of securing the career of their choice. For others, parental expectations and, in some cases, pressure played a significant role. A number had looked into undertaking an apprenticeship, or had applied for, but not been offered one. And despite having to pay fees to undertake a degree, the apprenticeship avenue had not presented itself as a particularly attractive alternative, with one student stating that:

> *… but it's [going to university] like something you've got to do for your career, because there's no other way really is there? And there isn't another way out of it [financial burden] unless you go and do an apprenticeship … like my friend she works 9:00 til 5:00 every single day and she's on three pounds something, I don't know, something like that, and it's a bit ridiculous.* (P 18)

Despite government rhetoric about degree apprenticeships providing a 'real alternative to traditional university study' (Gov.UK, 2015) and upbeat articles in the Times Higher Education suggesting that they are 'a ray of light in a gloomy sector' (Morley, 2017), the 'earn as you learn'

message does not seem to be gaining traction. Indeed, the decision to undertake a degree rather than take up other options was investigated in a study carried out on behalf of the University Partnership Programme (2015), the findings revealing that the predominant reason was the belief that 'university study offers better long-term salary prospects', closely followed by the respondents simply wanting 'the university-student experience' (2015: 4).

5.3.1.1 Why UCLan?

More than half the students interviewed had chosen to study at UCLan because it is their 'local university' and, for one reason or another, had wanted to live at home rather than in student or shared accommodation.

> *There's no point paying all that extra money [for student accommodation] and things when I live down the road, because a lot of people at UCLan treat it as a commuting uni.* (P 2)

> *Just because it was very close to home, so I can commute here and, erm, I have like medical reasons for being close to home, so it just seemed a lot easier for me.* (P 5)

> *I just couldn't stand the idea of having share with messy, noisy, disrespectful flatmates… I just wouldn't be able to take that.* (P 16)

Interestingly, several of the interviewees who were living 'at home' and commuting in stated that if they had been accepted by another institution equidistant from their place of residence, for example, the University of Manchester or Lancaster University, they would have lived in. However, these particular students had not attained the grades necessary to gain admission to their university of choice and, therefore, perhaps viewing UCLan as a 'lesser' institution, they had decided that paying for student accommodation on top of their fees was not worth the investment. Additionally, these students had not attended any open or applicant days, because they 'already knew about UCLan' (P 11).

Of those students who had attended an open day, several reported that choosing to study at UCLan had hinged upon positive interactions with staff, more so than in comparison with their experiences of other universities. For example:

> *I looked round quite a few [other universities] and when I was speaking to people [at UCLan], they seemed to actually know what they were talking about, whereas other places didn't really. And when you were asking them [UCLan staff] questions, they were really knowledgeable about what they were saying.* (P 13)

Many of the respondents had a very positive image of UCLan and felt as though the institution is on an upwards trajectory in terms of both reputation and programme offer:

It [the university] has changed quite a bit in the last couple of years, it keeps moving forward … I knew its rating, how it is seen, had improved massively … I think the Telegraph releases a list of the top hundred universities each year and this has moved up, I think, every year. (P 10)

It's a really good university and it [UCLan's reputation] seems to be getting bigger … it's kinda got a massive reputation … and on the website, it [the course programme] was really well structured … it listed all the modules we were going to do in each year. (P 7)

Generally, those who had not attended an open day had conducted research on the internet to inform their choice of institution. As their 'local university', for some UCLan presented itself as an obvious choice of institution, although the majority of respondents had investigated and compared the offerings and programme content of many other regional alternatives. Such in-depth research contradicts the assertions of Tomlinson (2017) and Nixon, Scullion and Hearn (2016) and suggests that student-consumers are able, at some levels, to discriminate between institutional offerings and make a rational choice. Their detailed exploration and examination of Unistats data confirms in many respects the predictions about discerning customers contained within the Browne Report (BIS, 2010: 27) and the suggestion that 'students are best placed to make judgements about what they want to get from participating in higher education'. The Report goes on to state that 'as students will be paying more, they will demand more in return'. The findings of this study certainly indicate a high level of expectation driven largely by the payment of substantial fees.

Somewhat significantly, the beliefs of many of the respondents had been shaped by their own interpretation of the materials on the website. For example, during the interviews, they expressed clear expectations about the perceived help on offer to find work placements, to secure graduate-level roles on completion of their studies, and to partake in opportunities to study overseas. However, although in reality there is some support available in these areas, it is by no means commensurate with the convictions found to be prevalent amongst the respondents, pointing to one way in which a university may inadvertently over-inflate student expectations.

In a related vein, one student reported that the promotional videos on the website had made her believe that being at UCLan was going to be like being part of 'one big family' and that 'everyone is going to be your friend'. However, this was far from her lived reality and she

was feeling 'really lonely' (P 15). For another interviewee, the anticipation-reality mismatch was even more overt, as the website had described course content that differed significantly from what was actually on offer; in particular, the aspects that had underpinned her choice of institution were missing:

> *In the Welcome Week, we got told what we were studying in our modules, but when I put that against what was on the website, I found it different. Like right now I'm doing [subjects] and that wasn't in detail online. [Online] I found modules in there, and I was like 'ooh I want to do that', so I was a bit, well really, disappointed.* (P 18)

These experiences reported by respondents in this research reflect the work of Koskina (2013), referred to in Chapter 3, who conducted an investigation into the student psychological contract in a UK higher education institution. Her study suggests that the student psychological contract contains both promissory as well as non-promissory expectations; promissory expectations are explicit and based largely on the university's brand image and promotional materials whereas non-promissory expectations are implicit. In differentiating between explicit and implicit promises, she adheres to the assertions of Rousseau (1989). According to the literature, the contravention of implicit promises can constitute a breach of an individual's psychological contract and can lead to feelings of disillusionment. However, breaking an explicit promise is regarded as being more serious and represents a 'violation' which is likely to result in disappointment, anger and a lack of trust in the organisation (Rousseau and Robinson, 1994; Rousseau and Tijiorwala, 1998; Wolfe-Morrison and Robinson, 1997).

Table 5.6 (page 131) presents responses to the question 'What would the University have to do to make you feel particularly disgruntled with it?' Participant 10 in particular was very vocal on this subject, listing a number of aspects that he would have a 'problem' or an 'issue' with. Amongst these were attractive features shown on the website that did not, in fact, have any relationship with reality. His view reinforces the perception that promotional materials contain explicit promises that should be honoured in order to prevent possible psychological contract breach or violation.

5.3.1.2 Social mobility

Many of the respondents, particularly those who were the first in their immediate family to attend university, believed that gaining a higher level qualification would open doors that might otherwise be closed to them. This notion could partly reflect the current rhetoric surrounding

social mobility, as well as their own observations of either their own family circumstances or those of others. For example:

My dad had a job at the bus station, but he slipped a disc in his back, so now he can't work … and because my mum's not got qualifications … she can't earn as much as she could have done if she was able to study. So I feel as if that's had a strain on the household income. (P 18)

I think in this day and age, it's more important to have a degree … especially for women, I feel that you hit a ceiling if you don't have a degree. I think that because she [her mother] doesn't have a degree, she's got to her limit. (P 11)

Another student whose parents had not attended university and who had already worked for some years said:

I wanted to move higher in business … a position with more responsibility, make more money and I thought the best chance of that happening was to come to university and get a good degree. I thought if I didn't come to university it would be harder to get into that sort of circle. (P 10)

He clearly held the belief that, 'that sort of circle', would otherwise be impenetrable to him.

One respondent reflected upon her own parents' financial success in comparison to her friends' parents, attributing the difference directly to educational attainment:

I think it's because my mum and dad have got degrees and I've seen how well they've done compared to some of my friends' parents who don't have degrees, who are in, you know, lower end jobs. (P 2)

It should be noted that improving social mobility is central to the government's agenda for higher education through the removal of perceived barriers to entry (Johnson, 2017). Indeed, a number of respondents in this research reported 'getting a better job' than their parents as a primary motivator for gaining a degree.

5.3.1.3 Career opportunities

The development of career-enhancing employability skills and the ability to obtain a graduate job on completion of their studies are often cited as tangible indicators of value for money, representing a 'return on investment' for students (CBI, 2011; Kandinko & Mawer, 2013; Koskina, 2013). The research presented in these studies, as well as those of Nixon et al., (2016) and Tomlinson (2017), suggests that many students entering higher education view a degree not

as an opportunity to grow intellectually, but as a means of securing a lucrative career on graduation; in short, it represents a ticket to a better life. Similarly, in the present study, when asked what prompted their decision to attend university, the majority alluded to career-related reasons:

> *Basically, I had two years out, when I left college, and I got to a point in my life where I just wasn't doing anything, like I tried to get jobs without a degree … there was one point where I had no job whatsoever, I was doing nothing and I, I was kinda down, so I decided to come to Uni.* (P 3)

> *With a degree you have more chances to get a good job.* (P 12)

> *It was the thought of being able to get a qualification to kick-start a career… like, a high-paid job, a professional career, like if I didn't, the chances of it would be a lot slimmer.* (P 14)

Employment after graduation appeared to be at the forefront of many of the respondents' minds yet, interestingly, none of them actually knew what they would like to do at this stage other than something 'in business'. More than half held the belief that doing a year-long placement may well be beneficial in terms of improving their employability but, again, none of them knew within what sort of business or, indeed, how to go about securing a placement. When discussing employability and their future employment, a common preconception was that the university would take an active role in equipping them with the requisite skills and assist them with finding both a placement as well as employment on graduation. Employability and employment outcomes are at the heart of the recommendations in the Browne Report which asserts that 'courses that deliver improved employability will prosper, those that make false promises will disappear' (BIS, 2010: 33).

Despite the perceived level of help on offer, when asked about the likelihood of finding a job on graduation, many of the respondents expected to struggle to do so:

> *I don't think I'll get a job straight away, because you hear a lot about graduates not doing much.* (P 11)

> *That's what worries me … you always read things that the rate of unemployment after a degree is such and such an amount. I, I really do not know what's going to make me stand out from the rest of the other people who are applying for a job.* (P 2)

I know there's a big percentage of graduates who are coming out of University with a degree and just going into like, low level jobs … there's no jobs out there for them. (P 14)

Troublingly, perhaps, Participant 14's whole raison d'être for choosing to attend university was to 'kick start' a professional career, but his statement points to the probable dawning of a realisation that his preconceived idea of the benefits of gaining a degree may, in fact, be somewhat misguided.

5.3.2 Socialisation

Socialisation with one's peers is considered by many researchers to be highly important in the construction of an individual's psychological contract (for example, Johnson & O'Leary-Kelly, 2003; Turnley & Feldman, 1999). Additionally, studies have shown that within an educational setting in particular, participating in social activities greatly increases a student's sense of connectedness with the institution. For example, Baron and Corbin (2012: 763) suggest that there is 'a strong correlation between academic engagement and engagement in the social and communal life of the university' whilst Ashwin (2006: 127) warns that 'social disengagement may lead to isolation that can impact upon a student's learning'. As discussed in this section, the interviews revealed that socialisation has proved to be difficult for many of the participants for reasons including living arrangements, a lack of disposable income, age and culture-related issues and successfully balancing a social life with work, university and family commitments.

Specifically, the interviews revealed a common expectation amongst the respondents that, at university, they would have an active and fulfilling social life. For many, however, the reality was quite the reverse. For example: 'you know how people say you find like a lot of friends? I don't feel as if I have' (P 18); 'actually I haven't been out once' (P 14); and, 'I expected parties and making friends and like have study groups and none of it kinda happened' (P 17). These findings are in line with a recent study by Unite Students (2017: 9) which asserts that 81 percent of their survey group expected to socialise at university much more than they did at school but, in reality, just over half found that to be the case, (see Figure 5.1)

Figure 5.1: Percentage of students agreeing that they would expect to spend more time socialising at university than they did at school
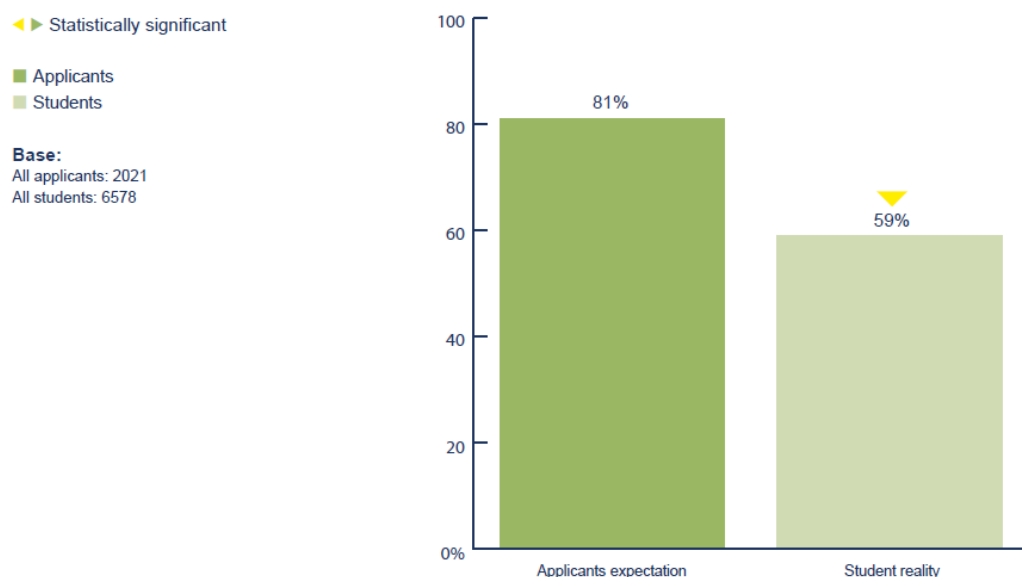
Source: Unite Students (2017: 9)

Also consistent with the results of the Unite Students (2017) study is the perhaps unsurprising finding that those students who were living at home and commuting felt most socially isolated. While some had anticipated it and were unperturbed by it, for others, this reality came as something of a shock:

> *When I came here I was a bit, not disappointed, but it wasn't what I expected … kind of everyone goes off in their own way, 'cos they all come from different places … And then my mum started to say 'oh you've not invited any friends home' and I started to realise how lonely I felt. (P 2)*

> *The social life aspect is really, really different to what I was expecting, but again, I think that's just because I live at home … when I speak to people, they've all got friends who live here in the [student] accommodation and they go out with them, not people like me. (P 11)*

However, the majority of the respondents who live in student accommodation also reported not going out as much as they had expected. This was largely owing to a lack of disposable income, as well as having to juggle work commitments with their studies.

