

Transition from Diploma to Degree for  
Dental Hygienists and Dental Therapists:  
Academic and social experiences

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of  
the requirements for the degree of Professional Doctorate in  
Education at the University of Central Lancashire

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## Abstract

### Introduction

This thesis joins a continued discussion in the social sciences about transition into Higher Education (HE) for non-traditional students. Transition into Higher Education can be problematic, particularly for direct entrants and those from a non-traditional background. Dental Hygienists and Dental Therapists can enter into Higher Education (HE) following diploma level study. In 2012, the School of Dentistry at the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) developed the BSc (Hons) Dental Studies for Dental Care Professionals to support the academic development of Dental Hygienists and Dental Therapists allowing them to have the opportunity to study the final year of a degree to build on their existing diploma.

### Method

Using Gale and Parker's (2014) concepts of transition as induction, development and becoming as a framework, the study aimed to investigate the expectations and academic and social experiences during the transition into HE. A qualitative methodology using a phenomenological case study design was adopted. A topical approach to interviews was used and a purposive sampling technique was carried out with eight participants who were at different stages in the programme. In addition to this, documentary evidence was examined.

### Main Findings

Four key concepts derived from the research; expectations, motivation (including family commitments, personal and career), transition and communities of practice.

## Conclusions

The study found that both the periods before and during transition are significant for students and therefore the study concludes that student pre-induction is an area that is limited in current literature and therefore would benefit from further research to support student transition. Further research could also examine the correlation of the length of time away from study and transitional issues. The study also recommends that a pre-induction strategy could be developed which could include a pre-transition questionnaire, digital support materials and the use of Microsoft Teams to facilitate a community of practice.

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## Glossary

ALTC	Australian Learning and Teaching Council
BERA	British Educational Research Association
BDA	British Dental Association
BDS	Bachelor in Dental Surgery
BSc	Bachelor in Science
CDT	Clinical Dental Technician
CoP	Community of Practice
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
DCP	Dental Care Professional
DCS	Dental Complaints Service
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DH	Dental Hygienist
DHDT	Dental Hygiene/Therapist
DoH	Department of Health
DSA	Dental Surgery Assistant
DT	Dental Therapist
FE	Further Education
FSHA	Family Services Health Authority
FtP	Fitness to Practice
FYHE	First Year in Higher Education
GDC	General Dental Council
GDP	General Dental Practice
GDS	General Dental Services
GMC	General Medical Council
GP	General Practitioner
HE	Higher Education
HEA	Higher Education Academy
HEE	Health Education England
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council England
HEI	Higher Education Institute
HENW	Health Education North West
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
LDS RCS England	Licence in Dental Surgery of the Royal College of Surgeons of England

NHS	National Health Service
OT	Orthodontic Therapy/Therapist
PCD	Professional Complimentary to Dentistry
PDS	Personal Dental Services
UCLan	University of Central Lancashire
UK	United Kingdom

## **CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION**

### **Structure of the Thesis**

When considering the structure of the thesis, I looked at various approaches to writing (Holliday 2007, Murray 2011, Oliver 2014). 'The purpose of writing research in social science is to inform rather than persuade' (Brancati 2018:319), with the writing demonstrating a formal and analytical approach. Therefore the structure adopted for this thesis is based on an analytical story, which adopts a conversationalist approach (Silverman 2000). Silverman (2004) discusses that there are two other approaches: the hypothesis story and the mystery story and suggests that the use of only one story is appropriate but this will be an individual choice (Silverman 2000). The approach taken was rationalised due to having clear concepts at the outset and the data identified a relationship with the original research problem.

The structure adopted for the chapters of the thesis will be linear-analytic which is appropriate for a descriptive study. The rationale for this study adopting a descriptive approach is based on wanting to achieve a thorough contextualised description of the phenomenon. This will be discussed further in Chapter 3. The following chapters will follow; introduction, literature review, methodology, methods, data analysis, results, discussion, conclusion and recommendations.

### **Rationale for the Study**

The rationale for the study is based on my professional experience of working with a group of students in the School of Dentistry at the UCLan. The students are all Dental Hygienists/Dental Therapists (DHDTs) who, before entering Higher Education (HE) had previously qualified at Diploma level and were returning onto a final top up year with a view to gaining a degree. The aim of the final year of

the course is to build on the students' existing diploma and allow for achievement of degree level study. The curriculum does not include additional clinical skills.

As the students were all mature, they are defined in the literature as non-traditional students (Brimble 2015, Chung et al 2014, Fragoso et al 2013, Gilardi and Guglielmetti 2011, Howard and Davies 2012, Taylor and House 2010). The concept of non-traditional students will be discussed further in chapter 2. The initial ideas started to develop as I worked with the students as they transitioned into university. It was at this stage that I began to consider if the previous experiences of study had prepared the students for study at HE level. The reason I began to think this was based on anecdotal evidence being presented by the students about some of the challenges they were facing in HE, particularly from an academic perspective, but not excluding social aspects. They discussed difficulties with understanding what was expected of them at degree level study and difficulties with academic writing, study skills and generally returning to study. The students' were diverse in terms of their time away from study, ranging from two years to 30 years and they had all studied at different dental schools, dental hospitals or universities.

My interest in this was also enthused by my own personal educational experiences, as I had not taken a traditional pathway to gaining my first degree, returning to HE following prior study as a mature student. Personal experiences are a common factor for researchers choosing a topic area (Brancati 2018). The initial ideas for the study were discussed with the taught doctorate course leader who also felt that researching the experiences and expectations of transition into HE would be helpful by way of contribution to practice. Following an initial scope of the literature on transition and non-traditional students, I established that although there was a good amount of evidence in other disciplines, there were



no studies that focussed on transition of students in dentistry. It was therefore hoped that the research would contribute to the existing evidence base. Based on the above, the aim of this study was to investigate the experiences of diploma students during transition into HE, with a view to understanding any challenges. Having this greater understanding could then allow the course team to further support students and enhance student experience and attainment.

### **Dentistry in the United Kingdom**

In order to contextualise the current role and the professional arena for DHDTs, this section will review the history of dentistry, which traces back as far as the 1700s when in 1771 John Hunter indexed teeth, giving each a name and insisted that a scientific approach was needed. Prior to this, there were no qualified dentists and often any dental treatment an individual required was carried out mainly by the local barber (or even blacksmith), with barbers in particular adopting a dual role carrying out minor oral surgery. Between the late 1700s and 1878, dentistry began to advance and included the significant introduction of the first toothbrush. This would prove to be a key development in prevention strategies in future years (Davies et al 2003, Loe 2011, Poklepovic et al 2013) and a significant scope of practice for current DHDTs in the United Kingdom (UK). In 1870 the Dental Reform Committee was formed with a view to providing greater unity within the profession. As a result of this, the first Dentists Act was introduced in 1878. This was followed by the inception of the Dentist's register in 1879. To be eligible to join the register, there was a requirement to hold a dental qualification or demonstration of experience through practise, and for the first time the title of the 'dental surgeon' and 'dentist' was restricted to those individuals who were on the register' (Wilson and Gelbier 2016:134). The Licence in Dental Surgery of the

Royal College of Surgeons of England (LDS RCS England) was the first qualification to be awarded in 1860 by the Royal College of Surgeons. The Royal College of Surgeons Edinburgh, the Royal College of Surgeons Ireland and the Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow all followed with the introduction of their own LDS (British Dental Association 1999). However, despite these early attempts to regulate the profession, some individuals were able to continue practising dentistry if they used an unprotected title such as dental room, thus avoiding the need to register. During the period 1878 and 1921 when the second Dentists Act was introduced, the number of individuals who were practising outside of the register exceeded the number practising whilst registered (British Dental Association 1999). The Dental Board of the General Medical Council (GMC) was introduced as part of the Dentists Act 1921. Despite previous registrations being limited to Dentists and Dental Surgeons, this Board allowed the registration of other professionals which included medical practitioners (for example general practitioners (GPs) and pharmacists. Under this registration they were permitted to extract teeth, although this was contested at the time by many within the dental profession. The foundation of the National Health Service (NHS) on 5<sup>th</sup> July 1948 was seen as a landmark development that introduced an ambitious plan to bring affordable, good quality healthcare to all. For the first time, it brought together those working in the hospital setting, doctors, dentists, nurses, pharmacists and opticians all under one umbrella (NHS Choices 2018). This was followed in 1956 by the third Dentists Act which led to the formation of the General Dental Council (GDC) and the introduction of new roles within the profession. The GDC and its role will be discussed further in this chapter. The fourth Dentists Act was introduced in 1984 which consolidated the previous Acts and built on the

work that had already taken place within the profession with a particular emphasis on regulation and education.

### **The Emergence of Associated Professionals**

Around the time of the second Dentists Act (1921), dental Surgeons and dentists were beginning to be assisted by individuals known as dental dressers (Rowbotham et al 2009, Wilson and Gelbier 2016). These individuals were usually female and some were trained and permitted to undertake clinical activity; a scope that was a source of controversy. Wilson and Gelbier (2016) describe the dental dressers' role in relation to that of the current dental nurse (DN). However Rowbotham et al (2009), compare the role of the dental dresser, in particular the scope of practice of their activity, to that of the current dental therapist (DT), resulting in some contradiction and no clarity around the role of the dental dresser. This lack of clarity is due to the scope of practice of clinical activity being significantly different for a DN and a DT. By the 1940s the role of the Dental Surgery Assistant (DSA) (now termed DN) had started to evolve with further professional recognition available through an optional qualification. This role continued to develop right through to 2006 when compulsory registration with the GDC for DNs was first introduced. It is also important to acknowledge that following the inception of the GDC, as well as the term DSA, dental auxiliaries were also being introduced and being referred to (Dyer and Robinson 2016). In trying to define the dental auxiliary, the early literature suggests that it encompassed both the role of school nurse and the oral hygienist (Pilbeam 1950). Other countries still use the term dental auxiliaries, with the composition of this group generally being made up of DTs, clinical dental technicians (CDTs) and DHs (Thomas and Robinson 2016). However, this can vary, depending on the individual country (Dyer et al 2014). In addition to this, the role that the dental

auxiliary undertake can differ in varying localities. However most dental auxiliaries are only permitted to carry out a limited range of intra-oral procedures (Dyer and Robinson 2016).

More recently in the United Kingdom (UK) this term was known as Professional Complimentary to Dentistry (PCDs). This was then replaced with Dental Care Professionals (DCPs) (Kravitz and Treasure 2007). The title of DCP is protected by law and can only be used by those individuals who have completed a recognised qualification, met a defined standard of health and have indemnity in place (GDC 2013). The latter is required in the event that a patient decides to seek compensation for any harm they have suffered (GDC 2017). These requirements then allow a DCP to gain registration with the GDC (Shoemiths 2018). The term DCP is a protected title by law for DNs orthodontic therapists (OTs), DHs, DTs, dental technicians and CDTs (GDC 2015). This means that it is illegal for any individual to use this title without having successfully achieved the relevant recognised qualification approved by GDC. The publication Preparing for Practice: Dental team learning outcomes for registration (GDC 2015), directs which DCPs are termed as operating (undertaking treatments) or non- operating (not undertaking any direct clinical procedures) (Kravitz and Treasure 2007). In addition to this, the publication Scope of Practice (GDC 2013) allows the opportunity for a DCP to be trained to undertake additional roles, resulting in many individuals who would have historically been non-operating, now having the opportunity to be trained to undertake clinical procedures. An example of this is a DN, who within his or her scope of practice would undertake procedures to assist the dentist, he or she may now be trained to apply topical fluoride, hence changing from non-operant to operant.

As part of the DCP group, DHDTs are DCPs registered with the GDC. These individuals may have qualified with a combined DHDT qualification or may have studied DH separately. Within the context of this study, only DHs and DHDTs will be discussed as part of the research, however, other DCPs may be referred to for background information. Both DHs and DHDTs can work in primary care (in the NHS or in private practice) or in secondary care. In the UK, the training and role of a DH began in 1928 with a programme that was developed by University College Hospital London (Wilson and Gelbier 2016). The 1956 Dentists Act allowed for recognition of their role in practice, allowing a DH to be able to practise in various settings, including dental practice, hospitals and the community. However, the emergence of the DH was not without challenge and not always well received within the profession. For some there were anxieties that the new role represented a 'dilution of the profession' (Wilson and Gelbier 2016). Despite these concerns the first Dental Hygiene school was opened in Manchester in 1959. The initial training was for nine months but developments within the scope of practice of clinical activity has seen this increase over the years, initially being developed as a one-year programme and then two-year programme. The role of the DH within the dental team is to help and 'support patients to maintain their oral health by preventing and treating periodontal disease and also promoting good oral health practice. They do this by working under the prescription of a dentist' (GDC 2013:7). A DHDT can undertake the full scope of practice as a DH with additional competencies (GDC 2013). For example, they can undertake some routine fillings, place performed crowns and undertake pulp treatments on deciduous teeth. The first DTs were trained at New Cross Hospital in London which opened in 1959. Although at this stage the term dental auxiliary was still in use, individuals were trained to undertake 'simple fillings and extraction of

deciduous teeth' (Rowbotham et al 2009:356). This is now also part of the scope of practice for a DT in today's clinical practice. Despite this role developing well, New Cross Hospital closed its doors in 1983 and the number of individuals being trained were reduced. Following this, a small number of DTs continue to be trained at the Royal London Hospital. This was a significant landmark in the profession as for the first time they trained to be dually qualified as DHDT. However despite this advancement, during the 1980s DHDTs were unable to work clinically in General Dental Practice (GDP) and were restricted to roles in the community or hospital setting. This resulted in difficulties in gaining employment. Due to this, many individuals decided to retrain as a DH, as DHs were permitted to work in GDP (Rowbotham 2009). This accounted for 38% of the original 154 therapists who had trained at New Cross (Godson et al 2009). The publication of the Nuffield Report in 1993 saw a strong recommendation being made that DTs should be allowed to work in general practice, resulting in training starting to re-emerge. Pre-1996 qualified DHs received a certificate of competency rather than a diploma. At this time there was also some discussion about dental auxiliaries having an alternative qualification route with clinical modules and employment leading to qualification as a dentist (Smith 1993). To date this is still not a route to qualification and registration as a dentist.

The extent to which dentists have used or employed DHDTs in their practices has been limited (Godson et al 2009). There has been an increase since the 1980s, with 43% of dentists in 2007 reporting that they may consider employing a DHDT (Jones et al 2007), but this was not actual evidence of usage. In Scotland the percentage of consideration was higher at 64% (Ross et al 2007). Despite this, the evidence presented identified that the reasons for possible non employment of a DHDT was due to the dentists' lack of knowledge in respect of their remit,

scope of practice and the level of supervision that would be required (Gallagher and Wright 2002, Ross et al 2007). This is despite workforce planning suggesting that by 2025, DCPs could be undertaking as much as 50% of the dental workload (Centre for Workforce Intelligence 2014).

By 2009, it was reported that half of registered DHDTs were employed in general dental practice (Godson et al 2009). However, it was also suggested that many were only undertaking the role of a DH, possibly resulting in a degree of deskilling due to not being exposed to the full range within their scope of practice. In addition to this, it was also reported that patients were being seen by the most expensive resource in the practice, the dental practitioner (Milsom et al 2009) and the same treatment needs of the patients could be met by a DHDT. The problem of utilisation of a DHDT is still present in 2018, with the term 'role substitution' (Hill et al 2017:311) used for treatments that can be undertaken by a DHDT (or the wider DCP group) instead of a dentist. Despite evidence demonstrating that the effective use of DHDTs (as part of the wider DCP group) to replace NHS delivery that would normally be undertaken by the dentist potentially having significant financial benefits for both the practice and the wider NHS services (Gallagher and Wilson 2009), DHDTs still remain underutilised within the provision of dental services (Wilson and Gelbier 2016). However, it is envisaged that contract reform may change this in the future (Wilson and Gelbier 2016) with 'stakeholders believing that skill mix in the multidisciplinary workforce is likely to change, with DCP's taking on more of the activity currently undertaken by dentists' (Centre of Workforce Development 2014:3 GDC 2012, HEE 2017).

Contractually there have been some changes since the inception of the NHS in 1948. Dental charges were introduced in 1951, with patients making a contribution to the cost of their dental treatment. This is still the case at present.

However varying types of contracts and how the charges were structured included the Family Services Health Authority (FSHA) contract, the General Dental Services (GDS) contract and the Personal Dental Services (PDS) contract (Department of Health 2015). The current dental contract was implemented in 2006 and has been described by the profession as not fit for purpose (BDA 2017). This contract focuses primarily on remuneration purely based on activity. However, making the transition from a contract based purely on activity to a desired contract that includes an outcome of improved oral health, is challenging (NHS 2009). Following the Steele Report (NHS 2009), the first reformed pilot contract was implemented in 2011, followed by the prototype remuneration model in 2015. The work around this latter pilot is still ongoing and currently it is anticipated that a new contract will be rolled out in 2020/2021. When considering the use of DHDT and skill mix within the dental contract, it was reported that even in practices where DCPs are employed, there is limited delegation taking due to reluctance (DOH 2014).

Contract reform is focussed on how dental services are delivered. In addition to this, there is currently a large project, Advancing Dental Care, being undertaken by Health Education England (HEE) and the Department of Health (DoH) to look at the dental workforce and who will be required to deliver which dental services in the future. This could determine how many DHDTs are trained based on what the service requires. The function of HEE is to:

*'support the delivery of excellent healthcare and health improvement to the patients and public of England by ensuring that the workforce of today and tomorrow has the right numbers, skills, values and behaviours, at the right time and in the right place'* (HEE 2017:1).



As part of this development, part of the remit of Advancing Dental Care is to consider whether the existing models of training and training pathways will produce a workforce that will be able to meet the future demands of patients. The current models have been in existence for many years and based on population needs that are no longer current (HEE 2017), particularly in respect of children and the older population (Royal College of Surgeons 2015, Royal College of Surgeons 2017). The Advancing Dental Care project began in September 2017 with a stakeholder event, followed by the development of five sub work streams to undertake some preliminary work on dental training pathways, post foundation training, scope of practice, short term adjustments and the economic models of training (HEE 2018). The first stage of the review started to identify how ‘training and professional development can encourage the whole oral health workforce to utilise its full skillset, as required’ (HEE 2018:5). Following this initial review, 21 recommendations were made and approval was granted for a continued three year project to commence in 2018 (HEE 2018).

The skill set of some DCPs has already been enhanced with direct access being introduced in 2013. Direct access allows DHDTs to carry out their full scope of practice as midlevel dental providers without patients having to see a dentist first’ (Brocklehurst et al 2014:326). Following this legislative change in May 2013, the role of the DHDT changed from a clinician who could only see patients on referral, to that of an independent clinician. This legislative change was the result of a review that took place in 2012, commissioned by the GDC to primarily ‘evaluate the likely impact, including benefits and risks, of allowing patients direct access to treatment by a DCP’ (Turner et al 2012:18). The review concluded that:

- a) *There was no evidence of significant issues of patient safety resulting from the clinical activity of DCPs.*

- b) *There was evidence that access to dental care improved as a result of direct access arrangements, of cost benefits to patients and of high levels of patient satisfaction.*
- c) *There was some evidence that DCPs may over-refer patients to dentists, which may ensure patient safety but lead to wasteful use of resources and a high level of 'no shows' on referral (Turner et al 2012:6).*

This change was welcomed by DHDTs and was seen as a positive development and recognition of their role and scope of practice. However, within the wider profession it was not without controversy (Brocklehurst et al 2014). It was argued from a positive perspective that this change would encourage a move from treatment to prevention (Mertz and Mouradian 2009), whilst concern was raised that it 'was a misguided decision that fails to consider best practice and continuity of care, patient choice and cost effectiveness' (BDA 2013:379). Following the introduction of direct access there are still anxieties within the profession, with many dentists having 'concern and distrust surrounding a DHDT working with greater autonomy', including the perception that it is a cost cutting exercise and questioning the level of clinical competency a DHDT has when working without prescription (Ross and Turner 2015:647). Guidance has been provided which recommends that upon qualification and registration, a DHDT should work for at least 12 months in a protected environment under prescription before considering working under direct access (Dental Protection 2018). There are currently 243 DHDTs working in practices with direct access with advantages being evidenced. These advantages include increased patient list sizes, increased practice income, more time available for dentists to focus on specialist treatment and less time required for prescription writing (Turner and Ross 2017).

All of these advantages strengthen the rationale for utilising the skills of a DHDT in GDP.

The discussion above highlights some of the difficulties that DHDTs can face in terms of their skills being recognised by GDPs, and although it is reported that DHDTs have high confidence levels in their clinical skills (Turner et al 2011), discussions with the profession can indicate that confidence is affected by not having the recognition and value by the wider profession for the role they are qualified to do.

### **Professional Body and Registration**

The GDC was established on 4<sup>th</sup> July 1956 and became the sole regulator for the Dental Profession. Its primary function is to regulate dental professionals with a view to maintaining high standards for the benefit of the patient (GDC 2018). This regulatory body is still in place today and is itself regulated by the Professional Standard Authority. Since its inception, the GDC has undergone continuous development (Wilson and Gelbier 2016) and the council currently consists of twelve members, six registrants and six lay members, all of whom are appointed. The 1984 Dentist Act laid out the statutory function of the GDC:

*‘To protect the public including promoting and maintaining health, safety and wellbeing, to promote and maintain confidence in the dental profession and to maintain proper professional standards and conduct for members of those professions’ (Gdc-uk.org, 2018).*

The GDC also has four legislative responsibilities that it has the power to enact, which include granting registration to dental professionals who have met all the requirements, setting standards for dental education providers, investigating complaints against dental professionals and ensuring that registrants keep their

skills up to date through continuous professional development (CPD) requirements (GDC 2018). The GDC currently hold registers of dental professionals who are able to practise in the UK. There are several different types of registers, two of which are dentists and DCPs. The number of registrants on these two primary registers has changed over recent years, with DCPs now being the largest percentage of the registrants practising. As of 31<sup>st</sup> December 2016, there were 6931 DHs on the register and 2897 DTs, with 2016 seeing 272 new DH registrants and 163 new DT registrants. The gender composition demonstrated 254 of the 272 DHs female as well as 151 of the 163 DTs (GDC 2016). This significant number of registrants highlights the skill mix that is working in the profession. In relation to this study, it also highlights that there will be a large number of these registrants who qualified at diploma level and therefore may consider the BSc (Hons) Dental Studies Programme to top up to degree level.

Providers of dental education are quality assured by the GDC (GDC 2015) and the curriculum is mapped against two main practice guidelines: Preparing for Practice: Dental team learning outcomes (GDC 2015) and Standards for Dental Education (2015). It is the role of the GDC to ensure that courses that lead to registration with them demonstrate that the students will have met the required learning outcomes. The GDC inspect educational providers for DHDT programmes, it is the sole responsibility of the GDC to decide if a programme is approved or withdrawn (GDC 2015). The students who enrol onto the BSc (Hons) Dental Studies Programme will have undertaken a diploma with a dental provider who will have been approved and are regulated by the GDC.

The GDC are also responsible for investigating any serious concerns that a patient or member of the public has made against a dental registrant. These

concerns may be related to the health of the registrant, their behaviour or the ability of the registrant when undertaking their role (GDC 2017). If the concern is regarding treatment, the treatment must have been provided on the NHS. Any concern about treatment that has been carried out privately, needs to be discussed with the Dental Complaints Service (DCS). Although the DCS is only concerned with private treatment, there could be an investigation by the GDC if there was a concern about the registrant who provided treatment.

‘CPD for dental professionals is defined in law as lectures, seminars, courses, individual study and other activity that can be reasonably expected to advance your professional development’ (GDC 2013:6.) It is mandatory for both dentists and DCPs to demonstrate that they are keeping up to date with both their knowledge and skills to enable them to remain registered with the GDC. Mandatory CPD for DCPs was introduced in August 2008, working on a five year cycle with activity falling into either verifiable or non-verifiable. Within verifiable CPD there was a requirement to undertake continuous learning in core subjects including radiography, infection control and medical emergencies. Prior to 2008, CPD was good practice but not necessarily undertaken formally by all dental professionals. This has now further developed and the emergence of enhanced CPD was introduced on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2018 for dentists and this was introduced on 1<sup>st</sup> August 2018 for DCPs (GDC 2017). The emphasis of enhanced CPD is to acknowledge that not one size fits all, and professional development should be linked to personal needs, with a focus of plan, do, record and reflect. However, there are still highly recommended CPD topics which include medical emergencies, disinfection and decontamination and radiography and radiation protection. In addition to this there are also recommended topics to enhance patient safety which include legal and ethical issues, complaints handling,

safeguarding children and young people, oral cancer and safeguarding vulnerable adults (GDC 2019). CPD can be in the form of small, short courses or can be elements of programmes like the BSc Dental Studies.

The GDC have acknowledged that some of the systems around the four functions of regulation are ‘antiquated’ and designed for a different era (GDC 2018:5). They identified that three of the four functions, education, registration and standards (Figure 1.1) are upstream measures, meaning that they should be a key focus along with time and resources to avoid the dental registrants falling into problems with poor practice that may lead to Fitness to Practise (FtP) concerns. To date, FtP has been a large proportion of the work that has been undertaken by the GDC with financial implications for all involved. It is anticipated that moving forward, FtP will have more local resolution and less focus at the punitive stage (GDC 2018).



**Figure 1.1** GDC Four Functions of Regulation

### **Training and Professional Development**

In the UK, at the time of writing, there are twenty-one providers of DH or DHDT education. However, in 2018, this has changed due to funding. This will be discussed further below. Five of the providers are outside of England and therefore will not form part of the discussion in this study. Despite having regulatory body requirements for educational provision, there is no single

prescribed formula for the provision of DHDT education. Current provision is varied and diverse and consists of different approaches, qualifications and environments for delivery and assessment. Appendix 1 lists the providers of Dental Hygiene and Dental Therapy in England and their respective awards. There are currently only two providers (Bristol Dental School and Hospital and University of Essex) that have GDC approved provision leading to a qualification in DH only. However, the University of Essex programme offers a foundation degree that on completion allows for DH to continue to the BSc Oral Health Science degree and register as a DHDT. All of the other fourteen providers have a dual qualification leading to an award in DHDT. However, of the fourteen, only six of these providers are approved for a BSc level (level 6) and eight are approved for diploma level (level 5). It is likely that the providers who are approved to deliver diploma level will never have offered a BSc programme. This means that these providers will have had many students qualify with a diploma in DHDT and therefore the BSc (Hons) Dental Studies Programme has and will continue to attract many of these students who want to progress. Despite the different level of the exit qualifications below, all are required to meet GDC learning outcomes.

The power to award taught degrees is granted by either 'a Royal Charter, a Private Act of Parliament or an Order of Council (section 76.1) of the Further and Higher Education Act (1992) (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills 2015:8) and only awarding organisations can apply for the use of the title 'university'. In England, all providers of BSc awards for DHDT are HE organisations holding the university title, with the exception of Birmingham Dental Hospital, which is a collaboration between the dental school and Birmingham Community Healthcare NHS Trust, and the award is validated by Birmingham

University. The funding and support for DHDT training has differed depending on the level of qualification. Historically, if a student studied through the diploma route, they were eligible for an NHS commissioned place which was allocated to the training providers. The BSc route was funded through the HE system. From 2017/18 all undergraduate courses that lead to the successful registration of DHDT as well as nurses, midwives and some allied health professionals will be funded through the HE finance system (HEFCE 2016). Due to this change, from September 2018 only five diploma programmes will continue to attract an NHS bursary (Department of Health and Social Care 2018) and therefore this may mean that institutions that offer the diploma may be required to change their programme to BSc to allow for students to access student finance

### **Development of the BSc (Hons) Dental Studies Programme**

As referred to above, on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2016 there were approximately 10,000 DHDTs and DTs on the GDC register (GDC 2018). Many of the DHs and DHDTs on the GDC register have previously studied at diploma level. The exact ratio of diploma to degree holders is not known. In 2010 following consultation with HEE and other stakeholders in the profession, it was reported that that in some cases a DT or DHDT who held a registerable diploma with the GDC (as opposed to a BSc), were finding it difficult in a competitive employment arena to secure positions in both primary and secondary care dentistry. It was suggested that the reason for this was when they were applying for positions alongside a DHDT who had studied at degree level, they were disadvantaged due to the qualification level. It was proposed by Health Education North West (HENW) (formerly North Western Deanery) that a top up degree would support these individuals.

In 2011, the School of Medicine and Dentistry at UCLan developed the BSc (Hons) Dental Studies for Dental Care Professionals, which would allow a DH or



DHDT who had a diploma qualification to enter onto the third year of the degree programme. The BSc (Hons) Dental Studies for Dental Care Professionals was not intended to be a qualification that would gain GDC registration as potential students would already hold a qualification that allowed them to work within their remit and scope of practice (GDC 2015). However the curriculum and award could support both career and academic development. In addition to this, the recruitment of students to the programme would support the university's widening participation (WP) agenda by ensuring equality of access and raising aspirations (UCLan 2018). The BSc (Hons) Dental Studies for Dental Care Professionals curriculum was approved by the university in September 2011 and the first cohort of students began in January 2012. The programme has continued to recruit students each January with an average intake of twenty. The age profile of the students is over 21 years, thus being referred to as mature students (HEFCE 2015) and in the literature as non-traditional students (Roberts 2011, Taylor and House 2010). Non-traditional students will be discussed further in Chapter 2. Despite evidence suggesting that the number of mature learners engaging with HE has declined continuously from just over 11 million learners in 2010/11 to under 800,000 in 2013/14 (HEFCE 2015), the BSc has continued to recruit successfully. This could be due to the fact that it is the only dental specific top up programme for DHDTs in the UK.

Following recruitment of students to the first and second cohort (January 2012 and January 2013 intake) and from working with the students, evidence began to emerge that little was known within our own practice and school about the experiences and expectations of the students as they transitioned from a clinical diploma into study at level 6. Anecdotal evidence suggested that this transition was challenging and not necessarily a natural progression from previous study

due to the clinical and technical content of the diploma. In my role as course leader and through observation and discussion with the students, it was being suggested that there was difficulty with study skills, critical writing, reflective practice and self-directed study as well as knowing what to expect. My own interest in this area is from two perspectives. As previously mentioned, my own personal interest in this area stems from having been a mature student myself and not necessarily following a traditional educational pathway, entering into HE in year 2 and encountering some challenges. Secondly, as course leader, I want to ensure I have as much knowledge as possible of the challenges to be able to maximise the student experience.

### **Research Aim and Questions**

The formulation of the research aim and questions derived from my professional interest and a lack of existing research in relation to this group of students and transition. The formulation was a reflective process (Agee 2009) and the research questions were refined and developed as the project developed. The aim of the research was to explore transitional experiences of BSc (Hons) Dental Studies students entering into higher education, considering both social and academic factors. The initial research question was 'Are diploma level graduate dental hygiene and therapy students prepared academically for the transition into Higher Education study'? This question was intended to explore two aspects. The first aspect was to examine the previous qualifications of students entering onto the programme, with a particular focus on the previous curricula that had been studied before the students entered HE. The data collection was intending to be the distribution of a questionnaire to all dental schools in the UK who provide diplomas in DH or DHDT. Although all dental curricula are required to be mapped to Preparing for Practice (GDC 2015) and the scope to deliver anything outside

of this remit limited, I wanted to explore the extent to which independent learning skills, for example academic writing, referencing, sourcing literature, were embedded into the curriculum. When the study began in January 2014, the School of Dentistry at UCLan did not have a GDC registered DHDT programme. However, at the same time as the research commenced, some significant changes were taking place in dentistry which prompted the development of a DHDT programme in the school. The main change was the reduction in NHS funded places to support the training of dentists, with all dental schools being required to reduce their annual intake by 10% (HEFCE 2012). The School also identified that skill mix in dentistry was part of future developments in the profession (Brocklehurst et al 2015, Gallagher et al 2010), and therefore it was essential that the training of DHDTs was part of the school's portfolio. On gaining both university and GDC approval for the course to begin, I was appointed as course leader which lead me to consider the questions that I was asking in the research. I felt that there could potentially be an ethical issue and a conflict of interest if I were to contact other dental schools asking them to complete questionnaires about their programme and curriculum at the same time as being involved with the curriculum development of our own programme. Although Milligan (2016) discusses a methodological approach of dissolving boundaries between the researcher and the researched, I did not feel that this was something that I would be able to overcome. I therefore revised the research question and on reflection, although the data from other providers could have provided some background information, the focus of the research was going to focus on the expectations and the experiences of the students themselves.

The second aspect had intended to focus on the academic transition of the students. On reflection and following some initial scoping of the literature, I began

to feel that only focussing on academic transition could compromise the breadth of the study. There is a wealth of peer reviewed literature (some of which will be discussed in chapter 2) which encompasses both academic and social aspects of student transition (Cole 2017, Fergy et al 2013, Howard and Davies 2012, Higher Education Academy 2016, Kahu et al 2015, Pike and Harrison 2012, Rienties et al 2012). This is also supported by Tinto's (1975) model of integration which examines both aspects of social and academic integration when looking at student experience and retention. These aspects will be further discussed in Chapter 2. In view of this, the aim of the research and research questions were revised to:

#### Aim

To investigate the academic and social experiences of diploma students (DHDT) during the transition to HE as they enter a BSc (Hons) Dental Studies Programme.

#### Research Questions

1. What are the expectations of the students entering onto the BSc (Hons) Dental Studies and HE?
2. How do students experience the transition from diploma to degree level study?

#### Summary

To summarise, the rationale for the research questions is based on wanting to gain an understanding of transition for the students on the BSc (Hons) Dental Studies Programme with a view to strengthening any support required. It was also felt that the findings from these questions could add to the current evidence

in the literature about transition, particularly in relation to non-traditional students. This chapter has outlined the context of dentistry, including the role of DHDTs and the wider context of dentistry that this group of registrants are working within. It has also discussed current dental education and regulation.

Chapter 2 will examine the literature relevant to the research aim and research questions.

## CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

### Introduction

The objective of this literature review is to investigate previous research and evidence on the issues pertinent to the research questions and to 'seek to lay a foundation for the current research' being undertaken (Oliver 2014:125). This allowed the study to be located within the context of a current and relevant evidence base. In the broadest terms, there are two types of literature review; a systematic review and the more traditional review. The former is a review of the evidence base on the issue(s) of interest and includes critically evaluating the quality of the literature. This literature may be included or excluded within a study, meaning that some of the literature extracted may not be used. This study adopted the more traditional literature review, critically appraising the evidence base in relation to the research aim and questions (Jesson et al 2011) and inclusion was based on relevance, quality and robustness.

The aim of the research was to investigate the academic and social experiences of diploma students (DHDT) during the transition to HE as they enter a BSc (Hons) Dental Studies Programme. At the initial stage, a scoping exercise was undertaken as the aim of the research was broad. This initial scoping of the evidence base allowed the research questions to be refined. This was followed by a conceptual review to synthesise the current evidence base and gain an understanding of the issue(s). This chapter will explore the positioning of the research within the theoretical framework as well as the current evidence base. The structure of the discussion will be framed by reviewing the broader issues as well as directly related issues and concepts.

The BSc (Hons) Dental Studies programme was the first in the UK within the dental profession to offer the opportunity for DHs and DHDTs to top up their

diploma to degree by entering into HE in the third year. Due to the infancy of this programme, the evidence base relating to transition with a specific focus of non-traditional students within the dental profession did not exist. There was limited evidence pertaining to transition in dentistry of dental students from dental school to foundation training, but this was not relevant to the context of this study. Therefore the review of literature looked at the wider educational context. The review of the literature will be framed by the theme of transition and will also include non-traditional students, identity, emotion, expectations, motivation and self-efficacy. Non-traditional students will be reviewed in the literature, as it is a key concept of the students in this study. From initially scoping the literature, the remaining areas were identified as pertinent to student transition and therefore it was felt that these were appropriate at this stage to consider.

### **Context of Higher Education**

'Student success, student engagement and student retention continue to be a concern for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) across the sector' (Kahu and Nelson 2017:1). It is still considered that HEIs see the most common entrants as 17-19 year olds resulting in a need to encourage a more diverse student population to increase the number of individuals entering into HE (Barron and D'annunzio-Green 2009). Therefore creating conditions that promote and foster student success in education has become a paramount concern for providers (Kuh et al 2006). Supporting access to HE to be equitable has been a key focus over the past two decades with the widening participation (WP) agenda being a driver for policy makers (Department for Education and Skills (DfES) 1987). Progress has been made to improve access to HE for some underrepresented groups including, students from neighbourhoods where HE participation is low,

individuals from households with low income and students with protected characteristics, but there are still improvements to be made (Higher Education Funding Council England (HEFCE) 2015). HEIs have expanded their portfolios to accommodate the increasing number of diverse students, but despite this, it is still felt that some of these groups remain under represented, with the social class gap remaining unacceptably high (DfES 2003, Roberts 2011).

### **Non-traditional Students**

The term non-traditional is widely used in the literature to describe students who present with diverse backgrounds (Kim 2010, Roberts 2011, Taylor and House 2010). In contrast, traditional students are described as full time students who have entered HE as a continuation from previous study and may not have family or work commitments (Offerman 2011). The term direct entrants is also used in the literature often relating to students who enter into HE in the third year, following the first two years of a degree being studied in FE (Christie et al 2013, Pike and Harrison 2009). Direct entry gives students the opportunity to enter into university in year two or three as direct entrants following earlier study in FE. This concept derived from having dual sector institutions and with the emergence of some of the early years of HE being delivered in FE (Stanton 2009). Although this is seen as a positive opportunity in respect of increased access and widening participation (Christie et al 2013), there is concern that FE may not prepare students adequately for HE (Broad 2006) despite 'students having had experience of both study and assessment at a higher education level' (Pike and Harrison 2011:58). There is also a concern that there is an expectation that students will be able to adapt to differing pedagogies that may be unfamiliar (Roberts 2011). It is important to acknowledge that direct entry students may also present with non-traditional characteristics. Despite the term non-traditional being



widely used in literature, it has also been reported that with the changes and expansions in HE, this term could rapidly become outdated (Kim et al 2010) due to an increase of students presenting with characteristics of both traditional and non-traditional. There is also great diversity in what is meant by the term, with 45 definitions being identified in literature (Chung et al 2014). It is acknowledged that non-traditional can be contextualised to the individual study (Tilley 2014). When using the term for students who do not present as traditional, it is important to recognise that not all students will present with all of the individual characteristics of being non-traditional. There can be a danger that the different characteristics are not recognised as individual considerations, with a risk that by being too general about the term, the complexity of the diverse groups may not be captured (Smit 2012, Taylor and House 2010). For the purpose of this study, the term non-traditional will be used.

