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**OPTIMAL CULTURAL DISTANCE:
A CONCEPTUAL MODEL
OF GREATER AND LESSER
LIKELIHOOD OF PARTICIPATION
IN HIGHER EDUCATION BY
POTENTIAL ENTRANTS
FROM UNDER-REPRESENTED
SOCIO-ECONOMIC GROUPS**

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of the requirements for the degree of PhD**

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**No part of this thesis has previously been submitted
for a degree or other qualification to City University
or any other university or institution of higher education**

ABSTRACT

This research investigated processes associated with greater and lesser likelihood of participation in higher education. The sample, of whom 89% were from under-represented socio-economic groups, counted eight focus groups with a total of 78 participants and 26 individual interviews. The interaction of assumptions (drivers and barriers, constructions of students and of higher education and public discourses) and life history factors (initial education and familial influences) was examined to formulate a conceptual model of greater and lesser likelihood of participation in higher education.

This conceptual model was derived from a literature-based, preliminary conceptual model that was adjusted to fit the key findings. The model is based on the idea of optimal cultural distance or the point at which higher education becomes for oneself rather than not for oneself. It takes into account the factors that lessen cultural distance and internalised barriers and hence increase the likelihood of reaching the point of optimal cultural distance. The model also takes into account the extent to which entering higher education is a decision or a non-decision and the extent to which decisions and non-decisions are made within practical or discursive consciousness.

The conceptual model of greater and lesser likelihood of participation by potential entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups goes beyond contrasting polarised and social-class based educational trajectories. It offers important insights into personal constructions of higher education and will inform policy and practice in the current climate of higher education today.

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1

INTRODUCTION

This research arose as an indirect consequence of my experiences as a member of a small group of mature students in a secondary school where we were taught Higher Grades together with young people.¹ Very few of the young people and even fewer of the mature students subsequently entered higher education. Most of those who did enter higher education first went to a further education college to gain more qualifications even though they did not need them. At a time when there were no tuition fees and when maintenance grants were still available (for full time degrees only), this experience made me wonder why most of the younger and mature qualified potential entrants were so reluctant to enter higher education directly and why some never did enter higher education.

In order to contextualise and introduce the present research the first chapter is divided into four sections:

- starting point
- aims and objectives
- nature and scope
- brief outline of the thesis

Starting point

Broadly speaking, within the British context the terms ‘access’ and ‘widening participation’ belong to a relatively recent higher education policy discourse (Parry 1997: 108) that shall be examined shortly. However, it is also worth pointing out that concerns about access and widening participation in all levels of education go back

¹ This was part of a widening participation initiative from a Scottish Regional Council and the European Social Fund whereby schools were financially encouraged to open their certificate classes [and offer leisure classes] to adults returning to formal education. Those schools which accepted to take part were funded to have a crèche for the children of not just the adult returners but also the staff.

to the Reformation in the 16th century in Scotland and to the Royal Commissions into Oxford and Cambridge in the mid 19th century in England. *The Book of Discipline* (1560) by John Knox and his followers attempted to conceptualise and put into place a cohesive and closely articulated national system of education at primary, secondary and tertiary level based on academic ability rather than social class (Bell and Grant 1974; Devine 1999). Arguably, as a consequence of such thinking at national level, by the early 19th century the Scottish universities taught a broader and more utilitarian curriculum primarily to local students who mainly studied part-time (McCrone 1992). The professional and business classes constituted one half, the skilled working class one quarter, and the aristocracy one quarter of the students. This contrasted sharply with the exclusive, residential, elitist Oxford and Cambridge universities where three quarters of the students came from the Anglican aristocracy and clergy (Stephens 1998). Feeling largely excluded from Oxford and Cambridge, the professional and business classes, which made up only one quarter of the students, lobbied parliament to widen the social class intake and modernise the narrow classical curriculum that they found to have little relevance to their needs (Sanderson 1972). This led to the Royal Commissions into Oxford and Cambridge in 1852 and 1853, which were the first parliamentary attempts to widen access and participation to university education in England (Sanderson 1972). At that time the only other English universities were the universities of London and Durham and a civic university in Manchester (Stephens 1998). The Royal Commissions recommended that the prescriptive religious barriers be removed and that Oxbridge should widen its social class intake. Within a few years the professional and business classes or middle classes doubled their participation (Sanderson 1972).