5.3.2.1 Disposable income

Many of those interviewed reported that financial issues contributed significantly to the curtailment of social activities. Some had wanted to join societies, for example, but simply could not afford to do so, whilst others talked about the unexpectedly high cost of living now that they were living away from home and essentially funding their own social lives. For example:

You see things on the television, but I don't think you truly appreciate it, until you actually do it, so erm, the cost, the amount I need has come more evident to me … you know, you might think, 'oh you know, a fiver for a burger and chips, that sounds alright' … but that builds up. When you're not paying for it yourself, it's easy to think 'erm, it's not that much', but it is. (P 19)

You want to socialise, which means you have to spend money, so you don't go out, and then you're upset 'cos you've not gone out, and then you decide 'right, I'll stay in and do my assignment', but then you end up not doing your work 'cos you're too miserable. (P 4)

Everything at University is costs, you have to pay for your printing, you have to pay for all your food, your drinks, you're paying nine grand, should that not be incorporated with that? Do you know what I mean, it's like everything's added cost. (P 6)

Difficulties managing money were mentioned repeatedly by respondents, particularly by mature students paying mortgages or high rents, and also by those previously in full-time employment who had given up their jobs to attend university.

5.3.2.2 Widening participation

As an institution, UCLan is committed to the widening participation agenda. However, for both the 'traditional' as well as the 'non-traditional' students, finding oneself in a classroom situation with students of a different age group appeared to be somewhat undesirable for both parties.

They all seem like children … they act like children, I'm over 20, so I can see the difference between us. (P 12, age 21)

At uni the weirdest thing for me is I can be in a class with someone who's got three kids or something and is coming because they're in a career break or something, they'll be like 50 or something and then there's me straight out of college. (P 11, age 18)

And I think because I am so much older than everybody else in the class, they probably don't want to talk to me … I joined a society and at first when I joined and used to go, nobody would talk to me … and then I didn't go for two weeks, 'cos I just thought 'what's the point?'. (P 21, age 37)

5.3.2.3 International students

Just as with widening participation, UCLan is dedicated to internationalisation and, each year, welcomes students of more than 130 nationalities. China is dramatically overrepresented in the makeup of this group. Of the 2017/2018 total international cohort on campus in Preston, Chinese students accounted for 788, or 42 percent. The next largest group were students from India, representing just 11 percent of the total (UCLan International Office, 2017). When responding to questions about integrating into British academic and social life, the two international students who were interviewed reported problems with mixing and communicating with their peers. For example, Participant 20 said 'I'm really, really afraid to talk with my classmates, like British students or something'. Somewhat disturbingly, both participants perceived that problems concerning integration were exacerbated by the attitude and approach of some of the teaching staff:

We come from different countries, from different cultures, we need balance you know, but it's not balanced [lecturer interaction with overseas students]. (P 1)

They [the lecturers] need to care about all the students, not just some, like some active students [ones who contribute], and others, they leave them, that's not good, they need to take care of all the students. (P 20)

Having made the decision to leave their countries of origin, retention amongst international students is generally high. However, it is of some concern that they might not be receiving the experience they had originally hoped for. Interestingly, some of the 'home' students remarked on the lack of integration by Chinese and Asian Indian students, as they felt that 'everyone just sticks to their own groups' (P 2).

5.3.2.4 Balancing social lives, work and study

When asked about social life-job-university balance, it became evident that many of the respondents were working long hours around their studies and, consequently, were finding it difficult to manage all their perceived commitments:

Having to juggle friends and family and studying and my boyfriend and work, and time to just stop for a minute, it's difficult. So you feel like you're paying a lot of money to be here, so you know that obviously your study time should be your most important one, but then if you spend too much time on studying, you can start to feel really lonely, because you're not interacting with people, but then when you're interacting with people, you feel guilty, because you should be doing work. You should be putting all these hours in, you're told you should do, so it's difficult trying, I never realised. (P 16)

I work, erm, Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday, so Wednesday, I'll finish uni at 12:00, then I work 3.00, til 9:00, then Saturday, I do my lessons from 9:00 [teaching people to swim], then lifeguard 12.00 til 5:00, then Sunday, is 9:00 til 5:00. (P 8)

I work every single night … we have to, it's part of our contract. I'm just one of the warehouse lads [for a parcel company] … at the moment we are doing seven and a half thousand [parcels] in three hours … they grind me down sometimes, yeah, it's horrible … they're asking me to do overtime as well on the shift after mine [5:30 to 8:30] which is from half eight til about three o'clock in the morning. (P 14)

The literature on socialisation and engagement and their relationship with retention suggests that students who immerse themselves socially and academically are much more likely to enjoy their university experience and are less prone to leaving (Thomas, 2012). However, for many of the respondents, having to prioritise their free time meant that their participation in social activities suffered:

Actually, I applied for gym membership, but I couldn't find myself time you know, if I find time, I'm going to sleep, I'm going to sleep. (P 1)

I'd prefer it [the timetable] to be a lot more condensed… it's a bit of a nightmare trying to fit in work and friends and university. (P 13)

I love running, like it's my life, and I've not been since probably October. (P 21)

The publication '*Working towards your Future*' (CBI, 2011), aimed at undergraduate university students, cheerily suggests that 'the better you organise your time for studying, attending lectures and other course activities, the more of it you'll have left over for social life and other things you want to do. And we all need a balance of activities in our lives.' However, the reality for most respondents in this study is having to juggle multiple commitments, not through choice, but through necessity.

5.3.3 Teaching and learning

When asked about their perceptions and expectations of what teaching and learning would be like at university level, the common view was that it would be lecture-style delivery in a large amphitheatre with a 'stereotypical professor' at the front 'talking *at* you' for two hours. For those who were the first in their family to go to university, this image had largely been generated from 'films' and the 'media' in general; one (P 5) still thought it was going to be like 'Legally Blonde', even though both her parents had previously attended university. However, all but one of the respondents were pleasantly surprised by the actual situation whereby the majority of the teaching and learning takes place in smaller seminars and workshops. In this environment, they felt that they could learn more through closer interaction with the tutors and their peer group. However, the aspect of university life that surprised and disappointed many was the lack of contact hours as they had expected much more tuition – not as many hours as at college level, but certainly more than the 12 or 13 that they were actually receiving.

The results revealed that, other than the beliefs concerning delivery style and contact hours, the students held a great many expectations of themselves and what they assumed the university expected of them. These findings are presented in Table 5.3 below.

Table 5.3 Students' expectations of themselves and what they believe the university expects of them

What students expect of themselves	What students believe the university expects of them
Have a large social circle Lots of nights out To try my best and get good grades Gain better social, IT and problem solving skills Not to mess about Try to stay motivated To do a placement year or study abroad Struggle to find a job after graduation Having fun as well as working hard Get the most out of the experience Attend lectures and pass the assignments Put in the effort Read, read, read Make sure I understand what's being taught Having to juggle a job and course work Get a better job than their parents/siblings Interact and try hard	Attend all the lectures and seminars Be engaged with a good attitude Be punctual Read all the books on the list Hand assignments in on time Ask questions if you don't understand Proof read assignments before submitting them Study outside of university Not to be disrespectful of peers Respect your surroundings Concentrate and not be distracted Mutual respect Enjoy learning Be well organised Interact with the lecturers Come in as often as possible

As outlined in Table 5.3, there are definite parallels with the findings of Pietersen (2014: 30) who gathered qualitative data from 25 undergraduates concerning what they perceived to be the 'rights and responsibilities' of students (see Chapter 3). The views that aligned most closely with those expressed in Pieterson's (2014) study related to working hard, attending lectures and generally participating in class. In the present investigation, although the interviewees came from a variety of backgrounds and cultures, were of both genders and were of mixed age range, they held surprisingly similar views concerning what they expected of themselves and what they believed the university expected of them. However, the most interesting expectations were those towards their peer group. The views summarised in Table 5.4 below were all volunteered without any prompting or solicitation and provide a fascinating insight into the students' lived and shared experience.

Concerning 'pulling your weight in group work', Participant 13 recounted an instance when the students had been asked to work in teams of four or five on a project. He mentioned one member who did not respond to e-mails or attend the group's meetings and, when he did, came unprepared and empty handed, a situation which Participant 13 found 'frustrating'. Collectively, the group wrote a letter of complaint to the module tutor because they had 'all agreed that it wasn't fair to, kind of, carry someone, as such'. Another student reported a similar situation 'where your mark is dependent on other people's efforts… I don't find that fair at all, erm, not when you end up being the person putting all the effort in to make sure it's done' (P 16).

Table 5.4 Students' expectations of their peer group

What students expect of their peers
Pull their weight in group work Pay attention and not disrupt the class Have good attendance Ask questions in class Speak up if they don't understand Not to use mobile phones and talk over the lecturer Be punctual Do the reading prior to attending class To be friendly and supportive Everyone to be a similar age Hand their assignments in on time Not to watch movies on their laptops in lectures Take university seriously and care about your education Don't back chat the lecturers Don't come to class just to chat to your friends

Other criticisms of their peers concerned punctuality, respect, preparing work in advance (doing the set readings), handing in assignments and general conduct in class. For example:

Attendance is quite key and being punctual, well attending on time, rather than just strolling up 10 to 15 minutes into the lesson and disrupting everyone … It's quite annoying when people are not taking it seriously as well, they'll be on their phones … And I'm surprised actually at how much back chat lecturers get off some of the pupils, it's so disrespectful. (P 13)

I get so annoyed, I have approached some students myself after lectures, I had to ask her [the lecturer] to repeat something three times 'cos I was just not getting it, but it was mainly because people were speaking behind me and I couldn't hear properly. So afterwards I did go and I said 'listen guys you know, I couldn't understand what she was saying, in fact I couldn't hear anything she was saying 'cos you were talking so much.' And it's really funny because that group of students, if other students talk and they see me, they say 'shhhhh' and I did feel really bad, but I had to say something … because I feel like they are taking away the learning experience of students who want to be there and who put in the work. (P 21)

Like I've been to some lectures and people are watching movies on their laptops, I just don't see the reason … it's just so they can say that they attended the class, but they didn't get anything from it (P 12)

'Cos you find some people, which is quite annoying, won't actually prepare in advance, you get given all these questions to discuss and they drag everyone else back. (P 16)

I wouldn't expect people not to hand assignments in on time … I thought everybody would do it on time, 'cos they're spending nine grand a year … you're kind of just wasting your time by handing it in late, or just not doing it, which is a bit of a shock, 'cos what's the point of being here? (P 6)

5.3.3.1 Adjusting to independent learning

Kandinko and Mawer (2013) suggest that students' expectations rarely match their subsequent experiences of higher education. In terms of their preconceptions towards independent learning, the findings of the present study support that assertion. Although the majority of the respondents were familiar with the notion of independent learning, the reality for many was highly unpalatable. In particular, they reported that they were finding the transition to independent learning and managing their time very difficult. However, others were enjoying the challenge of working more autonomously and viewed this new academic experience as giving them a palpable sense of achievement:

I quite like the thought of being able to do it myself … once I get the grades back and hopefully they'll be good, I'll be able to sit back and think 'well, I've done that myself'. (P 14)

I didn't expect it [the learning] to be quite as independent, but actually as time's gone on, that's quite a good thing, 'cos you get to do things on your own, rather than be told what you have to do. (P 13)

Another interviewee, when discussing university-level learning, compared it favourably with her college experience which she felt was far less intellectually stimulating and challenging:

Here you're expected to go out, get the books, get the information and do all the work, whereas at college, you basically wrote your notes, learnt them off by heart and you've got yourself an A star. (P 2)

Many described being 'chased' for coursework and homework and being 'told exactly what to do' by their college tutors with regard to assignments and even exam questions. At university, they appreciated that you have to be much more self-motivated and in many respects take charge of your own academic journey. One student said:

[At uni] you're not baby fed, you're not spoon fed any more. Here, you go, you'll research it, you do it yourself and there's less help … and it isn't them pushing you, if you don't hand in an assignment, it's your fault, not anybody else's and they're not going to keep asking you about it. (P 6)

For others, though, it has clearly been a difficult transition to make:

I love it, I love being told, I love being told what to do and then get on with it … 'cos I've been, if you've been spoon fed your whole life from high school to college … my whole life we've been told what to do. (P 9)

Unsurprisingly, when asked how she was adjusting to independent learning, her response was 'erh, not good…' Students were not only finding difficulty with the ambiguity of there not necessarily being one 'right' answer, but with managing their own time. Many reported leaving assignments to the last minute and underestimating how long writing up would take them. At stage one of the interviews which took place in late November, only half of the respondents had received their first marks for their assignments and so were uncertain of their academic capabilities. The students who had previously undertaken a BTEC were used to having clear instructions regarding the content of their work, as well as being able to submit drafts for approval. Conversely, those who had done A Levels were used to sitting exams and so were unfamiliar with being marked on course work. The students who seemed to fare best were those who had come into the first year via the Foundation route, as they had clearer notions of what was expected of them. However, they were generally older and more mature than the BTEC/A Level students, which could also account for their relative ease in adjusting to independent learning. In terms of their academic studies, more than half of the respondents reported that university was much, much harder than they had expected it to be.

5.3.3.2 The aspects of academic life that students found most difficult

The aspects of academic life that virtually all of the respondents found most demanding related to reading journals and text books, referencing other people's work and meeting conflicting assignment deadlines. Participant 6, is a comparatively clever student who did exceptionally well in his A Levels, well enough in fact to grant him access to a much higher tariff university than UCLan, yet for him, one of the most 'challenging' aspects has been the amount of reading that he feels he is expected to do:

You're expected to do more outside yourself, even read books you've not been told about, to increase your wider learning which is quite hard, 'cos I'm not really a massive books person, so it's hard for me to read extra when I don't really want to. (P 6)

In a similar vein, another disclosed that, 'I really hate reading, but I try' (P 15) and yet another interviewee said, '… but it's just so much reading, that I didn't expect', going on to say 'I'm adapting to it slightly, but at first, I totally did not like it, it wasn't for me at all' (P 11). Even a mature student who had already successfully undertaken a degree overseas was shocked by the amount of reading she had to do:

> I knew it would be a lot of self-study, obviously, I'd have to go home and do a lot of reading myself, but I didn't expect that much, I didn't think it would be as much as we do have … I just feel like I don't have enough time to do all my reading. (P 21)

However, a minority revealed that they enjoyed reading and learning and the sheer challenge of adjusting to academic life at university. They were there not for potential job-related, economic gains, but because they wanted to immerse themselves in the experience and take as much from university life as they could. These, 'outlying' students were quite critical of others, who they perceived to be 'here for a piece of paper' (P 13) rather than for personal cerebral improvement, or for the love of learning. One reported that, '…some people don't like learning… but they want to come to university, so they've got a degree at the end of it, but I'm doing it, not necessarily for the degree, but because I like learning' (P 16).