Non-traditional students can be identified as students from low socio economic backgrounds, mature students (associated with age), commuters, students who study part time (possibly to accommodate family or carer commitments), first generation students, students with disabilities and students from an ethnic minority background (Roberts 2011, Taylor and House 2010). First generation students are described as individuals who are the first in their family to attend university and are still considered to be a minority in HE (Hinz 2016, Ward et al 2012). Age is a defining characteristic of non-traditional students and is often used when differentiating students from those presenting as a traditional student (Chung et al 2014). However, despite age being a defining characteristic, there appears to be a lack of consistency when reporting at what age this begins. The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) (2018) define mature students as those over the age of 21, with Chung et al (2017) and Tilley (2014) referring to

mature students as being over the age of 25. The University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) describe mature students as those over the age of 21. These students make up 54.7% of the student population. In addition to this, 15.2% of the overall student base is part-time and 18.4% of students come from neighbourhoods where attendance at university is low (UCLan 2018). The profiles of the students on the BSc (Hons) Dental Studies programme reflect characteristics of a non-traditional student with all of the students studying part time. Other characteristics include maturity, having family commitments, first generation students and students who commute to university. Mature students make up a large proportion of the student body within HE (Taylor and House 2010) and attracting mature students into HE can widen participation (Howard and Davies 2012). Mature students can demonstrate an increased level of satisfaction and confidence (Grabowski 2016) as well as being reported to perform better than their traditional counterparts (Martin et al 2013, Schofield and Dismore 2010). Age related to maturity, has been identified as an indicator of higher levels of motivation in students as well as them being able to manage better emotionally and succeed in achieving their goals (Bye et al 2007). However, mature students can have higher 'economic, social and cognitive risks' (Howard and Davies 2013:770). Economic risk can relate to financial responsibilities and having long term commitments. These may include having accommodation responsibilities or they may be in full time employment and not able to commit to returning to study.

Many mature students are balancing academic responsibilities with family commitments (Carney-Compton and Tan 2002, Quimby and O'Brien 2006). Chung et al (2014:1128) incorporate family commitments into 'multiple roles', which identify two sub groups of partner/spouse and parent/carer of a dependant. Education has seen a change in the profiles of students entering into HE and it

can no longer be assumed that all students are single with no family commitments (Offerman 2011). Having family commitments is also a key characteristic of non-traditional students and this characteristic can be a contributing factor when students are deciding to (or not to) undertake a course of study. It can also impact on the student having the ability or time to study. Evidence suggests that striking the balance between academic and family commitments can impact on engagement and therefore academic success, as being a non-traditional student can often result in additional external demands that can impact on study (Gilardi and Guglielmetti 2011). It is reported that the motivation for mature students transitioning to HE is one of intrinsic desire rather than extrinsic (McCune et al 2010). In an academic context, a student who is intrinsically motivated will present with autonomy and be self-initiating and directed (Sansone and Smith 2000).

Mature students can also perform to a higher academic level (Carney-Crompton and Tan 2002, Salamonson and Andrew 2006), with students over the age of 25 being reported as more successful than those who were under that age (Brimble 2015). Mature students can adopt a deeper learning approach with a view to achieving grades of a high level (Halpern 2007).

## **Transition**

When examining the literature on transition for this study, it was found that there is a lot of evidence that is related to children and youths, with slightly less literature focussing on adults. Transition into HE does form a proportion of this literature and will be examined below. Literature pertaining to transition into HE forms part of the wider concept of life transitions. There is also reference in the literature to transition pedagogy (Kift et al 2010) which is described as 'a guiding philosophy for first year curriculum design and support which carefully scaffolds and supports the first year learning experience for the contemporary

heterogeneous cohort' (Kift 2009a: 2). However, Crafter and Mauder (2012) describe transition as a social theory which is constructed using the experiences of wider social contexts.

Over recent years, increased interest in student transition has become both a political and popular concern for academia in the UK and Europe (Colley 2007). Transition has developed further from being traditionally about access (Gale and Parker 2014), but this is still important as improving access to HE is seen as having the potential to make improvements to the lives of individuals as well as the wider economy, increasing the chances of institutional survival, increasing the opportunity for equity and allowing changes in teaching and learning due to a differing population base (Belyakov et al 2009). HEIs need to be able to develop capabilities to manage successful transitions for students (Field 2012). Student transition in education has been well-documented (Akso et al 2015, Briggs et al 2012, Gale and Parker 2014, Holton 2018, Hussey and Smith 2010, Leese 2010, Pike and Harrison 2011, Tinto 1988, Winter and Dismore 2010), but despite this, evidence highlights difficulties in defining what transition is. The term has been interpreted and understood in a variety of different ways, resulting in a lack of clarity and difficulty in trying to determine one single definition (Colley 2007, Higher Education Academy 2016). In an attempt to provide a definition, Gale and Parker (2014:734) describe transition as a 'change navigated by students in their movement within and thorough formal education', with Colley (2007:428) describing it as a 'process of change over time' and Kraft-Sayre and Pianta (2000:2) discussing it as 'an experience as students move from one level to the next, rather than a single event that happens'. The latter of these definitions suggest the responsibility of transition lies with the student having the capability to engage with change as well as having the resources to support this. Even with

these attempts to identify a clear definition, there is still a lack of evidence that moves forward from defining what transition is, to the how and why of transition. The how and why are described as key elements that could influence the 'implementation of effective practices to support transition' (Higher Education Academy 2016:5). By adopting a socio-cultural perspective, transition can be identified as 'something that takes place over time, taking into consideration whole-of-life fluctuations in lived reality or subjective experiences' (Gale and Parker 2014: 737). This perspective considers a factor of transition is the student being embedded in the practice and the social structures (Lave and Wenger 1991). Socio-cultural factors can include religion, culture, values and families and can affect behaviours and thoughts. This highlights that transition may not be a single moment in time, but one that is apparent at different stages in a student's life. This will be discussed further later in this chapter.

### **Transitional Encounters**

There are many transitions that a student may encounter during their educational lifetime. Within compulsory education all students will encounter transition into primary education at a young age and from primary to secondary school. Within the UK, unless an individual begins an apprenticeship or traineeship, they must remain in education until the age of 18 (Gov.UK 2018), resulting in a transition from secondary education to Further Education (FE). From FE some students, including the student population in this study, will then experience the transition from FE to HE. These transitions are described by Ecclestone (2006) as institutional transitions, from one educational context to another. Both national and European policy focusses on the importance of these transitions being smooth in order to prevent social exclusion (Colley 2007). Although these transitions are described as institutional and have some common factors,

including the adjustment to new surroundings, meeting new peers and staff and institutional procedures (Sanders et al 2005) there are also some significant differences.

In the transition from primary to secondary school, it is reported that approximately 10% of students suffer serious problems (Hanewald 2013, Youngman 1986), including bullying, making new friends and the lack of confidence and self-esteem (Department for Children, Schools and Families 2008). Elder (1975) examined the transition of students into secondary school using life course theory, a concept described as the

*'interweave of age-graded trajectories, such as work careers and family pathways, that are subject to changing conditions and future options, and to short-term transitions ranging from leaving school to retirement'* (Elder 1994:5)

During transition, socialisation institutions such as secondary schools can positively support optimisation of the adaptation of skills for young people (Bronfenbrenner 1979), including social adjustment and curriculum interest.

However, inadvertently, some of the routine procedures, for example getting to the correct class on time and being accustomed to the culture of the organisation, can have a detrimental effect by interfering with normal development if the transition is not supported (Akos et al 2015, Elias et al 1985). Elder (1975) concluded that the effect that transition can have on learners at this stage in their educational development can vary between students with some experiencing stress from social disequilibria. Students may be aware of the academic challenges that they may face in transition (Rowley et al 2008). However it is reported that homework (content and amount) and the achievement of good

grades can cause anxiety (Akos and Galassi 2004). A decline in grades, an increase in feeling lonely and demonstrating depressive symptoms has also been evidenced (Benner 2017). In contrast, some students found the transition into secondary education an 'escape from the challenges of previous environments' (Benner 2011:308). Transition into secondary school is often seen as a 'developmental transition' (Benner 2011:301) and therefore life course approaches are seen as relevant and important in examining these transitions and drawing any conclusions.

The transition from secondary school into post 16 education such as a sixth form college or into FE is described as an 'important developmental milestone that holds the potential for personal growth and behavioural change' (Fromme et al 2008:1497), with students being described as emerging adults (Arnett, 2000, Kenyon 2009, Mattanah et al 2004). However, this emergence of adulthood can be challenging for many students as they attempt to deal with their independence as well as the differing academic and social demands that they have been used to in previous educational environments (Huynh and Fuligni 2012). Stress levels in students can increase during this time with contributory factors including managing changing academic workloads, moving from one community to another, building new relationships and developing autonomy (Drake et al 2015, Huynh and Fulgini 2012, Kenyon 2009). Developing autonomy can be behavioural and/or emotional (Goossens, 2006), with the latter also focussing on students beginning to develop their own individual identity. It is evident from the above discussion that there are different factors relating to student transition at different times throughout the educational journey, particularly relating to academic demands. The students who enter on to the BSc (Hons) Dental Studies

Programme will have encountered previous transition, some of which may be familiar as they move into HE.

### Transition to HE

With the emergence and emphasis on lifelong learning, there is a growing evidence base which focuses on the transition of students into HE, with a view to informing policy, practice and further research (Bowles 2014, Cole 2017, Hutchinson et al 2011, Kahu et al 2015, Scanlon 2007). Due to the increasing diversity of students who enter into HE, the prior learning and experience that students have had before they enter into HE, cannot be assumed (Haggis 2006). Many common themes on the difficulties of transition have been reported including identity, autonomy, motivation, home responsibilities, finance, building friendship groups and becoming an independent learner (Bowles et al 2014, Christie et al, Cole 2007, Fergy et al 2013, McMillan 2013), with Kift (2015:52) concluding that 'successful transition into HE is a significant issue'. Kahu and Nelson (2017) discuss the main challenge of the gap between the students and the HEI which identifies three differing thoughts. The first thought is based on students not having the right level of skill or knowledge, the second based on students being able to adapt to the new culture and the third relates to learning involving power and identity. These factors were apparent with the BSc (Hons) Dental Studies students, which led to the rationale for the research project, particularly the level of skill and adapting to a new culture. Identity will be discussed later in this chapter as the students on the programme could potentially be developing a new identity.

Students from a background with 'little or no experience of higher education are considered most vulnerable in transition and most at risk of academic failure' (McMillan 2014:1123). They can also be perceived as being weaker than their



counterpart peers (Haggis 2006), as well as experiencing issues with social integration. Both academic and social integration can increase commitment, attrition and retention (Fergy et al 2013, Tinto 1993). Students can also find course specific study skills, including sourcing appropriate materials difficult (Christie et al 2013). Adopting strategies to manage these changes can require students to be more independent in their approach to study (Christie et al 2013). Adopting an independent approach can be challenging for students, and they are often not prepared (Bowman 2016), particularly those who are presenting as non-traditional or direct entrants (Christie et al 2013). This requires an ability to be able to manage time, workload and assessments (Krause and Coates 2008). However, research suggests that mature students can adapt more readily to deep approaches to learning (Haggis 2009, Lake and Boyd 2015, Sutherland 1994). This approach can be linked to previous experiences and can influence academic success (Clayton et al 2010). In contrast, Haggis (2006:526) suggests that students may be limited in their ability to understand 'curricula expectations' due to a lack of exposure and experience to academic work.

Overall it is reported that most students do not feel adequately prepared for the transition into HE (Brinkworth et al 2009). The focus of this study is not on teaching and learning strategies. However, it must be acknowledged that literature suggests that in addition to transition focussing on the students, HEI's must also consider their teaching and learning strategies, which may not be suited to the diversity of students that HEIs are now attracting (Haggis 2006).

Gale and Parker (2014) discuss three concepts pertaining to student transition into HE; transition as induction, transition as development and transition as becoming. These three concepts derived from extensive research and analysis, in particular the Australian Learning and Teaching Councils (ALTC) projects

which examined good practice in transition (Gale and Parker 2014). These concepts will be used as a starting point to frame the discussion on transition in this chapter. The rationale for using these three concepts to frame the discussion is based on the perceived relevance of the three areas within the research study. However, these concepts will be discussed alongside alternative theories and models of transition. Both transition as induction and transition as development highlight that transition can be problematic, but they differ in where the responsibility lies. Transition as induction suggests it is the role of the HEI to facilitate and support this notion, whereas transition as development suggests that the responsibility is that of the students (Gale and Parker 2014). The starting point for the three concepts is at the actual point of entry into HE. However it is important to acknowledge that the transitional process can begin prior to this (pre-transition) when students can begin to develop expectations of what HE will be like. The concept of pre-transition itself is not well reported in the literature, with the focus being on when students enter and the first year, rather than that of any experiences before they enter. However, student expectations are well reported (Hamshire et al 2013, Leese, 2010, Money et al 2017, Rowley et al 2008) and will be discussed further in this chapter.

### **Transition as Induction**

In the literature there is considerable focus on transition as induction, with induction suggesting a single point in time when students enter into HE. However, the notion of a singular has been rejected (Belyakov et al 2009, Gill 2011) with literature discussing induction as not being defined as a single occurrence, but rather something that happens over a period of time. This is usually during the first year in higher education (FYHE) (Brinkworth et al 2009, Gale and Parker 2014, Harvey and Drew 2006, Johnston 2010, Yorke and Longden 2008) and

refers to a particular period of time in the student's life. When referring to the FYHE, it is important to acknowledge that for direct entrants this may mean year two or three, and although some of the considerations during this period of time in relation to transition may be similar, there may be some considerable differences for this group of students (Christie et al 2013). This will be explored further in this chapter. It is important to acknowledge that this time in a student's life is not age specific and can take place from any age post 18 years as with non-traditional students. During this time, it is suggested that a period of adjustment will take place (Ecclestone 2006, Gale and Parker 2014), which can involve academic transitions but also can include changes in lifestyle and social transitions (Hussey and Smith 2010). It is during this first year that students can be vulnerable and retention can be an issue (McInnis 2001). High levels of student attrition are not a desired outcome for any HEI, this issue being reported as a waste of institutional resources (Hillman 2005). It can also be very damaging for the reputation of the institution (Ramsey et al 2003). However transition and the first year can also be a springboard for student achievement and success (Keup and Kilgo 2014), particularly from an assessment perspective.

When discussing transition into HE during the first year, the literature identifies the importance of both academic and social integration (Briggs et al. 2012, Fergy et al. 2013, Morgan 2013, Rienties et al. 2011, Tett et al. 2016). Social transition is concerned with the adaptation to the social way of life (Rientes et al 2011) and can include factors such as how many friends you have, personal contact with academics and enjoying being at university. Much of the literature around first-year experience suggests that early academic and social integration is of key importance and can influence whether a student decides to remain or leave a course of study (Harvey et al 2006, Keenan 2008, Rientes et al 2011, Tinto,

1993), with the success or failure in the first year being influenced by the effectiveness of the transition. Tinto's (1975) early model of student retention had a central concept of integration, with drop out or failure heavily influenced by the level of academic and social integration and support.

A first measure of academic integration can be identified as the extent to which students adapt to the academic way of life, with successful integration being measured by grades and performance being achieved, levels of academic self-esteem, enjoying the subjects being studied, accepting academic norms and values, academic expectations, prior qualifications, academic support and identifying oneself a student within the environment (Tinto 1975). The academic ability of students during transition can be challenging and evidence suggests that HEIs should have an understanding of previous levels of study to be able to support a smooth transition (Pike and Harrison 2011). As discussed, transition as induction can suggest that the responsibility of transition lies within the HEI environment and that the role of the institution has the sole responsibility of the organisation to facilitate academic and social transition (HEA 2016) through an effective induction programme. However, Ecclestone (2006) discusses four concepts of transition; institutional, social and contextual, process of being and becoming, permanent human state. The first concept of institutional transition does not only refer to the responsibility of the educational provider, but also the role that individual students will play in the movement from one educational context to another.

### **Transition as Development**

Gale and Parker's (2014) second concept of transition is transition as development. In contrast to transition as induction which has a focus of a time period, transition as development focuses on the stages of development for

learners (HEA 2016) and is concerned with 'social psychology' rather than transition being the responsibility of the organisation (Gale and Parker 2014:743). Although it could be argued that development could also be associated with periods of time and the two terms are closely linked, a development may not be complete simply because the period of time has been exhausted (Quinn 2010). Transition as development can mean a student moving from a passive learner to autonomous student, one of great importance in the process of transition (Hussey and Smith 2010). However, it is reported that students can have difficulties when they move from a prescriptive and supported learning environment to one where there is an expectation that they acquire their own self-directed knowledge (Fisher et al 2011). Successful transition can be influenced by the extent to which a student becomes an independent learner (Christie et al 2013). Passive teaching and learning strategies can include lectures or watching recorded material (Lee et al 2016) with the transition to an active learner being encouraged by a higher level of critical thinking.

### Identity

Transition as development can also be seen through the lens of identity, where during transition students can move from one identity to another (Ecclestone et al 2010). Learner identity can be described as a 'temporary identity that is socially constructed' (MacFarlane 2018:1202), based on the students themselves and also others. On entry to HE, students can begin a process of self-reflection about their own identity (Barron and D'annunzio 2009), but for learners who have no previous experience of studying at HE level, identity formation can be complex (Thomas 2012). Non-traditional students, particularly those who present as mature students, can often suffer from what the literature describes as imposter

syndrome (Clance and Imes 1978) as they struggle to find a sense of belonging and identity in HE.

Baumeister and Muraven (1996) discuss identity as a phenomenon that is emerging where individuals are constantly modifying and changing their identity to be able to manage the context that they are currently in, or one that they may be moving into. This work is based on the symbolic interactionist framework (Schutz and Luckman 1973) where identity can be framed by experiences. Initially there may be a sense of loss of an old identity as a new one is developing. Individuals may be forming more than one identity in different contexts at any single time (Scanlon et al 2007), thus making it multifaceted and individual identities situated. Bauman (2007:97) describes identity as a 'serial birth' with individuals constantly 'recasting themselves as commodities and products'. Environments and contexts can provide stability for individual identities and during transition these identities can be challenged, potentially leading to displacement (Scanlon et al 2007:228) or a sense of loss. It is therefore important that transition into HE provides support for the formation of learner identity in the new environment (Briggs et al 2012) as it is suggested that this formation is vital for successful transition and it can begin before the student enters into HE. Creating this positive learner identity is not without challenge as there may be a contradiction of emotions from guilt and displacement to pleasure and hopes for success (Tett et al 2016). During transition into HE students can face personal transformation (Hussey and Smith 2010). Social identity theory is reported extensively in the literature (Bliuc et al 2011, Smyth et al 2015, Tajfel and Turner 1979, Wilkins et al 2016). Social identity theory examines an individual's own self-concept of identity in respect of being a member of a particular group and also with that of others in the group who share the same identity. It is also suggested

that the concept of social identity must be considered alongside factors such as achievement in HE and student commitment and motivation (Wilkins et al 2016). Zittoun (2006) identifies that the process of identity reconstruction can be supported by considering both the cognitive and social resources that are available during this transitional period. Cognitive resources can include formal knowledge that can be drawn on to help the adjustment into a new environment (Crafter and Maunder 2012), with social knowledge focussing on experiences that may change identity. Zittoun (2006) refers to three types of identity rupture which can be viewed as a change in a person's life; changes in cultural context, changes to a person's sphere of experience and changes to relationships or interactions (Crafter and Maunder 2012). Returning to study in a new environment can be a significant change, particularly with non-traditional students, and mature students can construct an identity as a non-learner (Howard and Davies 2012) and perceive that university is not for them, thus presenting as a social risk. Student identity for a non-traditional student is not necessarily only defined by an individual's student role, but it can also be influenced by roles that they have outside of the educational environment (Forrest and Peterson 2006). This can result in difficulties with integration and prevent entry into the community. It is thought that the process of identity formation in the HE environment does not just begin at the transition stage (induction) but can start to develop at the stage when a student may consider returning to university (Briggs 2009).

### **Transition as Becoming**

The third concept (Gale and Parker 2014) is that of transition as becoming which rejects the former two conceptualisations as unhelpful (Ecclestone et al 2010). This concept moves away from the assumption that transition is problematic for everyone, and discusses that life itself is a transition and although moving from

one development to another can be complex, it will happen throughout life (Colley 2007, Ingram et al 2005) and will not present with a beginning or end point (Gale and Parker 2014). As a result of this, Quinn (2010:127) argues that some of the previous concepts discussed do not fully capture the 'fluidity' of life and that the concept of transition needs to be reframed to capture that transition cannot be defined by periods of time or stages in life, but should be viewed as an experience of change rather than a process of change (Crafter and Maunder 2012). Literature identifies that there are differing thoughts about transition in relation to when and how, and this will be considered as the study progresses.

### Transition as a Sociocultural Framework

Social theory has identified that transition is not simply an academic consideration, but one also that looks at the 'concern of restructuring of what a person does and who the person perceives themselves to be' (McMillan 2013:169). This transition is best understood from the perspective of a sociocultural framework, where human thought and action link to social and cultural situatedness (Zittoun 2006). Sociocultural theory is based on Vygotsky's (1978) work in learning and development where learning is socially situated and individuals use the knowledge from the community that they have been in and reconstruct the cultural knowledge to enable them to develop. Crafter and Maunder (2012:10) base their work on transition on that of Vygotsky (1978) and discuss three socio-cultural frameworks; 'the notion of consequential transitions (Beach 1999), symbolic transitions and identity rupture (Zittoun 2006) and communities of practice (Lave and Wenger 1998). This sociocultural approach disagrees with Gale and Parker's (2014) two notions of transition and suggests that student transition will focus on the experience of changing rather than a period of change (HEA 2016). Consequential transitions 'involve a developmental



change in the relationship between an individual, and a social activity' (Beach 1999:114) and can allow a student to adapt to new contexts based on prior contexts. Beach (1999:130) defines consequential transition as:

*'the conscious reflective struggle to reconstruct knowledge, skills, and identity in ways that are consequential to the individual becoming someone or something new, and in ways that contribute to the creation and metamorphosis of social activity and, ultimately, society'.*

Consequential transitions have four primary types: lateral, collateral, encompassing and mediational (Beach 1999). Although these transitions have differences, they all involve individuals constructing some knowledge or skill or developing identity or transformation. Lateral transition involves the movement from one development to another and can be seen as a linear process. An example of this relating to this study may be a direct move from diploma level to HE where participation in the latter is a development from the first, with no reverse movement involved. Collateral transition involves two or more historically related movements. In the context of this study, this may be the students who are studying part time, working and commuting. These are characteristics of all of the students on the programme. Encompassing transition can be linked to Lave and Wenger's (1998) notion of community of practice where transition is focussed on the participant becoming a participant in the activity. Community of practice will be discussed further in this chapter, but is particularly relevant to the students in question. The final transition, mediational, has a notion of development and is seen as a continuum (Beach 1999). The mediation is seen as the activity and is the bridge from where the students are and where they are heading

developmentally. The four types of consequential transitions all have some relevance to the students on the BSc (Hons) Dental Studies Programme and are therefore pertinent to the study.

Crafter and Maunders' (2012) second concept of symbolic transitions and identity rupture builds on consequential transitions. Consequential transition can be challenging for students and these challenges may result in 'personal transformation' (HEA 2016:9), in particular from the perspective of an individual's identity. Ecclestone (2007:2) identifies that transition is not simply a 'movement or transfer', but will also include a shift or change in a student's identity and agency. In the second concept of social and contextual transition, Ecclestone (2006) identifies that the process of transition will impact on individual identity. This is similar to Gale and Parker's (2014) transition as development, where during transition, students can form a new identity as discussed previously in this chapter. This change in identity can also lead to changes in emotion and cognition (Crafter and Maunder 2012). It is without doubt that students entering into HE will experience identity change, in particular as they move from professional to student and then have to manage the identity of both during the BSc (Hons) Dental Studies Programme.

### Emotion

The role of emotion in transition is one of key importance. Over recent years research has identified that emotion can influence both learning and motivation (Pekrun and Linnerbrink-Garcia 2014). Emotions can be described as 'commentaries about our concerns' (Archer 2002:16). Transition into HE can necessitate a change in identity and environment and this can initiate many changing emotions for students (Postareff et al 2017). A successful transition into the learning environment is vital to student retention and attainment and the role

that emotion will play is not detached from this process. However, students can experience emotional vulnerability at this time (McMillan 2012). Archer (2002) describes three competing concerns that can generate emotions; physical well-being that can generate emotions of anger, fear and relief, achievement related to performance with emotions of satisfaction, joy and frustration and finally self-worth with emotions presenting as admiration or shame. Students can begin to prioritise these three concerns and this can also influence the formation of their identity in how it is shaped and determined (Archer 2002). Reay (2005) considers the role of emotional capital in transition. Emotional capital relates to the levels of confidence and security that a student may have and can determine the perceived emotional risk that a student may be vulnerable to during the transition to university (McMillan 2014). Emotional capital can have broader implications for first generation students as opposed to students from middle class families (McMillan 2014). First generation students can consider themselves to be different possibly from an economic or cultural capital perspective and therefore balance the emotional feelings of anxiety and guilt against the feelings of excitement of being at university (Reay 2005). It is difficult to comment at this stage whether this would be the case for the students in this study due to them currently working in a professional role and also having studied a professional course, but it is worthy of consideration.

Emotional capital builds on Bourdieu's (1986) concepts of cultural capital, economic capital and social capital, all of which will have an influence on emotion. Cultural capital is the skills that individuals have learned through the social aspect of family life, based on the socio-economic status (Lee and Bowen 2006). The education system assumes that everyone possesses cultural capital, however this can vary dependent upon social class (Sullivan

2002). Bourdieu's concept of habitus also derives from the family setting but unlike cultural capital which is based on knowledge, habitus focusses on values and attitudes. The social class of the students on the programme is aligned with literature which discusses non-traditional students being working class and often first generation students (Holmegaard 2017, Holton 2018). The above makes the work of Bourdieu relevant to this study, particularly in terms of cultural capital and the functions of social class and background that the students have previously engaged with (Murtagh 2012). Reay (2002) also relates cultural capital to the previously discussed imposter syndrome. However, Leese (2010) discusses that HEIs should move away from seeing the problem of cultural capital as that of the student, but instead they should focus on adaptation of their curricula to meet the needs of the increased diverse student population.

Crafter and Maunders' (2012) third consequential transition is based on the socio-cultural theory of Communities of Practice (CoP) (Lave and Wenger 1998). The initial theory of legitimate peripheral participation describes how individuals entered into a group or community as newcomers undertaking low risk tasks to eventually become an established member of the community (Lave and Wenger 1998). CoP is an extension of situated learning (Wenger 1998). The key concept of a CoP is the relationship that develops between the learners, enabling learning to take place within a culture of support, trust and mutual understanding (Swift 2014:29). In the context of this study, a CoP is a group of students who engage in a process of learning together with interaction taking place to allow them to develop (Wenger 2010). It is acknowledged that a community of practice can be positive for students from a learning and development perspective (Andrew and Ferguson 2008). The relationship that

develops can be in the form of a face to face or in an online community. An online community can have a strong focus on how these CoP are formed and the importance of language in this information (Hou 2016). An online community of practice can also support professional development through sharing evidence based practice (Ikioda and Kendall 2016) and can act as a powerful catalyst in enhancing professional learning (Hou 2014). It can be argued that there are many strategies that can also facilitate professional learning. However, studies have concluded that individuals participating in an online CoP engage more with critical reflection (Yang 2009) and share their knowledge and expertise as well as forming friendships and support (Paulus and Sherff 2008).

Tinto (1988) discusses transition and rites of passage with this concept considering that before students can enter into a new stage of education, they need to be able to remove or detach themselves from any previous community to facilitate a smooth transition, similar to that of moving from one identity to another. For transition to be successful there needs to be transformation (Nora 2001). Lave and Wenger (cited in Smith 2003, 2009) discuss that for learning to take place within a community of practice, a deepening process of participation is required. Part of this participation requires individuals to establish ways to become a person within the context. Literature has discussed what defines a community of practice (Wenger 2010, Blackmore 2010) and outlines three characteristics that are essential:

1. The domain in which there is a shared interest.
2. The community - the activity, sharing of information and the relationships that allow the opportunity for people to engage in learning

3. The practice. The practice is described as individuals being practitioners and having shared practice (Wenger et al 2014).

Lave and Wenger (1991) also discuss a CoP as an approach to learning which includes active participation, situation and identity, with Andrew and Ferguson (2008) describing communities as a learning tool. The work of Lave and Wenger (1991) identifies that individuals can enter into a community as novices, in this study entering into HE as new learners, and use the expertise of others to gain legitimate peripheral participation (Park 2015). Gherardi et al (1998:280) discuss that there is also a situated learning curriculum that is specific to that particular community but one that cannot be considered in isolation outside of the 'social relations that shape legitimate peripheral participation in that community'. Hodkinson et al (2007) critique the work of Wenger and CoP as they consider the key focus within this concept is simply the community and this alone does not allow for any consideration of prior communities and learning that may have taken place, or how the organisational culture may have impacted in this. Hodkinson et al (2007) acknowledge that although there are activity theories that support a socio-cultural approach to learning (for example the work of Vygotsky), it must also be considered that the culture in an organisation in respect of individuals' learning, must be examined in more detail. It must also be recognised that 'there is a person behind the student' (Hodkinson et al. 2007:37) which will also be an influencing factor in the organisation and can play a part in how that culture develops or reconstructs.

## **Considerations of Transition**

### **Student Expectations**

When discussing transition, much of the literature has some discussion about student expectations (Brinkworth et al 2008, Leese 2010, McMillan 2013, Tower

et al 2015), with these expectations potentially impacting on satisfaction and success in HE ( Money et al 2017). However, evidence suggests that more research is needed to fully understand this area (Faganel 2010, Headar et al 2013). During transition, HEIs need to be able to address expectations, particularly those from students from non-traditional backgrounds (Samuels et al 2012). It is reported that students' expectations are influenced by the choice of subject they study and this is often aligned to their perceived abilities (Byrne et al 2012). Expectations can also derive from prior experiences of education (Bennett et al 2007), but often there are significant differences between the expectations and actual experiences that are encountered during the first year (Leese 2010, Roberts 2011), with this disjoint potentially resulting in disengagement and dissatisfaction (Rowley et al 2008). Expectations can be seen as 'composite constructions' (Borghini et al 2016:172) and involve an expectation that is deemed as the ideal and a prediction of what is likely to happen. These constructions also consider influences of prior experiences and similar occurrences. Tinto's (1975) approach to academic and social integration argued that student expectations and motivation were bound by individual characteristics. These expectations can be influenced by a changing and diverse student population and include factors such as the age of the student, the gender or the culture (Headar et al 2013, Parahoo et al 2013). Student expectations can also influence identity formation (Tett et al 2016).

Over recent years, the profession has seen increased expectations from students particularly as they now pay more for their studies than ever before. The expectation that there will be a return on their investment in the form of career enhancement and financial benefits is at the forefront (Times Higher Education 2015). This is described as outcome expectations which relates to the benefits

that will come from being in HE (Lee and Park 2011). Factors including widening participation, an increase in the number of non-traditional students and lower attrition rates will require HEIs to have a better understanding of the experiences that the students will both want and expect. Having this understanding could help facilitate the continued development of both educational policy and practice (Kahu and Nelson 2017). Following the introduction of student tuition fees and the subsequent tripling of these fees from £3000 to £9000 (Browne 2010), the government defined students in HEIs as 'customers' (Bunce et al 2017, Dearing 1997). The introduction of increased fees in 2012 resulted in 20% fewer mature students enrolling in HEIs (BBC 2018) as well as a drop in part time students. The introduction of fees has also resulted in students making increased demands in terms of value for money. However, this value can be hard to determine as the service can be seen as experiential and phenomenological (Woodall et al 2014). It is also argued that the quality of education can be compromised if students are seen as consumers as this can result in learners not being academically challenged and prepared for the real world, with HEIs simply appeasing learners to meet their demands (Harrison and Risler 2015). Student success relies on students being able to make connections between what they are learning and their own thinking (Goodman et al 2011) and this could be compromised in a consumer model. In addition to the debate about students as consumers, it is also suggested that direct entry students can have a lack of understanding about what to expect from HE from an academic perspective (Barron and D'annunzio 2009, Borghi et al 2016, McMillan 2013), with the gap between expectations and the reality increasing in size (Brinkworth et al 2009). This is a common theme across the literature. It is suggested that the true extent of what HE will be like in comparison to FE is not known prior to arrival (Barron and Dannunzio 2009).



There is some acknowledgement that it will be different from FE (Leese 2009), but students may find it difficult to predict fully what university life will be like (Smith and Hopkins 2005, Longdon 2006), resulting in a difference between the perception and the reality of HE. Concerns are expressed about balancing the social aspect and part time working with academic requirements. However, students have reported that they expect that the work will be rigorous and challenging and they know that there will be some differences between FE and HE (Crips et al 2009). These expectations may be informed by past experiences (Miller et al 2005) and can have a significant impact on how the learning experience is perceived (Ecclestone et al 2010).

As previously discussed, outcome expectations are concerned with what return a student expects to gain from HE. However, it is suggested that the importance of the outcome expectation is irrelevant if the student does not believe that they can achieve (Bergin and Jimmieson 2017). Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1986) suggests that outcomes expectations can be experienced as social, physical or evaluative, with academic self-efficacy described as the 'belief or confidence that a specific academic goal, particular outcome of academic task can be achieved can be achieved' (Putwain et al 2012:633). These outcomes can present as a social risk for mature students.

In addition to the students having their own expectations, there can be difficulty in knowing what the university will expect of them with inadequate communication from lecturers about requirements (Scanlon et al 2007), leading to a difference between student and staff expectations (Borghini et al 2016). Crafter and Maunders' (2012) application of sociocultural theory, previously discussed, identifies that the transition to university can be translated to a consequential transition (HEA 2016) where students base their expectations of what university

will be like on prior learning experiences that have taken place. HEIs need to be able to understand the expectations in order to try and close the expectation gap (Money et al 2017)

### Motivation

'From an educational perspective, motivation can be associated to learning and academic stimulation' (Budzar et al 2017:74). Student motivation to study can play an essential role in academic and social outcomes in HE (Gegenfurtner 2011). Intrinsic motivation refers to the extent that an individual will engage with something for their own self (Froiland and Olos 2014, Klingi 2006), with extrinsic motivation being influenced by wanting external achievement, for example a grade, career prospects or financial gain. From an academic perspective, students can be motivated both intrinsically and extrinsically; intrinsic from the perspective of wanting to fulfil a sense of personal achievement in HE and extrinsic from a perspective of grades (D'Lima et al 2014). Students who are motivated by intrinsic factors are reported to be autonomous and self-directed in their learning. Self-determination theory builds on the concept of motivation and examines the 'inner needs' of individuals (Sergis et al 2018:369). Self-determination theory is concerned with the effects of autonomous motivation versus controlled motivation, with intrinsic motivation being the 'optimal' autonomy as it is fully self-determined by the individual (Rothes 2014:941). Self-determination theory suggests that there are three dimensions that sit at the heart of a student's needs; competence relating to how well the student feels they are able to engage with learning, autonomy relating to the need to be autonomous within the task, and relatedness, the ability to be able to collaborate with other fellow learners (Ryan and Deci 2000, Sergis et al 2018). Within autonomy, it is also suggested that the appropriate level of support for autonomy provided by

lecturers/supervisors is essential to facilitate students with self-regulation and decision making (Amoura et al 2015). In contrast, students with controlled motivation by extrinsic factors view learning and the tasks associated with this as a means to an end (Bye et al 2007). Evidence suggests that one of the key extrinsic factors that motivates non-traditional students to attend HE is one of improving career prospects (Balloo et al 2015), with intrinsically motivated students, personal development and improving their quality of life as well as that of their families also being important (Babineau and Wai-Ling Packard 2006). However, Bye et al (2007) discuss the intrinsic factors being more important, with factors such as self-improvement and personal goals being paramount in students staying at university and succeeding. The individuals' stage in life is influential in the desire to engage with learning (Swain and Hammond 2011) with potential students entering HE at different stages in their lives and having differing reasons for doing this. These factors may be dependent upon individual circumstances with considerations such as age, gender and caring responsibilities potentially influencing these decisions (Money et al 2017). Mature students who have caring or family responsibilities can find that this responsibility itself can be a motivator as they attempt a break from the responsibilities, are provided with an opportunity to develop (Money et al 2017) and have the opportunity to discover a role outside of being a parent or carer. However, as well as these personal circumstances being a motivational factor, the commitments can also be a reason that students fail to complete study (Scott et al 1998).

The factors that motivate students to apply for university can differ dependent on the discipline or subject area (Taylor and House 2010). However mature students are reported to be more influenced by intrinsic motivation than traditional students

when considering whether to apply to university or not (Bye et al 2007, Kahu et al 2013, Murphy and Roopchand 2003), which could be an important consideration for the students in this study. This higher level of intrinsic motivation can lead to a self-selection process and attract students with a high level of self-efficacy (Bye et al 2007). This is particularly significant for female students (Murphy and Roopchand 2003). Bye et al (2007:153) examined the relationship between intrinsic motivation in students and the positive affect level, with non-traditional students having an 'increased positive affect function of intrinsic motivation'. Positive affect levels are related to higher engagement in activities (Brose 2014) which also relates to believing in what you do having a likely effect on increased effort (Bandura 1977). It is also reported that as age increases, the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to return to study is lessened (Rothes et al 2014). There is also evidence to suggest that mature students participating in education are likely to be employed and therefore extrinsic motivational factors which are career related are also evident (Berker and Horn 2003).

Despite evidence suggesting that mature students are intrinsically motivated, Rothes et al (2014) discuss Carre's (2000) ten motivational factors relating to why adult or mature students enter HE. Within these ten factors, only three are intrinsic, and seven extrinsic. The intrinsic factors include learning for yourself, searching for interpersonal relationships and pleasure from the environment and resources. Extrinsic factors include economic benefits, the prescription of learning by others, avoiding other activities, to gain professional skills, to gain skills outside of professional practice, vocational and gaining skills to improve status. The decision to enter HE can also be influenced by a particular life event that may have happened, for example children leaving home or a divorce, and can be labelled as redundancy (Walters 2000). It can be at this point in time that

the availability of time to invest in oneself can be a priority, and mature students are able to commit to engaging with university long term (Carney-Crompton and Tan 2002). In contrast to this, Gorard et al (1998) discuss motivation to learning as trajectories that can be affected by past experiences including family background and educational experiences. The students on the BSc (Hons) Dental Studies Programme all present from diverse backgrounds in terms of personal circumstances.

### Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy can be seen as one of the most important motivational factors (Bandura 1977, Rothes et al 2014). Bandura (1977, 1986) describes self-efficacy as being at the heart of how individuals function and is related to having the confidence to succeed (Spitzer 2000). Social cognitive theory (Bandura 1997) identifies four sources that can facilitate self-efficacy for students; 'enactive mastery experiences, vicarious (observational) experiences, social persuasions and physiological and psychological states. The enactive mastery experience is based on interpretation of successful authentic activities, contributing to the belief of one's capability to achieve (van Dinther 2011). However, caution must be taken to ensure that mastery experience does not become negative if students have many negative mastery experiences (van Dinther 2011). Vicarious experiences relate to social models and suggests that self-efficacy is developed by observation of others, particularly peers who may be suitable comparators (Darkwah et al 2011). The third concept of social persuasion is one that can develop an individual's belief that they can perform based on communication from others which may build confidence (Anderson 2000). The fourth concept is internal to the individual and is influenced by their mood, emotions and anxieties (Chang et al 2016, van Dinther 2011).