It is worth noting that from 1851 onwards the civic universities in England were based on the Scottish rather than the Oxford and Cambridge model (Bell 2000). To facilitate access and widening participation franchised courses from the University of London offered part-time and distance learning from 1858 (Ward and Taylor 1986). The University Extension movement from the 1870s onwards offered similar opportunities on a wider scale (Fieldhouse *et al* 1996). From mid-19th century, supported by a few enlightened men, women successfully fought to change legislation so that in 1878 they were able to graduate from British universities (McDermid 2000). In 1922 the Asquith Royal Commission into Oxford and Cambridge advocated that there should be a greater representation from students of

the largest social group, the working-class because it was greatly under-represented. Later in the century Robbins (1963) and Dearing (1997), in commissions of inquiry into higher education, were still advocating a greater representation from working-class students because they were still under-represented while the middle class was over-represented.

After entitlement to secondary schooling became universal² the educational discourse shifted from a focus on equality of opportunity for entry to secondary education to a focus on equality of opportunity for entry into higher education. The latter discourse was in turn superseded in the late 1970s by the discourse of ‘access and widening participation’ to higher education, which has now become a major policy issue in post-school education in the British context (Fulton 1981; 1989; Parry and Wake 1990; Blackburn and Jarman 1993; Eggerton and Halsey 1993; Davies 1994; Williams 1997; Reay and Ball 1997; Dearing 1997, CVCP 1998; DfEE 1998a; DfES 2004a, 2004b, 2004c; Scottish Executive 2004; HEFCE 2005 *inter alia*) and worldwide (Halsey 1992b; Davies 1995; Lynch and O’Riordan 1998; Skilbeck and Connell 2000). Since the early 1990s ‘access and widening participation’ has thus increasingly become “the mission for institutions of higher education, defining the character of courses and academic structures, pervading the values of institutions and transforming historic patterns of organisations” (Robertson 1997: 31).

The shift in discourse took place against a background of expanding student numbers. In 1963 there were 180,000 students in British universities whereas in 2001/2002 there were 2,086,080 million students (of whom 1,610,000 were undergraduate) in 168 British higher education institutions (HEIs) (Ramsden 2004: 11 and 28). If the number of students doing higher education courses in further education is taken into account (7% of total number in England and 25% in Scotland) the total number of higher education students was 2,294,165 (Ramsden 2004: 10).

The expansion of higher education in the United Kingdom led to a greater openness on the part of many institutions of higher education to mature, part-time and other non-traditional students. The expansion also led to a significant improvement in relative participation rates for women, most minority ethnic groups and mature

² The Norwood Report of 1943 led to the 1944 Education Act for England and Wales and the broadly similar 1945 Education (Scotland) Act. These parallel acts gave full and unequivocal access to secondary education for all free at the point of delivery.

students (CVCP 1998). The exact position of social class is more difficult to pin down because of shortcomings in data availability and a lack of a systematic approach in how the data is analysed (HEFCE 1996; Davies 1994, 1997, Davies *et al* 2002). However, over the past 40 years the ratios of relative participation from lower social groups have remained fairly constant and higher education still counts a disproportionate number of students from professional and managerial background

More importantly, a far greater percentage of qualified potential entrants from skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled background do not enter higher education than from professional and managerial backgrounds (Robbins 1963; HEFCE 1996; 1997a, 1997b; Dearing 1997, CVCP 1998; DfES 2004a; DfES 2004b; SHEFC 2004; Scottish Executive 2004; HEFCE 2005). Robbins (1963) found that 37% of the boys and 51% of the girls from maintained Grammar schools who had two or more A level passes did not go on to university the following year. Redpath and Harvey (1987) discovered that 14% of those who had two or more A-level passes did not apply to higher education and that more than 50% of the girls and 40% of the boys who took BTECs (British Technical Education Council qualifications) or ONDs (Ordinary National Diplomas)³ did not apply. Metcalf (1997) underlined that 33% of all 18/19 year olds qualified to enter higher education in England and Wales did not enter: 18% of those with two A-levels and 70% of those with GNVQs (General National Vocational Qualifications) and BTECs⁴ More recently, Metcalf (1997) showed a direct correlation between social class and qualified potential entrants to higher education who remain non-participants summarised in table 1.1 below.