Although this student stated that she likes learning, she still felt pressurised academically:

> I feel like they [the lecturers] think we should be putting as much time into this as we've got, which is fine, which I'm happy to do, but I don't think they realise the emotional side of it, you know, the struggles, how sometimes you need to switch off and focus on people rather than reading. (P 16)

Other than the previously mentioned Foundation students, most of the interviewees had no prior experience of either a substantial reading load or having to reference the assignments they produced. Several reported writing an assignment and then finding references to try to support what they were saying after they had finished the piece. The number of assignments was also something of a shock to most of the interviewees, as there were far more than they had expected. They also reported difficulties with conflicting deadlines and managing their time to ensure everything was completed. Participant 6, as well as struggling with reading, described being 'bombarded with them [assignments]' and the sheer volume, coupled with conflicting deadlines, he said was 'one big shock for me' (P 6).

Nevertheless, although many of the participants reported that they were struggling with academic life at university, the vast majority were pleasantly surprised by the teaching and learning arrangements in terms of class size and the delivery of the materials. These aspects will be discussed in the next section.

5.3.3.3 Seminar style delivery

A number of recent surveys suggest that very many students are discontented with their university experience and, in particular, with the quality of the teaching being offered (HEA, 2015, cited in BIS, 2016; Neves & Hillman, 2017; Unite/HEPI, 2017). However, the results of the present study revealed that not to be the case, and in some respects, quite the reverse. Discovering that most of the teaching sessions would be smaller style seminar-style gatherings rather than large-scale lectures had a very positive effect on the overall satisfaction of the study group. In particular, the fact that they could interact with their peers and listen to and learn from other's ideas and contributions was seen as extremely beneficial, with many feeling that it significantly enhanced their learning experience. The level of staff support on offer was also unexpected by many. Rather than being taught by lecturers who were aloof and distant, the students felt that the tutors were largely 'warm', 'approachable' and 'caring':

> *You do like visualise university, like you see it in a movie and it's always big lectures and stuff …*
> *and the lecturers always seem very dominant and like, very scientific, but they're not like that.*
> *Like with [name] for instance, she's so down to earth, she's so nice, I mean she really is, I love*
> *her to bits, I think she's class.* (P 14)

> *I'm having a concern or I'm having a problem with this, they'll definitely support you with it.*
> *Which is, which I found like interesting, I didn't think they would, erm … I think it's just kind of*
> *a stereotype where like this perception that I had, I dunno.* (P 5)

> *I didn't expect the tutors to be that nice. I always had the expectation of them to be quite, like*
> *you can't talk to them … not approachable, and not as, just not as nice.* (P 9)

> *I thought it was gonna be a lot of lectures, erh, whereas it's actually not, it's all mostly seminars*
> *and workshops, which is quite good, being able to speak to teachers … it's more personal than*
> *I expected, I thought it was going to be a big lecture hall with two or three hundred people in it.*
> (P 13)

The small seminars are great, erm, it's a bit more personal, like the teacher actually knows who you are… so you feel like you are part of a group and you learn more [than in the lectures]. (P 15)

However, although generally feeling supported by their tutors, many students revealed they were fearful of providing a 'wrong' answer in front of their classmates. Several described their anxiety about 'being put on the spot' or 'criticised' publically, whilst many found interacting with their peers and contributing in the seminars a frightening experience. Some reported making contributions in sessions and feeling that their lecturers had responded negatively to their input. In one case, a participant felt that the tutor had replied 'sarcastically' to the answer she had proffered, so much so that the student made a mental note to 'never say anything in class again' as it was just 'too embarrassing' (P 18). Her reaction perhaps reflects assertions in the literature concerning the resilience of the Millennial generation. Tulgan (2016: 7) for example, suggests that contemporary parents have invested a great deal of time and energy in 'making children feel great about themselves and building up their self-esteem'. It appears that it takes very little to damage their confidence and suggests a strong external locus of control. Espinoza et al. (2010) concur with Tulgan (2016) and describe the way that Millennials have been made to feel appreciated, listened to and special since early childhood. Perhaps it is no wonder that they have high expectations of the factors shaping their lives.

5.3.3.4 What makes a good lecturer?

When discussing teaching and learning and their expectations of it, the students were asked, what, in their opinion, makes a good lecturer? The responses are presented in Table 5.5 below.

Table 5.5 Students' beliefs about the characteristics of a 'good' lecturer

What makes a good lecturer?
Approachable, supportive and understanding
Nice and not intimidating
Interactive and engaging
Motivates you and keeps you focussed
Makes the learning relevant and interesting
Explains clearly what they are talking about
Has a laugh with the students, but knows when enough is enough
Doesn't just talk at you
Takes an interest in you and helps you out
Someone who gives a bit of themselves
You feel like you know them on a personal basis and they care about you
Not too authoritative, but not too lenient
Someone you can confide in like a friend
Gets on with what we need to be taught
Treats us like adults
Gives me the information to get a good grade
Says exactly what they want for the assignments
Helps me get a placement and a career

The findings shown in Table 5.5 do not correspond with those described in much of the literature, which depicts contemporary students as being almost wholly instrumental and transactional in their approach to academic life (for example, Bunce, Baird & Jones. 2016; Itzkovich & Alt, 2015; Nixon et al., 2016; Tomlinson, 2017). Rather, the outcomes of this study concur more with the findings of Koskina (2013) and Pietersen (2014) who assert that student psychological contracts contain a blend of transactional and relational expectations. Those elements considered to be transactional related to performance requirements, whereas the aspects regarded as relational concerned such perceptions as the approachability of lecturers and help and support from staff in general. In this study, it became clear that the majority of students desire a much more relational bond with the lecturers, a desire which may go unnoticed by academics convinced of the 'narcissistic', 'infantile' demands of present day student-consumers, as described by Nixon et al. (2016).

The dichotomy here is that although many students want to form a solid relationship with the teaching staff, they are still acutely aware of the financial burden that they are accruing and of getting, or indeed, not getting what they are paying for. The phrase 'I'm paying nine grand a year for this' or something very similar was used by at least two thirds of the respondents. Throughout the interviews, issues concerning fees, debt and money in general were proffered

without prompts by the interviewer. However, towards the end of each interview, respondents were asked directly what they considered to represent 'good value for money'. Views about fees and the notions of what constitutes good, or poor value for money are considered in the next section.

5.3.4 I'm paying nine grand a year for this...

According to the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD, 2015), the majority of the towns and cities (Blackburn, Blackpool, Bolton, Burnley, Chorley, Preston) that form the catchment area for entrants to UCLan are in the top 10% of the most deprived areas of the UK. This percentage is calculated using metrics such as household income, employment opportunities, child welfare, crime and overall health. It is not surprising, therefore, that issues surrounding fees, debt and notions of value for money are foremost in many of the students' minds. For the respondents, the concept of value for money was inextricably linked with ideas about independent learning, getting a good degree and even the perceived 'relevance' of the taught materials. One student described value for money as being overall 'customer satisfaction' (P 11), clearly framing herself as a paying consumer of an educational product. Notions of value for money and the reality of independent learning were negatively associated in the minds of a number of respondents who felt that they were essentially paying a premium for a 'DIY experience' (P 17).

> *I think they [the tutors] expect you to be engaged, but we're the ones paying the money …*
> *'cos you're paying nine grand. I don't think they understand that they need to teach us properly*
> *and not just make us do everything ourselves. (P 4)*

> *I'm paying such and such amount a year and I'm not getting all the information I need to, you*
> *know, to basically get my degree passed. (P 19)*

> *I'm expected to do everything, they expect me to do the teacher's job basically, to teach myself*
> *everything and also we're just getting the same stuff people were paying for before, and they*
> *were like paying three grand for it, so where's the value in that? (P 17)*

Consistent with the literature (CBI, 2011; Kandinko & Mawer, 2013; Koskina, 2013; Nixon et al., 2016; Tomlinson, 2017), respondents viewed that getting good degree (a first or a 2:1) and securing a fulfilling job at the end of their studies represented value for money. Participants said that, for them, value for money embodied the following:

Coming out with the highest grades you can … that's what I say would be value for money. (P 14)

I think if I get a high degree, the money is going to be for UCLan, you deserve it. (P 1)

As long as the tutors engage with you and give you the information that you need to get the best grade possible. (P 10)

Many students, prior to entering university, had believed that their fees would cover additional items such as printing and parking and felt that these elements should be either free, or much cheaper.

There's loads of other stuff that I actually thought would be part of the fees, like printing's not free. And I've heard about students that drive, they have to pay for parking and stuff. (P 15)

Students were clearly concerned about the cost of everything connected to their academic experience and about paying their loans back.

It's nine grand and you don't get any benefits, everything's loans, so they are making you more in debt … most people don't know about the interest which is five or six percent, so that's on top of everything else. (P 6)

Another thing that scares me the most, is when I have to pay it [the loan] back. (P 12)

5.3.4.1 Relevance of course content

Perhaps a surprising result consistent in many respondents' comments was their associating the 'relevance' of the course content to the notion of value for money:

They need to get on with what they're supposed to be telling us, not speeding off, talking about their life stories … it's [going off at a tangent] not relevant to the subject, they should get on with what we need to be taught, otherwise it's not worth the money. (P 6)

When asked about her very first teaching session after Welcome Week, one participant simply stated that it was 'boring'. When she was probed to go into greater detail regarding what 'boring' actually looked like, her response was this 'erm, we just sat there, wrote some notes, erm off the PowerPoint and the lecturer just said random things and then we just left'. When questioned further on what she meant by 'random' she said: 'the lecturer just chats a load of rubbish, just goes off the subject and tells us stuff that's not relevant. I wouldn't mind if that

module was coursework, but it's for our exam at the end of the year, so it's quite annoying' (P 4).

However, further exploration of the literature revealed that the association between notions of relevance and those of perceived value for money are quite frequently interlinked. Students seem to have quite clear ideas about what they should, and should not, be learning, even at the outset of their studies. They have preconceived expectations concerning what they are 'paying for' and the extent to which they are receiving a return on that investment. Nixon et al. (2016: 2) suggest that for institutions in the current competitive climate, the 'service offering becomes crucial' and that course content seen as 'unrealistic' or in some way unrelated to the 'real world' is 'unnecessary' (2016: 11). Relatedly, Tomlinson (2017: 457) discusses students who believe they have licence to demand maximum value from their courses whilst, at the same time, minimising 'so-called faulty provision'. He goes on to question the extent to which 'a pervasive consumerist approach' damages and reshapes 'pedagogic relations' (2017: 464).

5.3.4.2 Improving university facilities

Although some students in this study felt as though they were not receiving particularly good value for money, others had a much more positive outlook on their time at university. Many mentioned the facilities, which they generally felt to be exceptional, especially the library. Others mentioned forming good relationships with the teaching staff which, for them, justified the money they were spending on their education. Interestingly, however, the recent building work at the university prompted some students to voice concerns regarding how their fees were being spent, and on what:

> *Social spaces? Who the hell socialises at university? Like you do it outside, you go for a drink, you don't really spend time in uni, unless it's like the Library. I don't really see people like in buildings, you don't really see people, unless they're actually waiting for their class.* (P 17)

> *I don't see the point of it particularly … it's just a disturbance and money which could be spent elsewhere in my opinion … they're cutting it off [the walkway between two buildings], so it's making you have to walk round … so it's just cutting, blocking you off.* (P 6)

These last two statements correspond with the findings of Neves and Hillman (2017: 48) who asked their survey subjects 'In which areas would you most/least prefer your university to save money?' Students responded by ranking 'spending less on buildings' highly on the 'most prefer' scale.

5.3.5 Summary of findings and discussion from stage one of the semi-structured interviews

Adjusting to the complexities of university life was, for the majority of respondents, more arduous than they had expected. Many reported difficulties balancing work commitments, finding time to socialise, as well as meeting academic demands. Making the transition to independent learning had also been a significant hurdle for many. Concerns regarding money emerged as a dominant theme in tandem with the concept of value for money regarding the investment being made. Although most of the respondents had entered university for career-related reasons, many were worried about actually securing a job on graduation, particularly if they wanted to remain in the region.

However, it became evident that, as discussed in following section, some interesting, sometimes subtle, shifts in the students' perceptions of their university experience had occurred in the six months between stages one and two of the interviews.

5.4 Findings and discussion from stage two of the semi-structured interviews

As presented in Chapter 4, a further round of interviews was conducted six months after the initial meetings in order to introduce a longitudinal element into the research. Writers on research methods agree that longitudinal studies can be valuable in exploring changes and developments as they take place, and in identifying the causal factors that influence those changes (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Robson, 1993; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2009). However, while there are distinct benefits of conducting a longitudinal study, the principal drawback is that of 'sample attrition', Robson (1993: 161). This is indeed what happened in the present study, in which only 10 of the original 21 participants attended a second interview. As previously stated in Chapter 4, Bryman and Bell (2011: 59) suggest that 'those who leave the study may differ in some important respects from those who remain, so that the latter does not form a representative group'. Thus, perhaps unsurprisingly, the students who chose to be re-interviewed at stage two were those who had fared well academically and who had largely received high grades in their assignments and exams. Nevertheless, the findings from this second stage highlighted a number of salient issues that were not revealed at stage one and the data, therefore, merit inclusion. This section presents the findings from the stage two interviews by focusing on four main topics: independent learning; value for money; the impact of friends withdrawing from university; and, what advice the respondents would give to a new first year

embarking on their academic journey (Appendix 4 contains the full interview schedule and Appendix 5 contains a full transcript).