From the perspective of learning, it is believed that in addition to having the ability and knowledge to be able to undertake learning there must also be the belief that a required level of performance can be attained. From an educational perspective, self-efficacy can be the belief in being able to complete academic requirements (Zimmerman 2000). Wilson and Deaney (2010) suggest that transition to HE for non-traditional students requires a strong reliance on self-efficacy to facilitate a smooth transition. However, in respect of non-traditional students, the evidence does not suggest that self-efficacy is any more prominent than it is in students who present from traditional backgrounds (Spencer 1999).

### Summary

In this chapter, I have identified that literature does not describe transition in any one particular way and there are different theories and approaches reported (Beach 1999, Ecclestone et al 2010, Gale and Parker 2014). There is a lack of consensus as to what transition is; a stage in life or part of a sociocultural approach. There is also some conflicting discussion about when transition occurs and whether it is a single occurrence or a period of time, with limited literature pertaining to transition beginning before a student enters to HE. What has become clear is that however transition is defined, there are numerous factors that can influence it. Motivation is one factor that can influence the transition to HE. However, there are differing views about whether it is intrinsic or extrinsic motivational factors that are perceived as the most important for mature students (Berker and Horn 2003, Rothes et al 2014). Another influencing factor is student expectations, with these often differing from the reality of what happens. There are also considerations that are a result of transition into HE, including a change in identity and entering into a new community of practice. In Chapter 3, I will

outline the methodological approach that was adopted for this study. This will be based on the discussion to date.

## **CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY**

### **Introduction**

Chapter 2 examined the literature relevant to the research aims and research questions. This chapter will examine and present a detailed discussion of the methodological approach and design that was undertaken for this study. In doing this, the 'broader questions of approach' will be considered (Holiday 2007:53). An introduction to the background of the research will include the research questions that were outlined in Chapter 1. This will be followed by an examination of my own position within the study and the use of a phenomenological approach will be rationalised and justified. A case study design will be discussed, including the different types of cases, the justification for the particular selection used and the limitations. Both case study and phenomenology will be discussed with reference to theoretical underpinning, as well as within the context of the research undertaken. Guba and Lincoln (1998:113) discuss how a research paradigm is intrinsically associated with the concepts of ontology, epistemology and methodology and provides a framework that will guide the research process. However, there is not one ideal theoretical framework (Braun and Clarke 2006). The framework adopted for this study is a qualitative single case study using phenomenology.

### **Background to the Study**

The aim of the research study was to investigate the academic and social experiences of diploma students during the transition into HE when they enter a BSC (Hons) Dental Studies Programme. Evidence suggests that the number of non-traditional students entering into higher education are now a large part of the student body within universities (Taylor and House 2010). This particular group of students include a significant proportion (usually up to 90%) of mature students



(Christie 2009). As previously discussed, non-traditional students are defined as students who study part time (this could be to accommodate a career or family), students with disabilities, lower socio-economic groups, commuters, mature students and students from an ethnic minority background (Roberts 2011). From my experience as course leader on the BSc (Hons) Dental Studies programme and from working with the students as they began the course, it was identified that the students were not necessarily prepared for study at HE level 6. DHDTs who qualified post 1996, did so with either a Diploma in Dental Hygiene or a combined Diploma in Dental Hygiene and Dental Therapy having met the learning outcomes in 'Preparing for Practice: Dental Team Learning Outcomes for Registration' (GDC 2015). Individuals who qualified before 1996 received a certificate of competency which was then converted to a diploma for registration with the General Dental Council (GDC). Both qualifications have a focus of demonstrating competency of clinical technical skills alongside evidence of underpinning knowledge and theory. Although they both allow registration with the (GDC), from experience of working within the dental profession and from anecdotal evidence, it was suggested that students have had very little exposure and engagement with academic writing, researching literature and reflective practice, skills that would normally begin to be developed at the outset of the undergraduate years. The purpose of this research was to allow the course team to have a clear understanding of the transitional experiences to be able to support the students and prepare them for academic and social integration into HE.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Miles and Huberman (1984:33) describe a conceptual framework as a 'current version of the researcher's map of territory being investigated; the key facts, variables or constructs and the presumed relationship between them'. Based on

this, the starting point of my own framework was taken from the aim of the research: an investigation into the academic and social experiences of diploma students (DHDTs) during the transition to HE as they enter a BSc (Hons) Dental Studies Programme. As previously mentioned this aim had derived from the research problem identified and at the initial stage was a 'tentative theory' (Maxwell 2005:39), a theory that helped to plan the design of the research. This theory continued to develop during the research process. The research problem was a key aspect of developing the conceptual framework despite it sometimes being considered as a separate part of the design or proposal (Maxwell 2005). A conceptual framework can also be referred to in the literature as a 'theoretical framework' or an 'idea context' but Maxwell (2005:41) points out that 'it is something that is constructed, not simply found'. The concepts within the framework provided elements of existing knowledge, but this knowledge developed throughout the study. Maxwell (2005) continues to describe the conceptual framework as one of the five essential components that are required for qualitative research design which also includes goals, research questions, methods and validity. Ravitch and Riggan (2017) also describe a conceptual framework as a link between all of the different aspects of the research project.

The research questions started to develop based on some of the concepts in the framework. The development of these were an iterative process, resulting in the final research questions:

What were the expectations of the students entering onto the BSc (Hons) Dental Studies and Higher Education?

How do students experience the transition from diploma to degree level study?

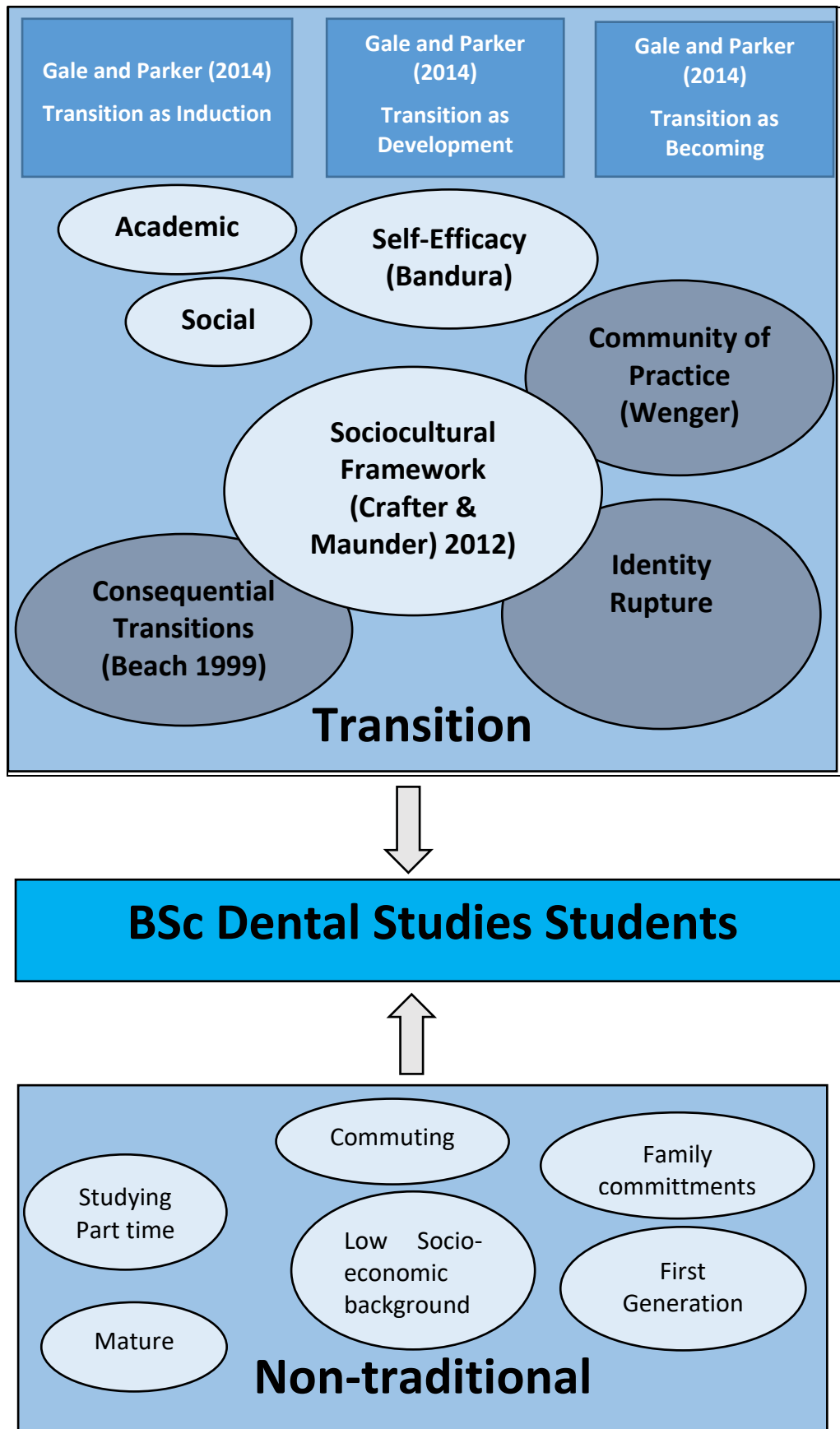


Figure 3.1 Conceptual Framework

## Positioning the Research

Berger (2015) discusses the notion of being objective with three types of positionality; the research being affected by whether the researcher is part of the researched and shares the participants' experience, when the researcher moves from outsider to insider and the researcher having no position or experience of the area being studied. The first two of these positions are ones that were pertinent in this research. Cohen et al (2000) concurs with Berger's (2015) thoughts on positionality, discussing that social reality is determined by the researcher themselves based on their own ideological position. This subjectivity can guide the research project and can include how the methodologies are selected as well as how the data is analysed and interpreted. However self-awareness of this position is integral throughout the research process (Patnaik 2013) to avoid any potential bias.

### Insider/Outsider

The discussion whether a researcher is an insider or outsider is considered to be one of an epistemological consideration due to the relationship between the researcher and the participants. This position can potentially influence the knowledge that is created (Hayfield and Huxley 2015). A researcher who is an insider is described as one who belongs to the same group as the participants in the study (Gair 2012) and is a member of the population that is being studied (Kanuha 2000). This is a position that I considered myself to be in. The rationale for this was that I was involved with the students from the perspective of being the course leader on the programme and I also had my own prior experiences of having been a non-traditional student. This latter fact allowed me to have a shared experience and identity with the participants. My experience of entering into HE as a non-traditional student and thinking about my own life trajectories,

allowed me to consider my academic pathway. Although I could not be sure that my research area initially derived consciously from the experience of my similar educational pathway, I could relate to transition in relation to my own experience of being a non-traditional student. This may have potentially given me insight into some of the challenges and difficulties this could bring. In view of this, I felt that I would be situated in a position of personal experience when working in the field. However, when being in situ, it is also important to be aware of keeping this in perspective. I was consciously aware that I needed to develop the skill of bracketing (Ahern 1999) and acknowledge my own experiences and preconceptions when listening to the participants' experiences. However, Berger (2015:3) discusses 'interpretation through the eyes and cultural standards of the researcher' suggesting that full objectivity can never be fully achieved but it can be monitored through reflexivity. It is also suggested that holding the position of being an outsider in the research may hold some advantages. It is essential that reflexivity is clearly situated within the design stage of a research project as well as being a consideration at other points throughout, including data collection, data analysis and findings (Darawsheh 2014). Unlike quantitative methodologies which can often make straightforward claims to objectivity (Buckner 2005), this can be more difficult with a qualitative approach. Reflexivity can be viewed from two aspects; epistemological and personal (Willig and Stainton-Rogers 2008). Epistemological is the view of the world that individuals have and the assumptions that can be made from this, with personal linking to our own personal beliefs. Reflexivity is often discussed with reference to the researcher ensuring objectivity throughout the research study at the same time as gaining an enhanced comprehension of the research process (Bettany and Woodruffe-Burton 2009). With a qualitative methodology, reflexivity refers to the researcher being aware

throughout the process of their own experiences and how these may contribute to, influence or shape the research findings (Dowling 2006, Patnaik 2013). From my own perspective, my personal beliefs may be influenced by an epistemological view as these were influenced by previous experiences. From an epistemological perspective, this type of reflexivity allowed me to consider the assumptions that I may have in relation to the world, on experience and how this impacted on the knowledge that I created.

It has been argued (Milligan 2016:239) that a clear line cannot be used to separate an 'insider' or 'outsider' as the researcher may be 'in-between' at different stages in the research process. The role adopted may be dependent on varying factors including socio-cultural norms or the individuals that you are interacting with at a particular time. However, I considered that some of the socio-cultural factors that the participants were presenting with in relation to being a non-traditional student and transition shared similarities to my experiences, therefore I found it difficult to consider myself as an outsider.

### Power

When considering these potential influences, it led me to firstly think about the power relationship between myself and the participants, and one I needed to be clear about in respect of my identity and positionality within the research (Day 2012). Identity and positionality can to some degree be synonymous but that may not always be the case and it must be acknowledged that they can also be examined independently.

### Practitioner and Researcher

Undertaking research with a dual role of researcher and practitioner has over recent years developed considerably (Coupal 2005). My own role as a researcher

and a practitioner was a consideration within the research process. Research taking place within a researcher's own setting and the role of a practitioner moving into a dual role can be a potential concern (Marshall and Rossman 2016) and the nature of moving from one culture to another can be challenging (Kennedy-Lewis 2012). Participants can also find it difficult to see a practitioner in a different role due to the shared position (Hayfield and Huxley 2015). In contrast it can be advantageous to hold the dual role, as the subjective experiences of these interactions can improve the quality of the data collected, thus the strength of the study (Toma 2000). I acknowledged at the outset of the study that I could not confidently or explicitly put myself into a single role of researcher. I would need to have the professional ability to wear a researcher hat when undertaking interviews with the participants (who were also students), at the same time as undertaking a practitioner role. My role as practitioner involved me working with the participants but as students on the BSc (Hons) Dental Studies programme. This would incorporate giving feedback, marking work and being an academic advisor. I reflected that this potentially could be problematic and it would require more than just writing a few words on an ethics form to justify the reality of being in a dual role and how this could influence the research. The potential difficulty of the dual role is complex and often the difficulties of transformation from practitioner to researcher are underestimated. The work of an educational researcher demands the development and consolidation of an appropriate identity, personal capabilities and a world view that enables engagement in research that is rigorous, credible and revelatory' (Rhodes 2013:4, Scott and Morrison 2010). For doctoral students like myself, there is also the added complexity of imposter syndrome described by Coryell et al (2013) as becoming a real researcher. Eradicating imposter syndrome

necessitates developing a researcher identity by continuously questioning thought processes (Mittapalli and Samaras 2008).

## **Research Design**

Hartley (2004:326) defines a research design as ‘the argument for the logical steps which will be taken to link the research question(s) and issues to data collection, analysis and interpretation in a coherent way’. Yin (2003a:21) identifies five key components of research design that are important for case studies; the research questions, the study propositions, the units of analysis, linking the data to propositions and interpreting the study’s findings. These two slightly differing components were used as a framework for the design and will be discussed both in this chapter and subsequent ones.

## **A Qualitative Enquiry**

The research focussed on examining the academic and social experiences of DHDTs entering into HE, therefore it was felt appropriate to adopt a qualitative methodology. The justification for this was that to use an approach which would allow for the examination of social phenomena, a key focus of this being the study of experience (Smith et al 2009). The study was undertaken in the ‘natural world’ (Marshall and Rossman 2016:2) and also drew on multiple methods with an interpretive approach resulting in ‘interconnected interpretive practices’ (Denzin and Lincoln 2005:4). The study had a focus of how and what rather than how many (Silverman 2013). I also acknowledged early in the process that the scope of practice of the research (as in many qualitative studies) may be secondary to the detail of the data. This detail would involve understandings and interactions in the participants’ own context. The research questions focussed on expectations and experiences of the students and therefore it would have been



difficult to explore these factors thorough a quantitative methodology as this would not have allowed for ‘an emerging qualitative approach to enquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting or an inductive analysis with emerging themes’ (Creswell 2007:33). However, a quantitative research methodology can also be important in measuring educational phenomena but a qualitative approach will capture context (Ponce and Pagan-Maldonado 2015). Creswell (2007:37) discusses a qualitative approach as one that can ‘begin with assumptions, a world view, the possible use of a theoretical lens’. A quantitative approach would have compromised the ability to interpret the phenomenon, the phenomenon being the transitional experiences. Agee (2009) also highlights the importance of the qualitative enquiry being reflective; a key strength of qualitative methodology. A qualitative approach is described ‘as a way to explore human behaviour (Lichtman 2014:4), with Denzin and Lincoln (2011:3) expanding on this to state that it is:

*‘A situated activity that **locates the observer in the world**. Qualitative research consists of a set of **interpretive, material practices** that make the world visible. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their **natural settings**, attempting to **make sense or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them**’*

When examining this definition, the key words highlighted resonated with the approach that I was taking in the study.

There has been a long history of paradigm wars within research methodology. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there was much debate about the credibility of qualitative research and the methodologies adopted within the field in comparison to the positivist and scientific thought of a quantitative approach. During the early part of this century, the Chicago School of Sociology was focussed on ‘qualitative

methodologies being more suitable for studying urban and social phenomena' (Lutters and Ackerman 1996:3). However, during the period post World War II, quantitative methods of research still appeared to take prominence in research fields. However, despite the discussion about the credibility of a qualitative paradigm, some high profile qualitative case studies were starting to emerge. Whyte's (1943) *Street Corner Society* was a descriptive case study about youths from lower income backgrounds and their career opportunities (Yin 2009), bringing qualitative studies into the field.

Critical theorists have disputed that there can only be the existence of a singular, objective reality. They propose that knowledge is construction of race, gender, class, culture, economics, and values and these can determine how participants view the social world (Hewitt 2007). As discussed, the debate of quantitative versus qualitative methodologies is not a new phenomenon but more recent times have seen the evolution of mixed methods research (Fraser 2014), with Patel (2011:43) arguing that the debates and discussion about the varying merits of each approach have been 'superseded by the evolution of a creative interdisciplinary combination of both quantitative and qualitative designs'. There is evidence of the use of the combination of designs in many studies and the advantages clearly expressed (Moeller et al 2016). Marshall and Rossman (2016:xvii) discuss qualitative research methodologies as having matured and being situated in a 'warmer climate'. They also go on to say that literature is spending less time defending the design and more time 'asserting the appropriateness of the inquiry', strengthening the value of this approach to the contribution of knowledge.

## Phenomenology

A phenomenological approach is a postmodern qualitative perspective which sits within the anti-positivism or constructivist paradigm, where reality and social science are socially constructed through interpretation. This reality can be multi layered and full of complexities (Cohen et al. 2000), with phenomenology being described by Smith et al (2009:11) as a 'philosophical approach to the study of experience'. This is aligned with the aim of this research and the rationale for a phenomenological approach. Also within this perspective, anti-positivists believe that reality cannot be a single interpretation of a phenomenon but believe that reality is a single phenomenon with many possible interpretations. The aim, to investigate the academic and social experiences of diploma students entering into HE, had a key objective of exploring the lived experiences of the students as well as the expectations that they had of the transition when entering into HE. The latter also required the students to reflect on their experiences. In this study, the phenomenon being examined was that of 'student transition'.

A phenomenological approach to research derived from strands of western philosophy (Marshall and Rossman 2016) with Smith et al (2009) describing phenomenology as an approach that is embedded within a particular philosophy. It is important to identify that when examining experience, a phenomenological approach looks to establish the perception of the meaning of an event or experience rather than looking at the event as it actually existed. The work by Edmund Husserl (2014), a 20<sup>th</sup> century philosopher supported this referring to individuals accurately knowing their own experience. Husserl's approach also identified that within phenomenology it is important that the researcher is able to identify their own pre-conceived notions and prejudices about the phenomenon

being studied and is able to put them to one side. Husserl (Smith et al 2009) as discussed above, describes this as bracketing and having the ability to put to one side the taken for granted world. However, Husserl also discusses the importance of not making that world disappear but rather through a process of reduction try to move away from the distractions of our own assumptions.

In phenomenology it is often thought that little consideration is given to the research design with only the conclusions of the study being the usual focus (Alsop and Tompsett 2006). Padilla-Díaz (2015:103) describes three types of phenomenology:

*‘Descriptive or hermeneutical phenomenology – It refers to the study of personal experience and requires a description or interpretation of the meanings of phenomena experienced by participants in an investigation.*

*Eidetic (essence) or transcendental phenomenology – It analyzes the essences perceived by consciousness with regard to individual experiences.*

*‘Egological’, genetic or constitutional phenomenology – It refers to the analysis of the self as a conscious entity. This type of phenomenology appeals to universal consciousness’.*

The type of phenomenology that was adopted in this study was that of the descriptive nature in line with the aim of the research, which was to investigate the academic and social experiences of DHDTs during the transition to HE. This description would have been personal to each individual and would need some interpretation. Giorgi (1995:69) outlined that there are two descriptive levels of a phenomenological approach: the first one being where the original data is collected through ‘naive’ descriptions taken from dialogue with the participants

using open ended questions (semi structured interviews in this case) and the second where the researcher describes the experiences (data analysis) using reflective analysis and interpretation of the participants' account or story they have told. Padilla-Diaz (2015) describes two types of interpretation at the analysis stage, which includes textual analysis (what is expressed by the participants in the research) and structural analysis (interpretation by the researcher). Both interpretation of textual analysis and structural analysis was undertaken at the analysis stage of this study when the data from the synthesised grids identified key concepts. This will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

### **Case Study**

'Using case study in educational research can be beneficial for both policy design and gaining experience through exposure to a particular phenomenon' (Timmons and Cairns 2012:2). In this research, a case study was the selected methodology and was informed by the phenomena. The rationale for case study selection will be discussed in this section. Yin (2009) identifies that there are some situations where the researcher should be able to identify a particular methodology which has a distinct advantage for the particular study being investigated. As with any research, the methodology needs to be situated within the context of the research as well as within the objectives of the study (Pearson et al 2015). Within an adopted case study there are usually three characteristics that are apparent; a 'how' or 'why' question being asked, a contemporary set of events and little or no control from the investigator' (Yin 2009:13).

This study had two research questions:

1. What are the expectations of the students entering onto the BSc (Hons) Dental Studies and HE?

## 2. How do students experience the transition from diploma to degree level study?

Although one of the questions did not fit within the usual characteristics of how or why questions used in case study, one of the questions did and the other characteristics were also apparent. Case study research is described by Yin (2009:1) as a linear but iterative process indicating that the different stages of the research, for example, design, data collection, data analysis may not simply follow each other with one ending as the other begins.

### History of Case Study

Case study as a naturalistic research design or methodology is not a new concept. It can be traced back to 1910 when the German philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey claimed that 'objective and scientific studies did not do the best job to acquaint man with himself' (Cited in Stake 1978:5). Case study methodology is often only thought about in the context of a qualitative methodological approach (Pearson et al 2015, Creswell 2007), but it must be acknowledged that its existence also can be adopted in quantitative studies either as a stand-alone or part of a mixed methodological approach. However, the existence of case study in quantitative research has been questioned (MacDonald and Walker 2006:2) who opposed this thought and reported that 'case study methodology lies outside the discourse of quantitative experimentalism'. However, Yin (2003) discussed that case study characteristics are not defined by the contrast of the two types of research but by the data collection attributes themselves.

### Adoption of Case Study in Educational Research

It was not until the 1960s and 1970s that case study was adopted into educational research. At this stage, it was still seen as a method that was an element of more

traditional research designs rather than it being a method in its own right (Simons 1996). This started to change towards the end of the 1970s and early 1980s with literature justifying its use, particularly in educational research as a research approach that was legitimate (Simons 1996). Despite this justification, there was still apparent criticism of case study with Yin (2009:6) discussing 'that there was a common misconception' that different methods (case study, survey, experiment) were positioned within a hierarchical structure, with case study 'only being appropriate for the exploratory stage of research' and not being appropriate for description or explanation. Yin (2009) goes on to dispute this misconception, providing the example of the research by Allison (1971), a single case study which used an explanatory approach, evidencing that case study could be used for more than one type of study.

Case study itself due to its application of methods, can be closely linked to ethnography. Ethnography like case study, also looks to examine the nature of a particular phenomenon and does not intend to try to test a hypothesis but rather has a focus on a concept of deep exploration and investigation.

### Types of Case Studies

The literature describes many different approaches to types of case studies (Stenhouse 1985). The work of Stake (1995), Stenhouse (2009) and Yin (2009) will be discussed below.

Yin (2009) refers to three types of case study; exploratory, descriptive and explanatory, and explains that rather than a hierarchical decision, the selection of study may be based on the purpose or objective. Stake (1995) also discusses three alternative typologies which are based on the selection of the case; intrinsic, instrumental and collective.

Yin (2009) hierarchical	Stake (1995) Selection of the case
<b>Exploratory</b> Used often to pilot a study	<b>Intrinsic</b> The case is not necessarily chosen but given
<b>Descriptive</b> Used to provide a thorough contextualised description of the phenomenon	<b>Instrumental</b> The case is selected for its ability to contribute to a general understanding of a phenomenon
<b>Explanatory</b> Used to shed light on causal factors	<b>Collective</b> Used as an extension to the instrumental case study, where two or more representative cases are selected

**Figure 3.2** Approaches to Case Study (Pearson et al 2015:2)

It is suggested that when the typologies are used together, they are beneficial, allowing the researcher to characterise the study and identify if there is any applicability to other settings (Pearson et al 2015). Within this study, both a descriptive and instrumental typology were identified with a contextualised description of the transition of the students being described as well as the research contributing to the wider literature around the phenomenon. In addition to this, as this case was a focus of the research question and not necessarily a selected case, it was also intrinsic (Stake 1994). Stenhouse (1985) identified four different styles of case study; ethnographic, evaluative, action research studies and educational. Evaluative case study also aligned well with this research being described as single or multiple in depth studies which aim to provide decision makers with information that will allow them to judge the merit of something (Stenhouse 1985). In this case, it was anticipated that the information would support continued development of the programme to support transition.

### Selection of Case Study

There can be two reasons why case studies may be selected. The first is based on an intrinsic rationale where the case in question is of interest to the researcher.



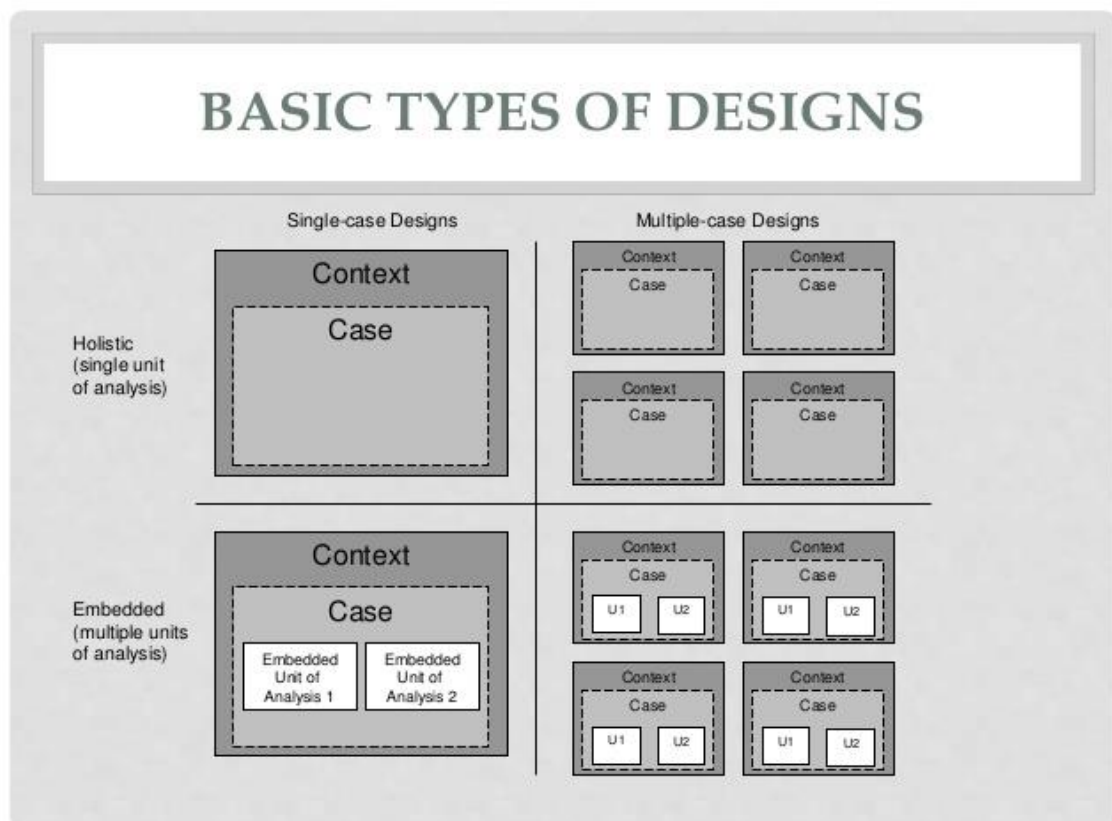
The second is based on it being analytically or purposefully selected where a case may be 'information rich or unique' (Johansson 2003:8). If a case is purposefully selected, it is likely that the findings may be generalised. As in many areas of qualitative research, there is not always one approach that aligns with the research. Within this study, the selection had an element of being both intrinsic and analytical due to my own interest in student transition but also from the purposeful perspective of wanting to explore rich data and also examine a unique area.

The literature attempts to define the characteristics of case study (Holliday 2016, Silverman 2013, Yin 2009). Yin (2009) describes case study examining a real life contemporary phenomenon, whilst Holliday (2016:13) defines it as a 'specific bounded system, for example a person or an institution'. Bassey (1999) suggests that with empirical research there are two types of outcomes: predictions and interpretations. Within the interpretive outcome, case study is a typical methodology to use. Therefore, the rationale for using a case study was based on wanting to explore the social phenomenon and in depth descriptions of student experiences.

As case study is a naturalistic enquiry, it is one where the researcher and the object of enquiry are intertwined (Lincoln and Guba 1985). The researcher is looking to answer questions and the success of this relies on the researcher being able to embed themselves in the situation and get to know in depth the activity and the experience of the case (Stake 2006). This was apparent throughout this case study as the participants were also students that I previously had, or who I was currently working with in their educational study. In addition to this, and as earlier discussed, my own previous experiences of being a non-traditional student allowed me to be able to relate to the participants and their experiences of

transition. However, that can also lead researchers into being too close to the subject, leading to difficulties in keeping the interpretation of the data trustworthy (Bassey 1999).

Yin (2009:46) discusses four types of research design for case study; single case holistic design, single case embedded design, multiple case holistic design and multiple case embedded design (Figure 3.3), below. Within all of the four designs there is an emphasis on the case and the context within which the case sits. The diagram illustrates with the dotted lines that these two factors are likely not that distinguishable from one another.



**Figure 3.3** Case Study Designs (Yin 2009:46)

The design adopted for this study was single case embedded design. This was due to the case being situated in context and having several units of analysis. Ragin (1992b:217) cited in Sandelowski (2011) discusses that a case is a 'spatially and temporally defined entity created by researchers via a process

referred to as 'casing'. This process of casing allows for the researcher to create and develop discrete objects for the case. In this particular study, the object is transition of a group of subjects, the particular group being students who enter onto the BSc (Hons) Dental Studies programme and present as non-traditional (Taylor and House 2010). Yin (2009) discusses the importance of identifying the units of activity as this will support the quality of the research design and the justification for a single case. Yin (2009) also says that if as a researcher you had the choice between multiple cases and a single case, the former would be the preferred option as single case studies can be 'vulnerable' (Yin 2009:60). Although the students could have been used as individual cases, resulting in multiple case studies, I chose not to do this and alternatively looking at the students on the programme as a whole. As the focus of the research was to examine the transitional experiences of the BSc (Hons) Dental Studies students, the case is specific to them and does not form part of any other research. A single case study was therefore justified.

There are some differences between a single case and a multiple case study, one of them being that a multiple case study can be used to understand the differences and the similarities between the cases (Baxter and Jack, 2008; Stake, 1995). Although this case study had several units of analysis these were examined for individual themes and not necessarily to draw comparisons between them. When researchers are using single case studies, five potential rationales are considered for its appropriate selection (Yin 2009). These are 'representation of the critical case, an extreme or particular unique case, a representative case or typical case, a revelatory case or a longitude case' (Yin 2009:47). This research had elements of both the particular case and in contrast the representative case. Student transition has been well documented in

research (Hussey and Smith 2010, Pike and Harrison 2011, Morgan 2013), thus this particular case could therefore be representative or typical. However, in contrast, the students on the BSc (Hons) Dental Studies Programme are unique as the particular course is the only one in the UK.

### *Composition of the Case*

There are four compositional formats of case study; single case study, multiple case study, option for either a single or multiple case study and option for multiple case study (Yin 2018). Based on previous discussion, the format adopted was be single case which 'showcased and analysed the case' (Yin 2018:226).

### *Quality of the Research Design*

Yin (2003a) identified a concern with the design of case studies can be the conditions that relate to design quality. Using a single case study can also be criticised in respect of the amount of rigour that can be achieved. 'Four conditions or tests' can be used to strengthen the use of a single case; 'construct validity, internal validity, external validity and reliability' (Yin 2003a:19) The four tests have been commonly used in case study methodology to understand the quality of the design. Figure 3.4 below is a summary of the four tests, including the tactic that may be used, and at what stage in the research process the condition refers to.

Test	Case Study Tactic	Where this will be examined in the research
Construct Validity	use multiple sources of evidence  establish chain of evidence  participants to review draft case study report	data collection  data collection  composition
Internal Validity	do pattern matching do explanation building address rival explanations use logic models	All at data analysis stage
External Validity	use theory in single case studies use replication logic in multiple case studies	All at research design stage
Reliability	use case study protocol develop case study database	All at data collection stage

**Figure 3.4** Case Study Tactics Adapted from Yin (2009:41)

### Construct Validity

The first test of construct validity refers to the researcher being able to identify the appropriate ‘operational measures for the concepts being studied’ (Yin 2018:42). Within case study research, there is criticism that this is problematic, leading to the researcher making subjective assumptions or judgements (Flyvbjerg 2006). To strengthen construct validity, it is recommended that the researcher adopts the tactics of using multiple sources of evidence at the data collection stage and establishes chain of evidence (Yin 2018). This will be discussed further in Chapter 4.

### Internal Validity

Internal validity in a case study methodology can be problematic in relation to making inferences that are often based on collecting evidence through interviews

and documents (Yin 2018). Consideration must be given to the accuracy of the inferences and also ensuring that any rival explanations are discussed. Internal validity will be discussed further in Chapter 5 in relation to the analytical tactics that can be adopted to support this.

### External Validity

External validity is concerned with knowing to what extent the findings from a study are generalisable (Yin 2009). Case study research relies on analytical generalisations as opposed to statistical generalisations (Welsh and Lyons 2001). Analytical generalisations attempt to generalise the results from the analysis to some wider or broader theory. External validity can also be supported by the sampling strategy adopted. The sampling strategy will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4, however the sample was selected from current students who were enrolled onto the programme.

### Generalisation

One of the tests in the research design of a case study is the extent to which the study can be generalised; the findings being able to be applied to other areas. Generalisation can be a disadvantage when using a case study approach as it may offer a poor basis for being able to generalise in the wider context (Yin 2009). A case study can also have a perceived inability to generalise the findings to any broader level other than that of the intended research (Yin 2012). This critique of generalisation is pertinent to both multiple and single case studies, however, single case studies in particular have been criticised as often they do not allow for conclusions that can be generalised (Tellis 1997, Yin 2009). This thought is replicated by Stake (1995:85) who states that 'a single case study is not a strong base for generalising to a population of cases'. It is argued that the relative size

of the sample used at the data collection stage does not necessarily mean that a single or multiple case will be generalisable (Hamel et al 1993, Yin 2009). Johansson (2003) discusses that case studies are often selected due to the intrinsic interest of the researcher and 'they are the examination of an instance or action (MacDonald and Walker 2006:2). Researchers who have an intrinsic interest may have no interest in producing data that can be generalised (Johansson 2003). However, it has also been argued that within some case studies generalisation from the findings can be made (Ruddin 2006) with Yin (2018) discussing that case studies may be generalised to theoretical propositions but not to any particular population. The generalisations in this case study considered the wider theory that had been identified within the conceptual framework. This included student transition with a particular focus on non-traditional students. However, it must be acknowledged that this was limited due to the previously mentioned specific nature of the programme and there being no specific previous studies on the transition of DHDTs. In addition to this, the rationale for this study derived from my experience of working with the students on the BSc programme and establishing that they may not have been prepared for study at degree level, therefore I could not discount that I had a personal interest in exploring this area of research as a single case.

Stake and Trumbull (1982) discuss two different type of generalisation that is pertinent to research; explicated (propositional) generalisations and naturalistic generalisation. The former is based on generalisations being made from information and knowledge provided by others. As this case study was singular and unique in respect of the students being the first to embark on this type of educational programme, there was no available research to date within the dental profession. However, the literature review identified that there is evidence relating

to student transition from foundation degree to degree or alternatives in other countries, and therefore any generalisations in this study could be referred to as explicated generalisations. The alternative thought of naturalistic generalisation is where researchers can draw conclusions from personal engagement in life or by vicarious experiences (Stake and Trumbull 1982). This may be from the study itself, as in this case. Johansson (2003) discusses an alternative of analytical generalisations which can be separated into three distinct categories; inductive, deductive and abductive. Despite these categories being distinct, generalisations can be made by using one or a combination of these categories. A generalisation from a deductive category is one that will normally test a hypothesis and deduct a theory from the findings. Johansson (2003:9) defines abduction as 'the process of facing an unexpected fact, applying some rule (known already or created for the occasion), and as a result, positing a case that may be'. The third category and the one that was pertinent to this study, was inductive. Based on inductive theory generation, the generalisations derive from the data set and a theory.

### Reliability

Reliability is concerned with 'minimising the bias in results' (Yin 2018:46) and the extent to which the 'findings from the case study could be replicated' (Lichtman 2014:385). Using a protocol for the case study and developing a case study database during data collection, can support reliability as there will be evidence that there was a procedure followed within the study (Yin 2018) This will be discussed further in Chapter 4.