Table 1.1 Social class, household distribution and qualifications, applications and entrance to higher education for 18/19 year olds in England and Wales

Social class	1 & 2	3nm& 3m	4 & 5
Household distribution	39	42	19
% gaining minimum qualifications for entrance to higher education*	50	27	16
% of those qualified not entering higher education*	23	41	53
% of those qualified entering higher education	77	59	47

Source: derived from figures in Metcalf (1997: 5) and Dearing (1997: 103) using data from OPCS 1991; *Youth Cohort Survey 1993 for England and Wales; # calculated from available data in Metcalf and in Dearing

³ BTEC level 3 and OND are held to be equivalent to 2 A-levels
⁴ BTEC level 3 and GNVQ level 3 are held to be equivalent to 2 A-levels

Table 1.1 shows that among young people in social classes 1 and 2 less than a quarter of those aged 18/19 who are qualified (23%) do not enter higher education. In social classes 3nm and 3m the number is less than half (41%) and in social classes 4 and 5 the figure is more than half (53%). Of those in social classes 1 and 2 gaining minimum qualifications 77% enter higher education, in social classes 3nm and 3m and in social classes 4 and 5 only 59% and 47% enter respectively. More recent figures indicate that the percentage of those with two A-levels who do not go to higher education is down to 10% (DfES 2004b). However, only 19% of those from manual backgrounds gained two or more A-levels by the age of 18 compared to 43 % from non-manual backgrounds (DfES 2004b). Hence many researchers and policy makers have argued that the over-representation of professional and managerial and the under-representation of manual socio-economic groups has yet to be resolved (Robertson 1992; Woodrow 2001; Ball *et al* 2002; DfES 2004b; HEFCE 2005).

Before going any further it is worth underlining that some caution is needed about figures involving social class and participation in higher education. As seen earlier the exact position of social class is more difficult to ascertain with certainty because of shortcomings in data availability and analysis that make comparisons over time difficult (HEFCE 1996; Davies 1994, 1997). In addition to this, comparisons between UK countries and especially between England and Scotland are also problematic since data is often not gathered in exactly the same way because of national differences between the education systems. Also, the published data available is either for the United Kingdom or for individual countries, but England and Wales are often put together. Notwithstanding this, comparing what seems liked very comparable data can create also create problems if defining elements of one system are not taken into account as shown in tables 1.2 and 1.3 below.

Table 1.2 Acceptance rate by social class to HEIs in England and Scotland for applicants aged 17-21 in 1997/1998

	1	2	3nm	3m	4	5
England	83.4	81.1	79.2	76.0	76.6	73.1
Scotland	83.2	78.6	74.5	72.1	75.6	72.7

Source: derived from 1991/1992 UCAS figures used by Osborne (1999) and does not include higher education courses in further education

Table 1.2 indicates that in both England and Scotland the higher social classes do significantly better than the lower social classes. In addition, applicants to Scottish institutions from social classes 3m and 3m are substantially more rejected with differences of nearly 5% and 4% respectively with applicants to English institutions.

Table 1.3 *Acceptance rate by social class and acceptance to higher education among applicants to HEIs in England and Scotland in 1991/1992*

	England	Scotland
% population that belong to 3m, 4 and 5	42.0	44.9
3m, 4 and 5 percentage of acceptance to higher education	24.5	25.3

Source: derived from 1991/1992 UCAS figures used by Osborne (1999) and does not include higher education courses in further education

Since social classes 3m, 4 and 5 represent a slightly greater proportion of the population in Scotland, for a similar percentage of acceptances Scotland should have a rate of 27.2% of acceptances. This means that Scotland appears to be 2% behind England. However, Osborne (1999) used figures from the University Central Admissions Systems (UCAS) that did not take into account the percentage of acceptances to higher education courses in further education colleges. Yet, such courses constitute a significant proportion of Scottish higher education. They explain the far higher overall participation rate and the greater representation of the working class in higher education in Scotland (Dearing 1997; Arbuthnott 1997; SHEFC 2004; HEFCE 2005).⁵