5.4.1 Adjusting to independent learning

When asked about the 'high spots' of the year, Participant 6 simply said 'finishing'. He had found his first year particularly gruelling academically, although he had achieved excellent results overall. As at the first stage of interviews, he reported difficulties adjusting to independent learning and felt as though he had not received as much help from the teaching staff as he had expected over the year. However, and consistent with Tomlinson's (2017) findings, this student was of the type who believed that his academic success, rather than being the primary responsibility of the teaching staff, required commensurate effort from himself. On this subject he said, 'well I put all my effort in you know, I mean I've put a lot of work into it, so it's like what you put in, is like what you get out of it' (P 6). His 'Achilles heel' had been coping with the amount of reading which had represented a considerable 'struggle' for not only him, but for many of his classmates, reporting that 'most people on my course don't really like reading that much'. Interestingly, he predicted that the 'reading issue' would be likely to worsen in the future because:

> *Now people have technology, they're not really bothered with books, like if you give a ten-year-old a book, they wouldn't be bothered with it, they'd rather be on their iPad, or whatever.* (P 6)

In a similar vein, Participant 17 said the highlight of her year had been 'the end'. She too had found her first year arduous, even though she had also achieved high grades. When describing adjusting to independent learning, she said 'it's horrible… I hate it, I still have to force myself to study'. Similarly, Participant 18 had found the year 'really stressful'. She described her stress as stemming largely from adjusting to autonomous learning, clashing assignment deadlines and juggling her part-time job with her studies. Despite her reported anxiety, however, she had enjoyed the year overall and received better grades than she had expected, averaging an upper second.

Participant 14 described the 'worst thing' about independent learning was 'not knowing if you're on the right track'. He described a situation where:

> *You're confident you've done the best that you could [in an assignment], but then the feedback says 'you've not met the criteria'. It just sort of like hits you and you're like 'oh, right, well, that's a bit of a slap in the face.* (P 14)

However, since Christmas, he reported that everything had begun to fall into place for him and that 'since then, I think I've done fantastically'. Similarly, Participant 2 had adjusted well to independent learning and had developed a routine whereby she completed all of her work in university time, thus leaving her evenings free to socialise. At stage one of the interviews, this particular student had complained of feeling isolated socially, reporting that it was having a negative impact on her studies, on her desire to remain on the course, and on her overall emotional stability. This finding is in line with the literature on socialisation and its relationship with retention as described earlier in the chapter. Socially, this student had earlier felt that her expectations of university life had not been met, so much so that she was considering leaving. However, at stage two, her social circle had widened considerably and she had decided to remain on her course.

Another significant change in the period between the two interview stages was reported by Participant 7, who had opined at stage one that he, along with the majority of his classmates, were struggling badly in adjusting to independent learning. However, as the year had worn on, things had just got 'better and better'. He had even begun to understand the point of referencing, stating 'like you can know what you're talking about and write a full on essay, but if you've got nothing to back it up with, then it's useless'.

It would appear that the initial shock of learning more autonomously begins to diminish as the year progresses although, for some, it still represents something of a battle, even by the end of the second semester. These students expressed concerns about entering year two, as they were expecting it to be considerably more difficult and academically taxing.

5.4.2 Notions of value for money

At stage two of the interviews, all of the respondents stated that they believed that their first year had not represented particularly good value for money. Indeed, even those who at stage one had considered the experience to be of good value had revised this opinion. For example, at stage one of the interviews, Participant 2 had not really thought about the fees and the extent to which they represented value for money. However, at stage two, she reported that, on reflection, she had now concluded that overall her fees did not represent good value for money. Her reasons related mainly to the length of the academic calendar, stating 'I've got like five months off now, and I'm not doing anything, so it's a bit annoying knowing you've paid nine grand, for like what, six or seven months?' Relatedly, although Participant 21 had said her first year was 'absolutely amazing', she too was disgruntled by the relatively short term times, saying,

'I think "you know, I'm paying nine thousand pounds to come to university from September to May", I think it's quite a short time'.

One interviewee reported that for him, value for money was all about contact time, or the lack of it, and compared his university experience unfavourably with that of college:

When I was at college, you had to do four and a half hours per week per subject at least, which is a massive difference, because you had that contact time … they say 'oh it's about independent learning', but you're paying nine grand, and I'm doing this independent learning … but I'm not getting anything out of it, not getting support … And sometimes you think the sessions are pointless and then you just think 'I'm paying nine grand for this'. (P 6)

The association between contact time and value for money reflects the government's stance (Johnson, 2017) and perhaps supports the inclusion of teaching intensity as a metric for evaluation in the Teaching Excellence Framework.

Similarly, for Participants 17 and 18, the perceived lack of contact time in conjunction with independent learning did not represent value for money:

You get like a crappy crap presentation that lasts for like twenty minutes and then they tell you to read a book, it's like 'am I really paying you to tell me to read a book?' And then I have to pay for the book as well! (P 17)

Like the lectures, they're an hour, by the time you get into it [the subject], it's quarter past, let's say, and then you're out by quarter to … so you've only got, what, half an hour? Me and my friends worked it out that you're paying 36 pounds an hour for this, that's not good value. (P 18)

However, not all the respondents expressed negative views about value for money. Participant 20, for example, believed that her first year had represented good value because she was receiving a 'good education' and that the 'facilities are great'. In the same vein, Participant 14 said that 'from leaving college to now, I think I've learnt just ridiculous amounts' and 'my whole attitude to learning has just changed, it's so much better'.

The connection between notions of value for money and having to learn more autonomously are inextricably linked in the minds of the majority of the respondents. Although the consequent negative feelings concerning this connection appear to be ameliorated to an extent by the 'approachability' and 'helpfulness' of the teaching staff, discontent with the situation is prevalent.

5.4.3 The impact of friends withdrawing from university

By stage two of the interviews, most of the respondents knew someone who had withdrawn from the course which they had found, to a greater or lesser extent, somewhat unsettling. Participant 6, for example, reported that 'the lowest point in the year' had been the withdrawal from studies of one of his 'best mates', saying that he had felt 'pretty gutted' about it. The impact of this incident was clearly negative, although not enough to make him question his own desire to remain on the course. Similarly, Participant 14 reported that one of his friends had left because he was struggling with a particular assignment, stating, 'it just got to him, it just got to his head, he just started losing the plot'. When asked about how that made him feel, he replied, 'erh, shocked to be fair, I was actually quite scared, I was like "well, if he can be like that, then what about me? I might get through this assignment easily, but what about the next one?"'

Another respondent described a particularly interesting scenario in which a student starting the course in September had become progressively absent, until he had finally 'dropped out':

> *I knew from the start that he was only in it [the university] to get the student finance, the loan and that, and the grant and the maintenance. That's all he came for, like you can just tell, he wasn't arsed about anything else and he was like, 'yeah, I've dropped out of uni like three times for three years now' … and so he just gets the money. (P 18)*

Even though this student knew the boy was 'gaming' the system, she still spoke about the incident making her 'worried'. However, it had also caused her to reflect on her own situation and had made her more determined to continue with her studies.

Participant 2 revealed that her boyfriend had left the course and that:

> *I broke up with him in the morning and in the afternoon, he quit uni … he told me that the only reason he was doing it, carrying on doing it, when he didn't want was 'cos I was there. It made me feel a bit bad, but it's like university just wasn't for him. (P 2)*

Participant 21, a mature student, reported that someone she had been 'quite close to' stopped attending university at the end of November. Although she was worried about the girl herself, she felt that some of the people who had left the university had done so because they 'weren't ready to do it, maybe they were quite young'. In a similar vein, Participant 8 reflected that 'university can be like a bit of a shock, no matter how much you think you are prepared for it'.

Students leaving the course clearly has an impact on those left behind. Even discussing wanting to leave, but not actually doing so, provoked feelings of discomfort amongst classmates. Such pervasive negativity is consistent with both the psychological contract and EVLN literatures (for

example, Itzkovich & Alt, 2015; Rusbult, Zembrodt & Gunn (1982); Turnley & Feldman, 1999; Withey & Cooper, 1989).

5.4.4 What advice would you give to a new first year?

The interviewees were asked to reflect on their first year at university and to think about the sort of advice they would liked to have received as new entrants, or that they might give to the following year's new cohorts. Their suggestions and reflections are presented in Table 5.6 below.

Table 5.6 Words of advice for first years embarking on their academic journey

What advice would you give to a new first year?
Not to worry, sit back and just take things slowly and to spend as much time socialising as you do studying, which is what I got wrong in the first semester really. (P2)
Make sure you read up on everything beforehand, like what all the subjects are gonna contain and just talk to lots of people about what the course is about. (P 4)
I would tell them to get involved with as much as possible that they can handle, erm, 'cos I wish I would kind of joined more societies and done the social aspect a tiny bit more. Erm, and don't leave everything to the last minute, 'cos I'm such a pain for doing that and it's so stressful. (P 5)
Don't take it easy… you've got to put a lot of effort in, they say that thee first year doesn't count, but you can't afford to think like that. (P 6)
Get as close as you can to your lecturers, so they know who you are and turn up to your lessons. (P 7)
Not to be shy if you've got any questions or if you're struggling, just ask, otherwise you'll get too stressed and end up leaving when you shouldn't really have to. (P 14)
Study, just study… don't care about anyone going out, because you will still have fun on like the weekends. I wish that someone had pushed me at the beginning of the year. (P 17)
I'd just say 'go with the flow' really and don't expect anything, like people tell you it's going to be such and such, like you're going to have this great social life, but it's not as 'wow' [university life] as people make it out to be. (P 18)

> *Maybe join the clubs or the groups, I, I wanted to join the groups at the first time, but I didn't, so it's a shame.* (P 20)
>
> *Get involved in different clubs, 'cos you are going to need people to talk to and not feel lonely and if you don't understand something, talk to the lecturers, 'cos really they are there to help and support you.* (P 21)

Interestingly, although there is some parity in the advice presented in Table 5.5, particularly with regard to joining clubs and societies, there are completely opposing viewpoints on other matters. For example, Participant 2 suggests that new entrants 'spend as much time socialising as you do studying', whereas Participant 17 asserts that the best approach would be not to 'care about anyone going out, because you will still have fun on like the weekends'. Similar contradictory advice concerns approaches to studying, with Participant 2 suggesting that new first years should 'sit back and just take things slowly' as opposed to Participant 6 asserting 'don't take it easy... you've got to put a lot of effort in'. The advice on offer clearly reflects the subjectivity of the participants' own lived reality of their academic experiences so far.

5.4.5 Summary of findings and discussion from stage two of the semi-structured interviews

Overall, in the six months between the interviews the students had largely adjusted to independent learning. Although many reported that they still did not particularly enjoy it, they had come to accept it as a necessary part of university life. Many of the respondents at stage two of the interviews were much clearer about what they were planning to do career-wise and had decided to take specialist modules in the following year. Finding some sort of direction had provided them with a greater sense of purpose and convinced them that they had indeed made a sound decision in embarking on a degree.

Despite generally feeling more positive about their university experience, however, the majority reported that they had: (i) considered leaving university at some point over the year; (ii) they had made complaints about their programmes of study; (iii) although some course content seemed irrelevant, they 'had to accept it; and (iv) they had missed teaching sessions, or handed work in late. These behaviours are all consistent with those delineated in the EVLN framework which is considered in the final section of this chapter.

5.5 Mapping the student experience against the EVLN constructs

This final part of this chapter now presents the findings from both stages of the semi-structured interviews and maps the students' responses against the four Exit-Voice-Loyalty-Neglect (EVLN) elements as introduced in Chapter 1 and described in Chapter 3. The EVLN framework is a flexible construct which has been used to explore and measure responses to discontent in a wide variety of settings including within the context of higher education (for example, Itzkovich & Alt, 2015; Lovitts, 1996; Mahaffey, Neu & Taylor, 1991). Central to Mahaffey et al.'s (1991) study is the hypothesis that the concepts are interrelated which, they assert, has not been sufficiently demonstrated in much of the workplace-related research. Mahaffey et al. (1991) sought to discover why, when faced with similar unsatisfactory conditions, some students decide to leave their institution, others complain in the hope of restitution, some increasingly stay away from lectures, while still others quietly tolerate the situation, hoping that things will improve. Their study indicates that the responses for each of the constructs are largely distinguishable from one another. However, other than overtly quitting the institution, they found that the majority of the exit acts are more typical of neglect behaviours, rather than those of exit. They explain this finding by suggesting that students are not simply customers of a service who can readily go elsewhere, and that the interrelation of exit and neglect might reflect 'the angst many students experience when contemplating withdrawal (Mahaffey et al., 1991: 82).

Research conducted for this study found evidence both to support the interrelation of the concepts, as well as revealing distinct behavioural responses consistent with the organisational literature. However, the more nuanced picture which has emerged may largely reflect the qualitative nature of the research methods; that is, prior investigations into the EVLN framework, in all contexts, have almost wholly relied on quantitative methods which may have 'glossed over' some of the subtleties that describe and make sense of human behaviour. In particular, this study uncovers evidence of dissatisfaction amongst the students at both stages of the interviews. However, of the 21 respondents, only one had found the situation so intolerable that she had decided to leave.

At stage one of the interviews, the respondents were asked what the university would have to do to make them feel let down in some way, a situation therefore, representing a possible breach or violation of their psychological contract. Their answers are presented in Table 5.7 below.

Table 5.7 An overview of students' perceptions of breach or violation

What might constitute breaches and violations?