### Additional Considerations of Single Case Study

As well as generalisation, another disadvantage of single case study is it can often be viewed as sitting in isolation of anything else that is going on (Stake



2006). Consideration needs to be given at the early stage of the research process to the worthiness of the research that is being proposed as the identification of the case itself can prove limiting (Creswell 2013). The 'selected empirical units of study' (Sandelowski 2011:154) can be specific and individual to the researcher, thus making it limited. It is acknowledged that the case was based on a research issue identified in a single setting and therefore could be viewed as isolated. Another concern of case study can be guilty knowledge, although it has to be acknowledged that this can also be apparent with other qualitative methodologies. Guilty knowledge relates to the researcher acquiring knowledge during the research process that could potentially cause harm (Williams 2009) to a person, group or organisation. Although an advantage of adopting a case study methodology is that the researcher can gain in depth, rich data about the phenomena, the researcher must be cautious as to how the data is used to avoid any harm. An example of this could be that a student could feel ashamed if they were to disclose that they found the academic level challenging. However, it was not considered that this would be an issue for this study, however it was thought about during the study.

## Summary

This chapter has outlined the methodological approach that was selected and adopted for the study. Based on this approach, Chapter 4 will discuss the methods that were adopted. These methods were aligned to this methodological framework.

## **CHAPTER 4 METHODS AND DATA COLLECTION**

### **Introduction**

As discussed in Chapter 3, there is no one single theoretical framework when undertaking qualitative research. There is also no single method that is a preferred one. What needs to be considered is that the theoretical framework, the methodology and the methods selected, allow the researcher to investigate the area of study. The researcher must also ensure that they acknowledge why these approaches were chosen as the most appropriate (Braun and Clarke 2006). This chapter will build on the previous methodological approach and will focus on the methods adopted in the study. Marshall and Rossman (2016:141) discuss that researchers taking a qualitative approach usually 'rely on four primary methods of gathering information'; directly observing, being a participant in the setting, in depth interviews and analysing documents and material culture. Interviews and documentary evidence were used in this case study which had a phenomenological approach.

### **Context of the Study**

The research was undertaken in the School of Dentistry, UCLan. The participants were all students currently studying the final year on the BSc (Hons) Dental Studies for Dental Care Professionals Programme and were all DHDTs working in clinical practice. However, the professional background of the students was diverse, with some working in NHS or private practice, full time or part time, commuting or living more locally to the university and some had families with dependants at home. The time since qualification varied resulting in some students being more recently engaged with education than others, both academically and socially. The setting for the research was my own place of work

in the School of Dentistry, therefore access to the data was straightforward. However, this can also be problematic as the researcher can have expectations based on 'the familiarity of the setting' and the participants (Marshall and Rossman 2016:106). Often when the researcher is familiar with the research setting it is a result of having a dual role with the participants, with the researcher attempting to be both educator and investigator (Loftin et al 2011), as in this case. It is not uncommon for professional doctorate students to be researchers in the setting that they also work within, with their own life trajectories possibly influencing the study (Scott and Morrison 2010). In this study my role was both researcher (as a doctoral student) and practitioner. The latter involved me teaching and assessing the students who would be participants in the study, as well as supporting them pastorally. The complexities and often underestimated difficulties of transformation from practitioner to researcher has been discussed in the literature (Hay-Smith et al 2006, Rayner et al 2015, Rhodes 2013) with reference to the researcher needing to be able to develop an identity which supports engagement in research that can be validated as credible and rigorous. The dual role can mean that there are advantages of the researcher having transferability of knowledge that they can bring to the setting. However, the researcher also needs to ensure that they are aware of their privileged position and that they balance this with the ethical responsibility they have for both student and participant. Working within a dual-role may mean moving from one role to another (here from practitioner to researcher) adopting a change in professional identity (Rhodes 2013). Professional identity forms part of an individual's overall identity and is developed through place in society, interactions, context and reflection. There can be three stages in the formation of a researcher's professional identity; acculturation, assimilation and actualisation (Rhodes 2013).

Acculturation examines becoming integrated within the culture of the environment's research processes, in this case the university. As a practitioner in the same setting, I was already aware of this. Both the assimilation and actualisation stages build on the former and result in demonstrating evidence of a mind-set change from practitioner to researcher. These three stages are summarised by Rayner et al (2015:159) as 'get in, get on and get out'. On reflection, it was at the data collection stage when I considered that my mind-set changed from practitioner to researcher due to face to face communication and interaction taking place. I became more conscious of my position and possible power. Although Rhodes (2013) discusses the transition from one role to another, quite often for practitioner researcher, there is a balance between the two. What can be concluded is that although a dual-role can be advantageous, it does not necessarily mean this is an easy option in the research process.

### **Sampling Strategy**

When researchers are making decisions about what to study, as well as considering times, places and sites, there will also be decisions made on how many cases are required to ensure that the findings will establish information that is useful to the study (Luborsky and Rubinstein 1995, Marshall and Rossman 2016). 'Sampling must be consistent with the research paradigm' (Smith et al 2009:48). The sampling strategy and who is invited to participate, is an important consideration prior to data collection. This can have important implications for the study, its potential findings and the use of the data (Marshall and Rossman 2016). In general, there are two approaches to sample selection; non-probability sampling and probability sampling. Non-probability sampling selects participants for the study who are likely to meet the objectives, whereas probability sampling allows the possible opportunity for all members of the population to be included

and they may be selected randomly (Henry 2011). Non-probability sampling has four designs; 'availability sampling, purposive sampling, quota sampling and respondent-assisted sampling' (Daniel 2012:2). Sampling can be an issue in qualitative research and careful consideration to the strategy adopted is needed to support both internal and external validity (Uprichard 2013). Consideration must also be given to what is sampled and where the participants are sampled from (Uprichard 2013). Miles and Huberman (1994) also propose several attributes should be considered when selecting the sampling strategy. These include the sampling strategy that is adopted should be linked and relevant to the conceptual framework, the sample should be able to provide information on the phenomena, the sample needs to increase generalisability, the sample should provide descriptions that are true to life and the sampling strategy should be both feasible and ethical (Miles and Huberman 1994, cited in Curtis et al 2000). The sampling strategy adopted for this study was non-probability sampling, which is justified in a qualitative methodology (Teddlie and Yu 2007). This was also influenced by the conceptual framework that the research was positioned within (Curtis et al 2000, Marshall and Rossman 2016). Within the four designs of non-probability sampling, purposive sampling, also referred to as purposeful sampling (Daniel 2012), was selected to identify a range of data which was rich in information and also which related to the phenomenon (Palinkas et al 2015). This would also be reliant on the researcher's knowledge of the field (Barratt et al 2015), which in this case I considered myself to have. Purposive sampling can be also aligned to the inclusion and exclusion criteria of the study (Daniel 2012). Purposive sampling is 'often employed to enhance understanding of particular people or groups' experience(s) or for developing theories or concepts' (Devers et al 2000:264) and was therefore appropriate for this study.

Daniel (2012:7) describes five essential steps that are required in purposive sampling; 'defining the target population, identifying clear inclusion and exclusion criteria for the sample, creating a plan to recruit based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria, determining the sample size and selecting the target number of population elements'. The target population were students who were undertaking the BSc (Hons) Dental Studies programme in the School or had just completed the final module. This population was the appropriate selection as the aim of the research was to investigate the academic and social experiences of diploma students (DHDT) during the transition to HE as they enter a BSc (Hons) Dental Studies programme. The inclusion criteria was that participants had to be current students or just completed the programme. All cohorts were invited to participate, allowing equal opportunity. The programme begins in January each year and the structure of the programme offers different options in terms of completion. Therefore, the participants were not all students on the same cohort and were recruited from different stages of the programme. Any past student who was not currently enrolled on the programme was excluded from the study, as it was felt that the range of potential participants who were current students was broad enough to meet a determined sample size and there would be the ability to select participants from the sample. This inclusion/exclusion criterion was aligned to criteria based on variability (Daniel 2012). In addition to criteria based on variability, designs and uses of purposeful sampling include selection of extreme or deviant cases (central tendency), with criteria based on theory/model development and criteria based on judgement and reputation (Daniel 2012, Palinkas et al 2015). Within this study, although the professional profile of the students was homogenous, for example they were all qualified DHs or DHDTs, there were other variables which supported a maximum variation design and

homogenous sampling. As previously discussed, this included age, family commitments, the stage that they were on the programme, length of time away from study and ethnicity. It can be argued that the variation may not be known at the beginning of the study (Palinkas et al 2015). However the selected strategy did produce the required variation. Purposive sampling can also be appropriate when the case may be unique (Miles and Hubberman 1994). The concepts within the conceptual framework included student transition and non-traditional students. The assumptions that lie within both of these concepts is complex and although these concepts alone were not necessarily themselves unique, the participants were selected from a specific programme of study which has been identified as the only programme in the UK, therefore it could be argued that this case was unique. It was acknowledged that the sample size could likely be relatively small and from a single setting (Pike and Harrison 2011). However, a small sample can also produce a large amount of data (Curtis et al 2000), therefore I was not concerned about these factors. Evidence suggests that qualitative samples can produce analytical generalisations. For generalisations to be made from a specific sample selection, the sample must provide evidence that is 'truly universal and unrestricted as to time and space' Kaplan (1964:91), with findings possibly being generalised to some subsamples but not all (Lucas 2014). The rationale for this may be due to there being no better evidence or alternative (Barrett et al 2015). In contrast to this, it is also argued that purposive sampling can limit the ability to generalise, as these generalisations cannot go outside the boundaries of the sample selected (Daniel 2012, Lucas 2104). It was anticipated that the sample selected would produce believable descriptions and explanations due to the students having experienced the transition, with their expectations and experiences being situated in a real life context. It was also

anticipated that some generalisations may be able to be made but only in context to the students involved with the BSc (Hons) Dental Studies programme. As all the students had experienced transition, it was not necessary at the initial stage to adopt a criterion sample strategy (Creswell 2007). Due to the diversity of the participants who agreed to be part of the research, it was not necessary to use any criteria further into the research.

### **Process of Recruitment and Selection**

Initially a letter of offer to participate in the research including a consent form (Appendix 2), was sent to all students via email. This letter gave the students information about the study and information about being a participant. As the participants were all students on the BSc (Hons) Dental Studies programme, the latter factor was important as there could have been a potential power imbalance and the potential for students to feel that they had to participate. It was acknowledged that any power imbalance was unavoidable as the students were familiar with me as I was in a dual role. However, it can also be argued that this could be an advantage and a reason for participation. To clarify the position on voluntary participation, the following information was included on the consent form and included in my application to the university ethics committee:

'if you do not wish to take part, your studies will progress as normal'.

The following information was also included in the ethics submission, as well as being a consideration throughout the study:

'My role as course leader, module leader and personal tutor (now academic advisor) for the participants in the study will be considered and explored for issues of professional position, power, interviewer bias or assumed knowledge, participant bias, students not wishing to participate, students wishing to withdraw



during the research, confidentiality and my role as lecturer versus researcher. Consideration will be given to communication with participants to ensure that sufficient information is provided about the study to allow them to make an informed decision and provide consent for voluntary participation. Consideration will be given to students' assessments being marked by a colleague. The students will also have contact details for my supervisor to allow them to raise any concerns with a third party' (University of Central Lancashire Ethics Committee Approval Committee Submission March 2014). Ethical approval was granted by the University. The aim of the information provided to students before they decided to take part was to allow for informed consent to be given if they wished to participate in the study. Informed consent is within the principles of the Nuremberg Code, the Declaration of Helsinki and the Belmont Report (Nijhawan et al 2013) and is both a legal and ethical requirement for research that involves human participants. Before consent can be deemed as informed and a decision made to be involved in research, participants need to be provided with all information about the study (Nijhawan et al 2013). Consent should be voluntary and be given without participants feeling any threat or influence to their decision of participation. British Educational Research Association (BERA) (2018:9) describe voluntary consent 'to be the condition in which participants understand and agree to their participation without any duress, prior to the research getting underway'. The British Psychological Society (2018) discuss four principles of ethics and conduct, respect, competence, responsibility and integrity. Within the context of this research and the first principle of respect, informed consent was an agreement to participate in the study after having information provided, and understanding that information (Tee and Lathlean 2004). A consent form with information about the study was provided to all potential participants which

included why they were being asked to participate, how the data would be collected, how the data collected would be used, how it would be reported and the right to withdraw (BERA 2011). Following the initial invitation to participate, a second invite was sent to all responders asking for further participation in using documentary evidence, discussed below (Appendix 3). As previously discussed in the context of dual-role, it is common within educational research for the participants to be students of the researcher (Alexakos 2015, Midgley et al. 2013). However, during the study, I consciously avoided any discussion with the students about the research during their taught sessions on the degree programme. This was an attempt to eliminate any interlink between practitioner and researcher, both for myself and for the participants. I also wanted to ensure as far as possible, that when individuals agreed to be part of the study they had consented without any influence. However, it is acknowledged that full separation may never be achieved but by engaging in reflexivity, something that I strived to do throughout the research process, it can be minimised and reduce any exploitation of the research participants (Pillow 2003). The consent form also assured participants that any data collected would be subject to privacy and confidentiality.

As the participants were also students, consideration was given to the timing of the information to participate being sent out. This was based on two factors. The first one was related to the profile of the students as I was aware that they were often balancing the pressures of professional positions in employment as well as study, they were part time students and many of them also had family commitments. I was aware from discussions with the students that they often struggled to find the time to study and therefore I avoided any period of time where an assessment deadline may be pending. The second consideration was

also linked to assessments. I avoided sending out the information when students had just submitted an assessment as I did not want any student to think that their grades would be influenced if they did not participate.

Due to circumstances outside of the study, there was a small break in the research and therefore further letters of invite were sent to students on later cohorts. In total, eight students responded and agreed to participate. Two were from the initial letters and six from the latter, which resulted in participants coming from three cohorts.

### Profile of the Participants

Participant profiles (Figure 4.1) demonstrate that all of the participants were female. This accurately reflects the profession of DHDT as the workforce is predominantly female with a ratio of one male to every ten females (Sun et al 2009). Within the composition above, the role of the participants in respect of being a DH or a DHDT was evenly balanced. Due to all current qualifications now being the combined DHDT, there is a link to how long ago the participants may have qualified if they were a DH, and therefore how long they may have been away from the educational system.

Participant	Role	Gender	Stage on Programme
1	DHDT	Female	End of final module
2	DH	Female	End of final module
3	DHDT	Female	End of final module
4	DH	Female	Induction/ Early in Semester
5	DHDT	Female	Induction/ Early in Semester

6	DH	Female	Following first assessment
7	DHDT	Female	Following first assessment
8	DH	Female	Following first assessment

**Figure 4.1** Participant Profile

### The Process of Data Collection

The data collection involved interviews using a topical approach and documentary evidence. The initial method of interviewing was undertaken at various stages of the programme; the early stages of the first module to capture the early transitional experiences, at the time of first assessment when students had settled into the course and had some experience of HE, and finally as students came towards the end of the programme. Due to the timeframe involved in the study, it was not practical to shadow individual students all the way through and interview them longitudinally. It would have meant a greater commitment from students to be interviewed on different occasions and this may have affected the number of participants being involved. Therefore, the data was collected from individual students at key transition points. The rationale for capturing data at different times was to ensure that there was range of data collected at different stages. Although the study had a focus of transition, the evidence from Chapter 2 supports transition not necessarily just being at the beginning of the programme. In addition to this, it was also felt that reflective experiences of transition could change as participants progressed and retrospective feelings could be significant. The documentary evidence was collected from the participants who took part in the interviews.

## **Method of Data Collection**

Data collection in a case study usually relies on multiple methods and sources to gain information (Yin 2009). Within a qualitative study there are four methods of data collection that can be selected for use; interviews, observation, being a participant within the research setting and using material culture and documents for analysis (Marshall and Rossman 2016). However, Yin (2018:114) also discusses six sources of evidence, documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant observation and physical artifacts. When undertaking case study research, Yin (2018:126) describes four principles of data collection; 'using multiple sources of evidence, creating a case study database, maintaining a chain of evidence and exercising care when using data from social media'. The latter principle was not relevant to this study and will not be discussed further. By considering the three principles, construct validity and reliability which were discussed in Chapter 3, can be supported.

### **Principle 1 - Using Multiple Sources of Evidence**

The data collection methods adopted for this study were interviews and documentary evidence. The two primary data collection methods were selected and used to form the core of the enquiry (Marshall and Rossman 2016) and justified as they were two of the six sources used in case study research (Flick 2009, Yin 2018). It was felt that they were complementary to each other, as no single source 'has complete advantage over another' (Yin 2018: 113).

### **Interviews**

Qualitative interviewing is known to be one of the commonly used methods for data collection (Lichtman 2014), particularly where study explores the experiences and perceptions of the participants (Marshall and Rossman 2016).

Interviews as a research method are appropriate when undertaking a phenomenological approach (Padilla-Diaz 2015). When undertaken well, interviews can allow participants to discuss subjects that are related to their own life as well as supporting the interviewer to understand these realities and interpret them (Gommes Pessoa et al 2019). Interviews can be placed into five general types; 'the informal conversational interview, the interview guide or topical approach, the standardised open interview, the co-constructed and dialogic interview' (Marshall and Rossman 2016:150). The interview guide or topical approach was adopted in this study allowing for some questions and topics to be used. Initially I had intended that the interviews would be semi-structured based on them allowing a 'space of aperture for the informant to express their experiences, approaching reality as faithfully as possible (Padilla-Diaz 2015:104) and 'constructing a site of knowledge' for the exploration of 'a theme of interest' (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009:2). However, semi structured interview questions can be too scripted and in sequence and may not allow for flexibility of responses (Marshall and Rossman 2016). I wanted participants to be able to consider what the experience had been like for them and did not want to suppress this with the interview schedule being too rigid. I felt this could be achieved by adopting a topical approach which allow data and themes to emerge that may not necessarily have been part of the interview schedule (Appendix 4), at the same time as the conceptual framework being used to guide the discussion. This strategy is aligned to the 'fundamental assumption of qualitative research' (Marshall and Rossman 2016:150), in that the discussion is framed by the participants' views and experiences based on the phenomenon. Open ended questions were used during the interviews as much as possible to allow the participants to expand on the discussion and themes (Denscombe 2007). Why

questions were avoided where possible (Sohn et al 2017) as this can lead to participants feeling that they need to defend their experience. This was not an environment that I wanted to create. However, the question was asked 'Can you tell me why you decided to return to study at this stage?' which did ask 'why'. On reflection this could have been reworded to ask 'Can you tell me what it was that made you decide to return to study at this time?'. The benefits of interviews are well documented (Josselson 2013, Marshall and Rossman 2016, Silverman 2013), with this method allowing for a wealth of data to be collected over a relatively short period of time. This was an advantage in this study due to the time being limited when the participants were available to take part. It is acknowledged that some of the questions asked of the participants required them to discuss events and thoughts that had happened at the pre-transition stage. A consideration of this is hindsight bias which is described as retroactive interference (Pohl et al 2018). This relates to individuals changing their views of past experiences based on new learning. In this study, recollection bias needs to be considered. Recollection bias is described as having a lower probability of being able to accurately present reliable information (Erdfelder 2007). In order for hindsight bias to be eliminated, the newer thoughts need to be ignored to allow for an unbiased account of previous experiences (Bayen et al 2007).

### [Pilot Interviews](#)

Two initial pilot interviews were conducted. Both students were from the 2013/2014 cohort and were approaching the end of the final module. Pilot interviews have many advantages including strengthening the research instrument (in this case the interview schedule), identifying any logistical or equipment issues that may arise and collecting preliminary data (Teijlingen and Hundey 2001). A limitation of a pilot study is that the researcher may make

judgements that direct the course of the study based on a very small sample. In this case, the pilot interviews did not influence the interview guide but confirmed that the guide was appropriate. However, this guide did change slightly as further data emerged that had not been included in the original guide. An example of this was the inclusion of probing participants about the use of social media in supporting social transition.

### Types of Interviews Conducted

The objects or units of activity of the study were students who were considered non-traditional based on the characteristics previously discussed. Due to some of these factors, consideration was given to how the data was collected with a range of strategies for interviews needing to be adopted (Janghorban et al 2014). The participants were only on campus at limited times and when they were, this time was taken up with their taught curriculum. It was therefore proposed in the initial documentation that was sent to the potential participants that the interviews could be carried out either face to face or by Skype™.

### Face to Face Interviews

Qualitative interviews are mainly undertaken using face to face methods (Vogl 2013). Face to face interviews are still well documented as gold standard and having a high level of validity (Deakin and Wakefield 2014, Dowling et al. 2016, McCoyd and Kerson 2006). One of the advantages of conducting face to face interviews in the study was the availability of observing participants during the discussion, allowing the opportunity to engage with visual contact to gain a deeper understanding of the interaction (Vogl 2013). As well as the spoken word, observing the non-verbal signs of communication was also an advantage of conducting the interviews face to face. However, there can also be disadvantages



of conducting face to face interviews with the social context being seen by the participants and potential issues of bias and power balance. One of the challenges that I faced was a participant who could only be interviewed face to face when she was attending university for a study day. The participant requested that the interview was done over a lunch break and prior to the interview, I had not considered any potential issues with this. However, during the interview I was conscious that the time was limited and I was impacting on the participants' free time. When I transcribed the interview, it was apparent to me that the interview was slightly hurried and I had not used all the opportunities available to probe and ask further questions. Due to this, I felt that some data could have been missed. An example of this was when I asked the participant about what she expected university to be like and the response was:

'It's better than I thought it was going to be, more relevant, there is a similarity, but more involved, it just makes more sense'.

It was clear from my next question that I had not fully engaged and on reflection it became evident that there was a missed opportunity on my part to ask some open ended questions about the similarities referred to, how it was felt that it was more involved and what was meant by the term more sense.

### Skype Interviews

Over recent years, research participants have been described as 'geographically dispersed' (Janghorban et al 2014:1) and this has resulted in physical boundaries, time and financial constraints of being able to conduct face to face interviews. Alternative approaches have been taken to ensure maximum coverage in respect of participants, particularly those who are not in full time education and situated in the setting at all times, as in this case.

Four out of the eight interviews were conducted using Skype™. Using this method offers researchers a new and novel method in qualitative data collection (Deakin and Wakefield 2013). This has the advantages of saving time travelling and the interviewee being in their own space and surroundings, resulting in participants possibly being more responsive (Seitz 2016). These physical boundaries and time constraints were a consideration in this study, despite technological changes and developments facilitating some of these constraints. The most common reason given by participants for choosing to be interviewed using electronic technology was due to the lack of time they had (Vogl 2013). When using Skype™ the option of using both the audio and web camera was selected to allow for some visual face to face discussion with the participants. This is seen as being comparable to being face to face in the same room where non-verbal and social cues may be apparent (Sullivan 2012). Although this proved to be advantageous (as opposed to just using audio) there was still the compromise of not being able to see the whole person. Only being able to see the face and shoulders of the participants did not allow me to observe full body language (Cater 2011). Prior to one interview, the participant disclosed that this was going to be the first time they had used Skype™. Although this could have been seen as a positive developmental opportunity for the participant, I was also mindful that this could have also created extra pressure for the participant. A disadvantage of using this method can be interruptions from lost connections which can result in difficulties gaining rapport (Seitz 2016).

#### General Considerations in Interviews (both face to face and skype)

There were two separate issues of potential power balance during the interviews that I had anticipated; the first one being between myself as the researcher and the participants and the second in my role as the researcher undertaking

interviews with students on the BSc (Hons) Dental Studies Programme that I was also course leader for. The concern of power imbalance between the researcher and participant is one that may always be present in qualitative research where interactions are taking place. It can be common for a researcher to operate between more than one world, including the world of the participants and their cultural stance, at the same time as being positioned in their own world perspective (Denzin 2009). However, as a researcher, there must be caution not to display any authority. This was avoided in the interviews by not allowing the discussion to become a question and answer session, with myself as the researcher asking the questions and waiting for an answer from the participant. It is important for a researcher to get results from the interview without risk to the participant, therefore my objective was to make the participants feel supported and allowing them to feel that they could contribute to the discussion (Ashton 2014) without feeling like the conversation was being dominated and being led by myself as the interviewer. If this two way communication happens it can result in a 'co-operative interchange in the relationship being established' (Josselson 2013:133). Another consideration to avoid dominance was not to interrupt with further questions before the participant had finished responding to the question that had been previously asked. Using silence when interviewing can be advantageous however, it can also be seen as a disruptive to the flow conversation (Bengtsson and Fynbo 2017). However, the skill of using silence can be one that researchers struggle with and they may often avoid this by talking too much, answering their own questions and appearing to interrogate, all of which are common mistakes (Josselson 2013, Sohn et al 2017). If participants are able to use silence, they can construct power (Bengtsson and Fynbo 2018) allowing a more equal power balance relationship. The second power balance

issue of researcher/student is one that has already been discussed previously in this chapter in respect of recruiting participants. However, the consideration of participants answering truthfully and honestly (due to my course leader role) was one that stayed at the forefront during the interviews. It was hoped that by using good questioning techniques and keeping the interview questions focussed on the experiences of the participant rather than generalised (Josselson 2013), there would be a true and open discussion. On reflection, I feel that this was achieved.

### Recording the Interviews

The interviews were recorded using a Dictaphone. This method was selected to be able to capture all of the spoken word and to avoid any distractions during the interview. Recording was useful to be able to capture any differences in tones of voice or pauses that may have been lost if this method was not used. During the Skype™ interviews, although the quality of the recording was acceptable, in places it was not as clear as it may have been had computer-based recording software been used (Cater 2011). Taking notes can be used as an alternative as well as being used alongside the recordings. However, taking notes was avoided for two reasons. The first reason was that notetaking can be seen as a distraction in case study research and can be unsettling for the participant (Josselson 2013). Secondly due to my dual role, it could also have been perceived that I was assessing or marking the interviewee which I wanted to avoid.

Directly following each interview, there was a post interview debrief (Wengraf 2001) which was important to capture anything that had been reflected on. An example of this was following interview four (which was done using Skype™) where the participant had not studied for over 30 years and was very negative about herself and what her potential achievement could be. The debrief allowed some time after the interview just to talk through these disclosures and to provide

academic re-assurance. This was an example of me being positioned between researcher and practitioner.

### **Documentary Data Collection**

In addition to the interviews and to support methods triangulation, documents were used as a second data collection method. The documents used were personal statements taken from the initial application forms that the participants completed when applying for entry onto the BSc programme. Documents are often used in qualitative studies, in particular case study, to 'corroborate and augment evidence from other sources (Yin 2018:115) and can produce rich description of a single phenomenon, as well as adding value (Bowen 2009, Yin 2009). Documents are not created from the case study itself and therefore one of the advantages is that they are unobtrusive. This was an important factor when considering more than one data collection method from the perspective of the participants of the study and the commitment that they may want or be able to have. Documents can be referred to as archival (Lichtman 2014, Marshall & Rossman 2016) and can be in the form of electronic or paper. Documents can also take the form of primary or secondary. Primary documents are those that have been produced by individuals who have experienced the event and secondary are those produced by a third party. As the documents used in the study were personal statements, they were therefore considered primary. The university has a standard application form and therefore the requirement to complete the personal statement is standard requesting the applicant to:

"Please state your reasons for wishing to pursue the course. Give details of other relevant skills, such as Information Technology and Research Methods. Indicate any other achievements or experience that will support your application".

This type of document was selected as on application to the programme, the question 'please state your reasons for wishing to pursue the course' may have produced some rich data portraying, not only why they wanted to undertake the programme, but what the expectations may be (Marshall and Rossman 2016). The documents were felt advantageous as they may also capture the pre-transition experiences and thoughts. When using documents as a data collection method, researchers need to be aware of the audience or purpose that the document was written for (Yin 2018). It is likely that it was written with a purpose and based on particular assumptions (Bowen 2006), and not necessarily produced for the purpose of research and with a different objective in mind (Payne 2004). To avoid selection bias (Yin 2018), all participants who had taken part in the first data collection (interviews) were contacted and invited to participate using a further consent form. The consent form outlined the rationale for them being chosen.

### Triangulation

Using triangulation as a methodological approach can enhance the validity of the findings (Farmer et al 2006). Patton (2015:128) discusses four types of triangulation:

*'triangulation of data sources (data triangulation)*

*triangulation of different evaluators (investigator triangulation)*

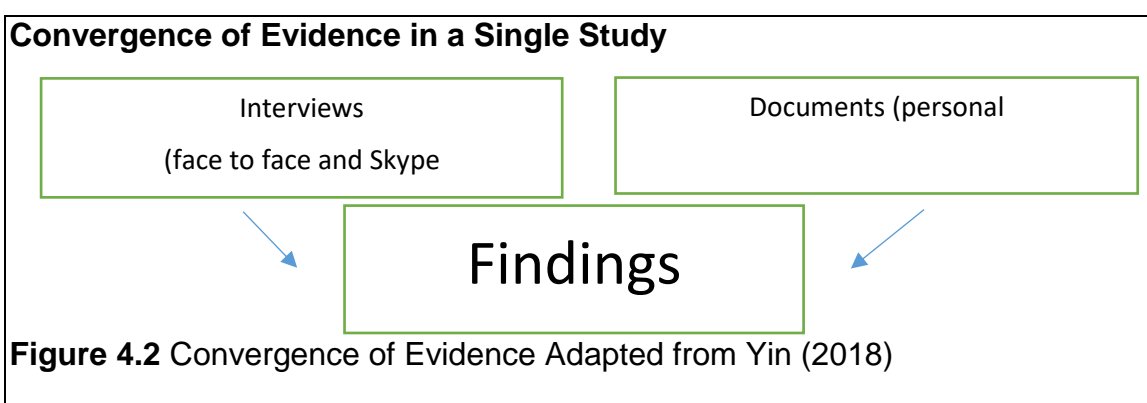
*triangulation of perspectives of the same data set (theory triangulation)*

*triangulation of methods (methodological triangulation)'*

Triangulation of data sources and triangulation of evaluators will be discussed below. The remaining two were not relevant to this study.

## Triangulation of Data Sources

Triangulation of data sources refers to the collection of data from multiple sources and using these sources to 'corroborate the findings' (Yin 2018:128). The interviews and documents were used as convergent evidence as they were analysed together rather than this being done separately, supporting construct validity. Data analysis will be discussed further in chapter 5.



## Triangulation of Evaluators

Triangulation of evaluators (investigator triangulation) was not undertaken in this study as the research was undertaken as part of a professional doctorate. It is acknowledged that this could be a potential limitation. However, despite the study being undertaken only by one researcher, there was oversight by a supervisory team.

## Principle 2 - Creating a Case Study Database

Maintaining a case study database is essential in supporting reliability (Yin 2009) and is a collection of the data that has been collected from the study (Yin 2018). When considering the database, it usually refers to two distinct collections; the data collected and the researcher's report. The database usually takes the form of four categories; notes, documents, tabular materials and new narrative compilations (Yin 2018). The database used in this study consisted of the copies

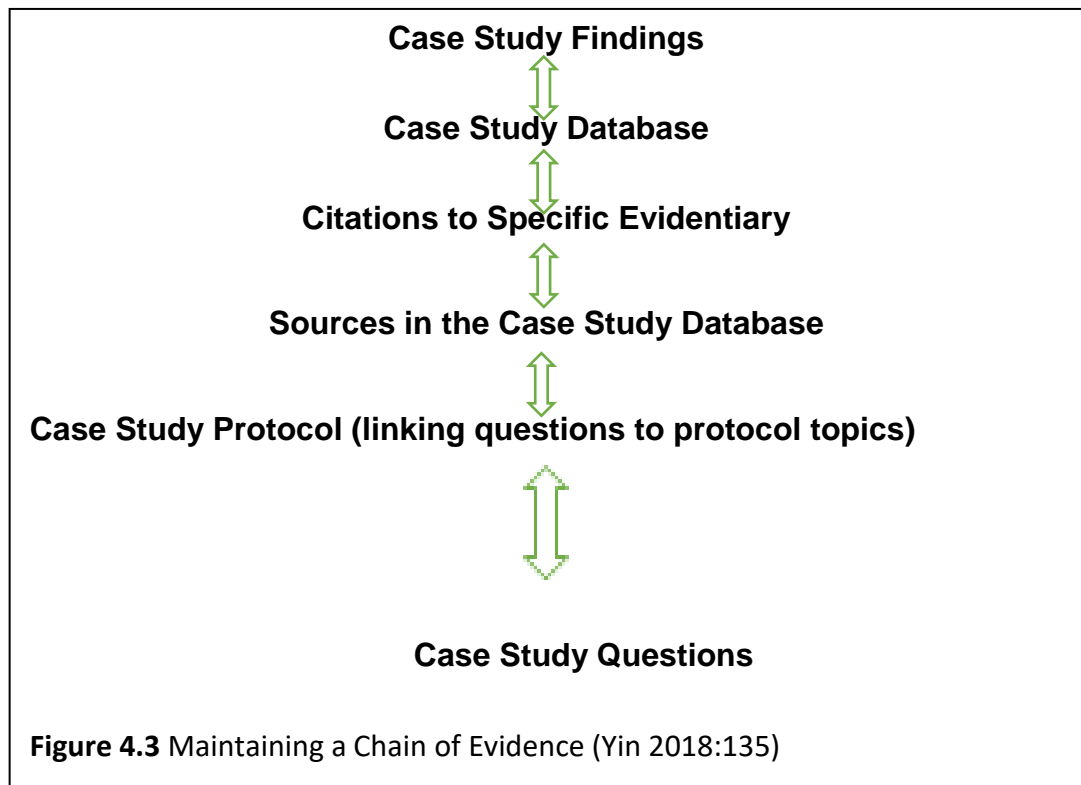
of the audio interview recordings, transcriptions from the audio recordings (notes) and the personal statements taken from the participants' application forms (documents). In addition to this, during the transcription process, some themes became apparent that resulted in some narrative compilations. These narrative compilations were in the form of notes which is similar to the process used in grounded theory (Corben and Strauss 2008). The audio recordings and the personal statements constituted the raw data and the transcriptions were the processed data (Marshall and Rossman 2016). The transcription process will be discussed further in chapter 5. Failure to keep an effective case study database can result in issues of subjectivity in the data reported, as case study can be one of the less controlled methods of data collection due to possible researcher or observer bias (Flyvbjerg 2006).

### **Principle 3 - Maintaining a Chain of Evidence**

Maintaining a chain of evidence supports construct validity and allows the evidence to be moved through in both directions with interconnecting links (Yin 2018). By moving through in the direction that the study has been undertaken there should be a clear foundation laid at each stage that should allow progression through to the next. This should also happen in reverse resulting in a 'clear cross referenced methodological approach' (Yin 2018:136) as seen in Figure 4.3 below.

There are varying designs of the chain of evidence. In this case, the foundations of the chain were the research questions and these influenced the research protocol (the design stage) and then the following stages of the study. The study mirrored Yin's (2018) desired chain of evidence with both the forward and reverse directions.





### Summary

As discussed, data was collected by undertaking interviews using a topical approach and accessing documentary evidence from personal statements from the application forms. The former produced a large amount of interview data via recordings from a range of students on the BSc (Hons) Dental Studies programme. This chapter has outlined the methods used in the study including the three principles of case study. The next chapter will describe the analysis of the data collected from the two sources.

## **CHAPTER 5 DATA ANALYSIS**

### **Introduction**

This chapter will outline the data analysis process and how the initial categories were developed from the coding. This will be followed by presentation of the synthesised categories and finally the presentation of the final concepts.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis is an analytical process that follows a logical process (Shamoo and Resnick 2003). It can be described as a similar process to the everyday way in which the human brain attempts to organise information, an undertaking that is not simply a random activity (Hardy and Bryman 2004).

In research, data analysis can adopt a quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods approach and this may be influenced by the methodological approach. Quantitative data analysis and qualitative data analysis can have some similarities. However, there are also some significant differences. Although this study is qualitative, a brief outline of the similarities will be presented.

### **Similarities of Quantitative and Qualitative Data Analysis**

The types of data that are collected using the different methodologies will be diverse. Quantitative data lends itself to the collection of descriptive statistics (Larson Hall and Plonsky 2015), whilst qualitative data collection is focussed on inviting participants to share experiences through a variety of strategies including interviews, focus groups, observation, field work, images or written material (Lichtman 2014, Silverman 2011, Yin 2018). Although there are differences in how the data is collected in, there can still be some common approaches to how the analysis may be undertaken. Both methodologies can produce a large amount of data resulting in both approaches being concerned with attempting to reduce the raw data that has been collected. However the data may have been

collected, this raw data can be analysed by adopting either a quantitative or qualitative approach (Wutich and Bernard 2016). Quantitative analysis deals with vast amounts of data 'in the form of many cases and variables' (Hardy and Bryman 2014:4) and the analysis tends to be measured in frequencies, tables and dispersions (Hardy and Bryman 2004). In a similar way, qualitative data can accumulate large amounts of information. For example, in the case of interviews, this could be an audio recording which results in extensive and lengthy transcripts. However, in contrast to quantitative analysis, qualitative analysis tends to take some form of a coding approach to generate themes and can involve a degree of interpretation. This will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

In addition to the reduction of data, both approaches are focussed on answering the research question. In both quantitative and qualitative approaches, the research question should be clearly identified as linked to the problem being investigated, which will allow for the relevant literature to be reviewed. In quantitative research, the research question is very specific and can have one or more hypotheses. During data analysis, the hypothesis is tested by following a series of logical tests (Martin and Bridgmon 2012). In contrast, in qualitative analysis, the research question that has been designed is usually one that allows the research to have some flexibility and not close off or restrict any potential avenues of exploration. However, it is also important that the question should not 'delimit' the research by not being focussed enough (Marshall and Rossman 2016). The analysis in both approaches will require the relationship between the analysis and the literature to be clearly linked. In quantitative analysis, the researcher will refer back to the literature in order to confirm or not the hypothesis. In qualitative analysis, the literature tends to be used to inform rather than confirm

(Hardy and Bryman 2004). As previously mentioned, quantitative data analysis usually measures frequencies but this may also be the case for qualitative analysis. Qualitative analysis can use indicators or patterns to report frequencies (Marshall and Rossman 2006), with words such as often or many, instead of the precise reporting of numbers used in quantitative. However, Hardy and Bryman (2004) argue that these should be used with caution as it can be difficult to assess what this means and this can lead to ambiguity. There is also a danger that if these frequencies are used to determine whether a code is used for a particular piece of data, it could eliminate any data that is low in frequency that may be significant.

### **Qualitative Data Analysis**

Qualitative data can be analysed both qualitatively or quantitatively (Bernard et al 2016). For this study, a qualitative approach to analysis was adopted. There is no exact formula for qualitative data analysis and it is often described as a linear process (Lichtman 2014). However qualitative data analysis should always be a reflexive, inductive and an iterative process from the beginning of data collection (Fielding 2004, Smith et al 2009).

Qualitative data analysis can be described as an 'analysis of the text' (Schutt 2006:321) or 'teasing out essential meaning' (Ely 1991:140). It is often viewed as being 'less prescribed' than quantitative analysis as it aims to discover new ideas and 'their associations' (Ganapathy 2016:106). It is a process that involves taking data from being descriptive to making interpretations (Grbich 2013), and therefore it is not possible to view qualitative analysis simply as a linear process, where one stage follows another until the analysis is complete. Qualitative data analysis is a process that is recursive, develops over time and as well as primary analysis, may also include some secondary analysis (Ely et al 1997, Fielding

2004). Primary analysis involves using original data that has been collected to form a 'basis of subsequent data analysis, interpretation and explanation' (Windle 2010:322). Secondary data analysis 'involves the analysis of an existing data set' (Miller and Brewer 2003:285), usually data that has been collected during a previous study. However, this is not without issue and careful consideration must be applied if secondary data is to be used, including evaluation of the methodologies and the purpose for which the data was collected (Miller and Brewer 2003, Tripathy 2013, Windle 2010).