At this point is worth reiterating that caution is needed not only when looking at figures involving social class and/or participation in higher education, but also when comparing England and Scotland. Osborne's figures give an overall percentage of 42.2% for the representation of social classes 3m, 4 and 5 within the general population. However, the figure is 47% of the British population according to the Office of Population and Census Survey (OPCS 1993 based on the 1991 census). Because of such discrepancies and because the figures available from published research were not systematically and consistently collected for each socio-economic group in each of countries in the United Kingdom, it is difficult to make precise

⁵ Osborne (1999) contradicts Robbins (1963) and Dearing (1997) who found that Scottish higher education was able to attract more working-class students than England or any country in the rest of the United Kingdom. Osborne (1999) generated a great level of controversy in Scotland. Under the heading *Scots Class Myth Debunked*, Olga Wojtas reported on Osborne's findings that showed that working-class participation in Scotland was minimally lagging behind all other countries in the United Kingdom. Ronald Crawford, Secretary of the

comparisons over time and between Scotland and England (HEFCE 1996; Davies 1994, 1997; Davies *et al* 2002). Notwithstanding this, it is possible to distinguish broad trends that apply to both England and Scotland. Young and mature people from social classes 3m, 4 and 5 are not only less likely to be qualified to enter higher education, but also less likely to apply if qualified and less likely to be accepted if they apply as well as less likely to enter higher education if they are offered a place (Mecalf 1997; Osborne 1999).

Aims and objectives

Many researchers have argued that the current funding arrangements ensure entrenched socio-economic disparities and hence inhibit wider participation. Policy is deemed ineffective because of the on-going under-representation of students from lower socio-economic groups and the sharp increase in the number of students working part-time (See Hodgson and Spours 1999, 2000; Woodrow 1999, 2000, 2001; Callender 2001; Watt 2001; Mackie 2001; Osborne 2001; Reynolds 2001; Davies *et al* 2002).

Metcalf (1997) and DfES (1998, 1998a, 2004a, 2004b) identified not gaining minimal entry qualifications and not entering higher education when qualified to do so as a problem of low aspirations and low self-confidence. Metcalf (1997) speculated that with no change in qualifications gained but a change in attitude, the likelihood of entering higher education of the middle social classes (3nm and 3m) and the lowest social classes (4 and 5) could be increased from 59% and 47% respectively to attain the 77% of the highest social classes (1 and 2) [see above table 1.1]. In other words, with the same qualifications but with higher aspirations and greater self-esteem an additional 23,000 students aged 18/19 would have entered higher education (17,000 from social classes 3nm and 3m and 6,000 from social classes 4 and 5).

The assumption underpinning the position of Metcalf (1997) and DfES (1998a, 1998b, 2004a, 2004b) seems to be that individuals are to blame for having low

aspirations and not participating in higher education, which is held as an unquestionable highly desirable goal. This stance fails to acknowledge that the education system, funding structures, the labour market and other socio-cultural factors might also create barriers or that higher education may not always be a highly desirable goal. The above tables 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3 and claims made about participants and non-participants raise the following questions:

- Are qualified potential entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups less likely to enter higher education because they have low aspirations and low self-confidence?
- What other mechanisms might best explain lesser likelihood of participation from under-represented socio-economic groups?

These questions were the starting point that gave me the idea of wanting to investigate processes associated with greater and lesser likelihood of participation in higher education by potential entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups in order to formulate a conceptual model explaining greater and lesser likelihood in both an English and Scottish context. In order to achieve this aim the following objectives were selected:

- 1 To analyse the assumptions that determine greater or lesser likelihood of participation
- 2 To investigate the influence of life history factors on greater or lesser likelihood of participation
- 3 To examine the interaction of assumptions and life history factors on greater or lesser likelihood of participation

For the purpose of this research *potential entrant* to higher education means potentially qualified in the sense that someone has embarked on a course, the successful completion of which will permit entrance to higher education. Potential entrant can also mean someone who is now in higher education but was a potential entrant at the time they left school. A *young* potential entrant to higher education is someone under 21 who is studying for a traditional entry qualifications such as A-levels in England and Highers Grades in Scotland and whose socio-cultural background is defined with respect to their parental occupation and residence. A *mature* potential entrant is someone over 21; who will or has entered higher

education with a wide range of entry qualifications such as traditional qualifications, access courses and vocational qualification.