If the tutor did not explain well and just give us tasks and say go and do it… for nine thousand, we need to know what is going on exactly and what we should do. (P 1)

Not having a good social life, because the social side of it is one of the most important things. I'd have to say I'm dissatisfied. (P 2)

I'm paying such and such amount a year and I'm not getting the information I need to you know to basically to get my degree passed. (P 3)

Not getting support if I needed it. (P 4)

It would have to be something quite big like a mistake with my grades or something, you know that that couldn't be fixed straight away or would be a long drawn out process. (P 5)

Lecturers not coming in, not paying attention, their attendance being down, not bothering, cancelling lectures, cancelling the seminars. (P 6)

As soon as it doesn't start to feel like a university, that's when I'll start to be let down, 'cos there's a massive difference between, you know, college and university. (P 7)

If the teachers didn't really care as much, like weren't taking, much of an interest, kinda just told you information and left you to do it [the assignment], on your own. (P 8)

If they didn't give me enough information for my assignment maybe. (P 9)

Expecting us to be here at unreasonable times or during unreasonable circumstances. And if there are things that are shown on the website that actually aren't here when you get here. (P 10)

Constant cancelling of classes… if that happened every week, I'd think, 'come on where's my money going here?' I think another thing would probably be if I was to turn up and not much happened, so if I got there and the lecturer was disengaged and you could tell he didn't really care or, wasn't bothered about getting you there and helping you along the way. (P 11)

Fail me. (P12)

If a lesson was getting cancelled regularly with no explanation… if it was cancelled for more than say two weeks on the row and nothing had been put into place, I think I'd be I'd start to get a little bit annoyed 'cos obviously you're paying for something you're not getting. (P 13)

If the level of teaching was to drop or if the facilities weren't there. (P 14)

I think if the teachers don't really get involved with students, 'cos then what's the point being a teacher when you can't really get your students to get involved and make them understand. (P 15)

I think it, most of it comes down to like the module leaders, I think if they don't give you help with assignments, or if they don't turn up and they don't care (P 16)

If they just tell me to read a book, read a book… I need them to tell me how to interpret the data, tell me how to study, I need help. (P 17)

> *If you have lecturers that don't really care, or you have like classes getting cancelled left right and centre, or if you're given your assignment back, but you don't get told what went well, what went wrong and how to improve, like I'm putting all this effort in, but I'm getting nothing back, I think that's what would disappoint me a lot. (P 18)*
>
> *Give me low grades, that, that would make me think 'arh I can't do this, I need to get out'. (P 19)*
>
> *Too much assignments, make us have little time to enjoy to rest to have travel. (20)*
>
> *If they didn't give any support especially with regards to placements or finding jobs, I think that is so important. (21)*

Of the statements presented in Table 5.7, more than half relate to grades and assignments. This finding highlights the centrality in the students' minds of the importance of academic attainment, and their possible disappointment if they felt unsupported in their educational pursuits. Several of the respondents made the direct association between paying their fees and getting their degree, which is consistent with the assertions of Tomlinson (2017).

5.5.1 The construct of exit

All but three of the respondents had thought about leaving the university at some point within their first few months of study. The reasons were varied and included physical and mental health issues, not forming as wide a circle of friends as they had expected and the challenge of juggling their part-time jobs with their course work and assignments. Rusbult et al. (1988) suggest that exit is not simply a matter of leaving an organisation, but can also encompass thinking about leaving and conducting searches for more attractive alternatives. If that is the case then, worryingly, almost the entire study group had engaged in exit behaviours at some point in their first year. Hirschman (1970: 35) suggests that in cases of disappointment, exit is the 'dominant reaction mode', even in situations where satisfaction had previously been high. An example amongst the interviewees which supports this assertion is that of Participant 15. When asked about what course of action she might take if her expectations of the university were unmet, she said 'I don't know, probably just get my bags and just go home'. However, when discussing what she had liked about UCLan in the first place, she described it as being 'like a breath of fresh air… I kind of liked the whole aura to be honest, it was just nice…yeh, all of the buildings, the accommodation, speaking to the course leaders, just yeh'.

Other respondents, when asked the same question about unmet expectations, said they would 'find a different uni probably, one that would meet my expectations, or change to a different course maybe' (P 4). And, 'the only solution there would be is to study somewhere else' (P 19). Although Participant 9 had not actively thought of leaving, she stated that she might consider it

if a better alternative were to present itself 'like if I was offered a job, or something' (P 9). This statement is consistent Rusbult et al.'s (1982) hypothesis that attractive alternatives may induce exit behaviours.

Participant 17, when asked if she had ever considered leaving her course, said 'like oh my God, like fifty times, I hate it, I'm not going to lie, I hate it, I absolutely hate it' (P 17). Interestingly, between the stage one and stage two interviews, this participant had actively conducted research into the offerings of other regional universities as she was seriously considering leaving UCLan. However, she had found the teaching environments and course content elsewhere to be less attractive than what she currently had at UCLan and had consequently decided to stay. Again, this finding is consistent with Rusbult et al.'s (1982) hypothesis that unattractive alternatives promote behaviours more closely aligned to those prevalent within the loyalty construct.

Participant 21 is a mature student who has already undertaken a degree overseas who described very clear expectations of what university life would be like. However, she too had considered leaving several times in the first semester. She recounted one occasion:

 And I was sitting there and she [the lecturer] was talking and I remember just this sick feeling and thinking number one, 'what is she even on about?' And number two, 'why am I here, why did I give up a full time job to come back to university to put myself through so much stress and pressure?' (P 21)

The fact that so many of the students seriously considered leaving the university indicates that their initial experience was far removed from what they had expected. Although this finding is consistent with the literature, (for example, Kandinko and Mawer, 2013), it of concern that such feelings are so prevalent. However, actual exit behaviours seem to be mitigated by the use of voice, which is examined next.

5.5.2 The construct of voice

Virtually all the respondents reported that if they had a problem, they would talk to either their tutor or their course leader rather than suffering in silence. The reason that they would be happy to do so is that they perceived the staff generally to be 'approachable'. Participant 8 said that 'I wouldn't feel awkward [speaking up], 'cos I wanna make it right'. Voicing concerns in the hope of restitution is line with the notion of 'considerate voice' as proposed by Hagedoorn, Van Yperen, Van de Vliert and Buunk (1999) who suggest that the voice construct, delineated by Farrell (1983), could be separated into two opposing forms:

'considerate voice and aggressive voice'. They regard considerate voice to be constructive, in that it 'consists of attempts to solve the problem' (1999: 311). Also consistent with the literature is the perception that the more approachable a lecturer is, the more likely students are to voice their concerns. Leck and Saunders (1992: 243) assert that individuals will voice their concerns if they feel the recipient of the information is '... fair and unbiased, approachable and not retributive…'

Of the participants who said they would speak up, many made statements in the same vein as Participant 13 who said '…I wouldn't leave it, because there's no point is there? You might as well get it sorted', and Participant 6 who stated 'I would probably go and see the head of our unit and talk to her about the problems I was experiencing… because she's very approachable'. However, some students described voice behaviours that were more militant and closer to Hagedoorn et al.'s (1999) definition of aggressive voice, one example being:

> *I was like, 'maybe she's having a bad day', but to tell you the truth, she was just treating us like five-year-olds… 'no phones allowed in my class', like 'if I catch you on your phone, you're going to get out'. I'm like 'come on, we're not five, I pay nine grand a year, if I want to be on my phone and waste my time, I will'. And I stood up, going like 'why are you treating us like kids? Like sorry, we're adults here, we're all adults'… and she just kind of hated me after that.* (P 17)

For some of the respondents, using the voice option meant working collectively to solve a perceived problem. For example, Participant 11 described a situation which resulted in quite a few students deciding together to file a complaint. It involved a lecturer who 'just speaks at yer …' He had given out an assignment but only provided what the students felt to be inadequate guidance. Rather than asking him to explain his requirements more clearly, they chose to bypass him in order to voice their concerns to what they perceived to be a higher authority who, they believed, would resolve the situation. Similarly, Participant 10 stated that if something was an issue that everyone thought was a problem, then he would 'maybe get a petition going, or something like that'. Importantly, the students clearly believe that many of the situations they feel negatively about can be resolved. This belief is consistent with the literature in that using voice may have a positive impact on neglect or exit behaviours (for example, Rusbult et al., 1982; Withey & Cooper, 1989).

However, the students' use of voice did not always improve the situation, as Participant 12 recounted. A number of classmates had misunderstood the requirements of an assignment and had already spent a considerable amount of time reading and researching, only to discover that they were off track; they e-mailed the tutor in question, to ask for guidance. Although she did respond to their e-mails, Participant 12 reported that 'she just said it's our fault, we didn't pay

enough attention'. Another student, who is one of the course representatives, described attending a Student Staff Liaison Committee meeting where she had raised a number of issues brought to her attention by her classmates. The staff member concerned became quite angry and, when the student's assignment was handed back to her, it was the lowest grade she had received that year and certainly not reflective of her previous performance. She is convinced that her poor grade came about as a direct result of her voicing complaints.

Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of voice behaviours is the concept of destructive voiced as mooted by Turnley and Feldman (1999), who suggest that individuals who complain bitterly about their circumstances, or talk about leaving the organisation, pervade the atmosphere with negativity, thus adversely affecting those around them. An example of the effects of destructive voice was provided by Participant 5, who described some of her classmates who were discussing changing their course or leaving the university altogether. She also went on to report that some students had said that they '…didn't see the point of the course as they felt it was too, too general to get you a really good job afterwards, so that's made me feel a little bit kind of uncertain, and just a little bit unsure at times'.

As presented earlier, the reason that many of the interviewees had chosen to study at university was to enhance their career prospects. Therefore, negative comments concerning future employment, are likely to have significant impact.

Speaking up about a situation is not the only option open to students, as the university has invested in putting 'suggestion boxes' all around the institution. However, the majority of students reported that they had either not seen them or were surprisingly cynical about their usefulness as a means of communicating their concerns. For example:

> *The problem is if you suggest something, the chances of it happening is probably next to none… there's a hierarchical system, so the people at the top have probably already made the decision and they're not really going to listen.* (P 6)

> *I don't feel they [suggestion boxes] really get looked at that much, 'cos at work, we have like a complaint box, and I know that my manager will kinda just put that [the complaint] in the bin.* (P 8)

> *Yeh, I've seen a picture, erm, where it's a suggestion box, with like, without the bottom. It was just like a bin underneath and I think that just represents how suggestion boxes work.* (P 15)

It would appear that, to these students at least, voicing their concerns to the university as an entity would fall on deaf ears and that the most viable option for restitution would be through directly approaching the course team, who were perceived to be 'agents' of the institution.

5.5.3 The construct of loyalty

Among the most surprising findings of this research are those related to the construct of loyalty. There is general agreement in the EVLN literature that loyalty actively and positively binds individuals to an organisation and discourages the behavioural option of exit (for example, Farrell & Rusbult, 1992; Rusbult et al. 1982). Some researchers agree that loyalty encourages the use of voice (Graham, 1986; Spencer, 1986), while others believe that loyalty supresses voice (for example, Farrell, 1983; Rusbult et al., 1988; Withey & Cooper, 1989). Of those who regard loyalty as having a negative impact on voice, Farrell (1983: 598), for example, characterises loyalty as 'suffering in silence'. Similarly, Withey and Cooper (1989: 536) suggest that passive loyalty presents very much like neglect, with individuals simply 'biding their time'. Clark, Golder and Golder (2016) also take this stance, suggesting individuals who demonstrate loyalty may do so because they are incapable of taking alternative action and not because they are reacting positively to an unsatisfactory situation.

The in vivo coding of the transcripts revealed that, in many cases, unhappy students were indeed suffering in silence and some of their statements indicted the feelings of entrapment and helplessness described in Withey and Cooper's (1989) study. When the interviewees were asked the question 'What if your personal expectations of UCLan weren't met, what do you think you would do?' responses pointed to a pervasive sense of resignation. For example:

> *I don't know… just kind of accept it, which is stupid, but I don't actually know.* (P 3)

> *I'm not a quitter, I wouldn't quit, but I think that most people, they think about leaving … They'd be like, 'do I really want to be here, is it really what I want?' But you stay … and at the end of it, you get a degree, rather than just getting ten grand in debt, then being nothing.* (P 6)

When talking about a lecturer who is not particularly popular amongst the student cohort, Participant 7 stated:

> *You've got to kinda like adapt to what you've got. I don't mind him that bad, 'cos he knows his stuff, but I think it's just the way he teaches … he makes you feel tired, even if you, you know, have like, four coffees.* (P 7)

> *Some of the stuff they teach us, I don't see how that's going to be relevant for my degree in the end, but it just gets you there, doesn't it, you've just got to put up with it. It feels a bit pointless … but it needs to be done.* (P 11)

This student clearly has feelings of powerlessness. Later in the interview she went on to state that even if she was facing problems, it is unlikely that she would approach any of her tutors. Even knowing that inaction might affect her 'negatively', she would rather wait to see if things

would improve. However, she had considered leaving quite early on in the course, but decided to give it six months as she's:

… not the sort of person to give in … I would think hard and long about, 'is this for me? Is this just the university? Is this universities in general? Will another university offer me something else, or is this me? (P11)

Although there were other examples of negative, passive loyalty, there were also students whose feelings of loyalty were much more positive. For example, Participant 10 said that if he felt let down by the university, 'I would just try to crack on with it… in the end, it will be alright'. Tellingly, a few moments later he went on to describe his course leader as 'brilliant' and 'really nice', someone who will sort out any issues whether it be academic or 'at home'. The assumption here is that his loyalist mind-set has largely been influenced by his relationship with the course leader. Not only did this student behave loyally, but he demonstrated virtually no neglect behaviours; reporting handing all his assignments in on time, and only missing a couple of teaching sessions over the whole year. However, his dedication to the programme was not reflected by the majority of the participants, as considered in the next section.

5.5.4 The construct of neglect

Tulgan's (2016) characterisation of the Millennial generation, presented earlier in this chapter, suggests that they lack a certain level of resilience and have a largely external locus of control. According to Withey and Cooper's (1989) research, an individual with a strong internal locus of control would be much more likely to engage in behaviours that would directly bring about change, namely, voice and exit. Those with an external locus of control, would, they predicted, respond to dissatisfaction with loyalty, or neglect behaviours. This is indeed what the findings of this study indicate, as neglect and passive loyalty appear to be prevalent behaviours.

All but two of the interviewees reported taking time off, often not because they were ill but for reasons ranging from a hangover to missing the bus. However, they felt able to catch up with their work as the majority of the materials are on the university's virtual learning area, Blackboard. Views were mixed as to the impact Blackboard has on students' motivation, with regards to both attending and engaging with the learning. When questioned about catching up on the work that she had missed through absence, one participant stated:

Oh they're [the materials] are all on Blackboard, so if you know you're going to get it on Blackboard, there's no point you coming in … Like there's one of my modules, there's 20 of us, but each week, it's like 10 going down, and it's like four of us left now. (P 15)

Participant 17 concurred with this view and stated:

Why do I bother going to the sessions? Everything's on Blackboard anyway, I can just read through the presentation in my own time.

Others described feeling unmotivated in lecturers, both by the content on offer as well as the lecturer's style of delivery:

I just switch off in that class. Yesterday morning, I couldn't get up, I'd had such a bad night … and I was going to [name] session. He just talks about his life stories … so I just thought 'no point even coming in anyway. (P 9).