### **Strategies in Qualitative Data Analysis**

There are many strategies that can be adopted for qualitative data analysis, strategies that can present with diversity and complexity (Holloway and Todres 2003). However, broadly there are two approaches: 'coding and looking for concepts or themes and developing narratives (Lichtman 2014). Within both of these approaches, the analysis will look to what the participants actually thought at that particular point in time, examining the experiences of the participants and the reality and meaning of things to them (Braun and Clarke 2006). Researchers using a qualitative methodology have been criticised for being 'too cautious and of producing analyses that are too descriptive' (Smith et al 2009:103), therefore the adoption of a hermeneutic approach with the analysis being used to inform some interpretation (Patton 2002), can support this criticism. Interpretation can emerge when spoken or written language is trying to be understood (Schmidt 2006), thus sitting at the heart of qualitative data analysis. From a theoretical perspective, Ricoeur's theory of interpretation acknowledges the relationship between the epistemological stance and the ontological position of the researcher or interpreter (Geanellos 2000) and recognises that the researcher will have 'intersubjective knowledge' (Horrigan-Kelly et al 2016:5).

The hermeneutic circle is concerned with relationship between the part and the whole (Horrigan-Kelly et al 2016, Kinsella 2006, Smith et al 2009) and how the researcher seeks understanding and meaning from what is expressed within the text. Equally, it is important to do the same with what may not be expressed in the text. Researchers are able to use analytical imagination when conducting qualitative analysis, allowing for reflexivity or continuous immersion in the data (Fielding 2004, James 2012). Interpretation of the text (part or whole) can be determined by the ontological position of the researcher and by the extent to which reflexivity occurs with the researcher sharing the experiences of the participants (Berger 2013). By continuously engaging with reflexivity, researchers can self-evaluate their own position and how this may influence the interpretation (Berger 2013). However, no single interpretation of the text will ever exhaust it as there can be multiple opportunities for interpretation based on the lived experience (Geanellos 2000). In this study, both a descriptive and interpretive approach were adopted in during analysis. This was undertaken using a coding/concept approach which involved 'coding, categorising and conceptualising' the data (Lichtman 2014: 317).

In addition to effective approaches to analysis, the success of qualitative data analysis relies on the skill of the researcher, and expertise is required to create a new storyline from the data collected (Jennings 2007). Analysis should be an ongoing process that starts as the data collection begins, allowing the opportunity of the analysis to inform further data collection (Blaxter et al 2010). Case study was the adopted design in this study and the analysis in this is reported as one of the most underdeveloped areas of case study research, having no 'fixed formula' to use as a guide or approach (Yin 2018:165). As discussed earlier, there are common methods of data collection for case study research and these are

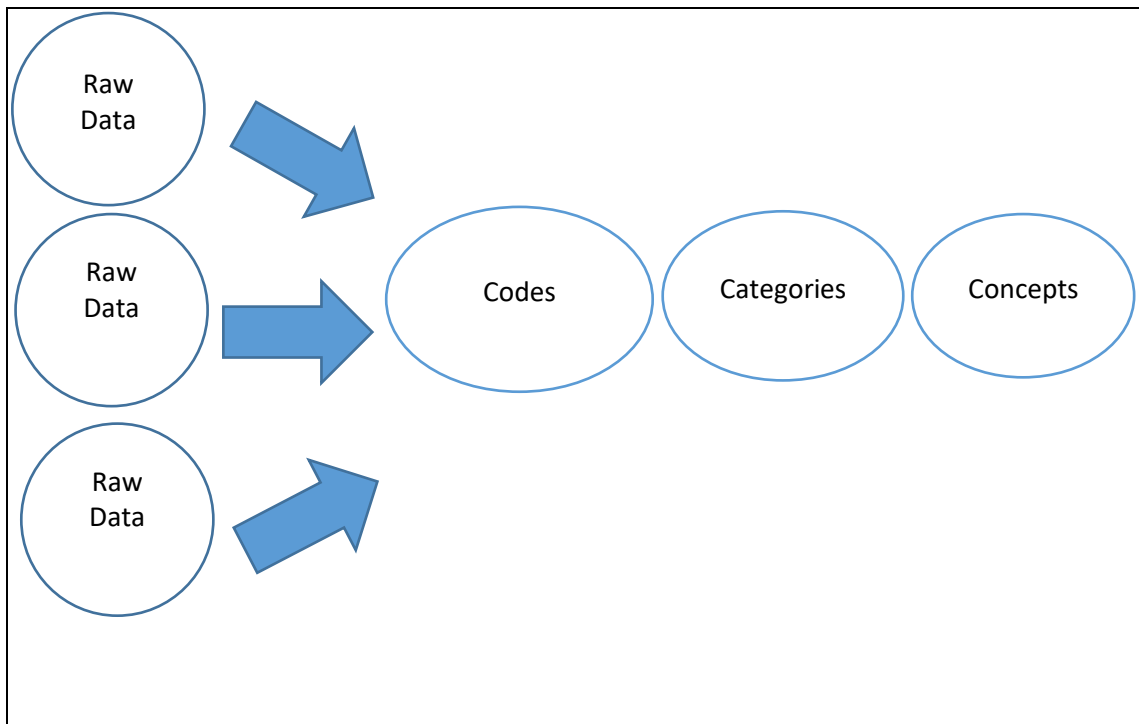
also reflected in the analysis. Similar to other qualitative approaches, the focus is on the text which is often a result of documentary evidence, observations or transcripts from interviews (Schutt 2006).

### **Issues and Challenges in Data Analysis**

Issues of reliability, validity, verification and transparency in qualitative data analysis are all well documented (Blaxter et al 2010, Grbich 2013, Krippendorf 2012, Wutich and Bernard 2016, Yin 2018). The quality of the research relies on transparency and the need for the research, including design, analysis and write up to be explicit. Dierckx de Casterle et al (2011) identify some specific common challenges with qualitative analysis; too much reliance on software packages, word overload, using a preconceived framework when undertaking coding, the full potential of data is not exploited and data analysis is undertaken as individual process. The first concern of too much reliance on software packages was not relevant to this study, as all analysis was undertaken manually by the researcher. The rationale for this approach was to allow for the researcher to have full immersion within the data throughout the analysis process by reading and re-reading the texts for emerging codes. These codes cannot be segmented or identified simply by using software (Sandelowski 1995). The final concern above of data analysis as an individual process is one that is acknowledged as a limitation within this study and can create credibility problems in qualitative methodologies (Madill et al 2000). In respect of this issue, the study has been undertaken as part of a doctorate in education, resulting in a sole researcher and analyst. However, although the analysis was undertaken by a single person, the study was supervised and mentored. Being the sole researcher can also be beneficial as it can support the researcher to 'grasp the essence of the research

findings' (Jennings 2007:263). The remaining challenges will be discussed further in this chapter in the context of the analysis undertaken in the study.

Challenges in qualitative analysis can be difficult but having structured steps in the analysis strategy can go some way to supporting this (Wutich and Bernard 2016). Developing a clear analysis strategy and framework which outlines the process that will be undertaken is necessary (Dierckx de Casterle et al 2011, Yin 2018). The analysis strategy adopted for this study was based on Lichtman's (2014) model of raw data, codes, categories and concepts (Figure 5.1). By using this approach, the analysis also adopted approaches outlined in phenomenological analysis including descriptive, linguistic, conceptual commenting (Smith et al 2009) and bracketing (Lichtman 2014). These will be discussed further in this chapter.



**Figure 5.1** Data Analysis Strategy Adapted from Lichtman (2014:328)

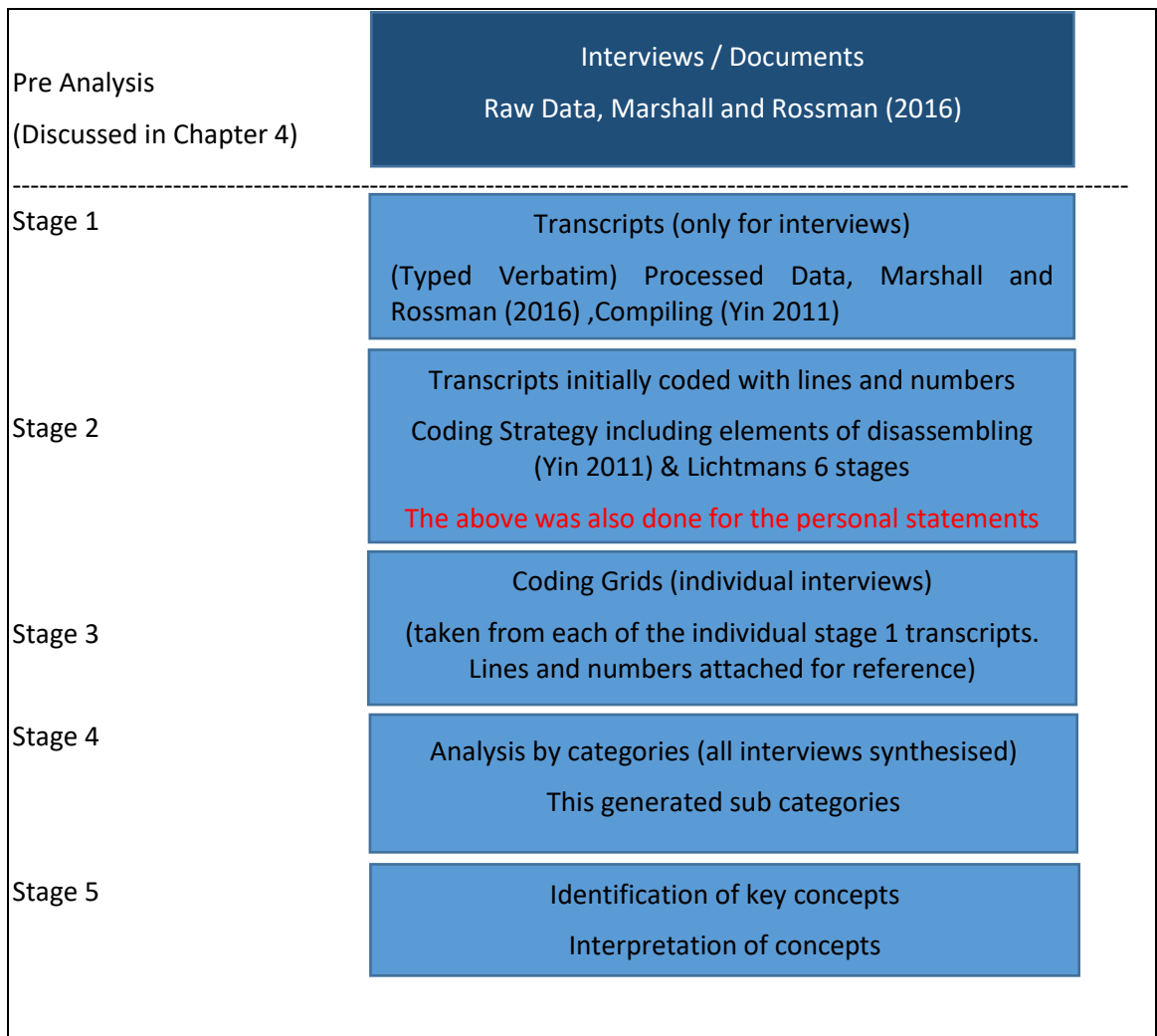
### Analysis in Context

This model was then used to create a framework below (Figure 5.2).

Stage 1     Transcribing the raw data into transcripts



- Stage 2      Coding the data (to produce data sets)
- Stage 3      Individual participant coding grids with categories and sub categories
- Stage 4      Combining all participant coding grids with categories and subcategories
- Stage 5      Interpretation of data from synthesised grids, identification of key concepts (data set)



**Figure 5.2** Data Analysis Framework

### Stages of Analysis

The pre-analysis stage has been discussed in chapter 4.

## Stage 1

### Transcribing the Data from Interviews

There is not necessarily a set of rules for transcription, but rather the researcher has to make choices, rationalise them and be clear about what they are in their discussion (Kvale and Brinkman 2009). Previous discussion has reported that in general the process of transcription is not outlined and discussed in enough detail in research reports (Kvale and Brinkman 2009, Tilley and Powick 2002). This can result in a lack of evidence that the analysis process is of good quality, trustworthy and that the claims being made are substantive (Davidson 2009, Duranti 2007). As discussed in chapter 4, the interview data in this study was collected using audio recording equipment before being transcribed into the written word. This in conjunction with the documentary evidence from the application form personal statements, produced the data corpus. Data corpus refers to all of the data which has been collected from the study (Braun and Clarke 2006). Transcription is a common approach in qualitative research which involves the transformation of verbal dialogue into written text (Ross 2010). However, this is not without challenge (Lapadat 2000, Silverman 2001). In the transcribing process there can be issues between the spoken word and what is then recorded in text (Wengraf 2001), issues that are often not given enough consideration or discussed extensively (Kvale and Brinkman 2009). There has been little attention paid in the literature in relation to some of the theoretical issues and implications from a methodological perspective (Davidson 2009, Halcomb and Davidson 2006, Lapadat 2000, Oliver et al 2005) and the process of transcription is often seen as a 'mundane task' (Lapadat 2000:204) and an inevitable part of the analysis process.

Transcription is described as:

*'Serving the purpose of taking speech, which is fleeting, aural, performative, and heavily contextualized within its situational and social context of use, and freezing it into a static, permanent, and manipulable form'* (Lapadat 2000:204).

During this transcription process it is the transcriber who makes the decisions about which verbal communication is written down in the text, a choice described by Green et al (1997) as potentially being political, interpretive and directed by the nature of the research. The above definition describes transcription as situational and within the context of its use and therefore the conversion of verbal discussion into written text should not merely be seen as an administrative task, but one that allows the opportunity for interpretation to begin.

Transcribers are encouraged to think about transcriptions as 'transformative texts' (Kvale 1996:165), as attempting to achieve a true objective transformation from verbal to written can be viewed as impossible. Marshall and Rossman (2016) describe the audio interview data as the raw data. The first stage of organising the raw data involved it being organised and documented within a case study database (Yin 2009). The rationale for this was to allow for any future inspection of the raw data, if required, and for a clear distinction being possible between the raw data and the case study report (Yin 2018). It is agreed that transcription needs to be rigorous and allow the transcriber to become familiar with the data (Grbich 2013, Lapadat 2000, Reissman 1993, Yin 2018). A consideration in transcription is making the decision who undertakes the role of transcribing the data. As is often seen within a qualitative study, there is no prescriptive approach and the selection of transcriber will vary from study to study, and may adopt differing strategies. For example, this may include a research assistant undertaking some initial transcription followed by the

researcher or the whole process being undertaken by either the researcher or another. Hardy and Bryman (2004) advise that at least some element of the transcription should be undertaken by the researcher to allow for interpretation to take place which is within the context of the objectives. However, Oliver et al (2005) discuss that it is not possible for two different transcribers to present identical transcripts, as all transcribers will have their own cultural linguistic filters that will determine the outcome of what is transcribed. In this study, the transcription of the recorded interviews was undertaken solely by myself as the primary researcher. The initial reason for this was my familiarity with the objectives of the research. I wanted to ensure that the spoken word and the written word were aligned as much as possible (Marshall and Rossman 2016) and also that I maintained as much of the detail as possible to support interpretation of the data. My view was that using another transcriber may limit this. However, I was also aware that my position of researcher (including insider researcher) and programme lead could influence the interpretation and I reflected on this throughout to remain as objective as possible. Using a transcriber can encounter problems of the researcher not providing clear direction and also ethical issues, which can all result in the process being time consuming. However, difficulties of 'translation from one narrative mode (oral language) to another (written language)' (Kvale 2009:178), can present as issues regardless of who the transcriber is. There was therefore an acceptance that there could always be challenges of the oral language not being transformed into the written language or artificial constructs being developed. It is important to retain the integrity of each respondent's story, the fourth challenge identified by Dierckx de Casterle et al (2011). Ross (2010:np) supports this by concluding that 'transcripts are very individual and say as much about the transcriber as the transcribed'.

Transcription should be a continuous process of revision (Coates and Thornborrow 1999).

### Verbatim

The interview recordings were all transcribed verbatim into word documents (Appendix 5) and stored in password protected electronic files. The transcriptions were each given a numerical identifier, for example transcript 1, transcript 2, each one relating (anonymously) to a participant (p). A sample transcript is included as Appendix 5. This also includes the coding.

The question of whether transcribing verbatim should be undertaken if participants have used incorrect grammar or used incomplete sentences, is one that the literature discusses (Marshall and Rossman 2016). As the interviews in the study were transcribed verbatim they did capture any incorrect grammar that was used. This approach aligns with phenomenological analysis where linguistic comments are considered to allow the transcript to be a true reflection of how the data was intended to be presented (Smith et al 2009). Oliver et al (2005) discuss two modes of transcription; naturalisation and denaturalisation. This builds on the work of Gail Jefferson (1974) who introduced symbols in transcription to capture utterances as well as the spoken word. Naturalisation captures idiosyncratic elements, for example, pauses and laughter, and is also described by House (2006) as overt transcription. The mode of denaturalisation does not record these elements within the transcript. In this study, naturalisation was used and notes were included in the text where there was a particular tone of voice, a pause taken or hesitation in responding (Smith et al 2009). This provided equivalence and transparency from the spoken word text. An example of this is below:

*VB 'Ok, do you think that impacted on how you have felt about coming onto the programme'?*

P4 *'Um [long pause]. No, I was expecting to take on what I knew was going to be difficult, but I was prepared to put myself out for that'.*

In addition to the above, notes were placed in the text to confirm meaning:

P4 *'I wasn't put off by it but I knew that I would have more work to do **(suggested would have to do more work than others on the programme)** more background work than what the newly qualified people on the course would and I made the decision to come on the course. In fact, I am quite surprised by the number of newly qualified on the course'.*

During this initial transcription stage, comments were also added to the typed transcripts as initial key concepts became apparent. These concepts were those that formed part of the conceptual framework, thus being 'sensitised by the previous literature' (Marshall and Rossman (2016:218). Wengraf (2001) describes this stage as the mind being able to think about the material as you are working through and the technical aspect of writing down the words that have been spoken. An example of this was from the interview undertaken with participant 1. Below are examples of codes added during transcription:

P1 *'It was a very hands on course and we didn't do any of the research. We did all the basic modules but no further research, like a dissertation'.*  
**(Code: Academic transition).**

P1 *'I had done a lot of CPD courses but in terms of the degree I just felt that would be a good step for me'.* **(Code: Personal motivation/intrinsic).**

P1 *'I just thought that, I think that being part of a group has been really good'.* **(Code: Community of Practice)**

The above is described by Yin (2018:167) as that of interpretation or 'playing with the data', thus starting the process of translation. It is impossible for translation not to be involved if you are seeking patterns or themes from the data (Wolff 2013:np). The difference between transcribing and translating is not always acknowledged and the terms can be used interchangeably. Regardless of what methods are used, or who is undertaking the transcribing, there will always be some translation which turns the text into the language of the researcher.

### Documentary Data

Primary documentary evidence was also part of the data collection. As previously discussed, this was through personal statements taken from the initial application forms that the participants completed when applying for entry onto the BSc programme. Using documentary evidence in data analysis can provide a rich explanation of existing thoughts of the participants (Lawson 2018). As the documents were already in written text, no transcribing was required. In general, the principles of analysing documentary evidence can be the same as other strategies used in social research (Scott 1990). However, four principles should also be considered; authenticity, credibility, representativeness and meaning (Scott 1990)

The next stages of the analysis process will be relevant for both the documentary evidence and the interviews.

### Stages 2 – 5

#### Coding Strategy

Following transcription of the interviews and collection of the primary documents, these were both coded using open coding (Appendix 6). Coding is described as an initial process of examining data rather than an established analysis tool or strategy (Grbich 2013, Marshall and Rossman 2016), and is often used by

researchers at the beginning of the analysis process (Coffey and Atkinson 1996). Coding can be described as identifying concepts, themes or ideas from raw data. These concepts, themes or ideas will have some connection with each other. (McLaughlin et al 2013)

Before beginning the process of coding, a coding strategy was adopted. This strategy was based on Lichtman's (2014) analysis strategy (previously discussed) and used the remaining areas of codes, categories and concepts to move through the framework previously discussed. The following were also incorporated:

- Lichtman's (2014) six stage coding
- Yins (2011) five steps of qualitative analysis

The mapping of this can be found in the analysis mapping table (Appendix 7). To establish the theory generated codes from the analysis involved working through the individual transcripts line by line to establish key words and phrases (Lichtman 2014) that were interpreted as relevant to the research aim, the research questions, conceptual framework and the literature discussed in Chapter 2. This initial analysis stage presented similarities to phenomenological analysis as descriptive, linguistic and conceptual phrases were highlighted in the text of the individual transcripts. This descriptive stage is described by Smith et al (2009:84) as 'taking things at face value' with linguistic considering tone of voice, pauses and interpretation. In vivo codes were also used for any codes that emerged from the data. By using the above, both preconceived ideas and new emerging ideas could be captured, as well as full potential being given to the data being exploited (Dierckx de Casterle et al (2011). Using preconceived ideas alone can be limiting as new emerging key concepts can be been missed (Baily and Jackson 2003, Dierckx de Casterle et al 2011), an issue identified as one of the



challenges of undertaking qualitative data analysis (Dierckx de Casterle et al 2011). This meant that as well as considering the aim, research questions, conceptual framework and literature, I had to be open to new concepts that I may not have considered previously.

At this stage it was also important to consider the hermeneutic circle, with attention given to both the part and the whole. An example of this was to be aware of where the single extract coded was positioned in relation to the complete text.

The process of coding is described by Yin (2011) as disassembling the data and creating groups that have some meaning. These codes can often be descriptive and taken from the text or they can be abstract, meaning that they may present as a metaphor (Miles et al 2014). A metaphor in qualitative analysis is described as 'enabling the reconstruction of cognitive strategies of action' (Schmitt 2005:359) and is based on the Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) theory of metaphor.

Two examples of metaphors that were coded are highlighted below:

Transcript one: *'It was a lot of work but I felt that we were told to keep on top of it.'* (Code 1.8.5.)

Transcript 2: *'I tend to panic and I also found with the diploma you were spoon fed (Code 2.6.6.) everything, like the lectures, parrot fashion' (Code 2.6.7.). Metaphors will be discussed further in Chapter 7.*

A number was attached to each code which identified the transcript, the line number in the transcript and a number to identify the location in the line. These were also highlighted for ease of identification. An example is provided below:

*P1.3 'When I went into the workplace and after I had been working for about 10 years. There were a lot of students coming into the workplace who had a degree (1) and they were coming from a research aspect, like*

*we did on your course. I didn't have those skills to be able to look at paper critically (2). I could read a paper but it is only when I have come on this course that I could see I was only reading and not actually (3) (pause) I was just taking things at face value'.*

The second challenge of analysing qualitative data described earlier by Dierckx de Casterle et al (2011) is that of creating an overload of work by taking a line by line approach to coding. However, it was felt that following the process above was necessary to capture all the required codes. During this stage, I was asking key questions which included 'what is happening in the text and what are the explicit reasons why it is happening' (Castleberry and Nolen 2018:809). Coding can often adopt an interpretive approach. However, it can be argued that it can also be used from a positivist perspective with researchers quantifying how many times a code is identified in the transcripts (Denzin and Lincoln 2013). Similarities of this can be seen in content analysis where there can be an assumption that the more times a code appears in the text, the more significant it may be. Content analysis is acknowledged as a qualitative method of analysis. However in this study, counting codes was not necessarily used as an indicator of significant text. Counting codes can be viewed as providing evidence of reliability which is concerned with the 'consistency of variables' (Hardy and Bryman 2004:22) and making the assumption that findings that we establish from the study, would be the same if the research was to be conducted again. However, the findings or truth can be viewed as being constructed through a particular lens, at a particular time and within context (Grbich 2013). It is acknowledged in this study that realities could be multiple and that the coding (and further analysis) was undertaken with researcher subjectivity, bound with personal identity, culture and could be subject to negotiation. Following the initial coding, the transcripts were

revisited for any obvious codes that were not relevant or redundant (Lichtman 2014). At this stage there were no codes that were eliminated, but revisiting the codes also continued during the initial stages of creating the categories, at which point some codes were removed. It is acknowledged that during coding there was an intention to reduce the data. In order to do this and aligned to phenomenological analysis, bracketing was adopted in an attempt to remove any preconceived thoughts that I may have as the researcher. Phenomenological literature also discusses epoche (Lichtman 2014) which is a conscious halt to any judgement by the researcher. On reflection, I did not think the latter was possible based on my position in the research and also my prior experiences of being a non-traditional student. However, although I attempted bracketing, the full extent to which I was able to do this could be questioned as it may only ever be partially achieved (Smith et al 2009) as understanding the lived experiences of the participants was an iterative process (Tobin 2010).

### Categories

Following the initial stage of coding, the keywords and phrases were revisited and categories were developed. The interview categories were then transferred into individual participant transcript categories grids which also contained sub categories. Revisiting the codes allowed for any initial redundant ones to be removed. This was also done for the documentary evidence. An example of one category and sub - category with included coding from transcript 1 is provided below (Figure 5.3).

<b>Time</b>	Impact Personal time 1.9.1 Had to fit it in 1.9.3 Studied at weekend 1.9.4 Studied when children at School 1.9.5	Management Struggled to fit in all study weekends and Medicine weekend 1.13.1 Timing of M/W 1.13.2	Previous study 20 years ago 1.14.4 May not have knowledge 1.20.1 Feel less confident 1.20.2  MOVED TO POSITION
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	Allocate time 1.10.4		
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**Figure 5.3** Sample Participant Categories Grid

This stage was an iterative process, with some of the content of the categories being moved to others as the individual grids were reviewed. The grid developed from the coding of the first transcript, was used as the foundation for categories and sub categories. As this was done prior to the analysis of the documents, this category and sub category grid was also considered for identification of categories in the documents. However, in both cases, these were added to if needed, as the analysis of the remaining transcripts and documents were developed into categories. Care was taken at this stage to ensure that the story of the data was told. As this process was taking place, the data was manipulated and potentially put into more than one category or moved from one category to another.

An example of this is provided above where the code from the transcript placed in the category of time (sub category previous study) was removed and placed into the separate category of position (sub category previous study). This was left in green to allow for further revisiting and to reflect on the category to which the code was attached. Yin (2011) refers to this stage as re-assembling the data using hierarchies and matrices (Castleberry and Nolen 2018). Each matrix contained verbatim data excerpts from the transcripts or data from the documentary evidence.

Once all of the coded transcripts had been put into individual category grids, these grids were then synthesised to create combined categories and sub categories grids (Appendix 8). There were nine categories that emerged. It is acknowledged that some data fit into more than one category.

## Concepts

The synthesised categories (and sub categories) matrices were then used to begin the process of identifying key concepts. This stage saw some further reduction of the data with some categories appearing richer and more powerful than others (Lichtman 2014). Although there was evidence of interpretation during the whole analysis process, it was at this stage that the concepts derived from the interpretation and meaning of the data (Willig and Stainton-Rogers 2008) and it was inevitable that the hermeneutic process involved the link between myself as the researcher and the interpretation of the data.

At this point the data was also examined for rival explanations, described by Tobin (2012:1) as being at the heart of 'robust analysis' when undertaking case study research. Undertaking this analysis allowed for a critical check of the data to enhance reliability of the findings. It was important at this stage to ensure that the concepts that had been identified had good characteristics. Some of the good characteristics outlined by Brancati (2018) are that they have clarity and are clear about what they represent. They should also be 'moderate in scope' (Brancati 2018:65), so that they are not too broad but also not too narrow that the power that they have in explaining them is limited. These were considerations in the study. Although there is no prescriptive number of concepts that should be found from the data, it is thought that between five and seven should be the maximum (Lichtman 2014).

## Organisation of the Data

Following the coding of the text, initial categories were identified from the data. These categories were influenced by the conceptual framework and literature review. This was not deemed a disadvantage. This coded data from each individual transcript (based on individual participants) and the documentary

evidence were then presented in a category grid. The master categories contained sub categories. The first categories grid was based on the transcript of participant 1 and formed the basis of the initial categories that were developed. Undertaking this process with the remaining transcripts, identified additional categories and sub categories. These are presented in the Figure 5.4 below and are identified in red. Not all of the interviews presented data for every category or sub-category.

Master category	Sub category (1)	Sub category (2)	Sub category (3)
Expectations	Academic	Others in Group	Social
Time	Impact	Management	Previous study
Transition	Academic	Knowledge provided	Social
Transition (extended category)	Preparation	Personal	Support from colleagues
Transition (extended category)	Certificate to Diploma	Motivation	
Position	Academic	Current position	Others
Position (cont)	Prior learning	Previous study	Adult Learner
Position (extended category)	Confidence		
Motivation (why the course)	Intrinsic/personal	Extrinsic	Others
Motivation (on programme)	Intrinsic/personal		
Knowledge	Previous experience	Impact	Challenges
Non Traditional student	Work commitments	Commuting	Family Commitments
Non Traditional Student (extended category)	University Life (belonging)	Weekend Study	Communication with peers
Non Traditional Student (extended category)	Challenges	Others in group	
University Support/Resources	Distance	Lecturers/team/Students	Use of resources

<b>Personal life</b>	Sacrifices	Family support	
<b>Social</b>	Group/communi ty of practice	Communication	Feelings
<b>Identity</b>	Professional	Social	
<b>Progression</b>	Academic	Progression routes	
<b>Peer group support</b>	Group/communi ty of practice		
<b>University</b>	Environment		
<b>Learning Styles</b>	Ownership of learning	Approaches to learning	Groups
<b>Feelings</b>	Entering the programme	Assessments	
<b>Academic Judgement</b>	Confidence	Feedback	

**Figure 5.4** Interview Categories and Sub Categories

This analytical process was also undertaken for the documentary evidence (Figure 5.5)

<b>Master category</b>	<b>Sub category (1)</b>	<b>Sub category (2)</b>	<b>Sub category (3)</b>
<b>Expectations</b>	Academic	Increased knowledge	Progression
<b>Motivation (why the course)</b>	Intrinsic/personal	Extrinsic	
<b>Time</b>	Impact	Management	Qualification period
<b>Non Traditional student</b>	Work commitments		

**Figure 5.5** Documentary Evidence Categories and Sub Categories

### Presentation of Synthesised Categories Grids with Revising of the Categories

Following this, the individual categories grids were synthesised to create categories that represented the relevant data collected across the case study.

At this stage, there was some revisiting of the categories and some judgements were made about what was most relevant in respect of the research questions conceptual framework and the literature review(Lichtman 2014).

It is acknowledged that there was duplication in some of the data captured in the sub categories both in the interview data and documentary evidence. This was re-examined as the concepts emerged.

There were nine categories (with sub categories) that emerged from the interview data and three from the documentary evidence (Appendix 9). These were then revisited and further analysis was undertaken leading to the final four concepts. Figure 5.6 below demonstrates how the synthesised categories reduced the data to the four concepts. The categories and sub categories may not have been exclusive to one concept.

<p><b><u>Synthesised Categories</u></b></p> <p>Expectations (all sub categories)</p> <p>Social Transition (Expectations unknown)</p> <p>Progression (post degree, profession)</p> <p><b><u>Concept 1:</u></b></p> <p><b><u>Expectations</u></b></p>	<p><b><u>Synthesised Categories</u></b></p> <p>Time Commitment (Commitment to attendance)</p> <p>Academic Transition (Motivation to return to study)</p> <p>Motivation (all sub categories)</p> <p>Non-traditional Student (family commitments)</p> <p><b><u>Concept 2:</u></b></p> <p><b><u>Motivation</u></b></p>
<p><b><u>Synthesised Category</u></b></p> <p>Time Commitment (all sub categories)</p> <p>Academic Transition (all sub categories)</p> <p>Social Transition (all sub categories)</p>	<p><b><u>Synthesised Category</u></b></p> <p>Expectations (Social)</p> <p>Social Transition (Pre-course, Peers, Bonding/group formation, shared profession, Social Media)</p> <p>Motivation (Learning Environment)</p>



Position (all sub categories) Non-Traditional Student (university Resources, Weekend Study, Travel, Working Commitments) Progression (Academic Writing) University Support (all sub categories)  <u><b>Concept 3:</b></u>  <u><b>Transition (Academic and Social)</b></u>	Non-traditional Student (Belonging) University Support (all sub categories)  <u><b>Concept 4:</b></u>  <u><b>Community of Practice</b></u>
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**Figure 5.6** Final four concepts from the categories and sub categories.

The final four concepts were expectation, motivation, transition (academic and social) and CoP.

### Summary

There are four principles that underpin good qualitative analysis (Yin 2018:199); using as much evidence as possible, investigating ‘all plausible rival interpretations’ the analysis should aim to work with the ‘most significant aspect of the case’ and finally you should be familiar with the current thinking around your research area. The principles were used and reflected on throughout the above analytical process. The analysis strategy adopted during stages 2-5 were conducted for both the interviews and the documentary evidence. In the next chapter I will present the results from the analysis and outline the key concepts and findings. These will then be used to frame the discussion in chapter 7.

## CHAPTER 6 FINDINGS

### Introduction

The aim of this study was to investigate the academic and social experiences of diploma students (DHDT) during the transition to HE as they enter a BSc (Hons) Dental Studies Programme. The first chapter of the thesis introduced the background to the issue of transition, followed by a literature review of the current evidence base. Gale and Parker's (2014) three concepts of transition as induction, development and becoming were used to frame the literature review, which then influenced the methodological approach adopted. The chapters that followed examined the methods adopted for data collection and how the data was then analysed. This chapter will now present the findings that emerged from the data and will be framed by the research questions; What are the expectations of the students entering onto the BSc (Hons) Dental Studies and HE? and How do students experience the transition from diploma to degree level study? When doing this, the conceptual framework, discussed in Chapter 3, will be considered in relation to the findings from the data and analysis. Vignettes will be used to illustrate some of the findings from the individual interviews. Vignettes can be described as 'short stories about individuals in specific situations, which are connected to important aspects of the research topic' (Torrönen 2018:276.) There can be three purposes for using vignettes: to allow for actions within the context to be explored, to clarify participants' judgements and to enable sensitive research areas to be presented in a less threatening way (Barter and Renold 1999). The first purpose will be the primary rationale for the use of vignettes. Vignettes are often focussed on the third person, particularly when the subject is sensitive, but this will not be the case for this study. The methodology was a case study using a phenomenological approach, therefore the decision to use

vignettes allowed for the data to be provided in a way that it did not disaggregate the experiences from the data but encouraged a sense of the individual.

### **Presentation of the Data**

Four concepts derived from the final analysis; expectations, motivation, transition (academic and social) and CoP. Each of the four concepts also had sub concepts which will be presented. The findings from the interviews and documentary evidence will be presented independently with both supporting and contrasting data and alternative perspectives (Yin 2018).

Although expectations and motivation appeared to be related to research question 1, and the concepts of academic transition and community of practice related to research question 2, they did not sit exclusively and there was some overlap. The conceptual framework will also be considered when presenting the findings to provide a theoretical background.

### **Expectations**

The first concept of expectations derived from both the interviews and the documentary evidence. However, the findings did identify differing interpretations and therefore the results will be presented separately. During the interviews, the questions asked of each participant did not always take the same format dependent on the discussion taking place. It was not always possible to pose the same questions with the same words or in the same order (Brancati 2018, Hardy and Bryman 2004). Examples of the questions used in the interviews were in relation to the expectations of the programme, detailed below:

*'What did you expect it to be like'?*

*'Has it been what you expected'?*

*'Is it the same or different to what you thought it would be'?*

Although the above questions were not specific about reference to a particular expectation, the findings were heavily focussed on the academic aspect of the transition and were based on participants reflecting on their expectations prior to entry on to the programme. The findings fell into six different categories; the programme was different from what was expected, there were unknown expectations, it was harder than what was expected, it was better than expected, it was as expected and there was an expectation of achievement. The perceived expectation of it being different to the reality of what the programme was actually like once study had commenced had a clear focus on the academic level. However, this presented with different concerns. One of the areas discussed was in relation to the expected level of study. Jane, a mature student aged 30 reported

*'I thought that the work required would be more descriptive and initially I thought the only work required would be at weekends'.*

Another expectation was related to the expected amount of time required. Lesley, also a mature student aged 40, reported

*'I didn't realise that I would have to commit as many hours as I did. I thought initially the time commitment would be 2 hours a day but the reality is more like 3 hours plus every day'.*

Reference was also made to the difference in expectation about the teaching and learning strategies adopted. Amanda, a mature student aged 50 has not studied for 30 years and reported

*'I think I expected to get a text book and be answering questions, like more short answer questions. So it's been very different to what I thought'*

The perceived expectation of the academic level and the reality of it being more difficult than expected was reported as differing in respect of the level of study

required. Although all of the participants had studied at Diploma level, the findings presented this as a challenge. Jane reported

*'I thought it would be a lot easier than it actually is'* and Kelly, a mature 35-year-old also commented *'I thought that my level of education was reasonable but the level was a lot deeper than I thought'*

The perceived expectation and the reality of it being the same was reported. This was less evident than the other categories. Amanda also reported that the reality of expectations surpassed the perceived expectations:

*'the programme being better than I thought it would be. The subject is terribly interesting and I am really enthused by it'*.

It was reported that, in some cases, the expectations were unknown (either consciously or unconsciously). Karen, a mature student, working full time reported

*'I don't know what I expected it to be like at all. When you apply for things, it's the excitement and you think oh, I am going to do this, and I'm going to do that, I don't really think I thought what it was going to be like academically, so when I got there, it was a shock. I didn't really think it was going to be like this'*.

The first four analytical categories demonstrated that the expectations prior to entry were different from the reality of the programme but for differing reasons. However, despite some of the above having positive outcomes, the majority of participants indicated that the reality of expectations was less positive than anticipated.

The evidence from the personal statements was heavily focussed on the expectations of some academic development taking place for the individual. Due

to the personal statements being completed before entry onto the programme, the analysis of these allowed insight into not only what the expectations were of the programme but also what the participants wanted to achieve. Therefore, although the concept being reported here is expectations, it cannot be completely disconnected from the concept of motivation and the intrinsic or extrinsic reasons that the participants reported as the reasons for entry onto the programme. The key finding within this concept was that there was an expectation that knowledge would be gained by undertaking the programme, building on existing knowledge that had already been acquired. This finding was reported in the documentary evidence as

*'The course will reinforce my current knowledge and I will use my new found knowledge constructively.'*

In addition to this, there was an expectation that gaining this knowledge would allow for progression and career development with one of the participants clearly stating that the knowledge gained from this particular programme would allow progression onto another professional course following completion of the programme.