In this research the socio-economic groups classification is that of *The Registrar-General's Classifications of Occupations 1911-1998*⁶, which states that in at the time of the 1991 Census the social class distribution of economically active persons was:

- professional and managerial or professional and intermediate classes or social classes 1 and 2
- skilled non-manual and skilled manual or social classes 3nm and 3m
- semi-skilled and unskilled or social classes 4 and 5

Social classes 1 and 2 are over-represented. Social classes 3nm is slightly under-represented while social classes 3m, 4 and 5 are significantly under-represented (Robbins 1963; Dearing 1997; CVCP 1998; DfES 2004b; SHEFC 2004; HEFCE 2005). In 1999 social classes 1 and 2 represented 52% of accepted applicants while social classes 3nm, 3m, 4 and 5 represented 38% of accepted applicants (12% of applicants were of unknown social class) (UCAS 1999). Skilled manual, semi-skilled or unskilled people form about half the economically active population of the United Kingdom and only about a quarter of young entrants to higher education are from these groups (OPCS 1993; Marks 2000; HEFCE 2001).

Nature, scope and significance

Although the Anglo-centrism of British educational research has somewhat declined over the past few years, with the exception of Davies *et al* (2002) and Marks *et al* (2003) who compared mature applicants and entrants in both England and Scotland, most research still focuses to a significant extent either on England and more specifically on London or Birmingham. Brooks (2003a, 2003b) examined young applicants in the London area. Bowl (2001, 2003) and Warmington (2002) examined

⁶ This was superseded by *The Office for National Statistics Classification of Occupations 1998* which came into effect in 2001 (but does not seem to be used by anyone yet) and has eight categories: class 1 = Higher Professionals; class 2 = Lower and Associate Professionals; class 3 = Intermediary Occupations; class 4 = Self-Employed Non Professionals; class 5 = Craft and Related or Lower Supervisory or Technical; class 6 = Semi-Routine Occupations in Manufacturing and Services; class 7 = Routine or elementary occupations in Manufacturing and Services; and class 8 = Never Worked, Unemployed and Long-term Sick; See Hale, B (1999) The change of class; Teachers move down a rung on social scale, *The Daily Mail*, 17 March, 29

mature students in the Birmingham area. Ball *et al* (2000, 2002) looked at young students in the London area. Reay (1998, 2001), Reay *et al* (2001, 2002), Archer and Hutchings (2000) and Hutchings and Archer (2001) investigated mature and young potential entrants in the London area. West (1996), Pugsley (1998) and Baxter and Britton (1999, 2001) examined mature students in Kent, Wales and the East Midlands.

More importantly, although the Scottish higher education system has many elements that distinguish it from that of England, such as a different funding council and separate legislation for higher education since the [re-]creation of the Scottish Parliament in 1999, the main policy debates and developments have been very similar to those in England (Schuller *et al* 1999). At the same time there have been debates that were different since Scotland removed the upfront tuition fees with the *Graduate Endowment (Scotland) Regulations 2001*, a piece of legislation that adopted most of the recommendations of the Cubie Report (1999). The two countries are therefore eminently suitable for a comparative analysis within the field of access and widening participation research that has become not only a major policy issue but also a rapidly expanding priority in the government's agenda of each country.