I know that the lectures on Tuesday and Thursday are really important, so I kind of skip the Wednesday, nine til, I think eleven. (P 12)

It's in a massive lecture theatre, and he kinda talks at you, for like an hour … there's meant to be about just over a hundred I think, but that's like almost halved now. (P 7)

In general, the students did not seem overly concerned about missing taught sessions. This finding represents something of a contradiction, as many of them had calculated exactly how much they were paying either per day or per taught session. One student said that in her first few weeks she had 'missed a lot of classes, 'cos half the time I was lost, I just didn't find my way round the uni, so I was like "oh I'll leave it and go back home and just chill"' (P 15).

For others, though, the adoption of neglect behaviours was an involuntary action. For example, Participant 3 described a situation in which, because of work commitments, he had had to miss four hours of lectures for a few weeks. He said that 'it was just a bit of a nightmare trying to juggle everything', but that the tutors 'were quite understanding' as 'it wasn't just not bothering to turn up, I did actually have a reason, whereas some people are just "oh me train's late or something"' (P 3). Similarly, Participant 13 reported that due to the shift for his part-time job beginning at 5:30, he had missed six or seven sessions of a particular module. Although he had spoken to his manager at work about starting and finishing later, it was not an option. On taking the matter up with his module tutor, he felt that she had not understood the importance of his job and his contribution to the family finances. His father had recently broken his back and was unable to work. This student's income was vital, but his module tutor was clearly 'not overly pleased'. Often, academics bemoan the lack of engagement on the part of the students they teach, however, many seriously struggle to balance all their real, as well perceived, commitments.

5.5.5 Concluding mapping the student experience against the EVLN constructs

The findings in this study are in line with those of Mahaffey et al. (1991) in that participants' behaviour can be categorised into the concepts concerning exit, voice, loyalty and neglect responses. However, very many of the loyalty behaviours in the present study are not related to notions of restitution as proposed by Hirschman (1970). Rather, they are more akin to the type of passive loyalty put forward by Withey and Cooper (1989), where individuals describe feelings of reluctant acceptance. This unwilling tolerance is similar to that described by Clark et al. (2016) in that unhappy students may simply feel that there are no attractive and viable options open to them.

5.6 Conclusions

In 2005, Naidoo and Jamieson wrote a strikingly prophetic paper which predicted what the shape of the British higher education system might look like if the then increasing marketization were to continue on its present trajectory. In it, they suggest 'that the impact could be so profound, that it could change popular understanding of the aims and nature of education' (Naidoo & Jamieson, 2005: 268). They go on to assert that, 'these changes could have an effect of some of the key constituent elements', including the rise of student-consumers driving course content and the erosion of academics' professional identities. They suggest, well in advance of the recommendations of the Browne report and the subsequent sector environment, that market forces would drive greater competition between institutions and that the 'losers' in this contest would be the lower ranking, lower tariff universities, 'vulnerable' to increased consumerism (Naidoo & Jamieson, 2005: 271). Their forecasts have become a contemporary reality, as described in Chapter 2.

With the advent of higher fees, it is perhaps understandable that students today expect much more from their higher education experience than previous generations. And, as demonstrated in the findings, many of those expectations remain unmet. It is tempting for many to view today's young people as 'infantile' and 'narcissistic' (Nixon et al. 2016) with short attention spans, who expect to be 'spoon fed' (Tomlinson, 2017) and receive everything on a plate. However, it is felt that this widespread perception is largely unjust and often held by those who enjoyed the benefit of a free, and sometimes 'paid for', pre-1992 higher educational experience. Many contemporary students face a lifetime of debt, have to balance their studies with often demanding part-time jobs, fulfilling family obligations, as well as dealing with stressful personal circumstances. It is simply too glib to malign them for their lack of intellectual curiosity and consumerist mind-set.

Consistent with traditional psychological contract theory, students do embark on their academic journey with definite expectations. They have preconceived, ideas which are often inculcated by glossy marketing rhetoric and open day experiences designed to present the best face possible of the university. Their responses to the breach or violation of these perceived 'promises', do indeed correspond with findings contained within the EVLN literature and may provide the basis for future recommendations and research, as outlined in the following concluding chapter.

Chapter Six

Conclusions, Recommendations and Future Research

6.1 Introduction

As stated in Chapter 1, the initial inspiration for this research was stimulated by an article published in *The Guardian* newspaper in 2014. Here, Boffey (2014) drew attention to the increasing marketing spend by universities racing to attract students. Indeed, developments in the UK higher education sector have rarely been out of the media, particularly in recent years. Tomlinson (2017), along with other critics, asserts that increased marketization and commodification are profoundly changing the way in which higher education is perceived not only by the media, but by the various stakeholders within the system. A consumerist mindset is taking hold amongst students in that many no longer see themselves primarily as 'learners', but as paying 'customers' buying an educational product (Haywood & Scullion, 2017; Nixon, Scullion & Hearn, 2016; Tomlinson, 2014).

The prediction made in the Browne Report (2010: 27) that 'as students will be paying more, they will demand more in return' certainly resonates today. It would appear, therefore, that bridging the gap between university provision and the expectations formed by students increasingly warrants investigation. Thus, the overall questions that this research set out to understand concern the expectations that students have about their university experience and whether or not these expectations, beliefs, and perceived promises are being met. Moreover, if they remain unfulfilled, or are met initially and then breached in some way, what course of action might a student take in the face of disappointment and disillusionment? Hence, this thesis seeks to gain a new understanding of how the student psychological contract determines responses to dissatisfaction and the possible subsequent predilection towards Exit-Voice-Loyalty-Neglect (EVLN) behaviours.

The purpose of this final chapter is to draw all the threads together and to evaluate the extent to which the research aims and objectives have been met. Additionally, recommendations are made for the implementation of new university policies and procedures designed to enhance the student-university relationship. The chapter is divided into seven sections as follows: first, a summary of the individual chapters is provided. Second, the research aims and objectives are reviewed and how they have been met. Third the contribution to knowledge that this research makes is considered which includes suggestions for potential practical alterations to university policy. The fourth section contains recommendations aimed at enhancing the student-university relationship. The fifth section concerns the rich seams of interest revealed during the course of

this investigation that might provide the basis for future research. The sixth section considers the limitations of the research and finally, in section seven, the researcher provides a short, reflective overview of the Doctoral journey. The next section provides a brief summary of the thesis, chapter by chapter.

6.2 Thesis summary

Chapter One: Provides an introduction to and broad overview of the thesis. It introduces the theoretical underpinnings of the study, namely psychological contract theory and the EVLN framework as useful lenses through which to examine the student-university relationship. The chapter also states the research aims and objectives and outlines the methodology employed in meeting those aims and objectives.

Chapter Two: Establishes the context for the study. It is divided into three principal sections: the first provides a 'snapshot' of the UK's current higher education landscape using statistical data. The second examines and maps out the principal changes and events that have shaped the sector, particularly those occurring within the last decade. The final section explores how the strategies and policies have impacted upon the various stakeholders within the system.

Chapter Three: Examines and critically apprises the literature surrounding psychological contract theory and provides a detailed examination of the EVLN topology, both in a workplace setting and in the context of higher education. The principal writers in both fields are introduced and the various strands of research and prevalent theories are discussed. The review concludes with the identification of gaps in the literature that could offer potential opportunities for future investigation.

Chapter Four: Considers the research design and methodology and provides the rationale for adopting a pragmatic approach in addressing the research questions and in meeting the aims and objectives. Two phases of semi-structured interviews were held six months apart with first year students from the Schools of Business and Management. The interview questions were informed in-part by the findings of a focus group meeting with pre-entry students. The interviews sought to ascertain the nature of the expectations that students embark on their higher education experience with and the extent to which those expectations are fulfilled.

Chapter Five: Presents the results of the focus group meeting and the data gathered through both phases of semi-structured interviews. The findings are critically explored and are set out in a manner reflecting the themes which emerged through the coding and analysis of the interview transcripts. The final part of the chapter maps out the students' responses against the

four EVLN constructs to uncover the extent to which the findings of this research are in line with previous studies as described in the literature.

Chapter Six: Concludes the study, evaluating both its position relative to the extant literature and its contribution to knowledge in the field. It aims to add to the debate through the formulation of a set of conclusions and recommendations regarding the application of new methodologies to respond positively to student dissatisfaction.

6.3 A review of the research aims and objectives

The principal aims of this research were, first, to critically appraise the potential value of the psychological contract in general and the EVLN framework in particular in understanding university students' relationships with their institutions and, second, to propose ways of applying psychological contract theory and the EVLN framework in practice in order to enhance student-university relationships.

In order to meet these aims, the research had the following objectives. The extent to which these have been met is now evaluated.

1. To systematically investigate previous research into psychological contract theory and EVLN behaviours, both in the employer-employee relationship, and in the setting of higher education, in order to gain a greater understanding of the field

As presented in Chapter 3, a thorough review was conducted of the extant literature surrounding psychological contract theory and the EVLN framework, both in a workplace setting and within higher education. The principal theories and debates were explored, comparing and contrasting the views of the principal authors in all three fields and potential gaps in the literature were highlighted.

2. To carry out primary fieldwork to investigate student perceptions of their higher education experience at UCLan

Primary qualitative fieldwork was carried out through two phases of semi-structured interviews, six months apart. The interview questions were informed in-part by the findings of an earlier focus group meeting conducted with pre-university students from a local feeder institution. In total, 31 interviews took place which produced a large body of rich, salient data.

3. To analyse the findings of the fieldwork to gain an understanding of the nature of students' expectations, beliefs, perceived promises and reciprocal obligations

The data were analysed initially by open coding the interview transcripts and then by grouping the codes within the emergent themes. The nature and content of the students' expectations, beliefs, perceived promises and reciprocal obligations were recorded and presented logically in Chapter 5.

4. To investigate students' likely course of action if a breach of their psychological contract were to occur

At phase one of the interviews, students were asked what, in their opinion, could the university do in order to let them down, in other words, to damage their psychological contract. Their statements are presented in Table 5.6, Chapter 5. Subsequently, they were asked what action they might take in the face of disappointment. Interestingly, the prevalent response aligned with the construct of loyalty, but perplexingly, loyalist behaviours in the context of higher education were characterised by feelings of passive, reluctant acceptance as discovered in the organisational research of Withey and Cooper (1989).

5. To contribute to the debate through the formulation of a set of conclusions and recommendations regarding the appropriate conditions for applying new methodologies to respond positively to student dissatisfaction.

The contribution to the debate, conclusions and recommendations are presented in sections 6.4, 6.4.1 and 6.5 below.

6.4 Contribution to knowledge and methodologies

The application of psychological contract theory in general, and of the EVLN topology in particular, to empirical research within the context of higher education have received scant attention. Therefore, this thesis makes a contribution to the literature in that respect. There are four additional ways in which a contribution has been made. First, previous studies into both psychological contract theory and the use of the EVLN framework have largely employed quantitative methods of investigation. As discussed in Chapter 1, the reliance on research instruments, such as self-report questionnaires, is regarded by many as unlikely to adequately describe the subtleties of human emotions and associated actions (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002; Saunders et al., 2009). The findings detailed in the present research have thus been arrived at by means of qualitative inquiry. The second contribution is that behavioural responses to dissatisfaction are qualitatively and pragmatically explored using the EVLN framework. Third, most of the studies employing the EVLN framework have focussed on more general responses to discontent, with only a handful of researchers making explicit links between psychological contract breach and the use of the framework (for example, Rousseau, 1995; Turnley and

Feldman, 1999). This paucity of conceptual connection indicates that further investigation may be warranted. And fourth, studies in which the EVLN framework has been used in the context of higher education are by researchers overseas rather than in those within the UK (for example, Itzkovich & Alt, 2015, Israel; Lovitts, 1996, USA; Mahaffey, Neu & Taylor, 1991, Canada; Riaz, Ali, & Riaz, 2013, Pakistan).

The use of qualitative methods has added to our understanding of the student experience by highlighting some of the underlying causes of dissatisfaction particularly with respect to the expectation-reality mismatch. The perception of promises made, both implicit and explicit, is central to the formation of the student psychological contract and to the possible responses students will make if that psychological contract is breached or violated in some way. Employing the four EVLN constructs has revealed that the majority of respondents have engaged in exit behviours and that voice is generally only used when the 'voice manager' is considered to be both approachable and responsive. The findings also suggest that neglect behaviours are widespread and that loyalty, rather than being active in nature, is passive and characterised by feelings of entrapment and hopelessness through the belief that there are few acceptable alternatives to undertaking a university education. This information is of significance, particularly in the current climate of heightened competition between institutions to both attract and retain students and to provide them with a rewarding and satisfying experience on their academic journey.

6.4.1 Contribution to university policy

The findings suggest that students embarking on their university experience do indeed form a psychological contract with the institution and, just as importantly, with their peers. This psychological contract comprises expectations, beliefs and perceived promises made by the university, and notions concerning reciprocal obligations to both the academic staff and the students' peer group. When students believe that their psychological contract has been breached or damaged in some way, this perception is inextricably linked to notions of value for money, or lack thereof. Therefore, the research could have practical implications for shaping university policy, in that greater transparency is needed so students have clearer picture of how their fees are being spent and on what. The findings revealed a surprising level of cynicism regarding how decisions are made by senior management and the extent to which students can influence policy decisions.

Although the whole point of marketing is to put goods, services or, indeed, educational offerings in the best possible light, care should be taken not to create false promises. It is a likely

eventuality that the university might suffer reputationally in the future if the student body feels unfulfilled by their educational experience. In the current climate of intense competition between institutions, both to attract and keep students, risking reputational damage should be minimised.

Crucially, senior management need to recognise that often the primary motivator for students to attend university is to secure a well-paid job on graduation. Although developing students' employability skills is theoretically of great importance to UCLan, in practice this is largely not the case. Findings from the focus group interview, as well as from the two phases of semi-structured interviews, cite career-related expectations, linking them explicitly with notions of value for money. This reflects the research conducted on behalf of the University Partnership Programme (2015), which revealed that the predominant reason was the belief that 'university study offers better long-term salary prospects', closely followed by the respondents simply wanting 'the university-student experience' (2015: 4).

Although students might believe that they 'want the university experience', the present study shows that the reality of student life can be far from what they had expected. Many interviewees reported feelings of 'isolation' and 'loneliness', even at the end of the second semester. Interestingly, a large proportion of the students who had not made as many friends as expected had not taken part in many Welcome Week activities, just engaging in 'one or two'. Attendance at Welcome Week is highly recommended, but not compulsory, unless the sessions are timetabled. Although some programmes of study do timetable workshops during this period, it is not a practice consistent across the university. Perhaps this policy could be re-examined so that opportunities for early socialisation are, indeed, timetabled. Further recommendations are presented in the next section.