## **Motivation**

Motivation and the reasons for wanting to pursue further study were reported in both the interviews and the documentary evidence. Intrinsic motivation was found to be a key factor, but extrinsic motivational factors were also evident. Family commitments and the desire to develop were the key motivational factors.

## Family Commitments

The first motivational factor was linked to the impact of family commitments, a finding from the interviews. This was reported with two separate dimensions; the impact of having family commitments, and in contrast the impact of not having any family commitments. From the perspective of the first, one of the key findings was that children were an influencing motivational factor when participants were deciding whether to return to study. These findings particularly related to grown up children who either may have gone to university themselves or were old enough not to need as much time from their parents. The participants in the study who discussed having children reported that this was a key consideration in the decision making process of whether to begin the programme at that appropriate time to invest in themselves as learners. Lesley reported

*'my daughter has grown up so it is the right time to do the course. It is time to look at what I want'.*

This finding was also supported by Amanda who said

*'the children have left home for university so it felt like the right time'.*

Furthermore, the analysis of the documentary evidence also pointed out the influence of family commitments being a reason for return to study as the participant was

*'now in a position where I would welcome the opportunity for further study as my children are now teenagers'.*

In contrast to the above, it was also reported that not having children or family commitments was a motivational factor as this meant that there were fewer barriers or considerations to study. Living at home with parents and not having the financial commitments of family meant that it was an appropriate and obvious choice to return to study at that time before any of the commitments made it more

difficult. Amy, a mature student aged 25 lives at home with her parents and has no family commitments. She reported

*'I live at home, I am not running a house and I have money available. The financial consideration was important'.*

The findings identified that although all of the participants' were mature, there were variations between the less mature and more mature participants and those with or without family commitments.

### Development

A second intrinsic motivator for returning to study was the participants' own personal development and a desire to progress. From this perspective, it was reported that personal achievement and wanting to do something as an individual was important and it was not necessarily about career progression. Amanda, who was very settled in her current professional role reported

*'I wanted to do well for myself, not for my career as I am happy with that. It is not going to change my career. I have chosen to do it and that is how I have chosen to spend my time over the next year'.*

Amy also reported that for her it was

*'a personal achievement'.*

There was evidence of participants' self-efficacy and the belief that they could succeed to achieve the degree. Karen reported that she had a:

*'mentality of going out and finding the information'.*

This was discussed in the context of wanting to do well. Amanda also reported that

*'she wanted to do well'.*

In contrast to the above, it was reported that although there was an element of personal achievement as a motivational factor, many DHDTs are now qualified



to degree level. Due to this, it was reported that it was necessary to undertake the programme in order to not feel left behind at work and not simply stay in the same position. There was a perception that they may be compromised in employment situations as they were not as qualified as other DHDTs who held a degree. Career progression was also discussed, with one participant using the programme as a

*'stepping stone',*

whilst others reported that they did not want to stay in a clinical role for a long duration of time and the programme could act as a catalyst to further development. For example, Karen saw the programme as a

*'staging post to further study for example a masters'.*

and Amy was aware of

*'the option to progress if things became available'.*

This indicated that the programme was possibly a potential progression route with Karen thinking about a particular programme and Amy was just ensuring that if the time came, she would be able to explore opportunities. There was evidence of personal development in all of the documents analysed, for example:

*'I wish to improve my knowledge and skills',*

with intrinsic motivation being paramount.

### **Transition (Academic and Social)**

The academic position that the participants placed themselves in as a learner was a finding from several of the interviews analysed. However, initially this was analysed under the concept of expectations. Following further reflection of the analysis, I felt that it would be more appropriate to present the findings and discussion within the concept of transition. The difference in how this was reported was reflected by the profile of the participant and the identity that they

had formed in the group. For some, it was also influenced by the length of time since any previous study had been undertaken. One of the main findings on transition was the perceived position that participants placed themselves in if they had been out of study for some time and also the perception they had of the students that had studied more recently. For example, Janet had returned to study after a gap of 30 years and due to this positioned herself as not being as familiar with the systems and conventions of HE as some of the other students would be:

*'It is over 30 years ago since I studied last, it was scary (coming into HE) as I knew that the programme I did, even with CPD was not at the same level as the ones that are there now. For those who have trained in the diploma properly it will be a lot easier for them than someone like me. I wasn't put off by it but I knew that I would have more work to do more background work than what the newly qualified people on the course would. There is a lot more for me to learn, I'm sure. Not just because of the time (duration from qualification) but because of the depth of what they have done before. I have found the computer side of things very difficult, I have never had word before, I have never done a lot of things. I've had to do a lot of writing on paper and then typing it up. I had a one to one with WISER on essay structure, again I wasn't really sure how to do all that. I had a one to one in the library to make sure I was reading the correct stuff eg how to find a book. I didn't think about all these things and after the induction I didn't feel confident to do all that. I have come up on Fridays, to have some one to ones and they have really helped. Referencing I have never done before, so yes, um I'm trying my hardest with that. I think that some of the other girls won't have to do that if they have done the Diploma.*

*These are some of the differences I mean, for me having to go the extra mile and find out things they already know. I think though that is the best way to do it, definitely. They are not there at the weekend, but they are there if you need them, its well worth taking time out to use them. It's my motivation, my motivation is wanting to do well. It's not that I'm behind but I do have some catching up to do, I want to get those skills. And once I have done it, I can use those skills and then use the library like the other girls. So just an hour one to one, I don't feel behind on that now. One of the first things that hit home, I did actually think, oh gosh, what all those girls are going to be able to do, you know, they can do this and they can do that'*

Other participants who had more recent experience of study reported that they were in a better position academically as they had recently engaged with education.

The findings point to many issues and concerns with transition in respect of the reported academic gap from diploma to degree. It was reported that due to the technical nature of clinical training in the previous diploma, this had not allowed for a natural transition into HE and the academic transition was challenging. The teaching and learning strategies prior to entry had a strong focus on repetitive skill acquirement, whereas the degree required a range of strategies to be adopted. The new strategies included group work, peer learning and taking part in professional debates.

Participants reported that any previous study had not prepared them for some of the requirements to be able to study on the programme. These challenges included not having the required skills for study and academic writing, lack of skills with referencing, being able to adjust to the level required, assessments

and being able to search for literature using the library resources. However, the benefits of engaging with the university support services was highlighted as beneficial. The challenge of the level of study, particularly in the early stages of the first module was also reported extensively. Many participants found the level of study required as difficult and harder than they had been used to at the same time as having more work than they expected, leading to them questioning themselves:

*'How can I do this?'*

and *asserting* that

*'it was too hard to be done'.*

However in contrast, it was also reported that some participants felt

*'it was an extension from the diploma'* and *natural progression from diploma'* and *'a natural progression'.*

However this was not reported extensively. Participants also reported that they found undertaking assessments difficult and they felt

*'nervous about handing in work for the first time'.*

It was evident that emotion played an integral part in transition with a variety of words used across the interviews to capture this such as:

*'nervous, apprehensive, scary, shock, how can I do this, confidence dented'.*

Despite some of these challenges, it was also reported that there was a good range of support provided by the course team as well as the wider university services, with participants reporting there was

*'a lot of support provided'.*

It was also acknowledged that the course team reinforced throughout the early stages of the programme the importance of

*'keeping on top of the work'*

with Kelly reporting

*'I don't know how much more I could have been told'.*

Karen also made reference to being a mature student and how this impacted on her approach to learning, reporting that

*'being more mature meant I put more effort in'.*

Within the findings relating to transition, the level of commitment reported was high. This could also link back to the previous finding of motivation.

The findings summarised that participants experienced academic challenges when transitioning from diploma to degree but there was support available. The findings also summarised the influence of how students positioned themselves in the group.

### **Community of Practice**

The findings suggested that being part of a community in HE was important to support individuals. There were no direct references made to any previous community. However, indirectly, individuals referred to networks in the workplace and at home. The fact that the participants' had a shared interest as they entered into university (all being DHs or DHDTs) was acknowledged and it was recognised that forming a community in the group was important. One participant reported that they felt that this community began at the interview stage as she met other potential students and this allowed for a social network to develop through the use of social media. The main finding in respect of this, was that the community did not necessarily form at the induction stage of the programme, but this did begin to happen over a period of time. The findings reported a very strong sense of bonding and the importance of the social group. However, it was also

reported by some that it was the teaching and learning strategies adopted in the second module had an influence. Lesley reported:

*'To begin with we were all a little bit disjointed and then um, the more we got into the course, the more we bonded together, but I would say it was the second module that we bonded together a lot more. We engaged together much better in the second module. We were encouraged more in group activities and I think made people then break away from their little social groups to work together, which I think is good. Social groups reformed due to group work.'*

Karen also shared some of these views and reported similar findings. However, she also made reference to the social aspect of forming a community being secondary to academic priority:

*'I think it took longer to get to know each other and make friendships. The ACS (module), no one really spoke outside of the module. We saw each other on a Saturday but it probably wasn't until the F/L module that we started to speak outside. Obviously there were a couple of people that you communicated with but the main group didn't bond until after the module. However, I needed to get as much out of the lectures as I could rather than let's make friends.'*

When discussing the community, it was reported that the students had formed an inclusive group and it was a positive environment to be in. In addition to this, Amanda discussed that there was no competition within the group and it was a supportive community:

*'everyone was interested in everyone else they were like-minded people and anyone was welcome in the group. Everyone is interested in each*

*other as they all want the same, therefore you were socially accepted and this made the transition easier'.*

One participant reported that having time off from the programme had significantly impacted on social connections. This was not due to the responses of others in the group but from an individual perspective of feeling detached from the others. It was also reported, although minimally, that age influenced having things in common to support bonding.

A significant finding from the analysis of the interview data was the use of social media to support both the formation of the community and also the continuation of this. This was reported as important due to the part time nature of the programme and students only attending the university for a limited amount of sessions. It was felt that as well as having a social media presence to support the social network and keeping people connected when they were not in university, it was also advantageous for the academic element of the programme. By using social media, this facilitated a forum where questions could be asked of peers and support could be provided, without the need for being face to face. It was reported that without this, it could have been difficult to engage and also keep in touch with others. However, although the above was a positive contribution, it brought challenges to participants who may not have had the necessary computer skills. In summary, being part of a community was reported as positive and advantageous but this was not without challenge.

### **Summary**

The main findings relating to the expectations and experiences of transition from diploma to degree highlighted the issue of expectations and how this can impact on study, both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors to enter into HE and some of the difficulties relating to academic transition. It was also evident that the

community into which students enter is important as is how they position themselves within this community of peers.

Although the findings presented alternative ideas from participants, the data did not present any major outliers. The next chapter will discuss the findings in relation to the literature review and the conceptual framework.



## **CHAPTER 7 DISCUSSION**

### **Introduction**

This chapter will draw on the findings from Chapter 6. The findings will be used to locate the study in what is already known about transition and to further develop key theories and theoretical concepts around transition. As discussed in the literature review in Chapter 2, although transition in education is well documented (Christie et al 2011, Cole 2017, Crafter and Maunder 2012, Gale and Parker 2014, Hussey and Smith 2010, Leese, 2010, Morgan 2013, Roberts, 2011, Pike and Harrison 2011, Winter and Dismore 2010), this is the first research study that has investigated the transition of DHDTs into HE.

The research questions, What are the expectations of the students entering onto the BSc (Hons) Dental Studies and HE? and How do students experience the transition from diploma to degree level study? were used to develop the conceptual framework. The methodological design was a qualitative single case study using a phenomenological approach. Topical interviews and documentary evidence were used for data collection and the participants were purposively selected from different cohorts of the BSc (Hons) Dental Studies programme. The data was analysed using codes, categories and concepts to develop the key findings.

### **Summary of the Findings**

Four key concepts of the expectations and experiences of the BSc (Hons) Dental Studies students were drawn from the findings and demonstrated some consistencies with previous research. These concepts were expectations, motivation (including family commitments, personal and career), transition, both academic and social (including identity and support) and communities of practice. The first concept of what the students expected study at HE level to be like,

outlined six diverse key areas. These included study at HE being different to what was expected, having unknown expectations, study at HE being academically harder than expected, HE being better than expected, as expected and the expectation of individual achievement. These six main concepts will be discussed below. However, it is important to acknowledge that these concepts do not always necessarily sit exclusively from each other.

### **Expectations**

Gale and Parker's (2014:739) first concept of transition as induction defines this as 'the domain of the first year experience', indicating that transition is thought about from the time that participants enter into HE and onwards rather than the experiences prior to entry. It was evident from the findings that the concept of expectations linked back to the pre-transition stage, a period of time before the participants applied for and entered into university and a concept that aligns with transition being at a point in time (Gale and Parker 2014). These expectations derived from the participants' pre-conceived ideas, a time period of transition that is not well reported in the literature as a pre-defined term. Due to the participants reflecting on their expectations before they entered the programme, it is important to acknowledge that this could be influenced by hindsight bias (Hawkins and Hastie 1990, Pohl et al 2018). This means that the recall of these earlier expectations (and therefore a pre-transitional phase), can influence the actual experiences that participants had once they enrolled onto the programme, potentially resulting in different data. However, although hindsight bias is acknowledged as a potential consideration, there was no evidence to suggest that this influenced any of the data.

The findings presented sub concepts of student expectations which will be discussed using the notions of composite constructions; ideal, predictions and normatives.

The first notion of ideal relates to what students expect as the ideal of what they would like to happen when they enter into HE, which supports the transition not just being about a point in time, but that of the experience of change (Quinn 2010). This was particularly evident in the documentary evidence, where there was an expectation of increased academic achievement from studying in HE. The participants had an expectation that studying at HE level would enable them to gain additional knowledge and also build on existing knowledge they already had, with outcome expectations being a main concern (Lee and Park 2011). However, it is also reported that self-efficacy, the belief that goals can be achieved relating to overall success (Corkett et al 2011), can influence this achievement (Bandura 1977). There was evidence from the findings that the participants demonstrated high levels of self-efficacy.

The second notion of composite constructions is predictions. In the context of this study, the predictions were the perceived expectations of what studying at HE would be like. This evidence was elicited mainly from the interviews. All of the concepts had a strong focus of academic expectations which also concurs with literature (Bergin and Jimmieson 2017, Brinkworth et al 2009, Rowley et al 2008). Three out of these six concepts demonstrated that the participants' expectations prior to study did not meet the reality of what happened once they entered in to HE (Brinkworth et al 2009). The expected level of study was an area that presented as being different to what the participants anticipated before they entered into HE, with a disparity between the level studied previously at FE and the expected level required at HE being apparent. This could be related to the

participants' prior experience of study, in this case diploma level, not preparing students academically for study at HE level. However, literature does suggest that mature students enter HE adopting a deeper approach to learning (Haggis 2009, Lake and Boyd 2015). This could suggest that although the expectations about the level of education were different to that of reality, students were able to adapt to the level during study due to a strong sense of self-efficacy. This concurs with literature which suggests that intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy are high in mature students (Bye 2007, Kahu et al 2013). However, it was also reported that participants found the academic level to be harder than what they expected, an example of this being that the participants thought their level of education was good but study at HE was at a much higher level. The participants entered into HE from diverse prior educational experiences, particularly in respect of the time since they last studied. For some of the participants, particularly those who presented as DHs, they had been away from education for some time, hence potentially impacting on the expectations not necessarily meeting reality.

The participants' expectation of how much time would be required for study also differed from reality, with more time having to be committed to undertaking academic work than was anticipated. As non-traditional students, family, carer or work commitments are often pressures that students have to balance and the ability to have sufficient time to dedicate to study is not always an option (Gilardi and Gugliemetti 2011). Therefore the perception of time that would be required, could have been based on their individual circumstances of how much time they actually had for study time.

The different approaches to teaching and learning were also a reality that differed from what was expected, resulting in the students having to learn and adopt new approaches to learning. It could be suggested that the three factors above were

influenced by normative experiences, meaning that prior educational experiences influenced what was expected (Brooks 2003 Crips et al 2009, Leese 2010). These expectations could have also been influenced by the participants' individual characteristics (Tinto 1975) such as age or culture. The students' profile as non-traditional may have resulted in a disconnect between expectations and reality, particularly from an academic perspective (Barron and D'annunzio 2009). The maturity of the students in the study could also be related to their differing expectations of teaching and learning approaches. As mentioned above, some of the participants had not been in formal education for many years, one participant in particular had not studied for 30 years, therefore returning to education and engaging with teaching and learning strategies that they were not necessarily familiar with could prove challenging, particularly if these different strategies may inadvertently alienate a non-traditional learner (Roberts 2011). As students, they would have needed to adapt to evolving teaching and learning strategies that now encourage engagement 'leading to transformative practice' (Menis 2017:196). This transformation of knowledge requires students to be part of the educational process and engaged rather than to simply be a passive learner (Menis 2017). This could be very different from previous experience study, particularly as the participants' previous dental education had been technically focussed. Therefore, it cannot just be assumed that the participants would have the ability to cope with adapting to a new way of learning.

It was reported by some of the participants that there were some unknown expectations of what HE would be like. The literature reports this unknown entity in two different ways; one is as a lack of understanding and the second is of not knowing the true extent of what is required (Barron and D'annunzio 2009). The latter can be linked back to expectations and participants having some idea about

what HE may be like but not knowing the full extent of this. The first point above relating to the lack of understanding is a factor that was apparent from the findings. Participants reported

*'not knowing what to expect',*

a thought that is supported in the literature (Barron and D'annunzio 2009). As discussed above, most of the participants' expectations did not meet with the reality from a perspective of them not being prepared for study at HE level. However one participant did report that the experience had been better than what was expected, a finding that was an outlier in the study. Evidence suggests that student expectations are based on their prior experiences, normatives. In the interview, participants did refer back to the Diploma that had been their previous study and therefore it could be concluded that in respect of the expectations, there was some comparison to this experience as a consequential transition, hence the difference between expectations and reality.

There is considerable discussion in more recent literature on transition relating to students being consumers (Browne 2010, Harrison and Risler 2015, Lee and Park 2011, Kahu and Nelson 2017, Woodall et al 2014). Despite this evidence base, this was not discussed by any of the participants in relation to their outcome expectations, despite evidence in literature suggesting that students want to see a return on their investment (Bunce et al 2017) and mature students being more at risk from an economic perspective (Howard and Davies 2013). It is acknowledged that the participants may not directly have referred to themselves as consumers. However even with this consideration there was still no evidence that indicated this was an important factor. It could be suggested that the lack of reference to this could be a positive factor if it is not a prime consideration or focus, as the connection between what students learn and their own independent

thinking could be lost if the participants' focus of responsibility was perceived to lie with the HEI in a consumer model (Goodman et al 2011). One of the participants did refer to money in respect of having the available funds to support study due to having no family commitments. However, this discussion did not refer to expecting a return on investment.

In summary, the findings evidence that the expectations of the participants differed from the reality of HE, particularly from the perspective of the academic requirements.

### **Motivation**

Motivation was interpreted from the analysis to be a key concept when considering the experiences of the participants' transition to HE onto the BSc (Hons) Dental Studies Programme. It was evident that factors that could be related to motivation had been a consideration of the participants at the pre-transition stage, again a period of time not well defined in the literature. The findings of the research in relation to motivation identified the significance of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors with each one not necessarily exclusive of the other (D'Lima 2014). The first significant finding was the influence of family or carer commitments in relation to the participants' motivation and reasons to return to study at that particular point in time. This motivation was also related to a significant life event of the participants, such as a child going to university or having grown up. This concurs with the notion of redundancy discussed in the literature review (Walters 2000). It was reported that due to this redundancy, it was felt an appropriate time to consider entering university, as spare time was more readily available and the participants felt that they would be able to make the long term commitment to invest in the time to study due to the stability of family life (Goncalves et al 2013). This indicates that the participants had a high

level of self-efficacy and a sense of seeking to achieve and were able to work autonomously as learners (Bye et al 2007). The research also found that participants who did not have any family or carer commitments were equally as intrinsically motivated as the personal circumstance of having a few or fewer commitments was a prime consideration when deciding to transition to university at the point in time. In this case, there was no sense of redundancy apparent, the decision was guided by having the time and finances in place to be able to commit to study. However, both cases demonstrated the same level of intrinsic motivation. This could suggest that non-traditional students are more likely to consider returning to university if family or carer commitments were reduced or removed. However, in contrast, two of the participants did have young children and adopted strategies to manage time and juggling these commitments was discussed as achievable. Although all of the participants were non-traditional and mature students, the different profiles and backgrounds in this case presented differing evidence.

A second intrinsic motivational factor was that of personal development and achievement. This intrinsic need was reported as wishing to gain something at a more personal level and a need to achieve personal growth and self-improvement (Bye et al 2007). This intrinsic motivation was closely linked to student identity (which will be discussed further in this chapter) with the participants seeking to prove to themselves that they had the ability to return to university and be successful students (Swain and Hammond 2011). As discussed in Chapter 2, intrinsic motivation is generally high in non-traditional students. Evidence also suggests that this is particularly relevant for female students (Murphy and Roopchand 2003) which is representative of the profile of the students on the BSc (Hons) Dental Studies programme. This is also aligned with Bandura's



(1977) concept of self-efficacy with the participants' acknowledgment that the degree may be challenging and the transition to university in some cases was an expectation that was not known. However, the belief that the degree could be achieved was evident, with clear goals being set and the participants' engaging in strategies of self-regulation (van Dinther et al 2011). The notion of competence within self-determination theory corresponds with the participants feeling that they had the ability to fully engage with the learning process with a view to successfully achieving their objectives (Amoura et al 2015). As dental professionals, these beliefs of capability may have been based on previous tasks or activities, possibly from successfully studying a previous professional qualification. The impact that these prior educational experiences have on motivation are also reported in the literature (Gorard et al 1998). These experiences may have created authentic evidence to build the foundations of a strong sense of self-efficacy (Palmer 2006). For these beliefs to continue, it is imperative that students continue to get a good range of practical experience and application of knowledge within the BSc (Hons) Dental Studies programme, to enable this level of self-efficacy to continue. However, even if this application of knowledge and practical experience is embedded in the programme, this does not necessarily convert into mastery for all students as this can be influenced by the authenticity of the experience (Zimmerman 2000).

The participants also reported evidence of autonomy with the ability to engage with study and adopt an autonomous approach, aligning with transition as development and the process from being a passive learner to that of an autonomous one (Gale and Parker 2014). However, autonomy can also be facilitated by the notion of autonomy-supportive, a dimension of Self-determination theory that is influenced not only by the students themselves but

also the level of autonomy-support provided by the lecturers and course team. Although the teaching team on the BSc (Hons) Dental Studies programme are supportive, particularly as the students are part-time and often in work, this level of support is balanced to allow for flexibility within learning and the students having the opportunity to self-regulate and make decisions. This is particularly apparent in the final research module of the programme.

The analysis of the data showed repeated references to personal achievement but in some cases this sense of achievement was not reported exclusively. Personal achievement was also discussed in relation to returning to study with a view that this would support or result in enhanced career prospects from an extrinsic perspective. All of the participants had studied before and were currently in employment, therefore it was not perhaps surprising that career prospects also featured as important. These career prospects emerged in two slightly different ways. The first was related to the change in wider context of dentistry and how DHDT training is now being delivered. Many of the more recently approved DHDT programmes are degree level programmes and it is likely that this number will continue to increase. Due to this, the participants felt that by gaining a degree they would be as qualified as some of the newer graduates who had already studied at degree level when undertaking the registerable qualification. As discussed earlier, recent changes in funding have resulted in DHDT courses no longer attracting an NHS Bursary, meaning that students will apply to Student Finance England for any tuition fees or maintenance loans (Business Services Authority (BSA) 2018). For the 2018/19 academic year, only five dental schools provided DHDT training that was exempt from these changes, however, it is anticipated this will also change for the following academic year. Evidence from across the profession indicates that due to funding being through Student

Finance England, this will result in DHDT programmes becoming degree level as opposed to some of them previously being at Diploma level. This reinforces the participants' desire to gain a degree.

The second significant finding regarding career prospects was participants having the opportunity to be able to enhance future career opportunities and use the study at HE level to improve these prospects, a concept reported extensively in the literature (Balloo et al 2015, Berker and Horn 2003, D'Lima 2014, Froilond and Olos 2014, Klingi 2006). The degree was referred to as a stepping stone to allow career progression and this was an influencing motivational factor when considering enrolling on the programme. This is reported in the literature as being more evident and significant for those students who have family commitments or have been carers (Swain and Hammond 2011) and of those who are employed. Both of these factors are aligned to the profile of the participants in this study. This desire to enhance and progress in a career could also be linked to confidence levels of working in the profession. As discussed in Chapter 1, DHDTs have not always been recognised by the wider profession for the role they are undertaking and this can affect confidence. Undertaking successful educational development may go some way to building this confidence and allowing DHDTs to gain the professional recognition they deserve. The pending contract reform and Advancing Dental Care (discussed in Chapter 1) may also contribute to this confidence and recognition of the role of a DHDT. One of the recommendations from the initial review from Advancing Dental Care is a dental workforce assessment will be undertaken to help the profession to understand the numbers for a DCP skill mix team (HEE 2018).

As previously discussed, data was collected from participants who were all at different stages in the programme. Therefore, although it could not be generalised

for all, the notion of perseverance and effort based on the degree of self-efficacy an individual has (Bandura 1997), was apparent from the success of the students, particularly those nearing the end of the programme.

In summary, the evidence suggests that the non-traditional students in this study had high levels of motivation. This was more apparent from an intrinsic perspective with the key factor being the desire to develop themselves as individuals. This is aligned with the literature (Bye et al 2007, Money et al 2017, Murphy and Roopchand 2003).

### **Transition (Academic and Social)**

Tinto's (1975) model of integration identifies academic transition as the extent to which students adapt to the academic way of life, in this case within HE. It was evident from the findings that participants acknowledged that there was a difference in academic level from diploma to degree and in some cases it was felt that that previous study had not necessarily supported the transition to HE. It could be argued that you would expect there to be a level difference for any student progressing from level 5 to level 6. However, in this case the difficulties could be related to the technical content of the diploma as well as the students being non-traditional. This is supported by Barron and D'Annunzio-Green (2009) who discuss evidence that students who enter HE with credits from previous study, as in the case of the BSc Dental Studies students, can often experience extreme difficulties in bridging the gap between their previous learning and also what is expected of them.

Although the analysis suggested that the level of academic work was important for students, when discussing academic transition (this has also been discussed earlier in this chapter in relation to expectations), one of the key findings was

around participants' perception of their academic position in the group. Gale and Parkers' (2014) first notion of transition as induction refers to changes taking place from a social perspective as well as academic transition during the first year of study. It was evident from the data collected, that the academic position of the participants had been self-identified early in the programme. they had begun to socially construct their own learner identity. It could also be suggested from the findings that this identity formation had already started to begin at the pre-transition stage, as when this was discussed by the participants, it was framed in the past tense with a suggestion of these thoughts prior to entry. This is aligned with the findings of Briggs et al (2012) who suggest that the formation of learner identity does not only take place on entry to HE, but can begin to happen pre-transition. However, it is still argued that transition and in this case learner identity, is still focussed on entry rather than what happens before entry (Gale and Parker 2014). Hussey and Smith (2010) discuss that identity formation is fluid and a continuous process thus changing throughout the student life and participating in a new community can contribute to a change of identity (Tuner and Tobbell 2018).

As non-traditional students, the profile of the participants relating to their previous study was diverse, ranging from some participants being away from education for 30 years, to others who had more recently qualified within the last two years. Despite there being extensive literature that focusses on non-traditional students, there appears to be less evidence that relates to any impact of the duration of time a student is away from previous study and more importantly, how this may contribute to the formation of learner identity. The amount of time a student had spent away from previous study linked to their perception of academic ability both from the perspective of recent study and any study that had taken place some

time ago and was evident from these findings. Participants who reported that they had been away from study for some time, perceived this to be a disadvantage, particularly when it came to being able to manage the new academic requirements, in particular, the level of study. As discussed in the literature review in Chapter 2, Kahu and Nelson (2017) discuss three challenges for students entering HE, with the first one relating to students not having the right level of skill. However, this challenge is reported from the perspective of students having insufficient skills due to differing demographic characteristics, and therefore they may not have the same level of academic skills, including numeracy and literacy (Warren 2002). In this study, the participants reported that they perceived their academic ability would not be sufficient. This was despite the fact that they had previously successfully engaged in education at a high level, leading to a professional qualification in DH or DHDT (Pike and Harrison 2011). This perceived disadvantage is discussed in the literature as students who have taken a long break in study potentially having 'underdeveloped approaches to learning' (Goodchild 2017:3) This is particularly relevant from the perspective of computer skills (Eichelberger and Bonnie 2016). The self-concept of the participants was a belief about their own ability and the ability they perceived their peers might have of them (Hussey and Smith 2010). The participants reported that they considered that they might lack the required skills, particularly in comparison to some of their peers (Reay 2002, Ross et al 2002). This evidence is reflective of literature, which indicates that negative perceptions of oneself can lead to anxiety and lack of confidence about being able to succeed (Mercer and Saunders 2004, Stone 2008). This is linked to cognitive risks and it is suggested that these cognitive risks can negatively affect self-efficacy and motivation (Bandura 1995). However as identified previously, self-efficacy was apparent through evidence that

participants believed that their goals could be achieved. There was also the perception that peers would have greater academic ability due to some of them having more recently engaged with education. This does not support social identity theory, as the participants did not identify themselves with the same identity as others in the group, perceiving themselves to be disadvantaged based on their time away from study.

This identity formation also presented itself as a social risk, as there was evidence that some of the participants' views of their identity aligned with evidence where individuals can position themselves as non-learners (Howard and Davies 2012). This positioning may also have been influenced by the role of emotion, which can affect transition and identity formation (Archer et al 2002, McMillan 2013) with feelings of self-worth being influential. However, there was evidence of the participants having a strong sense of emotional capital from the perspective of resilience as the feeling of not being good enough in comparison to peers and this was discussed and rationalised (Weber 2014).

The formation of a new identity can conflict with any previous or older one(s) and this can result in tensions, risks and ruptures (Baxter and Britton 2001, Brooks 2007, Mercer 2007). This could then impact on the participants' view of their position in the group. Identity rupture may have resulted in a change from the participants sphere of experience from being a non-student and professional to returning back to university and having to adapt to being a student, at the same time as experiencing a sense of not belonging to, or being different from others in the group (Hale and Abreu 2010:398). However, the findings suggest that participants were fully aware of the required changing identity and there was no perception that this could not be achieved. Again, this linked to the levels of self-efficacy presented. The approaches to learning referred to by the participants

included academic writing, new teaching and learning strategies, and computer skills. However, these skill deficits were not exclusive to participants who had been away from education for some time as some of these were identified by participants who had also recently qualified as a DHDT. Literature suggests that being a mature student is a barrier in transition to HE and is influenced by prior academic background (Fragoso 2013). Therefore the fact that these academic skills had not been developed at diploma level, possibly due to the curriculum of the diploma being focussed on technical and clinical skills rather than academic support, could be significant as well as the time spent away from study. Although it is also reported in the literature that the lack of relevant study skills and can impact on the engagement of mature students (Flemming and Murphy 2000), there was no evidence from the data that engagement was an issue. Difficulties in academic transition were a particular issue during the first module, therefore during the early stages of transition, aligning with Gale and Parker's (2014) notion of transition as induction, the first year of study can be a particularly challenging time for new students, in particular those from diverse backgrounds. The findings reported that during this first year, the level of the work was harder than expected, as well as there being more work than was anticipated. However, analysing the experiences of those participants who had been away from study for some time (also meaning they were more mature), identified that gaining IT literacy was perceived to be difficult when returning to HE and this was an area that had required some investment of time to develop. Gross and Latham (2012) support this finding as technology may not have been embedded in their early education in the same way as it has for the digital natives (Dearnley et al 2006, Prensky 2001) who were born after 1990. However, there could have been an assumption by the School that these skills were already a given, despite the fact that the



students presented as non-traditional and some were mature and had not been exposed to this (Leese 2009).

The self-concept of the participants was a belief about their own ability and also the ability that they perceived their peers thought them to have (Hussey and Smith 2010). This evidence is reflective of the literature which indicates that negative perceptions of oneself can lead to anxiety and a lack of confidence about being able to succeed (Mercer and Saunders, Stone 2008). Although confidence was not directly referred to in the data, it could be suggested that there was some indirect lack of confidence when the participants discussed factors pertaining to self-belief, academic levels and gaps in study skills. In addition to the participants' own self-belief and identity, there was the perceived ability of their peers. This pertained to their peers having a higher level of ability. This view was particularly relevant to those who had been more recently engaged in education.

## **Emotion**

Previous evidence demonstrates that emotion is linked to transition, not only through the lens of a change in environment but also a changing identity (Postereff et al 2017). There was evidence from the research that emotion had played a role in transition, being reported from both a social and academic perspective. Archer's (2002) first competing concern relating to physical well-being refers to feelings of fear and shock. The third concern is of self-worth linked to the levels of confidence, and could be interpreted as low self-worth at not knowing if the degree could be achieved. Emotional capital relates to an individual's level of confidence and security. Once again, this can relate to non-traditional students and being away from education for some time. Attached to this may be the perceived emotional risk that is associated with an individual

being vulnerable in the transition to university (McMillan 2014). Archer's (2002) second concern of achievement related performance was not reported.

In response to perceived ability, Jackson (2003) concluded that mature students who have not engaged with education for many years, may experience increased self-efficacy if they have a tutor who listens to them and they are taken seriously. The support that the students felt that they received was discussed as a positive aspect of transition, both from a programme level and also from the wider university support services. The available support from the wider university is highlighted to the students during the induction period, however it is then a personal choice as to whether these services are accessed. The reference to finding the support services positive highlights that participants took the initiative to access the support which is further evidence of high levels of self-efficacy, an area that has been discussed in this study.

### **Community of Practice**

Evidence suggests that although students need to engage with the educational process and be able to manage transition to HE from a social perspective and to support identity formation, it is also important that they become part of a CoP (Menis 2017). It is important to acknowledge that within this, it would be impossible to discuss CoP without reference to identity formation, which has already been discussed in more detail earlier this chapter.

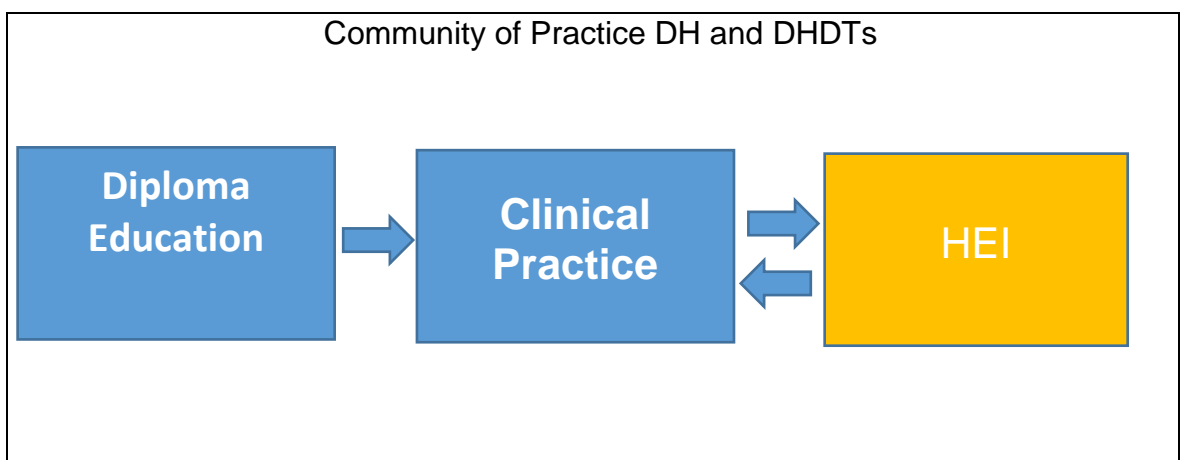
The research found that most participants felt that being part of a community was important in respect of support, both academically and socially. It was acknowledged by some participants that there was a shared interest from a professional perspective, meaning that all of the students in the group were either a DH or DHDT and embarking on further study to gain a degree. This links to the third characteristic of a community of practice, with the practice being referred to

in the findings as everyone being interested in everyone else. The positive comments relating the group formation and development of a CoP was extensively reported. Previous discussion regarding participants' motivation for returning to study highlighted mainly intrinsic factors for many of the participants. Having a domain where there is a shared interest is the first characteristic of a CoP, and this characteristic is usually based around a particular subject or community (Mayne et al 2015). As this was not discussed by every one of the participants, it could be argued that the community was not as important to some as others, aligning with the thoughts of Lanlehin (2018) who discusses that CoPs can differ for individuals, with some sitting on the periphery whilst others become actively involved and embedded. Within the context of this study, the reason for some participants remaining on the periphery could have been linked to their commitments outside university, for example family or carer commitments and the fact that they did not necessarily see the social aspect of attending university as important as they did academic achievement. The literature supports the view that mature students who travel to university tend to engage less with their peers in the community but are much abler to link the relevance of their study to work experiences (Kahu et all 2013). However, overall there was a sense of a community present. One participant discussed how they felt the community had started to form at the applicant and interview day. This may have been again because of the professional role of being a DH or DHDT and the shared interest being apparent at an early stage. This also links back to earlier discussion about the stages of transition and transition not only being defined as a period of time when a student enters HE, but transition can begin pre-entry. Reference was made to the use of social media to facilitate the development of this community, which aligns with the literature which describes a change in how peers interact

and having the ability to communicate with differing mediums (Gardner et al 2012) and the value of an online CoP in sharing expertise as well as socialising (Wang and Lu 2012). There is also evidence to suggest that social media can provide 'authentic communities of practice to foster professional identity' (Novakovich et al 2017:67). However, the success of these online communities relies on how well students socially connect with each other (Hsiu-Ting and Chi-Yin Yuen 2010). This could be particularly relevant as the research participants were non-traditional and attended university part-time. However, as previously discussed, vocational students who often are also non-traditional students, can be unprepared in using digital technology for academic purposes (Jones et al 2010, Smith et al 2013), a challenge particularly affecting mature and female students (Anderson et al 2010).

A significant finding in respect of CoP was that a community did begin to form. However, for some, this did not necessarily happen at the outset of transition, but rather it began to develop as the programme progressed. It was suggested that during the first module, the community only came together during the sessions and not outside of the taught programme. Although there was only one participant who made reference to needing to get as much out of the lectures as possible, with making friends being secondary, due to this evidencing that the academic level was challenging, this could be a reason why the group did not form as quickly as a community. Although there was no direct discussion about previous CoPs, it is clear that the participants would have been part of other CoPs, particularly from the perspective of being working professionals. Working as a registered DH or DHDT in dentistry in the UK has a requirement for continuous professional development to take place. Therefore, learning in a CoP will have developed within the clinical practice environment. Professional collaboration and

learning as part of a team is important in all disciplines (Dunn et al 2016), with dental registrants being required to demonstrate this to the GDC for continued registration. In addition to this, participants would also be part of other CoPs within their personal lives, meaning the possibility of participation in many communities at any one time. These may be both formal and informal (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015). Figure 7.1 below illustrates the professional CoP that the DHDT students may have been part of both prior to entering the BSc (Hons) Dental Studies Programme and also then during study.