In the British context theorising about the impact of socio-cultural factors and education policies, ideologies and discourses has been attempted many times with various degrees of success and usefulness (Skeggs 1997; Pugsley 1998; Du Bois-Reymond 1998; Lynch and O'Riordan 1998; Reay 1998, 2000, 2001; Archer and Hutchings 2000; Reay *et al* 2001, 2002; Ball *et al* 2002; Bamber and Tett 1997, 1999, 2000; Tett 1999; Power *et al* 1999; 2000, 2003; Ianelli 2000; Ianelli and Raffe 2000; Howieson and Raffe 1999; Hodgkinson and Sparkes 1997; Hodgkinson and Bloomer 1998, 2000; Raffe 1997; Raffe *et al* 1998, 1999, 2001a and 2001b; Gorard *et al* 1997, 1998, 1999a and 1999b). Few conceptual models have been formulated with the exception of Bourdieu (1976, 1977c, 1979, 1984, 1990b); Hodgkinson and Sparkes (1997) and Gorard *et al* (1997, 1998, 1999a, 1999b). It seemed therefore relevant and timely to develop a comparative conceptual model to explain the greater or lesser likelihood of participation by potential entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups in both an English and a Scottish context.

This research is a small-scale empirical investigation (76 participants in a total of 8 focus groups and 26 individual interviews) that gathered qualitative data to gain a better understanding of the interplay of societal forces and constructions of higher education as well as of dispositional or internalised drivers and barriers to access and widening participation. The fact that the data was gathered in 1999-2001 allowed for greater reflexivity and arguably greater validity because it has been possible to evaluate the extent of its fittingness with the research published since 2001. A major significance of the present research is that it compares assumptions about higher education and life history factors influencing the participation of young and mature potential entrants, which is still relatively uncommon (See Reay 1998; Reay *et al* 2001, 2002; Davies *et al* 2002; Marks *et al* 2003), while comparing both young and mature potential entrants in both an English and Scottish context is even rarer (See Davies *et al* 2002). Even more unique was an added comparison of life history factors and assumptions of higher education of an additional 10 interviewees from under-represented socio-economical groups who were generationally linked to the young and/or mature respondents making the present small scale empirical investigation span a period seventy years, although the main focus remains within the past thirty years, which were a highly significant period of time in the history of higher education in the United Kingdom, not least because they included the transition from an elite to a mass system (when the threshold of 15% Age Participation Rate (API) was reached in 1987) (See Trow 1970, 1973; Smith 1999). [See glossary for a full definition of the API on page 453]

This research is set within a broadly structuralist framework where individuals and groups are deemed to be both constrained by social structures (see Durkheim 1893, 1895, 1897) but are also enabled by these social structures since *habitus* mediate between structure and action (Bourdieu 1976, 1977c, 1979, 1984, 1990b, 1993b) and purposive action may have unintended consequences (see Weber 1932, 1946, 1978). The present research used the concept of *optimal cultural distance* in the formulation of the conceptual model in order to explain greater or lesser likelihood of participation. The concept was informed by Bourdieu's (1976, 1977c, 1984, 1990b, 1993b) notions of *cultural capital* and *habitus*, Foucault's (1972, 1980, 1988) ideas on *disciplinary power* and *finely graded hierarchies*, Jackson's (1968) concept of *the hidden curriculum*, Hodgkinson and Sparkes' (1997) ideas of *horizons for actions* and *pragmatically rational decision-making*, Gorard *et al* (1997, 1998, 1999a, 1999b)

notions of *familial learning trajectories* and *cultural shifts* and finally from Du Bois-Reymond's (1998) *decisions* and *non-decisions* and *intergenerational family scripts*.

Broadly speaking, this research is situated within the field of access and widening participation in higher education, which is "a field with open, over-lapping and all-embracing boundaries" (Parry 1997: 108). Access and widening participation research has increasingly become a more systematically defined and internationally accepted field of study (Thomas 2001a). Widening access means increasing the representation of particular subgroups that are under-represented in higher education. Participation concerns the extent to which sub-groups are represented across higher education institutions and subjects. Widening participation therefore means "seeking a more representative cross-section of potential entrants across universities and subjects" (Tonks and Farr 2003: 26).

The significance of access and widening participation research in general and of the present research in particular is the large pool of untapped potential represented by qualified potential entrants and potentially qualified entrants, both young and mature, who decide not to go to higher education (Robbins 1963; Redpath and Harvey 1987; Dearing 1997; Metcalf 1997; SHEFC 2004; DfES 2004a; HEFCE 2005) and the rise in the number of 16-19 year olds not involved in any form of education and training matched by a growth in their economic activity both in low skill full-time and part-time work (Hodgson and Spours 2000; Callender 2001; Metcalf 2003). These concerns have prompted the British government to aim for 50% of young people entering higher education by 2010⁷ (Blunkett 2001; DFES 2004a).