6.5 Recommendations

The findings of the research have considerable practical implications and have informed the recommendations detailed below:

1. Future outreach work should draw upon the findings of this research, so that a more accurate picture of university life can be presented to prospective students. As can be seen by the results of the focus group meeting discussed in Chapter 5, students in further education do indeed have a specific set of expectations about their future university life. Debate revolved around what their 'ideal' university would be like, their hopes, expectations, fears and the notion of value for money. The sources of these

expectations ranged from the media, to friends and family, to university websites, to their own course tutors. There are clearly a number of 'myths' to be dispelled concerning the focus on lecture style delivery, the realities of independent learning and the repayment of fees after graduation. If expectations can be understood and managed at pre-entry level, prospective students can make a more informed decision about whether or not university is the correct choice for them.

2. In a related vein, it could be beneficial for staff from local feeder institutions to spend time within UCLan, and vice versa for our staff, in order for them to experience first-hand how both university and pre-entry students are taught rather than relying on assumption and hearsay.

3. Across the institution, course content should be examined and compared to that advertised on the university website. The findings pointed to a mismatch as shown in Chapter 5, which led the particular student in question to feel let down by the institution. Marketing materials and promotional videos need reviewing to ensure that no false promises and claims, which cannot be honoured, are made.

4. Within the first two weeks of arrival, students should be given a short autobiographical writing task of 300 to 500 words so that the teaching staff can become acquainted 'personally' with each of them early on. Students are keen to develop close relationships with their tutors which is contrary to the picture presented in much of the literature (Nixon et al., 2016; Tomlinson, 2017). They want to feel a sense of belonging, believe that tutors 'know who they are' and that they take a 'personal interest' in them. The task will not only provide staff with an indication of the students' writing capabilities, but could alert them to potential problems.

5. Wherever possible, a student's first teaching session should be in a small seminar style room, rather than a large lecture theatre, in order to facilitate the negotiation of a shared psychological contract. Establishing expectations from the outset will go some way towards mitigating potential future problems. Such agreed understandings will enable students to discuss their expectations of the teaching staff, of each other and, reciprocally, establish what they believe the university expects of them.

6. The content and structure of course programmes should be examined and perhaps reordered, so as to avoid conflicting assignment deadlines. Additionally, an assessed assignment should be introduced as early into the semester as possible so that students can develop an 'academic benchmark'. Many lecturers believe that students are only

interested in grades and not in reading and learning from the feedback provided. This was not the case for the majority of the respondents in this study, who reported reading and acting upon feedback.

7. Staff development opportunities to be put in place with regard to introducing students to independent learning, critical thinking, referencing and constructing an argument using evidence. The findings of this research indicate that these are all areas of particular concern to new university entrants and aspects of academic life which are the cause of distress and angst amongst the student body. The emphasis by schools and colleges of further education on exam passes and the attainment of high grades means that the majority of students are used to receiving much more guidance and instruction with respect to writing assignments and preparing for exams. This elevated level of support has left an indelible imprint in the minds of students, that academic staff have a 'duty' to provide the sort of advice, guidance and prescriptive information-giving that they have become used to. Although pre and new entrants are largely familiar with the term 'independent learning', the reality is an unwelcome aspect of university that very many struggle to adjust to. Again, in the minds of students, perceptions of value for money surface in connection with independent learning, as many believe that they are paying handsomely for a 'DIY experience'.

8. Staff development opportunities be put in place to encourage the inclusion of overseas students in class debates and discussions. In the author's own experience, she has seen many occasions where teaching staff have struggled to facilitate discussion between students who do not have English as their first language, possibly leading to the feeling of being overlooked as described by the two international students in Chapter 5.

9. The structure of group work be reappraised, in that all participants have a specific role to play so each of the team members are assessed separately, and their grades are not dependent other members' performance. Students had high expectations of their peer group and reported feeling let down and angry by the behaviour of class members who 'didn't pull their weight', particularly in relation to working in groups.

Whilst there is no doubt that a consumerist ethos has become prevalent in the minds of students, consequently heightening their expectations, there are many relatively straightforward interventions that institutions could put in place to ease the transition of students into university life. In terms of future research, many of the above recommendations could provide a platform

for some enlightening and potentially valuable investigations. Additional ideas for further research are outlined in the following section.

6.6 Future research

The findings have revealed some interesting avenues for future research. The EVLN framework and psychological contract theory do indeed appear to be useful conceptual lenses through which to view the student-university relationship. The discovery of areas of overlap between the EVLN components certainly warrants further investigation, as does the possible subdivision of the constructs of loyalty and voice in the creation of a more nuanced situational picture. Additionally, that behaviours relating to the construct of loyalty reflect the feelings of entrapment and helplessness, as uncovered in the research of Withey and Cooper (1989), must be an avenue of research that could potentially enhance the student-university relationship in promoting voice behaviours that can mitigate such negative responses.

The extent to which students' psychological contract might change over the rest of their academic journey may also provide a rich seam of investigation, as too might the comparison of the perceptions of different cohorts of students, to ascertain whether there are areas of similarity or difference.

The results of the focus group meeting showed that in the minds of pre-entry students, value for money was connected with 'top quality teaching'. Exploring what that actually means to students at this level could provide another fruitful opportunity for further research. Relatedly, examining academics views towards being framed as 'service providers' and its impact on their professional identity and on curriculum design and content could also add significantly to the debate.

6.7 Limitations of the research

Whilst this research has successfully met the overall aims and objectives and made a contribution to knowledge, there are, however, significant limitations. The decision to use qualitative methods, while providing insights that might not have come to light with a quantitative approach, introduced an unavoidable element of subjectivity and bias. As is often the case in qualitative research, the study sample was necessarily limited and therefore relatively small in size. Additionally, the study group essentially 'self-selected' and although only a proportion of those who volunteered to take part were then purposefully chosen, these students would possibly be quite different in outlook to the ones who decided not to put

themselves forward for inclusion. Also, the fact that only 10 of the original 21 interviews chose to be re-interviewed possibly skewed the results, as all but one of the 10 had fared extremely well academically in their first year. As context is so influential upon the outcomes of qualitative research, this factor, coupled with the sample size means that the results might vary significantly in other institutions, with different populations of students. Nevertheless, salient data have been gathered that may well lead to wider practical applicability across post-1992 institutions and, indeed, across the sector as a whole.

6.8 Final thoughts

Had I fully appreciated the magnitude of this undertaking at the outset, I am not entirely sure that I would have embarked on this journey. I had been told that undertaking a Doctorate is a rite of passage; now I truly know what that means. It has been difficult, even painful, at times, but not without its rewards. Finishing this thesis has been the biggest achievement of my life. I am so proud of myself to have got this far without giving up and, believe me, I was tempted to do so on several occasions. It has been worth all the heartache, soul searching, angst and self-doubt, because I now have a sense of pride that I have never before experienced.

In terms of what the research has told me about today's students, I can only feel a sense of sympathy. Many academics today decry students' consumerist mind-set and bemoan what they perceive to be wholly 'instrumental' approaches to learning. However, there is immense pressure on contemporary students which, I believe, in many cases goes unappreciated. I personally had the benefit of receiving grants to pay for and support me through both my undergraduate and postgraduate studies. I did not have a part-time job, nor did any of my classmates. And because I was able to live away from home, I largely avoided stressful family situations. How lucky I was in comparison with the majority of the students who I interviewed for this research. Often they have substantial family commitments, work long hours in part-time jobs, as well as both attending university and finding the time to write assignments and revise for exams. Many are frightened at the prospect of saddling themselves with what they believe will be a lifetime of debt, coupled with the possibility of not even securing a graduate level job at the end of it. I feel duty bound to do all that I can to make a positive impact on our students' university experience and hopefully I will now have the opportunity to do so.

APPENDICES

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APPENDIX I

Research Participant Information Sheet (Focus Group)

Title of Thesis: The Student Psychological Contract: A critical analysis of EVLN in managing the student experience.

Researcher: Julie Hardy   **Date: August 2016**

Supervisor: Professor Richard Sharpley, School of Management,
RAJSharpley@uclan.ac.uk   **01772 894622**

Invitation

I would like to invite you to take part in a research study that is part of my professional doctorate (DBA) in the School of Management at the University of Central Lancashire. Before you decide whether or not to participate, you need to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Ask questions if anything you read is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

The purpose of the study

I am interested in finding out what you think about higher education and especially what you are expecting university life to be like. I want to try to understand how these expectations are formed.

What is EVLN?

The Exit-Voice-Loyalty-Neglect (EVLN) framework is used to predict what someone might do if they are dissatisfied with the experience they are having at work or university, for example. If someone is unhappy, they might leave (exit), or they might complain (voice). They might just wait patiently and hope that things improve (loyalty), or they may start taking time off, or coming

in late (neglect). I want to see whether this framework, which is used mainly in a work setting, can be useful in a university context.

Why have I been invited?

You have been invited as a UCLan partner college student and because you are thinking of going on to study at University (but not necessarily at UCLan). My intention is to conduct an interview with you to find out about your expectations of university life. This interview will last approximately 45 minutes.

Do I have to take part?

Your participation is completely voluntary and you can withdraw from the project at any time without giving a reason. If you wish to withdraw from the research at any time, please contact myself, Julie Hardy on jhardy@uclan.ac.uk / 01772895955 / 07872599604. See the section below on data storage for details about what happens to your data if you withdraw.

What will taking part involve for me?

I would ask you to meet me for approximately 45 minutes at your place of study. I would ask you as an individual a set of questions about your expectations about what university life might be like and try to understand how these expectations have been formed. There are no right or wrong answers, I'm simply interested in your opinions.

This meeting will be audio recorded and I may also take notes during this session (however, you can request not to be recorded).

I hope to minimise any disruption to your study time, so I will arrange the meeting at a time that you are most comfortable with and in collaboration with your Course Tutor. The data I gather will be used in my DBA thesis and potentially as part of publications before the submission of the thesis, as well as afterwards. You will not be identified in it, other than broad detail such as gender and the subject you are studying. I will alter any key biographic details to ensure that this is the case. Your place of study will not be identified.

Data storage and security

If you tell me you wish to withdraw from taking part in this research, I will destroy any notes and recordings as soon as is practical and your input will not feature in any part of the research.

All research data including: consent forms, recordings of interviews, notes, other communications, will all be stored securely on my personal UCLan drive (N) which is password protected and regularly backed up. Data may also be downloaded and stored securely on my personal, password protected laptop.

Audio recordings of our meeting will be uploaded to my personal UCLan drive within two days of our meeting. The audio files will be retained and disposed of according to UCLan guidelines. I am the only person to use the recorder and when it is not in use it is kept in a locked cupboard.

What will I have to do?

If you are willing to take part please sign the Consent Form and return it to me. I will be in touch with you to arrange a suitable time to meet with your group and will confirm this with your Course Tutor.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

In taking part you will be assisting me enormously with my DBA research and for that I am extremely grateful. You may find that taking part is an interesting and thought-provoking experience and it might contribute in a modest way to your own perceptions of your identity as a future University student.

What if there is a problem?

If you have any concerns or complaints about this research you can contact the University's Officer for Ethics. The information you provide should include the study name or description (so that it can be identified), the name of the researcher and the nature of the complaint.

Email: OfficerforEthics@uclan.ac.uk

Telephone: 01772 895 090

_____

Thank you for reading this information sheet. If you have any questions at all about the research please do contact me.

My name: Julie Hardy   Mobile: 07872599604   Email: jhardy@uclan.ac.uk

APPENDIX 2

Consent Form

Title of Project: The Student Psychological Contract: A critical analysis of EVLN in managing the student experience.

Name of Researcher: Julie Hardy

Please tick one of the following:

No, I do not want to take part in this study	
Yes, I would like to take part in this study	

If you have ticked 'yes', please read the following statements and place your initials in the right hand box.

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated August 2016, for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and ~~have had these answered satisfactorily.~~	
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason (please refer to the note on withdrawal on the Participant Information Sheet).	
3. I consent to the interview/session being audio-taped. (Please see note on data storage in the Participant Information Sheet).	
4. I agree to take part in the above study.	

If you have any concerns or complaints about this research you can contact the University's Officer for Ethics. The information you provide should include the study name or description (so that it can be identified), the name of the researcher and the nature of the complaint.

Email: OfficerforEthics@uclan.ac.uk   Telephone: 01772 895 090

Name of Participant: **Date:**

Preferred contact method and details:

Signature:

Please note that signing this Consent Form only indicates that you are willing to take part in this research. It does not mean that you <u>will</u> take part, as participants will be randomly selected from those who express an interest.

APPENDIX THREE

Focus Group Briefing Notes

1. Everything you tell me for the next 45 minutes will be treated in strictest confidence. Even if sensitive issues arise, I want you to feel completely comfortable telling me what you think

2. I would like to hear from everyone, so I might call on you for your opinion if I haven't heard from you for a while. I'd really like this to be a discussion and it's OK to build on what someone else has said, or to present a completely different view

3. There are absolutely no right or wrong answers. All that matters to me is your opinion and all of your opinions and experiences are important

4. I will be recording the session as I want to make sure that I capture everything that you say. Although I have given you name badges, that's just for my purposes now. When I come to write everything up, I will just assign you a number, so that everything will be completely anonymous

Questions

Warm up – Are you going to go to university? If so, which one and what subject will you study?

1. **Your 'ideal' university**. If money was no object and your university experience could be absolutely anything you wanted it to be, what would it be like? So think about things like facilities, teaching style, hours of study. Remember, everything is valid, so say what you like

2. What do you **hope** university will be like? OK, let's change emphasis now. We've looked at your ideal. Realistically, what do you hope it will be like? Both socially and academically

3. Going beyond your hopes, what do you actually **expect** it to be like? Thinking about what you already know about university life, what are your expectations? For example, how do you think you'll be taught?

4. Where do these **expectations** come from? How are they formed?

5. What are your biggest **fears** about going into higher education? Think about this both socially and academically. How could these fears be overcome?

6. If things weren't working out well for you at university, for whatever reason, what do you think you would do? Would you tell anyone and try to get advice?