**Figure 7.1** Community of Practice

At the initial stage of their career, student DHDTs enter into dental school and onto a two to three-year programme resulting in the award of diploma. Although it could be argued that this community may not be relevant to the new community of HEI, the learning that resulted from within that community may be significant in respect of the diversity of the prior learning, which has been previously discussed. It may also be significant in relation to the expectations that the participants had about the transition to university and the pedagogical approaches.

As qualified DHDTs, participants will have moved into a different community of clinical practice, where learning moves away from a formal curriculum and is

replaced with a professional community with strong evidence of shared practice. As previously mentioned, the learning within this community will be ongoing and a regulatory body requirement. Due to this, this learning community could not be static but rather a developing one as the profession moves forward (Gardner et al 2012). It is also within this community that they may have to demonstrate professional capital, firstly from the perspective of longer periods of engagement with learning to possibly support the economic growth of the practice but also the non-economic growth which may include the trust and relationships formed with patients in the practice (Blackmore 2010). Within the dental profession, there is still some perceived hierarchy within roles as discussed in Chapter 1, with the expanding role of the DHDT being seen as inappropriate. Therefore full social participation in a community is reliant upon the environmental culture. The regulatory body recognises the importance of dental professionals learning in a community and 'facilitating opportunities for dental team integration' (GDC 2015:12).

The participants in the study entered into the School of Dentistry whilst they were still part of the above community in the working environment. This prior community will have been established and therefore it could be argued that entering into a new community could be challenging, particularly from the perspective of established competence as they enter into a new phase. It is at this stage that the community characteristic which defines a CoP can be challenging, as the participants moved from being a professional to a student (and vice versa as the programme commences) and learning in a different environment. Leaving a community where competence has been gained, if only for a temporary period of time, can be an emotional experience. However, the participants acknowledged the importance of formation of a community, therefore

suggesting that they valued the positive effects of working and learning from each other. The diversity of the participants has been discussed in other areas and this diversity may have also contributed to evidence of legitimate peripheral participation where some participants within the community may have supported others.

When discussing the new community that the participants entered into, identity formation must be considered. Wenger (cited in Blackmore 2010:134) acknowledged that there will be different trajectories involved with identity and it is likely at this stage that 'inbound' trajectories will be apparent with participants being 'newcomers with their identity being invested in future participation'. Although the term imposter syndrome was not referenced directly by any of the participants, it was apparent that this had been experienced by some of the participants, despite all of the positive motivational factors that have previously been discussed.

The research found that it was during the second module of the programme that sub communities were formed and this had been guided by the pedagogy and the teaching and learning strategies that had been adopted. Groups formed to work together over the period of the module on a formative assessment, resulting in communities being formed. However, Wenger et al (2002) claims that for a community of practice to be established, the group must come together voluntarily. Therefore, although the other characteristics of a CoP were evident, it could be argued that it was not a community in the true sense, due to formation of the group being somewhat contrived and linked to the aims of the programme. Although all three characteristics of a community were evident, a community being created for the purpose of assessment may not fit the description of a CoP.

However, it was reported that encouragement from the tutor supporting group work in the second module, facilitated social groups and helped learning.

### **Contribution to Knowledge**

In summary, the four key findings of expectations, motivation, academic transition and community of practice, provided some insight into the transitional experiences of the students on the BSc (Hons) Dental Studies programme, as well as providing some opportunities for development during the transitional stage to facilitate students onto the programme. From all of the four areas there was some contribution to knowledge which complements existing literature. As discussed in Chapter 2, Gale and Parker (2014) acknowledge three concepts of transition; transition as induction, transition as development and transition as becoming. When considering transition as induction, it is clear from the study that this is not necessarily the starting point. Despite the literature focussing on the point in time that students enter into HE, it was evident that expectations were being thought about before entry and this is a concept that needs further exploration, particularly with relevance to this group of students. What happens before a student arrives at university (pre-induction) is key to contributing to a smooth transition. This is not well documented in the literature as it can appear that HEIs only consider induction from when the students arrive on the first day and onwards. Despite the literature discussing FYE extensively (Gale and Parker 2014, Kift 2015, Laing et al 2005), this FYE has not been a focus with the BSc Dental Studies students, with only the initial few weeks being considered as the induction period. This is not unusual and many schools in UCLan and other HEIs see only the first few weeks as relevant when thinking about induction. This study therefore adds to the existing theory pertaining to transition of non-traditional students, particular from the perspective of identifying that the process of



transition begins much earlier than when a student arrives in HE. This could compliment the work done by Gale and Parker (2014) and add a fourth concept to their existing transition as induction, development and belonging.

### **The Significance of Metaphors**

As discussed in Chapter 5, there was evidence from the data of metaphors being used by the participants. Alongside the analysis discussed in Chapter 5, these metaphors allowed me to reduce the raw data into concepts with a view to identifying emerging categories (Miles and Hubberman 1994). At the analysis stage, there was no intention to analyse the metaphors explicitly (Carpenter 2008) but rather they were evaluated in the context of the narrative from the individual participant (Steger 2007).

### **Summary**

This chapter has discussed the four key concepts in relation to the study and has highlighted some contribution to knowledge. The four concepts highlighted transition as a period of change but also transition as an experience of change (Crafter and Maunder 2012, Quinn 2010). The next chapter will summarise the key findings with recommendations.

## CHAPTER 8 CONCLUSION

### Concluding Comments

As discussed throughout this study, the transition of non-traditional students into HE is reported extensively in the literature. It is a multi-faceted phenomenon in terms of concerns and the issues involved. HEIs should consider these concerns if they are to meet the needs of a diverse and ever changing student population. This study aimed to investigate the experiences of a group of non-traditional students as they transitioned onto the BSc (Hons) Dental Studies programme within the School of Dentistry at the UCLan. The study set out to answer two research questions:

1. What were the expectations of students entering onto the BSc (Hons) Studies programme and HE?
2. How do students experience the transition from diploma to degree level study?

It is clear from the findings that there are areas of both expectations and experiences that need to be considered for future students who transition into HE, joining the programme from a non-traditional background. The areas discussed in the previous chapter do not sit exclusively from each other. When summarising these below they may be discussed through synthesis.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the research concluded that Gale and Parker's (2014) three concepts of transition as induction, development and becoming did not capture the pre-transition stage and the prior expectations of potential students before they entered into HE. When considering transition from a point in time perspective, the evidence from the literature focusses on entry to HE and the experiences during the first year. However, student expectations can begin to be formed much earlier in the process and these expectations potentially

influenced and shaped the experience during transition and into the first year. Although it is acknowledged that it could be difficult to accurately capture students' perceptions before they enter into HE, pre-induction transition would be worthy of further investigation to capture some of the expectations before the participants entered into HE. It is acknowledged in this study that there were some expectations expressed in the personal statements which did capture some evidence that contributed to the findings. However if pre-transition expectations were to be investigated further, it would be beneficial to pro-actively capture this information by an alternative method of data collection as the personal statements only rely on the information being provided. An additional advantage of undertaking research at the pre-transition stage could be the reduction of hindsight bias, an issue that is acknowledged as a potential limitation and one that concurs with the literature (Erdfelder et al 2007, Pohl et al 2018). However, as previously mentioned there was no evidence that this occurred within the study.

The evidence suggested that expectations can be divided into two distinct categories; what the students expected to achieve from studying at HE level and the perceived expectation or prediction of the experience to be. The expected achievement could relate to both academic and social aspects and could also be influenced by intrinsic and extrinsic needs. In support of current evidence (Corker et al 2011, Lee and Park 2011), it was concluded that outcome expectations are a high priority for this group of students. The participants had high expectations of achievement and this was driven by a high level of self-efficacy, the belief and personal judgement relating to their competency in an educational setting (van Dinther et al 2011). The participants of the study had all previously achieved professional qualifications and therefore the enactive mastery experiences of this

prior successful authentic experience could have influenced the interpretation of the capability and desire to perform. The self-efficacy of the participants could have also been influenced by social persuasion, either through peers in a professional setting or from feedback from previous study.

The perception of expectation of the experience had a strong academic focus. It was summarised that academic expectations were not always representative of the actual reality of what took place. It was also reported that reality of the required level that was needed for study at HE level was also different from the perception. This was discussed in the context of the prior study being at diploma level with it being felt that the diploma in DH or DHDT had not provided adequate academic preparation for future study. Although not reported, it must be acknowledged, as discussed in the introductory chapter, that the diploma is a clinical programme and therefore has a strong emphasis on clinical and technical skills to meet regulatory body requirements rather than academic skills. As these expectations differed from the actual experiences, it cannot therefore be assumed that a prior level of study necessarily prepares students academically for HE level. The level of preparation may be influenced by the prior curriculum and content and if this does not include, for example academic writing, referencing or study skills, this can impact on the preparedness of students. However, this clinical prior study may not be the only factor in academic preparedness. As discussed in Chapter 2, there are many factors that can affect transition including to what extent students are ready for study at HE. Haggis (2006) discusses that in order to support non-traditional students, HEIs must consider how they will help these groups of students be successful. Haggis (2006) continues to outline that it is not just about the needs of the students but HEIs must also think about new teaching technologies. As previously mentioned,

different dental schools deliver the curricula that they have developed and therefore it would not be possible to individually influence these in respect of introducing some of the required skills that would support student transition. However, since the study began, the BSc (Hons) Dental Studies programme has seen an increase in students who have recently graduated from the diploma programmes and from experience of conducting interviews with potential applicants of the programme, it is apparent that the programmes themselves have developed to include projects or elements of research. Early anecdotal evidence suggests that this may be supporting students in transition, particularly with academic writing skills. However, the programme continues to accept a diverse range of students and therefore it cannot be assumed this will be the case for all students. It is unlikely that the core GDC learning outcomes will change significantly and the continued focus for diploma providers will be preparedness for practice. This means that although there may be some programmes that incorporate some of the skills required for transition, this may not be standardised across the profession. Therefore, the BSc (Hons) Dental Studies programme needs to continue to focus on supporting students who may lack the necessary skills on entry. Since beginning the research, additional support has been incorporated into the programme to support students during the transitional period. There is now a mandatory half day applicant day which clearly outlines the programme requirements and level of study required. However, it can be argued that this remains abstract and as the students have not yet begun their study the expectations are still unknown. However this applicant day goes some way in opening up discussion about expectations. As part of transition as induction, a full day induction day is now included in the timetable. This allows for more time to be allocated to covering topics including study skills, academic

writing skills and to highlight the resources and support the wider university can offer. The latter point is particularly important due to the non-traditional nature of the students as often they have limited time on campus and do not always engage with the support available.

The research found that the use of social media facilitated the introduction of a CoP at the pre-transition stage and was viewed as an important tool, despite any difficulties in usage. The increase in use of social media and digital platforms that allow for student communities have many benefits, including participation in reflective practice from a collaborative perspective rather than just individually and in isolation (Hou 2015). Identity formation was also highlighted as a benefit, thus promoting CoP as a 'powerful catalyst' in supporting learners (Hou 2015:7) and removing any feelings of imposter syndrome. However caution must also be taken to avoid individuals using IT in deceitful ways, for example bullying and unprofessionalism, as this can result in a negative educational community rather than it being supportive (Macnamara 2010). The findings reported that the teaching and learning strategies adopted early in the programme did not necessarily allow for a community to develop at the stage, resulting in a possible delay. However, this did happen in the second module which is delivered within the first academic year. Therefore it is still aligned with literature which discusses transition relating to the FYE (Gill et al 2011, Harvey et al 2006, McInnis 2001). Literature has identified that online CoPs can promote and support networking for individuals who may not be face to face at that stage (Ikioda and Kendall 2016). However, a finding from the research evidence that engaging with technology can be challenging for some individuals and therefore how this recommendation would be implemented and supported would need careful consideration. Not providing enough digital support could be negative and have

the opposite effect of what was intended. This would need to be part of the induction process. However, the benefits of having an online community can outweigh any challenges as 'social networking technologies offer ways to participate in interactive dialogue and the means to conduct learning' (Gunawardena et al 2009:8).

Recent evidence has identified that engaging in a new community may result in changing identity (Turner and Tobbell 2018), and this was evident from the findings of the study. However, it was interesting that the participants did not directly discuss their change of community and their identity from the perspective of being a professional clinician and their identity changing when they became a student. It was discussed from the perspective of their own individual identity in the group and the new community that they had entered into. This could have been due to the questions that were asked as there was no direct reference to CoP. This individual identity had a clear link to time a student has away from study, particularly from the perspective of being away from study for a longer period of time. The participants who reported that they had been away from study for some time identified themselves as non-learners, and although there was no direct discussion regarding confidence levels of returning to study after a period of time, it is known from the literature that time away from study and confidence levels may be linked to each other (Mercer and Saunders 2008). The length of time away from study and the link to transitional issues is also reported in the literature and this was highlighted in this study, particularly by participants who had been away from study for some time. This is aligned with the literature which discusses imposter syndrome (Chapman 2017). Chapman (2017) highlighted some similar data to that of this study from mature students who had returned to HE, including students reporting they 'felt everyone else would be cleverer than

them' and everyone knowing what they were doing. This was particularly similar to Amanda's story, where she had clearly positioned herself as not at the same level as others in the group. However, the correlation between time away from study and transitional issues would benefit from further research for this particular group of students to establish a stronger evidence base.

From the perspective of the BSc Dental Studies and reflecting on the initial development of the programme, there appears to have been a change in motivation linked to the reasons applicants provide for joining the programme. These have developed from simply being means to an end (to simply gain a degree level qualification) to students reporting a desire to develop themselves both from a personal perspective and a professional one. A significant finding from this development was the belief that this could be achieved. The research found that intrinsic motivational factors were more prominent than extrinsic ones when participants referred to the influence to return to university. This aligns with previous literature which reports on the intrinsic motivations of non-traditional students and students who are female. Extrinsic factors were also apparent and these related consistently to career development. Beyond the study itself, the last three years have seen the extrinsic motivational factor of career development increase for this particular group and this has been evident from discussion that takes place when the applicants are interviewed before entry to the programme. The profession of DHDT has developed extensively over the past 10 years following mandatory registration for DCPs in 2008. This has allowed the opportunity for career development, particular since 2013 when Scope of Practice (GDC 2013) was published. It is therefore not surprising that as the BSc (Hons) Dental Studies programme is targeted at professionals that they would be also considering career progression.



In the wider context of dentistry, the initial findings from Advancing Dental Care (HEE 2018:5) 'identified flexibility in pre and post registration was required as well as more opportunities for part time workers to develop their careers', which will also support career development. It is therefore envisaged that increased opportunity will be available for DHDT career progression over the next few years. Since the start of the study, the School of Dentistry has integrated the Bachelor of Dental Surgery (BDS) and DHDT programme with a view that DHDTs will be able to progress to BDS without starting from the beginning of the four year BDS Programme.

### **Recommendations**

The research has identified four key recommendations that will support future students entering onto the BSc (Hons) Dental Studies programme. The first recommendation is that in order to further support transition in respect of expectations, the course team develop a pre-induction strategy which could capture some significant data including expectations and the applicants' perceived strengths and weaknesses as they enrol onto the programme. This could also allow for the teaching team on the programme to gain some understanding of previous pedagogical engagement and to individualise support for students at entry and during transition. It could also support teaching and learning strategies to be more appropriately tailored to the needs of the students and to ensure that the learning environment is as fully inclusive as possible. Enhancing inclusivity aligns with the Learning and Teaching strategy (UCLan 2017). Caution would be need to be applied as the diversity of the students may not lend itself to fulfilling all individual needs. This pre-induction programme could also benefit other students on different programmes in the school. It must also be acknowledged that induction is not simply the first few weeks and therefore the

course team also need to consider transition during the first year adopting strategies into the modules that will keep the students engaged.

As part of the pre-transition strategy, a second recommendation would be the development of some digital recordings of past students highlighting their perceived expectations and the experience of transition into HE. The school has recently introduced Flipgrid which is an online educational application designed to allow students to share their voice and experiences using digital recordings. Past students could be encouraged to upload recordings to support new students to the programme. By developing this Flipgrid area, this could support student expectations particularly in respect of the programme being different than what students expected, the unknown expectations and the academic level being harder than expected. Although it could be argued that this could be a strategy that many courses could adopt, technology has advanced and universities are embedding technology within their organisations with a view to supporting students (Conole and Alevizou 2010). The use of Flipgrid has been introduced in the School after the data collection was undertaken, therefore this recommendation supports the findings.

A third recommendation is to facilitate a Microsoft Teams area so that potential students could form an online CoP and have the ability to communicate with each other at an early stage. This is supported by literature which identifies that HEIs should consider 'developing new teaching technologies' to support students (Haggis 2006:523). This could allow for sharing information and seeking assistance where needed from other members of the group (Dennen 2014). However as discussed in the literature and a finding from this study, this would require full support from the course team as the use of IT can be challenging for some students. It is acknowledged in the literature that students often separate

the use of IT for social purposes and the use of IT for learning (Tess 2013). A recommendation would be that some further discussion with potential students before it could be assumed that IT would be beneficial for all. It is reported that the use of IT and social platforms need to be supported if students are to gain competence and see the benefits of use from a pedagogical perspective, particularly when being used by mature students (Anderson et al 2010).

A final recommendation would be further research in two areas. There is a gap in the current evidence base about the pre-transition stage. Further research in this area could complement the current evidence base that is already published and support the early stages of transition. This would also be useful for future researchers with an interest in student transition into HE. The second area that would benefit further research would be to examine the extent of the correlation between transitional issues and the length of time away from study for the students on the BSc (Hons) Dental Studies programme. In the academic years 2014/15 to 2017/18 UCLan had just over 15,000 students over the age of 21 who enrolled for study. The number under the age of 21 was just over 8,000 (HESA 2018). From the HESA (2019) data, it appears that universities in England are enrolling more mature students than those under the age of 20 and therefore further research in this area could be relevant to other institutions.

In summary this research has identified some positive recommendations that can be developed to support students and enhance the student experience. It must be acknowledged that not all of the findings were raised by all participants, but following analysis the conclusions were thought to be pertinent to continued support of the programme and students transitioning.

Due to the changes discussed above in funding for DHDT training in the England and the demise of NHS Bursaries, many more DHDT programmes will convert from diploma level to degree, potentially leading to a reduction in the number of applicants to the BSc (Hons) Dental Studies programme. The School also has an undergraduate BSc (Hons) Dental Therapy programme and many of these students also present from previous professional backgrounds and can have many characteristics of the participants reported in this study. Therefore, although transition will be into year 1 of the programme for a different group of students, the findings from this study could also prove valuable and relevant for these future students.

### **Limitations of the study**

All research has limitations. One of the limitations identified specifically with interpretive research by Marshall and Rossman (2016) and acknowledge in this study, is that of research bias. As discussed in chapter 3, full objectivity may never be possible (Berger 2015), and full bracketing of one's own previous experience and knowledge is difficult to achieve (Marshall and Rossman 2016). Both the researcher's personal experiences and their previous knowledge can influence the questions asked, observations and conclusions (Bowen 2006). There is an acknowledgement in this study that my prior experiences of being a non-traditional student could not always be fully detached and this may have subconsciously influenced the questions asked resulting in potential bias when interpreting the data. However, I also reflected on this potential bias as a strength. My own prior knowledge had initially led me to the interest of the experiences of this group of learners and ultimately to the research for the taught doctorate. Although bracketing is a consideration in phenomenology, it is also argued that it can be impossible to fully achieve (Lichtman 2014). This potentially could have

resulted in some researcher bias and a limitation of the validity of the data. Although validity of the data is a key component in attempting to reduce or fully eliminate bias (Chapman 2014), it may never be fully achieved in a qualitative study and therefore the concept of trustworthiness was used. Also, in attempting to reduce bias, I considered credibility and transferability and the criteria that sit within these (Guba and Lincoln 1998). I considered that from the perspective of credibility, I was an established member of the course team, working with the students and building trust, therefore I considered myself an insider researcher. I also adopted triangulation in the data collection methods.

It is also suggested that bracketing in qualitative research can allow reflexivity of the researcher to be enhanced (Tufford and Newman 2010). Transferability refers to being able to transfer the finding into other settings and this can be a limitation of a qualitative methodology. From an epistemological perspective, it is argued that you cannot generalise from the findings as that is expressed in the quantitative sense, however, naturalistic generalisations can be made. It is acknowledged that the study involved a small cohort of participants and this was undertaken in a single setting (Pike and Harrison 2011), potentially making it difficult to transfer the naturalistic generalisations into the wider population. The purposive sampling of participants represented a small percentage and therefore the views presented by the participants in the study may not necessarily fully represent those of all the students who transition onto the programme (Robson 2002). However by adopting a purposive sampling strategy, it can be argued that transferability can be enhanced (Chapman 2014) as generalisations can be 'applied to the wider theory on the basis of how selected cases fit with general constructs (Curtis et al 2000:1002). This thought

is also supported by Yin (2018:20) who discusses that 'case studies can be generalisable to theoretical propositions'

In support of generalisation to populations, it was felt that the participants did represent a diverse sample supporting that the findings could indicate trends which could resonate with other current students or future students on the BSc (Hons) Dental Studies programme. In addition to this, the concepts identified have been discussed in previous literature pertaining to transition and non-traditional students and therefore the findings from the sample size could suggest common patterns. It must also be acknowledged that all of the participants in the study were female, potentially resulting in a gender bias. However as discussed previously, the profile of DHDTs in the UK is predominantly female and therefore this does fit with the normal profile. In addition, much of the evidence reported pertaining to non-traditional students does not differentiate between gender and therefore the sample could still be seen as representative of that group.

It is also acknowledged that I had a dual role of practitioner and researcher, a role that potentially had challenges for both myself and the participants. From the initial contact of inviting the students to be participants, I attempted to separate my two roles but this did require some conscious thought. As I was teaching the potential participants, I ensured the research project was not discussed during any taught sessions with the students, in an attempt to keep the two roles separate. However, there were times that I felt that I was wearing both hats at the same time. An example of this was a participant who requested the interview take place during the lunch hour of a teaching session. Due to the nature of the programme I was very conscious throughout the interview that the participants' peers were all having lunch together and this was an important part of the social transition. As previously mentioned, on reflection following the interview and

listening back to the recording I was aware that I had missed opportunities to ask some further questions as I was conscious that I wanted the participant to utilise the time with peers effectively and be part of the community.

It is suggested that practitioner-researchers have individual strengths and a researcher who is also a practitioner can bring tacit practical knowledge during the data collection stage and when undertaking data analysis (Barnett and Muth 2008). I consider that this was advantageous as I was able to understand the context of the discussion in the interviews due to being aware of the setting, the participants' work background and some of the challenges of being a non-traditional student. Having the experience of being a practitioner also allowed me to consider the timings of the letters inviting participants to be involved did not coincide with any pending assessment results being released. I felt that if the letters were sent at this time, the students could feel a sense of obligation to agree to participate or their grades could be affected, resulting in a power imbalance. It is also acknowledged that this tacit knowledge can lead to bias in interpretation of the findings and this was something that I consciously considered throughout. However, as previously discussed, qualitative analysis will also have an element of interpretation and there is 'rarely one perfect interpretation' (Bergin 2018:168).

Evidence suggests that when adopting the two roles it can mean that the researcher has to consider different cultural contexts (Labaree 2003) and this can be challenging for the individual to move between the two cultures. I have reflected back on this and do not recall this being a conscious issue as although I was conducting research, it was situated in an HE environment. The practice of reflexivity was embedded throughout the study, and I was continuously conscious of my own position and how this may affect any outcomes. I attempted to manage

this by recognising the boundaries between 'involvement and detachment' (Berger 2015:221) and reflecting on how these may hinder or support the process (Lietz et al 2006).

The documentary evidence proved to be somewhat limited. The evidence that was available in those documents that related to the expectations of the participants, in particular their knowledge about what the programme would involve, was not as apparent as the data provided in the interviews. However the documents did provide evidence to support the concept of motivation and had a focus on motivational factors relating to returning to study. Due to this I revisited the literature to not only look at transition as induction, but to look at transition at the point of decision making to enter onto the programme. However, as previously discussed, this literature proved to be limited and an area that needs further development.

As discussed throughout this study, the participants presented as non-traditional with many of them commuting some distance to attend HE. This therefore meant that conducting face to face interviews was not always practically possible and therefore Skype™ was used for some of the interviews. Although this proved to be advantageous from a distance perspective, I felt that these interviews were slightly limited as I was not able to see the whole person. Only being able to see faces of the participants did not always allow me to observe all of their body language (Cater 2011) or to be able to read emotion (Seitz 2016). However, I was able to read some body language, for example if they were looking elsewhere away from the camera.

Prior to one interview, the participant disclosed they had not used Skype™ previously and I reflected that this could have affected the interview with the



participant having anxieties about the use of the communication and this taking precedence over the interview and discussion. Should Skype™ be used for any future research, some prior knowledge about IT levels of competency would be useful to avoid any extra pressure.

### **Contribution to Practice and Personal Learning from the Study**

Undertaking a professional doctorate aims to 'develop an individual's professional practice and to support them in producing a contribution to professional knowledge' (ESRC 2005:93). When beginning this doctorate, as well as hoping that the knowledge from the findings would contribute to professional practice, I also wanted to extend my own knowledge and skills as a researcher. One of the theoretical frameworks used for this study was Gale and Parker's (2014) transition as induction, development and becoming. As previously discussed these three concepts did not consider fully that student expectations and perceptions can begin to form much earlier than simply when they arrive at university. This study found that understanding these expectations at an earlier stage would be beneficial for the course team to allow for some of the perceived expectations to be discussed and in some cases eradicated, before study begins. Although it is acknowledged that this research was a single case study, this finding and recommendation may also be relevant to other cohorts of students, particularly in the school of dentistry at UCLan. In addition to the BSc (Hons) Dental Studies programme, many of the postgraduate programmes recruit clinicians onto Masters level study and the transition, particularly from an academic perspective, can be challenging. Therefore having a school wide strategy on pre-induction and transition could support the wider student population. This strategy would include the use of IT and digital platforms to support transition as this would also be beneficial for other cohorts of students

outside of the BSc Dental Studies. By doing this, a 'flexible, supportive environment will enable students from all backgrounds to thrive' (UCLan 2015:12). However, as previously discussed, students would need to be supported in the use of technology as evidence has suggested that using technology can be challenging for mature students. It is evident from the study that there is limited transition research which focusses on this pre-transition stage. By considering a pre-induction strategy and implementing this in the school, there could be some research following this intervention. The findings from this may then contribute to the evidence base in this under researched area.

The number of non-traditional students who enter onto programmes in the School of Dentistry is high, as many of the courses are developed to support the education and development of the whole dental team. By default, this means that many of the students are professional practitioners and are defined by the evidence base as mature. As previously discussed, the profile of the participants in this study was diverse and some evidence presented suggested that participants who had been away from study for some time, found that this impacted on identity and positionality in the group as well as their perceived academic ability. For the school of dentistry and possible other disciplines, this would be an area of further exploration with findings contributing to supporting student experience. The use of digital platforms is increasing in HE and the interaction between students and practitioners is important in a virtual learning environment (Liburd and Christensen 2013). It can also be used effectively as a communication platform (Sobaih and Moustafa 2016). As previously discussed Skype™ was used for some of the interviews. Since those interviews were undertaken, the university and school of dentistry have embedded the use of Microsoft Teams into both staff and student communities and I can see that this

would have been advantageous in the study had it been available at the early stages. As previously discussed this particular platform can also be used to support interventions highlighted in this study.

Beginning a doctorate can be described as identifying with a new role (Viczo and Wright 2010) and this was something that I related to at the outset of the study. My practitioner role in the School was one that I was comfortable with and felt academically prepared to undertake. In contrast, beginning the doctorate generated anxieties about time and capacity, academic ability and peer support. Literature describes two types of doctoral researchers; one who is focussed on professorship and the others that have an interest in personal development and learning (Callary et al 2012). On reflection at the outset of the study, the reason that I began the doctorate was for personal development, described as a process of becoming, learning, changing and reflecting (Devenish et al 2009). However, as the doctorate has progressed, my interest in research has increased. Callary et al (2012) argue that if when undertaking doctorate, it is only the academic experiences that form part of the researcher's reflections, career aspirations can be missed and opportunities limited. The transition to 'becoming a doctoral student required me to acquire new skills' (Baker and Pifer 2011:6), which included writing as a scholar and having an in depth knowledge of research methodologies. I also had to move from one role to another, viewed in the literature as a change in identity (Rhodes 2013). I initially found this challenging, particularly from the perspective of being a researcher as I was not aware of the processes and requirements. However I also saw this as a development opportunity, which I now have a greater understanding of. This developed knowledge has also supported my role as a practitioner when supervising both undergraduate and postgraduate research students. As previously discussed, the

clear distinction between the role of practitioner and researcher may not always be possible and I found myself throughout the study often somewhere in between. These personal reflections of my own development do resonate to some degree to the findings of the research. Although my own transition was from practitioner to researcher and for the participants in the study the transition had a focus of diploma to degree level study, the similarities of acquiring new skills and the change in identity was apparent for them and myself.

### **Final Reflections**

When I began this research project in 2014 I aimed to complete it in three years and had a clear timeframe that I wanted to work towards. However, the reality of combining a full time post, personal commitments and embarking on the modules which contained summative assessments soon became apparent. I realised that in order to undertake a piece of work that I had a keen interest in and give it the importance that it deserved, it was going to take longer than anticipated. At the early stage, the end seemed so far away. On reflection, the fact that I am now into the fifth year of the project and writing this final piece, I feel that the longer timeframe has actually been advantageous. It has allowed me to really immerse myself within the study and to become a much better reflexive practitioner.

I always anticipated that I would be pleased to see the end of the process. I now think this was a naive thought as I wonder if there is ever an end to a research project? I can already see where I can further develop my research interest in the phenomenon of non-traditional students transitioning into HE.

As I was writing the final chapters, I reflected on personal challenges that I had overcome during the study. One of those challenges was that of my own

confidence and being able to acknowledge that my research was actually credible and not just a means to an end to get a doctorate. This was a considerable challenge as although I considered myself to be an experienced practitioner, I did not feel the same way about being a researcher. From the outset I started to read literature pertaining to being a practitioner research. A key influence were the words of Fox et al (2007) who discuss that learning how to research is not simply about reading a book on how to do it. Instead, they related the development to Kolbs cyclical process (Kolb 1984) to which I can relate. Having time to develop my identity as a researcher was helpful in bringing this study to a conclusion, having been on both a personal and professional journey.

#### **A Final Thought.....**

“What holds most people back isn’t the quality of their ideas, but their lack of faith in themselves. You have to live your life as if you are already where you want to be.” **Russell Simmons**

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## APPENDIX 1 Educational Providers

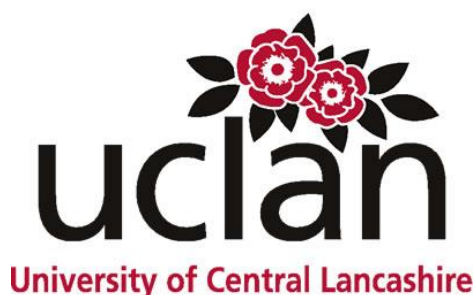
<b>Educational Provider</b>	<b>Qualification</b>	<b>Title of award</b>
Birmingham Dental Hospital	DHDT	BSc Dental Hygiene and Therapy
Bristol Dental School and Hospital	DH DT	Diploma in Dental Hygiene Diploma in Dental Therapy (conversion)
Eastman Dental Hospital	DHDT	Diploma in Dental Hygiene and Dental Therapy
Kings College Hospital NHS Foundation Trust	DHDT DT	Diploma in Dental Hygiene and Therapy Diploma in Dental Therapy
Newcastle University Dental Hospital	DHDT	Diploma in Dental Hygiene and Dental Therapy
Plymouth University Peninsula School of Dentistry	DHDT	BSc (Hons) Dental Therapy and Dental Hygiene
Queen Mary University of London Barts and the	DHDT	Diploma programme in

London Centre for Dental Care		Dental Hygiene and Dental Therapy
Teeside University	DHDT	BSc (Hons) Dental Hygiene and Dental Therapy
The Greater Manchester School for Dental Care Professionals	DT DHDT	Diploma in Dental Therapy (Conversion) Diploma in Dental Hygiene and Dental Therapy
The University of Liverpool Dental Hospital	DHDT	Combined Diploma in Dental Hygiene and Dental Therapy
University of Central Lancashire	DHDT	BSc (Hons) Dental Hygiene and Dental Therapy
University of Essex	DH DT	Foundation Degree in Oral Health Science BSc Oral Health Science
University of Leeds	DHDT	Graduate Diploma in Dental Hygiene and Dental Therapy



University Manchester	of	DHDT	BSc Oral Health Sciences (Hygiene and Therapy)
University Portsmouth	of	DHDT	BSc (Hons) Dental Hygiene and Dental Therapy
University of Sheffield		DHDT	Diploma in Dental Hygiene and Dental Therapy

## APPENDIX 2 Letter of Invite and Consent form (1)



### **The transition from Diploma to degree for dental hygienists and therapists – supporting academic and social transition for non-traditional students**

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether to or not, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. If there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information please ask and take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

The research you are being invited to take part in will involve students on the BSc Dental Studies course. I will also be collecting data from diploma educational providers to ensure that there is a joined up approach.

The research aims to:

- Investigate the academic curriculum prior to student joining the BSc at UCLan
- Investigate the experience of students entering the BSc Dental Studies degree
- The findings of the research may support both the academic and social transition of the diverse range students entering the BSc Dental Studies top up degree course. In addition to this, it will give you as a student a voice and allow you to share your experiences with me.

#### **Why have I been chosen?**

You have been invited because you are currently student on the course or are planning to enter the course. I would therefore welcome your input by agreeing to be interviewed (one-to-one), the maximum number of interviews would be two lasting approximately 35-45 minutes each. The interviews, with your permission, would be recorded and transcribed and the transcription used for my analysis.

#### **Do I have to take part?**

No – and if you do not wish to take part, your studies will progress as normal.

#### **What will happen to me if I take part?**

If you are happy to take part, please complete the attached permission form, which covers both the interview(s) and return it to me.

#### **What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

We do not consider that there are any significant risks to taking part. Care will be taken to ensure confidentiality and your anonymity throughout.

**What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

A benefit of taking part will be that you can use the project to reflect and refer to on your professional development. You will also be contributing to findings that may benefit other students elsewhere, and possibly enhance the experiences of students in the future.

**What if something goes wrong?**

If something goes wrong or you become concerned, you should contact me ([VBuller@uclan.ac.uk](mailto:VBuller@uclan.ac.uk)) and discuss this. You may withdraw at any time without prejudice to yourself. If you have any more questions about the project you can also contact my supervisor Paul Doherty by email ([PWDoherty@uclan.ac.uk](mailto:PWDoherty@uclan.ac.uk))

**Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?**

Yes. Transcriptions and interview transcriptions will be dealt with in strictest confidentiality and anonymised; institutions will also be anonymised when analysing data.

**What will happen to the results of the research study?**

The findings of the project will be reported as a Doctorate in Education and may also be used in any associated publication(s), if your data were to be used it would be anonymised.

**Who is organising and funding the research?**

The research is being undertaken as part of a taught doctorate (EdD) here at UCLan.

**Who may I contact for further information?**

If you wish to find out more about the project itself, the lead researcher on the project is Vicky Buller, from University of Central Lancashire. If you have any questions about the project please contact by email on [VBuller@uclan.ac.uk](mailto:VBuller@uclan.ac.uk).

Thank you for your interest in this research.

If you would like to help fill in the form overleaf.

**Consent form**

**Title of Project:** The transition from Diploma to degree for dental hygienists and therapists – supporting academic and social transition for non-traditional students

**Name of Researcher(s):** Vicky Buller (University of Central Lancashire)

Please initial box

I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason and without my professional work or legal rights being affected.

I give permission for my interviews to be recorded and to be used in any publications from the research study, and I understand that they will not be used for any other purposes.

I understand that any transcriptions or recordings will be securely and anonymously stored according to the requirements of the Data Protection Act.

I agree to take part in the above study.

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 3 Letter of Invite and Consent form (2)



### **The transition from Diploma to degree for dental hygienists and therapists – supporting academic and social transition for non-traditional students**

You are being invited to take part in further data collection as part of the above research study. Before you decide whether to or not, it is important for you to understand why the research is being undertaken and what the further data collection will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. If there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information please ask and take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

The research you are being invited to take part in will involve students on the BSc Dental Studies course who participated in some initial semi-structured interviews.

The research aims to:

Investigate the academic and social experiences of diploma students (DHDTs) during the transition to Higher Education (HE) as they enter a BSC (Hons) Dental Studies Programme.

#### **Why have I been chosen?**

You have been chosen because you are currently or have previously been a student on the programme and initially took part in an interview as part of this study. To support the data analysis from the interviews, further data from personal statements (when you initially applied for the course) is required. No other data from the application form will be used.

#### **Do I have to take consent?**

No If you do not wish to give consent, please return the form below by (date) and your personal statement will not be included in the data collection. Your studies will progress as normal.

#### **What will happen to me if I take part?**

If you are happy to take part, you do not need to do anything. If you do not provide a negative response by (date) your personal statement will be included in the data collection.

#### **What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

We do not consider that there are any significant risks to taking part. Care will be taken to ensure confidentiality and your anonymity throughout.

**What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

A benefit of taking part will be that you will be contributing to findings that may benefit other students elsewhere, and possibly enhance the experiences of students in the future.

**What if something goes wrong?**

If something goes wrong or you become concerned, you should contact me ([VBuller@uclan.ac.uk](mailto:VBuller@uclan.ac.uk)) and discuss this. You may withdraw at any time without prejudice to yourself. If you have any more questions about the project you can also contact my supervisor Paul Doherty by email ([PWDoherty@uclan.ac.uk](mailto:PWDoherty@uclan.ac.uk))

**Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?**

Yes. All data collected from the personal statements on the application forms will be dealt with in strictest confidentiality and anonymised; institutions will also be anonymised when analysing data.

**What will happen to the results of the research study?**

The findings of the project will be reported as a Doctorate in Education and may also be used in any associated publication(s), if your data were to be used it would be anonymised.

**Who is organising and funding the research?**

The research is being undertaken as part of a taught doctorate (EdD) here at UCLan.

**Who may I contact for further information?**

If you wish to find out more about the project itself, the lead researcher on the project is Vicky Buller, from University of Central Lancashire. If you have any questions about the project please contact by email on [VBuller@uclan.ac.uk](mailto:VBuller@uclan.ac.uk).

Thank you for your interest in this research.

If you would like to help fill in the form overleaf.

**Consent form**

**Title of Project: The transition from Diploma to degree for dental hygienists and therapists – supporting academic and social transition for non-traditional students**

**Name of Researcher(s):** Vicky Buller (University of Central Lancashire)

Please initial box

I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

I understand that my agreeing for my personal statement to be used for data collection is voluntary.