This research is therefore not only an original contribution to the research on access and participation in terms of understanding non-participation of potentially qualified entrants to higher education, but also to the debate concerning the changing shape and scope of higher education as well as a contribution to policy studies analysis. More importantly, this research adds valuable new insights to post-compulsory education, adult education and lifelong learning as well as to sociology of education, history of education and comparative education and in particular new insights on several major trends in the research on access and widening participation: young

⁷ Much of this expansion is expected to be through two-year Foundation Degrees to be developed in collaboration with employers [See DfEs 2003; DfES 2004a, DfES2004b]

people's transitions (See Hodkinson and Sparkes 1997 *inter alia*); older people's transitions (See Gorard *et al* 1999a, 1999b *inter alia*); the impact of funding policies and financial issues on the participation in higher education of young people (See Callender 2001; Woodrow 2001) as well as mature students (See Davies *et al* 2002; Reay *et al* 2002); and comparative studies along national lines within the United Kingdom (See Raffe *et al* 1999 *inter alia*) or research on social class attitudes and experiences in relation to higher education (Reay 1998, 2001; Tett 1999, 2004; Ball *et al* 2002 *inter alia*).

Outline of the thesis

The second chapter analyses of the evolution of pattern of participation by key variables in both England and Scotland and examines the changes in higher education structures, policies and purposes, ideologies and discourses in both England and Scotland. The third chapter reviews the general trends in the literature on access and widening participation and reviews the literature around what is known about the aims and objectives of the present research. The fourth chapter examines previous sociological theories and conceptual models and formulates a preliminary conceptual model of greater and lesser likelihood of participation in higher education by under-represented socio-economic groups. The fifth chapter explains the methodology and research design. The sixth chapter describes the context and profile of each focus group and analyses the categories generated during ranking exercises. The seventh chapter examines the assumptions and life history factors discussed in the focus groups and more especially both external and internal drivers and barriers to participation in higher education. The eighth chapter analyses the interviews and focuses on constructions of higher education and life history factors and more especially on the internal drivers and barriers to higher education. The ninth chapter synthesises the key findings from both the focus groups and the interviews in relation to the point of optimal cultural distance when higher education becomes for oneself rather than not for oneself. The tenth chapter adjusts the key findings to preliminary conceptual model to formulate the finalised conceptual model of greater and lesser likelihood of participation by potential entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups. The eleventh chapter justifies the conclusions

reached, shows how the present research contributed to new knowledge, reflects on the research process and identifies new ways forward.

Conclusion

This introductory chapter has briefly contextualised the research within the field of access and widening participation, which has increasingly become a key government priority against a background of persisting wide disparities in participation between the better off and the more disadvantaged social classes. The aim of the present research was identified as an investigation of processes associated with greater and lesser likelihood of participation among young and mature potential entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups in order to formulate an explanatory conceptual model. In order to achieve the aim of the research the following objectives were selected:

- 1 To analyse the assumptions that determine greater or lesser likelihood of participation
- 2 To investigate the influence of life history factors on greater or lesser likelihood of participation
- 3 To examine the interaction of assumptions and life history factors on greater or lesser likelihood of participation

The nature, scope and significance of the research were then described. To conclude the chapter a brief outline of the thesis was given.

Before these issues can be properly examined, it is necessary to contextualise the aims and objectives. The second chapter will thus now examine changes in the nature and scope of higher education, that is, external structures and policies, and the evolution of patterns of participation by key variables.