7. When you think about value for money in your university experience, what does that look like? What would represent good value for money for you?

APPENDIX 4

Interview Questions, Stage Two

Project Title: The Student Psychological Contract: A critical analysis of EVLN in managing the student experience.

Project Aim: The overall aim of the research is to critically appraise the potential value of the psychological contract in general, and the Exit-Voice-Loyalty-Neglect (EVLN) framework in particular, in understanding student relationships with the university.

Prior to conducting the interview

When the interviewee arrives, I will do the following:

- Thank the interviewee for the time they have invested in the process
- Give a timeframe for the interview
- Confirm that they are free to decline to answer any of the questions
- Assure them of confidentiality and anonymity throughout
- Confirm that the interview will be recorded

Main questions	Prompts	Probes
1. You are just about at the end of your first year, how has it been for you?	Highlights? Low points? Has it lived up to your expectations?	
2. Overall, what has the teaching been like?	How have you adjusted to independent learning? Have you struggled with anything? How did you feel about it? Have you had any opportunities to provide feedback on your course? How have you coped with the workload? Have you missed many of the sessions? What have your grades been like? If you could redesign your course, what changes would you make?	If you have struggled with anything, did you talk to anyone about it? Who have you given the feedback to? What was your feedback? If yes, what are the main reasons for missing sessions Are you grades better or worse than you expected?

3. How has your social life been?	Have you made any new friends as the year has worn on? Have you joined any clubs or societies? Have any of your friends left the course they were on?	If yes, how did that make you feel?
4. How do you feel now about whether your university experience represents value for money	What has been good value for money? What has been poor value for money?	Will you be coming back for your second year?
5. What advice would you give to a new first year starting in September?		
6. Is there anything else that we haven't covered that you would like to add?		

APPENDIX 5

Participant 5 Second Interview

Julie. "You're just about at the end of your first year, how's it been, give me an overview?" Interviewee. "It's been, erm, it's been good, I've enjoyed it and I think, it's been about the level at the end of it, about the level I thought it was gonna be. It, so it wasn't too difficult, there were definitely assignments where I was writing them and I was like 'oh my gosh I don't know what I'm, I don't know'". Julie. "Really?" Interviewee. "Yeh, like 'I don't know if this even makes sense', but then I ended up getting good grades on them, so I think I was just psyching myself out. There's definitely elements that were difficult but, overall it's been, maybe just above the level that it was going to be a good experience." Julie. "So what have been the high points?" Interviewee. "Erm, getting feedback on my assignments." Julie. "Oh really?" Interviewee. "Yeh."Julie. "Okay so tell me about how you've done in them?" Interviewee. "Erm I've got, like firsts consistently." Julie. "Really?" Interviewee. "And then couple of two ones yeh." Julie. "Brilliant." Interviewee. "Yeh." Julie. "So what was your best grade for?" Interviewee. "Erm, I got an eighty eight percent, well it's not moderated yet, but I got an eighty eight on my exam for Accounting and Finance, and I got erh, I got like seventy fours kinda of on a lot of assignments, so I'm really happy with those." Julie. "Brilliant, so your tutors must be really pleased with you?" Interviewee. "Yeh." Julie. "And did you exceed your own expectations with your marks?" Interviewee. "Erm I, I think I exceeded my expectations, but that was kind of my hope was to get that, but I wasn't expecting it at the start of the year but, yeh, so I went a little bit above what I thought I was gonna get." Julie. "Brilliant, and have there been any sort of like low points this year?" Interviewee. "Erm, I think I've struggled a little bit with some of the modules, which has made me kind of… I got good grades in them, but I wasn't enjoying the subject matter and erm, I was kinda just struggling with the comprehension because of that." Julie. "And what have you struggled with?" Interviewee. "Erm, particularly, HRM." Julie. "Right." Interviewee. "And a little bit with Marketing erm, I just think like, it was, I wasn't fully understanding why I was doing it, like what the purpose was of all these things I was reading about, so it was making it difficult for me to get into it

and." Julie. "Has it helped you to find more of direction for what you want to do when you leave?" Interviewee. "Erm." Julie. "Or not really yet?" Interviewee. "Not really yet I've, I've picked Marketing for next year, I because…" Julie. "Right, even though you struggled with it?" Interviewee. "Yeh, because erm." Julie. "A glutton for punishment?" Interviewee. "It was actually maybe a bit of a hasty decision, because I hadn't done that much Accounting and Finance yet when we were booking on and then after the exam, I was kind of like 'oh I can actually do that', erm but now I'm happy, I'm, I'm doing Marketing erm. I mean I'm not afraid of like a challenge or anything, so I'll work at it and I'm sure I'll get it, but yeh, that's what I've chosen to do, but as far as after University, erm I don't really know yet, no." Julie. "Well why should you? So overall, what would you say the teaching's been like?" Interviewee. "Erm, the teaching has been good, like consistently erm, but there's been a couple of teachers who have gone like above and beyond I think and then a couple that have kind of just at moments, not like been horrible, but just like at moments, I've thought 'that could have been a little bit a little bit better.'" Julie. "Okay, and have you had the opportunity to feedback to anybody about how you feel about the course, in general?" Interviewee. "Erm, I think that in one of my subjects a sheet, she sent round a feedback sheet, but I wasn't in for that day so that was the only one I know about, that, that was available." Julie. "Okay, so you've not had any okay. And have you like spoken to the course rep about how you felt about the course or anything like that or?" Interviewee. "No, but I do plan to because erm, I just feel a little bit, kind of disconnected with the course, a little bit." Julie. "In what way?" Interviewee. "Erm, I think a little bit of it is that I did History at A'Level, and I'm really missing doing History." Julie. "Right." Interviewee. "So I think it might be missing, that element, erm, and just maybe if, I could speak to either the course rep or even my, my course leader about if there was any way I could incorporate that, where which module she'd recommend for next year to kind of." Julie. "But didn't [subject] cover it?" Interviewee. "Yeh." Julie. "Cos that's fairly Sociological and Historical isn't it." Interviewee. "Yes, yeh." Julie. "So did you particularly like that module?" Interviewee. "I really, really liked that one." Julie. "But you see it's so funny, because a lot of people didn't, because they didn't see the point of it." Interviewee. "No, I

really enjoyed that one." Julie. "Is there a History society in UCLan?" Interviewee. "Erm I think there is yeh, but the thing is, with that I wasn't sure if you had to be like a History student to join in, I don't really know." Julie. "If you don't ask you don't get." Interviewee. "Exactly, I shall look into it." Julie. "So you said about missing, you know like you said when the feedback thing came round you weren't there, have you missed many of the sessions?" Interviewee. "Erm I, I have missed quite a few." Julie. "Okay." Interviewee. "Erm mostly due to medical kind of things." Julie. "Right." Interviewee. "Erm, yeh I have missed." Julie. "Did that mean you had to struggle to catch up or?" Interviewee. "Erm I think I felt like I was constantly playing catch up." Julie. "Right.". Interviewee. "But when I emailed tutors and things with questions or, kind of concerns about how behind I felt, they would reassure me and just double check where I was up to and answer all my questions. So I felt like I was able to keep up that way and my friends in the classes were meeting up with me and just explaining things to me if I still wasn't understanding it." Julie. "So you felt as though you got a reasonable amount of support from your tutors?" Interviewee. "Yeh." Julie. "Oh that's good, that's good. Okay, so if you could re-design your course in any way at all, you can add anything, or take anything away, what would you do with it?" Interviewee. "Erm, that's a big question." Julie. "It is a big question." Interviewee. "Erm, I think one of the things that I maybe didn't like so much was that all erm, all the modules were full year modules, but, but they switched topic half way through." Julie. "Right." Interviewee. "So maybe if, I was able to like kind of separate them a little bit more and just have them as separate modules that would maybe how I would reconfigure it." Julie. "Okay, and anything else you want to add or do differently?" Interviewee. "Erm."Julie. "Or stop doing." Interviewee. "I'm trying to think, but, but a lot of the things, even if I didn't particularly enjoy it, I think it were beneficial, so like Managing Information." Julie. "Oh that's all grown up of you." Interviewee. "I think, I think I don't particularly like doing Excel spreadsheets, or like making a Database or something like that but, the way, the way it was explained, it was if you're going to be a Manager, you need to have to understand where your information is coming from." Julie. "You do." Interviewee. "So I think even if it wasn't particularly nice, and I kinda struggled with it erm, I think overall I

wouldn't take it off, 'cos I need to know." Julie. "Yeh, so you had to build a Database?" Interviewee. "Yes." Julie. "Okay, so what else? Is there any other subject that you've done that's like that, and you just think 'yep necessary, but I didn't really like it?'" Interviewee. "Erm, I think maybe because Management and Organisations felt like, in that one we talked a lot about motivation theories, but they were touched on in other subjects as well." Julie. "Right." Interviewee. "So it's nice to have that kind of overlap so you can understand where things are coming from, but it was just a little bit, kind of tedious I guess, just going over same thing in multiple classes." Julie. "Right, so you'd probably like look at the whole course a bit more on how it all slots together." Interviewee. "Yeh." Julie. "Yeh, okay, and how's your social life been?" Interviewee. "Erm I do the Disney Society." Julie. "Oh that's right, I forgot." Interviewee. "But erm outside, I didn't really participate in many social aspects of University." Julie. "Okay, and have you, so have you made any new friends that you hadn't when I last spoke to you?" Interviewee. "Erm no, I've kept the same friends kind of thing. Erm, I've met new people but, not made them friends if that makes sense." Julie. "Yeh okay, and apart from the Disney Society, are you with any other, and I told you last time didn't I about the fact that Disney come to recruit on Campus?" Interviewee. "Yes." Julie. "Have you started to look into that yet?" Interviewee. "I did, I talked to my Course Leader about it, and she gave me the email of the person to talk to, but erm, the erm placements liaison for the Management School, I have lost her email, so I need to email again and say." Julie. "Can you remember her name?" Interviewee. "Oh." Julie. "Was it Vicky O'Brien?" Interviewee. "I think so." Julie. "Okay if you email me, okay I'll erm give you Vicky's email." Interviewee. "Thank you." Julie. "Ah, no worries, it's a pleasure." Julie. "Have any of your friends left the course, or anybody that you know left the course?" Interviewee. "I know a couple of people who have been thinking about it and one who definitely is." Julie. "Yes?" Interviewee. "But not left as of yet, they haven't left half way through, but are finishing the first year and then gonna leave." Julie. "So the fact that they're thinking about leaving how does that make you feel?" Interviewee. "Erm, it makes me feel a little bit, kind of uncertain, because there's been quite a few people talking about changing courses as well." Julie. "Really?" Interviewee. "So yeh." Julie. "To

what, something else within the Uni?" Interviewee. "Yeh something else within the Uni, but not in the same department so." Julie. "Right." Interviewee. "So one person was talking about changing to Journalism, and then another is talking about changing to Law and things like that, so it's a little bit outside of it. And a couple of people were coming to they didn't see the point of the course as they felt it was too, too general to get you a really good job afterwards, so that's made me feel a little bit kind of uncertain and just a little bit unsure at times." Julie. "But could that not be rectified by the modules that you choose next year? So for example, you're choosing Marketing, I mean could you do a Marketing Module in semester one and semester two or?" Interviewee. "Well, they said that the one next year is a pre-rec, so if you want to continue to do Marketing and have Marketing on your degree, like a specialism sort of thing, or something, you continue to do that. I think there definitely is an opportunity to specialise and get specific with what you'd really like to do, so it doesn't have to be a very general course and I think kind of the generalness of it erm allows you to get a really nice overview, especially if you're going to be a Manager." Julie. "Of course." Interviewee. "I think you need to kind of understand how each of the departments work." Julie. "Definitely." Interviewee. "So I mean it kind made me it, it just made me a little bit shaky that people were like leaving, erm, but yeh. There are opportunities to specialise and I think if you really wanted to, you could." Julie. "Yeh, exactly okay. So you know I asked you last time whether you felt that your University experience was value for money?" Interviewee. "Uh huh." Julie. "How do you feel about that now, reflecting back on the year?" Interviewee. "Erm, I think it, it's always gonna be a little bit expensive, and my sister she actually divides it down into how much each lecture would cost her." Julie. "Lots of people do." Interviewee. "Yeh, so she says to me, 'oh there was no point in me going to that, I want like forty pounds back for that one last year,' and things like that, but I think it's overall been really good. I've got the grades that I wanted, erm, so it's been beneficial. The only thing I guess would be erm, sometimes I feel like things are sometimes like spoon fed a little bit, which was actually really helpful it helps ease you in, but maybe a little bit overboard." Julie. "Right." Interviewee. "So I'm not, I wasn't getting the full independent learning kind of experience."

Julie. "But that's really interesting. Did you do A Levels or BTEC?" Interviewee. "A Levels." Julie. "Interesting okay. What advice would you give to a new first year starting in September?" Interviewee. "Erm, I would tell them to get involved with as much as possible that they can handle, erm cos I wish I would kind of joined more Societies and done the social aspect a tiny bit more. Erm, and don't leave everything to the last minute, 'cos I am such a pain for doing that, and it's so stressful." Julie. "Loads of people do". Interviewee. "I know." Julie. "So what about next year, you'll be coming back for your second year?" Interviewee. "Yeh." Julie. "So will you join any more Societies and stuff?" Interviewee. "I, I hope so, I think I would, I would like to, as long as they fit in around my schedule and things like that and erm, but yeh I would like to." Julie. "Have you got your eye on anything particular?" Interviewee. "Erm, nothing in particular yet, but I kinda need to look further, 'cos I have a lot of interests, so I think if I, I can like find a couple of things." Julie. "So what are your interests?" Interviewee. "Erm, I'm big into movies and I know there's a Movie Society and Musicals as well, so there's one about that erm, History and Greek Mythology as well." Julie. "Nice." Interviewee. "So there's a couple that I think go onto those and then also I would like to learn Sign Language and an instrument and I think there's a Ukulele Society maybe." Julie. "Really?" Interviewee. "So there's a couple of things." Julie. "Good and they're all free aren't they anyway these Societies, or are they?" Interviewee. "Erm, I think they're five pounds. Well, the one I've joined is five pounds at the start of the year, so that's really not." Julie. "Well that's not killing you is it?" Interviewee. "No, it's not that much." Julie. "So is there anything else that we've not covered that you want to add?" Interviewee. "Erh, I don't think so."

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