I give permission for the data collected to be used in any publications from the research study, and I understand that they will not be used for any other purposes.

I understand that any data collected will be securely and anonymously stored according to the requirements of the Data Protection Act.

I agree to take part in the above study.

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

\_\_\_\_\_

#### **APPENDIX 4 Interview Schedule**

These questions were used as a guide or prompt for discussion. Not all questions were asked at every interview as they may have been discussed by the participants during other questions.

Can you tell me why you decided to return to study and undertake the BSc (Hons) Dental Studies programme at this time?

Why was the decision taken at this particular time?

How have you found the transition?

Tell me about your diploma study.

What did you expect it (degree level study) to be like?

Has it been what you expected?

Is it the same or different to what you thought?

Tell me about your experiences of entering the BSc Dental Studies? (feelings, thoughts, anxieties? (not to be prescriptive but used as prompts if needed)

Has being a mature student impacted? (Ask participant to expand if needed)

How have you found the time commitment?

What have been your thoughts about the academic level?

How did you find the social aspect?

Is there anything that could be implemented to support your transition into higher education (consideration of bridging the gap)

How have you found the university support? Is there anything that you would want to add further about your experiences of transition?



## APPENDIX 5 Sample Transcriptions with Coding (Stage 2)

### Participant 4

VB – Vicky Buller

P4 – Participant 4

#### Transcript 4 (January 2017 start)

VB Can you talk me through why decided to do the degree now?

P4.1 It just felt the right time. My children have left home for university (1). I was happy working (2) but I wanted to see what was available (3), to meet new people (4). It is over 30 years ago since I studied last (5)

VB How did it feel making that decision after 30 years to come back to education?

P4.2 It was scary (1) as I knew that the programme I did, even with CPD was not at the same level as the ones (DHDT) (2) that are there now. For the diploma, I only had to do a couple of days, odd courses. That shouldn't have happened (3), I don't think. Now for those who train in the diploma properly (4) it will be a lot easier for them (5) than someone like me.(6)

VB That is really interesting. From what you are saying, it seems like there are two transitions, one from the certificate to the diploma and then this one into HE.

P4.3 Yes but it was clinical work really, no theory (1). It was clinical but by no means substantial enough in comparison to the diploma. (2)

VB Ok, do you think that impacted on how you have felt about coming onto the programme?

P4.4 Um (long pause).... No, I was expecting to take on what I knew was going to be difficult (1), but I was prepared to put myself out for that (2). I wasn't put off by it (3) but I knew that I would have more work to do (suggested than others) more background work than what the newly qualified people on the course would (4) and I made the decision to come on the course (5). In fact I am quite surprised by the number of newly qualified on the course (6).

VB OK? That is really interesting, explain why you think that?

P4.5 Um, I would have thought they would have been enjoying what they have just already done, (1) what they have just qualified to do, throwing themselves into the work (2) not just going back into study (3) I don't know how much more really there is, the difference between the diploma and the BSc I don't know how much more they can learn. There is a lot more for me to learn, I'm sure. (4)

VB OK.

P4.6 Not just because of the time (1) (duration from qualification) but because of the depth of what they have done before. (2)

VB OK, at this stage you have has an induction day and a couple of days of the first module (ACS) , thinking about the three days overall, is it what you thought? Maybe thinking about what

you have just said about having the certificate and your thoughts about the transition to diploma not being in depth enough, Where is it sitting?

P4.7 It has been very hard, but I expected it to be (1). It has been really interesting and I have come away thinking, it has inspired me to find out more (2). I probably have to think about it a lot more and go back and look at the things that I haven't done (3). So its taking a lot of time, I'm putting in a lot of hours into it. (4) Probably, if I hadn't been in the position time wise that I am (5) and wasn't prepared to sacrifice the things (6) I have, it wouldn't have been doable.

VB That's really interesting. Are you finding it manageable, thinking about the level and your earlier discussion?

P4.8 Yes, yes, definitely. I think if you put the theory into it (1), and the time, (2) it is completely manageable. For a therapist, the knowledge is already there. Its not like clinical skills. If your just a hygienist it's not always there. (3)

VB How do you feel about the time for the academic work?

P4.9 The subject is terribly interesting to me(1) and I am really enthused by it (2). The assignment is interesting and its not a difficult subject to research (3), its just difficult trying to pick out what I think may be important. (4) I feel like I've learned so much from researching it (5). I have spent hours researching it but being confident in having picked out the right things , (6) (6) um, yes, its quite difficult. I feel quite happy that I have had the chance to have some feedback as I didn't really want to go any further with it, knowing that I was on track with it. (7) So, I've really liked the assignment, I've really got into it and I've really enjoyed it (8). And I feel you are learning so much more than you are able to say in 3000 words.(9)

VB I guess that's the balance between the assignment and gaining knowledge for clinical practice

P4.10 Yes, Yes, I have been happy to take on the assignment. I have found the computer side of things very difficult (1) so, I have never had word before, I have never done a lot of things (2). I've had to do a lot of writing on paper (3) and then typing it up. I had a one to one with WISER on essay structure, again I wasn't really sure how to do all that. (4) I had a one to one in the library to make sure I was acceding the correct stuff eg how to find a book (5). I didn't think about all these things and after the induction I didn't feel confident to do all that (6). I have come up on Fridays, to have some one to ones and they have really helped.(8) Referencing I have never done before, so yes, um I'm trying my hardest with that. (7)

VB Am I right from what you are telling me that on the first day, you couldn't take in all the information to be able to come away and feel confident?

P4.11 Yes (1)

VB Do you feel that the extra that you have done have smoothed the transition or not?

P4.12 Definitely, you have to be prepared to come in on a day when you can do those things (1), so for a weekend course, um you have to come in on a Friday. (2) Again, that was something that I felt I have to come in for and I did it.

VB Do you think that could be a hindrance in terms of the distance and Saturday?

P4 Um (long pause)

VB Or do you feel that if you want to do it you will?

P4.13 Yes, I do, um yes, you maybe need to outline the commitment in terms of what you will have to do, (1) I think, yes, I would take a day off work knowing that I had to do that. I think that some of the other girls won't have to do that if they have done the Diploma (2). These are some of the differences I mean, for me having to go the extra mile (3) and find out things they already know (4). I think though that is the best way to do it, definitely. They are not there at the weekend, but they are there if you need them, its well worth taking time out to use them. (5)

VB Do you think personal motivation has anything to do with this?

P4.14 Yes, its my motivation, my motivation is wanting to do well (1). Um, not that I'm behind but I do have some catching up to do(2), um I want to get those skills(3). And once I have done it, I can use those skills and then use the library like the other girls (4). So just an hour one to one, I don't feel behind on that now. One of the first things that hit home, I did actually think, oh gosh, what all those girls are going to be able to do,(5) you know, they can do this and they can do that, I thought Ohhh.(6)

VB It is interesting where you have positioned yourself within the group? Do you think it is linked to confidence?

P4.15 Yes, I think it is.(1) If I hadn't have had the time to do this, and hadn't been prepared to put this time aside, I would be lost and not able to do it.(2)

VB OK

P4.16 At the end of the day I have chosen to do it, I don't have to do it(1), is probably not going to change my career(2). It may open a few doors.(3) I have chosen to do it and that's have I have chosen to spend my time over this next year or so.

VB How have you found the transition from a social perspective?

P4. Do you mean how have I interacted with everyone?

VB Yes

P4.17 Um (long pause) Its better than I thought it ever would be (1). I like the people, (2) there are ten in the group and that just works out. Um, anyone could come not knowing anyone else and they would be OK, (3) we have lunch together which is really nice (4). A couple travel on the train together which is very nice. Um, I actually come up the night before with my husband and we make it a weekend away, so it doesn't feel like I am studying (4), that's really nice. Already for the medicine weekend we are talking about meeting up on the Saturday for drinks, a meal. (5) We have chats in the group between the months (6), the lectures. We share things which is really nice and it doesn't feel competitive (7). There's a real nice group bond involving everyone in it. It doesn't feel "clicky" (8), it doesn't feel that you are in competition with anybody, (9) you help each other and everyone is really nice.

VB That sounds positive, why do you think that is?

P4.18 Um, I think that everyone just wants it and everyone is just interested in everyone else (1), um there's nine girls, just one boy but he wasn't here last time and he hasn't been involved in the group chat, we haven't heard anything from him. I know if he turns up at the next one, everyone will be willing. I think that there isn't any clashes in personality, trying to be queen of the class. (2) Everyone takes from it what they can (3).

VB Do you think your backgrounds have influenced this?

P4.19 Yes, I guess that in the work that we do, you do have to be friendly (1), ten personalities like that, you are just going to get on. Maybe we are just a nice group that have got on. (2).

VB Do you think that technology plays a part?

P4.20 I think people would be fine without it, (1) they would just pick up where they left off, the last time they saw each other. But it does mean you can keep in touch (2), Its just been general chit chat (3), no one panicking, no one really asking questions. Its just been every couple of weeks, is everyone OK kind of thing. I think the medicine weekend will be really nice because even the girls that would normally go home, because not all of us always stay, but because it is early, everyone is staying and because of the length of the day. I think that will be nice. If the weekend was in May, you might think oh the course is already gone now. (4)

VB How important do you think it is (communication) for you and this course?

P4.21 I think it is really good because you feel like you have contact, throughout really. I think it is really important. (1)

VB On reflection, thinking about the whole process, how ready do you think you were?

P4.22 Yes, I was very prepared, I wouldn't have applied if I thought I wasn't (1). I was ready to do it, ready to commit. (2) It was probably why I hadn't see the course before because I hadn't been looking for that type of course. So when I was ready it popped up – I couldn't believe it really. I was prepared to do it on my own (3), I didn't want to wait for anyone else. It was something that you would do totally independently and yes, I feel I was ready. I wouldn't have wanted to do it half heartedly. Yes, its challenging but one I wanted (4).

VB Is there anything that you would want to add?

P4.23 No, I don't think so. No, I would definitely recommend (1) it but I would say that anyone who qualified like I did, if you haven't up with any education, then it is a big jump. (2) I think I expected to get a text book and be answering questions, like more short answer questions (3). So its been very different to what I thought but a whole lot better (4). You need computer skills or be prepared to find them. (5) There is a big difference between the certificate and diploma. (6)

VB That's interesting about text books?

P4.24 Its just getting used to it. My children went to university in September and I asked them what text books they wanted and they said "yes, Yes" we don't need anything its all on line. I asked them how they could look at their work like that and not use a pad and paper, or read a book in the park. I understand now what they are saying and you can do it without a single text book in front of you . As long as you have your computer – its keeping up to date with current ways of doing things. (1) It's a confidence thing using computers (2). Its not that you cannot do it, its not what your used (3) to. Its more skills that I will come away with that I hadn't anticipated. (4) I'm definitely positive about it. Its all there for the taking, it just means putting yourself out to take it. (5) Everything that you do is good, it's um, building your confidence in an ever changing world (6) . It gives you more confidence in your clinical practice. (7)

## APPENDIX 6 Sample Coding Grid with Categories (Stage 3)

### Participant 4

Master code	Sub code (1)	Sub code (2)	Sub code (3)
Expectations	Academic <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expecting it to be difficult 4.4.1</li> <li>• Prepared to put myself out 4.4.2</li> <li>• Wasn't put off by it 4.4.3</li> <li>• Expected to be hard 4.7.1</li> <li>• Expected to get a text book and answer questions (Learning styles) 4.23.3</li> <li>• Different to expectations but better 4.23.4</li> </ul>	Other in group <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Would have more work to do than others in group 4.4.4</li> <li>• Others would be more qualified (years) 4.4.6</li> <li>• That others in group wont have anything to learn 4.5.4</li> <li>• That others would be enjoying themselves and getting experience 4.5.2</li> </ul>	Social <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better than thought I t would be 4.17.1</li> </ul>
Time	Impact	Management	Previous study

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has only been able to do it because have had time – would have been lost otherwise 4.15.2</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taking a lot of time, putting a lot of hours in (due to position) 4.7.4</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 30 years ago 4.1.5 <b>MOVED TO POSITION</b></li> </ul>
<b>Transition</b>	<p>Academic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Easier for others in transition if they have the diploma 4.2.5 <b>moved to position</b></li> <li>• Others will have advantage due to level of previous study 4.6.2</li> <li>• Will be easier for others if newly qualified 4.6.1</li> <li>• Probably have to think about it a lot more (than others (s) ) 4.7.3 <b>all moved to position</b></li> <li>• Missing bits 4.7.3</li> <li>• Had one to one with WISER 4.10.4</li> <li>• Had one to one with library 4.10.5</li> <li>• Didn't feel confident after induction to do all above 4.10.6, 4.11.1</li> <li>• Struggled with referencing 4.10.7</li> <li>• A challenge but one that was wanted 4.22.4</li> </ul>	<p>Knowledge provided</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need to outline commitment 4.13.1</li> </ul>	<p>Social Group/community of practice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wanted to meet new people 4.1.4</li> <li>• <b>Better than I thought it would be 4.17.1 (link to expectations)</b></li> <li>• I like the people 4.17.2</li> <li>• Anyone welcome in the group 4.17.3</li> <li>• Have lunch together 4.17.4</li> <li>• Arranging social evening 4.17.5</li> <li>• Everyone interested in everyone else 4.18.1, 4.18.3</li> <li>• No queen of the class 4.18.2</li> <li>• Friendliness related to profession 4.19.1</li> <li>• Nice group that just get on 4.19.2 (Meaning it is their own personalities)</li> <li>• Speak in social media groups in between –</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A big jump if you have done certificate 4.23.2 (anyone who qualified like I did)</li> <li>• You need computer skills (or to find them) s 4.23.5</li> <li>• Had to write on paper first 4.10.3</li> </ul> <p>Not sure how to structure an essay 4.10.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very interested in subject area 4.9.1</li> <li>• Assignment interesting 4.9.3</li> <li>• Learned a lot through researching 4.9.5</li> <li>• Learning more than just assignment (practice impact) 4.9.9 Very interested in subject area 4.9.1</li> <li>• Assignment interesting 4.9.3</li> <li>• Learned a lot through researching 4.9.5</li> </ul> <p>Learning more than just assignment (practice impact) 4.9.9</p>		<p>helped the transition 4.17.6</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Everyone is interested in each other as they all want the same, therefore socially accepted 4.18.1</li> <li>• Not competitive (relating to social group) 4.17.7, 4.17.9</li> </ul> <p>Not cliky 4.17.8</p>
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	<p>Very qualified clinically 4.3.1 Outlier in group (diploma and 30 years) 4.4.6</p> <p>Picking out relevant material for assignments 4.8.6, 4.9.4, 4.9.6</p> <p>Feedback has been important 4.9.7</p>		
<b>Transition (cont..)</b>	<p>Preparation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Was prepared, wouldn't have applied if not 4.22.1</li> <li>• Rdy to commit 4.22.2</li> <li>• Prepared to do it on my own 4.22.3</li> </ul>	<p>Personal</p> <p>X</p>	<p>CofP onto Diploma</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of theory coming when entering diploma, only clinical 4.3.1</li> <li>• Not substantial enough in comparison to diploma 4.3.2</li> </ul>
<b>Position</b>	<p>Academic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not as qualified/same level as diploma holders 4.2.2</li> <li>• Feels let down by above 4.2.3</li> <li>• Someone like me 4.2.6</li> <li>• Out of study for a long time 4.6.1 (S)</li> <li>• Depth of knowledge (non diploma) 4.6.2</li> </ul>	<p>Current position</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal life means time can be allocated to make it doable 4.7.5</li> <li>• Would recommend the course 4.23.1</li> <li>• Keeping up to date with current ways eg computers 4.24.1</li> <li>• It's a confidence thing using computers 4.24.2</li> </ul>	<p>Compared to others</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Others train for diploma properly 4.2.4</li> <li>• Easier for them in transition 4.2.5</li> <li>• Others more newly qualified, therefore would find it easier 4.4.4</li> <li>• Depth of knowledge (dip holders) 4.6.2</li> <li>• Therapists have the knowledge already 4.8.3</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need to put time in 4.8.2</li> <li>• Need to put theory in 4.8.1</li> <li>• A being difference between diploma and cert 4.23.6</li> <li>• Easier for others in transition if they have the diploma 4.2.5</li> <li>• Others will have advantage due to level of previous study 4.6.2</li> <li>• Will be easier for others if newly qualified 4.6.1</li> <li>• Probably have to think about it a lot more (than others (s) ) 4.7.3</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Will come away with more skills 4.24.4</li> <li>• Hadn't expected to gain as many skills 4/24/4</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Others wont have to access resources if done diploma 4.13.2</li> <li>• They will already know things that I have to research 4.13.4</li> <li>• Catching up to do 4.14.2</li> <li>• Want to be like the other girls 4.14.4</li> <li>• The others can do more 4.14.5, 4.14.6</li> <li>• That others would be enjoying themselves and getting experience (rather than doing a qualification) 4.5.2</li> </ul>
<b>Position cont....</b>	<p>Prior learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Position from CofC</li> <li>• If only DH, knowledge not necessarily there 4.8.3</li> </ul>	<p>Confidence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of confidence 4.15.1</li> </ul>	<p>Previous study</p> <p>30 years ago 4.1.5</p>
<b>Motivation – why course</b>	<p>Intrinsic/personal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Felt the right time 4.1.1</li> <li>• Children left home for uni 4.1.2</li> <li>• Happy working 4.1.3</li> </ul>	<p>Extrinsic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not going to change my career 4.16.2</li> <li>• It may open a few doors 4.16.3</li> </ul>	<p>Others</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• That others would be enjoying themselves and getting experience (rather than doing a</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wanted to meet new people 4.1.4</li> <li>• Personal decision 4.4.5</li> <li>• Motivation – wanting to do well 4.14.1</li> <li>• Chosen to do it – don't have to do it 4.16.1</li> <li>•</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• qualification) 4.5.2 moved to position</li> </ul>
<b>Motivation on programme</b>	<p>Intrinsic/personal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inspirational and wanting to learn more 4.7.2</li> <li>• Attend on days other than Saturday (Wiser etc) 4.12.1, 4.12.2</li> <li>• Want to get the skills (same as others) 4.14.3</li> <li>• Everything there to take – you have to do it 4.24.5</li> </ul>		
<b>Knowledge</b>	<p>Previous experience</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cof P versus diploma</li> </ul>	<p>Impact</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very interested in subject area 4.9.1</li> <li>• Assignment interesting 4.9.3</li> <li>• Learned a lot through researching 4.9.5</li> <li>• Learning more than just assignment (practice</li> </ul>	<p>Challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Computer work (word) 4.10.1/2</li> <li>• Had to write on paper first 4.10.3</li> <li>•</li> </ul>

		impact) 4.9.9 moved to academic transition	
<b>Non Traditional student</b>	Work commitments  X	Commuting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coming in on Friday for support (not an issue) 4.12.2</li> <li>Travel with husband and make a weekend of it – doesn't feel like study 4.17.4</li> </ul>	Family Commitments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4.1.1 children left home</li> </ul>
<b>Non Traditional Student cont..</b>	University Life (belonging)  X	Weekend Study <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Timing good for networking 4.20.4</li> <li>Travelled up on a Friday to access resource 4.10.8</li> </ul> Easier face to face than on line 4.10.4/5/8 (s)	Communication with peers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Speak in social media groups in between 4.17.6</li> <li>Would be fine without it 4.20.1</li> <li>But you can keep in touch 4.20.2</li> <li>Just general chit chat 4.20.3</li> <li>Communication important for contact 4.21.1</li> </ul>
<b>Non Traditional Student cont..</b>	Challenges <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Had to write on paper first 4.10.3</li> <li>Not sure how to structure an essay 4.10.4 moved to academic transition</li> </ul>		

<b>University Support/Resources</b>	<b>Distance</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Travelled up on a Friday to access resource 4.10.8</li> <li>• Easier face to face than on line 4.10.4/5/8 (S) moved to non traditional</li> </ul>	<b>Lecturers/team/Students</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>	<b>Use of resources</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Had one to one with WISER 4.10.4</li> <li>• Had one to one with library 4.10.5</li> <li>• Not available at weekends therefore have to take time out 4.13.5</li> </ul>
<b>Personal life</b>	<b>Sacrifices</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Made sacrifices 4.7.6</li> </ul>	<b>Family support</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Travel with husband and make a weekend of it – doesn't feel like study 4.17.4</li> </ul>	
<b>Social – all highlighted in green moved to social transition above</b>	<b>Group/community of practice</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wanted to meet new people 4.1.4</li> <li>• Better than I thought it would be 4.17.1 (link to expectations)</li> <li>• I like the people 4.17.2</li> <li>• Anyone welcome in the group 4.17.3</li> <li>• Have lunch together 4.17.4</li> <li>• Arranging social evening 4.17.5</li> <li>• Everyone interested in everyone else 4.18.1, 4.18.3</li> </ul>	<b>Communication</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Speak in social media groups in between 4.17.6</li> </ul>	<b>Feelings</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No queen of the class 4.18.2</li> <li>• Friendliness related to profession 4.19.1</li> <li>• Nice group that just get on 4.19.2 (Meaning it is their own personalities)</li> </ul>		
<b>Identity</b>	Professional <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very qualified clinically 4.3.1</li> <li>• Outlier in group (diploma and 30 years) 4.4.6 moved to academic transition</li> </ul>	Social (Bordieu and habitus, Social Class)	
	Academic X	Progression routes X	
<b>University</b>	Environment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not competitive (relating to social group) 4.17.7, 4.17.9</li> <li>• Not clicky 4.17.8 moved to social and academic transition</li> </ul>		
<b>Learning styles</b>	Ownership of learning X	Approaches to learning (personal) X	

<b>Feelings</b>	Entering the programme <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scary 4.2.1</li> </ul>		
<b>Academic Judgement</b>	Confidence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Picking out relevant material for assignments 4.8.6, 4.9.4, 4.9.6 moved to academic transition</li> </ul>	Feedback <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has been important 4.9.7 moved to academic transition</li> </ul>	

### APPENDIX 7 Data Analysis Mapping Table

<b>Lichtman (2014)</b>	Six stages of analysis (Lichtman 2014)	Yin (2011)	Stages undertaken (Researcher framework)
<b>Raw Data</b>		Compiling the data	
<b>Codes</b>	Initial coding of the data, which includes moving the responses to summaries	Disassembling	Stage 2 – Coding the data (data corpus)
	Revisiting the initial coding		Stage 2 – Coding the data (corpus data)
<b>Categories</b>	Developing an initial list of categories from the coding of the transcripts	Reassembling	Stage 3 – Individual participant coding grids with categories and sub categories
	Modifying the initial list based on additional engagement re-reading		Stage 3 – Individual participant coding grids with categories and sub categories

	Revisiting the categories and sub categories		Stage 4 – Combing all participant coding grids categories and sub categories (synthesis)
<b>Concepts</b>	Moving from categories to concepts	Interpreting  Concluding – link back to research question	Stage 5 – Developing concepts using interpretation



## APPENDIX 8 Synthesised Categories Grid

### Category 3 – Academic Transition with Emerging Concepts

(need to look at all of these in relation to non-traditional)

Academic Transition	Sub Category 1 Previous Learning	Sub Category 2 Requirements	Sub Category 3 Assessments	Sub Category 4 IT	Sub Category 5 Support provided/knowledge given <small>may need to separate this down after?</small>	Sub Theme 6 Feelings	Sub Theme 6 Confidence	Sub Theme 6 Motivation	Sub Theme 7 Environment
	<p>Quite a jump from previous learning 1.7.2</p> <p>Not done any of it before 1.12.3</p> <p>Felt ready for dissertation due to other 2 modules not diploma 2.4.2</p> <p>Diploma did not support 2.4.4</p> <p>Previous research very basic 2.4.5</p> <p>Different level of learning 2.7.3</p>	<p>A lot of reading required 1.7.3</p> <p>More than I thought 1.7.4</p> <p>Challenging 1.8.1</p> <p>Interesting 1.8.2, 1.8.3,</p> <p>Struggled with learning to learn 1.12.1, 1.12.10</p> <p>Found it hard 1.12.10</p> <p>Not hard enough to give up 1.12.10</p>	<p>Struggled with submitting assignments 1.12.2</p> <p>Concerns about doing an assignment 2.12.1</p> <p>Others in group struggled – showed in results 2.26.2</p> <p>Struggled with</p>	<p>Struggled using computer 1.12.12</p> <p>You need computer skills (or to find them) s 4.23.5</p>	<p>Don't know how much more I could have been told 1.14.3</p> <p>A lot of support provided 1.15.1</p> <p>Had one to one with WISER 4.10.4</p> <p>Had one to one with library 4.10.5</p> <p>Tutors helped you to nurture and grow 6.7.2</p>	<p>Shock 2.7.1</p> <p>Impact on personal feelings 2.10.6</p> <p>Quite daunting on first day 3.3.1</p> <p>Taken on too much 3.3.2</p> <p>Didn't feel like I was stupid if asked a silly</p>	<p>How can I do this 2.7.2</p> <p>How can I do this 2.7.2</p> <p>Over my head 2.10.1</p> <p>Too hard, cannot do 2.10.2</p> <p>Concerns about level, natural 2.10.4</p>	<p>Ready to commit 4.22.2</p> <p>Prepared to do it on my own 4.22.3</p> <p>Spoke to someone about the course 6.2.2</p>	<p>Environment More relaxed than previous diploma 2.6.3</p> <p>2.6.3 due to it being a postgraduate school 2.6.4</p> <p>2.22.2 (younger students) changes atmosphere and</p>

<p>Impact of length of time since previous study 2.10.5</p> <p>Seen as an extension to Diploma 3.6.8</p> <p>Feel like im understanding more this time 3.9.7</p> <p>Step up from diploma 3.13.4</p> <p>Understanding better than thought 3.13.6</p> <p>Diploma prepared for degree study 3.14.1</p> <p>Missing bits 4.7.3</p> <p>A big jump if you have done certificate 4.23.2</p>	<p>A lot deeper than expected 1.19.2</p> <p>Harder than thought 1.19.4</p> <p>Didn't know what dissertation was 1.21.3</p> <p>2 days in first weekend a lot when worked all week 3.3.3/4</p> <p>Didn't feel confident after induction to do all above 4.10.6, 4.11.1</p> <p>A challenge but one that was wanted 4.22.4</p> <p>Need to outline commitment 4.13.1</p>	<p>referencing 4.10.7</p> <p>Not sure what level is expected (until after exam) 5.8.1, 5.8.2,5.8.4</p> <p>Assignment relevant topic 5.9.2</p> <p>Enjoyed assignment 5.9.1</p> <p>Feedback from draft assignment had good comments so that was helpful 6.8.2</p> <p>Writing, referencing</p>		<p>Encouraged to grow 6.7.4</p> <p>Told amount of work at interview 1.7.5</p> <p>Told to keep on top of it 1.8.5 (expectations) Doctored into us 1.8.6</p> <p>Support from tutors 2.12.3</p> <p>Assignment structure covered in introduction 2.12.4</p> <p><b>External support</b>        Asked husband for help 8.6.1 (comfort zone) as oppose to asking help from university</p>	<p>question 6.7.3</p> <p>Really enjoyed the course so far 7.18.1</p> <p>Same feelings as when got on diploma (OMG) 8.8.1</p>	<p>Settled in part way through (ACS) (academic) 2.7.5</p> <p>Handling it quite well 3.13.5</p> <p>Could learn from saying something wrong 6.7.4</p> <p>Initially thought what have I done 5.3.1</p>	<p>Have to be prepared, prepared, reading, hit the ground running 6.6.3</p> <p>Knows that other professions also have a top up, so needed in dentistry (importance) 7.5.1.</p> <p>Personal reasons /activities</p>	<p>environment 2.22.4</p> <p>Like it being 2.6.5</p>
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	<p>(anyone who qualified like I did)</p> <p>You need computer skills (or to find them) s 4.23.5</p> <p>Was prepared, wouldn't have applied if not 4.22.1</p> <p>Lack of theory coming when entering diploma, only clinical 4.3.1</p> <p>Not substantial enough in comparison to diploma 4.3.2</p> <p>Initially thought what have I done 5.3.1</p> <p>Not that bad 5.3.4</p>	<p>Not sure what level is expected (until after exam) 5.8.1, 5.8.2, 5.8.4</p> <p>The level is higher (attendance essential) 6.6.1</p> <p>Half way through ACS – realisation of time commitment required 7.6.1</p> <p><b>Expectations</b> changed half way through – knew more what to expect 7.8.8</p> <p>Needed to read around subject before sessions 7.6.5</p>	<p>a challenge 8.5.1</p> <p>Felt happy with assignment 8.9.1</p> <p>Good assessments impacted on self esteem 2.20.1</p> <p>Picking out relevant material for assignments challenging 4.8.6, 4.9.4, 4.9.6</p> <p>Feedback has been important 4.9.7</p> <p>Feedback has been important 4.9.7</p>		<p>Spoke with colleague at work for support (level) 2.10.3</p> <p>Reassurance from colleague 2.10.3</p> <p>Being able to put knowledge into practice 3.12.1</p> <p>Manageable – not hammered with information 3.13.1</p> <p>Very interested in subject area 4.9.1</p> <p>Assignment interesting 4.9.3</p> <p>Learned a lot through researching 4.9.5</p> <p>Learning more than just</p>		<p>Understanding better than thought 3.13.6</p> <p>Pushed me to think I can do the work at that level 7.3.2</p> <p>Asked husband for help 8.6.1 (comfort zone) as oppose to asking help from university also in red</p>	<p>es dictated time 8.15.1</p> <p>Personal Ready for transition but own personality 2.28.1</p> <p>Wanted to use brain more 8.2.5</p> <p>Being a DH you don't use your brain 8.2.6</p>	
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	<p>Not as challenging as more recently qualified 5.4.1</p> <p>The same but more in depth 5.5.1, 5.6.3</p> <p>Makes more sense 5.5.2</p> <p>Hard 5.5.3</p> <p>More relevant, makes more sense (content) 5.6.2, 5.6.4</p> <p>Just doing best and hoping enough 5.8.3</p> <p>Broadening knowledge 5.9.4</p> <p>Challenged but in a positive way 6.3.8</p>	<p>Had to work things out independently 2.8.1</p> <p>2.9.1 linked to own motivation 2.7.4</p> <p>Made it easier for progression through modules 2.8.2</p> <p>Learn it more if you have to do it 2.6.9</p> <p>Have to learn it yourself 2.6.8</p> <p>Learner autonomy 2.7.4</p> <p>Had to do a lot of researching 2.13.3</p> <p>Need to be organised 2.10.7</p>	<p>Felt nervous handing in first piece of work 6.8.1</p> <p>Did not realise the level of referencing 7.8.1</p> <p>Thought work would be descriptive 7.8.2</p> <p>Good grades relaxed me 2.19.1</p>		<p>assignment (practice impact) 4.9.9</p> <p>Very interested in subject area 4.9.1</p> <p>Assignment interesting 4.9.3</p> <p>Learned a lot through researching 4.9.5</p> <p>Learning more than just assignment (practice impact) 4.9.9</p>			<p>Forgotten a lot from previous study 8.3.4</p>	
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<p>The level is higher (attendance essential) 6.6.1</p> <p>Huge jump 6.7.1</p> <p>Could learn from saying something wrong 6.7.4</p> <p>It became a natural progression 6.7.4</p> <p>Homework helped to engage with research 6.7.5</p> <p>Academic writing development 6.7.6</p> <p>Dental school was all exams therefore no prep for research and academic writing 6.7.7</p> <p>Had written essays but no academic writing 6.8.4</p>								
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	<p>You need to step up a level 7.16.2</p> <p>Gap from diploma to degree 7.16.3</p> <p>Gap between level 5 and 6 7.16.4.</p> <p>No critical appraisal/referencing in diploma 7.17.5</p> <p>Not the same amount of academia in a course that leads to professional registration 7.4.1</p> <p>Did a return to education course but still struggled with level 7.17.2</p> <p>Without doing that course I would have</p>								
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<p>struggled even more 7.17.3</p> <p>Said found it fine 8.3.1</p> <p>Enjoyed the challenge 8.3.2 (S – means it was challenging but not admitting?)</p> <p>Learning new things really interesting 8.3.3</p> <p>Writing most challenging bit 8.4.3 (see S above – some admission later on)</p> <p>Writing referencing a challenge 8.5.1</p> <p>Pulling it all together to be academic 8.5.2</p>								
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	<p>Coming back and writing again difficult 8.4.1</p> <p>Never written like that before 8.4.2</p> <p>Positive to do first weekend of 2 days 8.8.2</p> <p>Would have found it hard if only 1 day 8.8.3</p> <p>Asked husband for help 8.6.1 (comfort zone) as oppose to asking help from university</p> <p>Same feelings as when got on diploma (OMG) 8.8.1</p>								
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<p>Preparation by way of having Foundation modules 2.26.1</p> <p>Coming back to uni saw this as an extension of diploma 3.7.1</p> <p>Easier for others in transition if they have the diploma 4.2.5</p> <p>Easier for them in transition 4.2.5</p> <p>Havent found it that bad 5.10.1</p> <p>Dental school was all exams therefore no prep for research and academic writing 6.7.7</p> <p>Had written essays but no academic writing 6.8.4</p>								
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<p>Didn't have computer skills from school 6.9.3</p> <p>It became a natural progression 6.7.4</p> <p>Homework helped to engage with research 6.7.5</p> <p>Tutors helped you to nurture and grow 6.7.2</p> <p>Encouraged to grow 6.7.4</p> <p>Feedback from draft assignment had good comments so that was helpful 6.8.2</p> <p>Progression has been apparent from marks 7.8.4</p> <p>Had to write on paper first 4.10.3</p>								
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	<p>Not sure how to structure an essay 4.10.</p> <p>Age group not done a lot of academic writing 6.8.3</p> <p>Differences linked to age and duration of qualification eg lack of computer skills 6.9.1 (this is also linked to being a non traditional student)</p> <p>Social (Bordieu and habitus, Social Class)</p> <p>May have more knowledge if studied more recent 1.20.3 (Social Identity Theory – which group you belong to)</p>								
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<p>Different from diploma as all on line (resources) 3.23.2</p> <p>Very qualified clinically 4.3.1 Outlier in group (diploma and 30 years) 4.4.6</p> <p>Different from when at university as then everyone was the same age 5.14.2</p> <p>Some prior knowledge for IT would have been helpful 6.13.4</p> <p>Used to social media so accessing on line not an issue 3.23.3</p>								
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**Blue** Gap from Diploma to Degree

**Dark Green** – Position

**Green** – more than thought

**Red** – Support

**Yellow** - no gap

**Pink** – Harder

**Grey** – Confidence

**Bold** - Commitment

## APPENDIX 9 Synthesised Categories Grids

### Category 1 – Expectations

<b>Sub-categories</b>	<b>Description</b>
Academic level	The academic level that was required to undertake study at HE level and the expectations of the level
Position (negative)	Participants perceived position in the group from an academic perspective
Position (positive)	Participants perceived position in the group from an academic perspective
Observation of others	Participants perceived perceptions of others in the group
Impact of expectations	The impact that the perceived expectations had on the participants
Social Expectations	The perceived expectation of transition from a social perspective

### Category 2 - Time Commitment

<b>Sub-categories</b>	<b>Description</b>
Impact	The time commitment required what impact this had
Management	How participants managed study time
Attendance	The importance of committing to attending study sessions

### Category 3 - Academic Transition

<b>Sub-categories</b>	<b>Description</b>
Previous Learning	The transition from previous learning and how this may or may not have prepared the participants for study at HE level
Requirements	Participants knowledge of what was required to study at HE level
Assessments	Participants views on assessment
IT	Participants acknowledging the use of IT in relation to transition
Support provided	The support that participants felt they had received both from the School and wider university
Feelings	Feelings that participants experienced when returning to study
Confidence	Confidence levels relating to returning to study
Motivation	Motivations and reasons for returning to study
Environment	The HE environment

#### Category 4 – Social Transition

<b>Sub-categories</b>	<b>Description</b>
Personal	Personal thoughts on returning to study
Pre-course	The interview stage allowing for social networks to develop
Motivation	Social motivational factors influencing study
Expectations	Unknown expectations from a social perspective
Peers	The influence of peers once transition had taken place
Bonding/group formation	Participants perception of social group bonding
Profession	Participants being from a shared profession
Feelings	Feelings experienced when entering into a new social group
Social Media	The impact of social media on social transition

#### Category 5 - Position

<b>Sub-categories</b>	<b>Description</b>
Academic	The position that participants perceived themselves to be in from an academic perspective
Personal	The personal position of participants

Expected Position	The perceived position that the participants expected
Feelings	The impact of feelings on the position that participants felt they would be in
Prior Learning	The influence of prior learning and the position of participants
Peers	How participants positioned themselves against their peers
Age/maturity	Time lapse since previous study and how this impacted on the position that participants were in
Progression	Participants own progression through the programme

#### Category 6 - Motivation

<b>Sub-categories</b>	<b>Description</b>
Academic (prior)	Academic progression being a motivational factor of returning to study
Career	Career progression being a motivational factor of returning to study
Personal	Personal progression being a motivational factor of returning to study
Commitment	Motivation demonstrated through commitment to the programme



Patients	Wanting to provide good clinical treatment to patients being a motivational factor of returning to study
Academic (on programme)	Demonstration of motivation whilst on the programme
Environment	Wanting to be part of a learning environment being a motivational factor
Financial	Personal financial situation and how this motivated a return to study

#### Category 7 – Non-Traditional Student

<b>Sub-categories</b>	<b>Description</b>
Working commitments	Working as well as returning to study
Distance/Travel	Travel and proximity to the university
Family	Family commitments that were considered when returning to study
Belonging	The importance of belonging to the university
Weekend study (positive)	The positive aspects of studying at weekend
Weekend study (negative)	The negative aspects of studying at weekend
University resources	Access to university resources

### Category 8 – Progression

<b>Sub-categories</b>	<b>Description</b>
Post degree	Progression following the degree
Information regarding progression	The amount of information provided about progression
Academic writing progression	Progress made with academic writing during the programme
Profession	DHDTs needing progression routes
In practice	Using the knowledge/skills gained to progress in practice

### Category 9 – University Support

<b>Sub-categories</b>	<b>Description</b>
Module lead/tutor	Support provided by the course team
Social	Social support
Students	Support provided by other students
University resources	Support provided from wider university resources

The final synthesised categories for the documentary evidence are detailed below:

### Category 1 – Expectations

<b>Sub-categories</b>	<b>Description</b>
Academic development	The expectation that academic development would take place
Increased knowledge	The expectation that there would be an increase in knowledge
Progression	The expectation that study at HE would allow for future progression

### Category 2 – Motivation

<b>Sub-categories</b>	<b>Description</b>
Intrinsic	Motivational factors from an intrinsic perspective eg self-development
Extrinsic	Motivational factors from an extrinsic perspective eg career development
Family Commitments	Family situation motivating return to study

### Category 3 – Academic Transition

<b>Sub-categories</b>	<b>Description</b>
Management	How study at HE will be managed
Qualification Period	The time lapse since previous study and the impact on transition