2

POLICY CONTEXT

The first chapter introduced the problematic of disparities in higher education participation according to social class and the fact that a significant number of potential entrants who are qualified to enter higher education decide not to go. Before these issues can be properly examined, it is necessary to contextualise the aims and objectives. The second chapter thus discusses:

- the evolution of patterns of participation using the key variables of disability, ethnicity, sex, age, geography and social class
- the changes in external structures and in the nature and scope of higher education focussing on access and widening participation policies, entry requirement and qualifications, changes in the nature of acceptable knowledge, the English policy context and the Scottish policy context

Patterns of participation by key variables

A word of caution

As mentioned in the first chapter caution is needed when looking at figures involving social class and/or participation in higher education and/or when comparing England and Scotland. Figures available from published research were not systematically and consistently collected for each socio-economic group in each of constituent countries of the United Kingdom: often figures were given for the United Kingdom as a whole but not for separate countries and/or England and Wales were merged together. Although broad trends can be distinguished, it is nonetheless difficult to make absolutely precise comparisons over time and between Scotland and England and more especially as far as social class is concerned (See HEFCE 1996; Davies 1994, 1997; Davies *et al* 2002).

Although more systematic and more accurate monitoring has been introduced, it cannot remedy previous shortcomings and confusion still exists because of lack of standardisation for calculating social class representation. The British, English and Scottish household distributions are not often mentioned or taken into account by researchers (including those of the DfES and the Scottish Executive). Hence, variations of household distribution for social class over time are not often taken into account. When household distribution for social class is referred to, the figures given are rarely given for individual social class category. Instead social classes 1 and 2 are often put together as are 3nm and 3m and 5 and 6 *or* social classes 1, 2, and 3nm are taken together as are 3m, 4 and 5.¹ Also, a substantial amount of research uses the terms ‘working-class’ and ‘middle class’ without explaining exactly what is meant by these terms. Of those researchers who define their use, ‘middle class’ sometimes mean social classes 1, 2 and 3nm and sometimes only social classes 1 and 2 while ‘working class’ sometimes means social classes 3m, 4 and 5 or only 4 and 5 or 3nm, 3m, 4 and 5. Furthermore ‘British’ and ‘English’ are used interchangeably creating confusion made worse by the fact that figures are not systematically given separately for each country in the United Kingdom.

Age participation rate

The Age Participation Index (API) for the United Kingdom measures the number of home domiciled young (aged under 21) initial entrants to full-time and sandwich undergraduate courses expressed as a proportion of the average number of 18 to 19 year old in the United Kingdom for that given year (DfES 2004b).

Table 2.1 Age participation rate and number of students in the UK in 20th century

Year	API*	HE undergraduate students (rounded up)
1900	0.7%	35,000
1920	1.5%	65,000
1950	3%	140,000
1960	5%	180,000
1980	12%	400,000
2001	35%	1,773,500

Sources: derived from Edwards 1982, HESA 2002, Carpentier 2004 and DfES 2004b

¹ When figures are given for these they are not always congruent.

The overall API increased from 3% in 1950 to 5% in 1961. It had nearly tripled in 1970 when it stood at 14%. There were no significant changes until 1987 when it reached 15% and then more than doubled in 1994 when it reached 32% (Smith 1999: 153). From 1994 to 2000 the growth remained static and started to increase again in 2001 when the participation rate reached 35% (HESA 2002, DfES 2004b; HEFCE 2005) 52% for Scotland and 32% for England (Scottish Executive 2004). The expansion of higher education in the 1980s and especially the first half of the 1990s saw an elite system replaced by a mass system when the Age Participation Index (API) for students aged 17-19 reached 15% in 1987 (Trow 1970, 1973; Scott 1995; Wagner 1995). In the mid 1990s the Scottish API reached 40%, the threshold for a universal system of higher education (Arbuthnott 1997).

It is worth noting that the calculation of the API by the Scottish Executive is slightly different from that of the DfES. In addition to the API the latter also use the Higher Education Index Participation rate (HEIPR), an extension of the API that takes into account both full-time and part-time students aged 17-30 to measure progress towards the 50% target of participation set by the Labour Government. The HEIPR increased from 41% in 1999/2000 to 44% in 2002/2003. The API and HEIPR are aggregations of entrant counts and population estimates from different age groups over several years. Instead of the statistical 'distortion' of the API or HEIPR, HEFCE (2005) and SHEFC (2004) have recently started to use a participation rate calculated from the experiences of real cohorts defined relative to the school year called Young Participation Rate (YPR). Although monitoring is more accurate than it used to be, all these different methods of calculating rates of participation in higher education make comparisons between methods very difficult.

Disability

The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 (SENDA) which came into force in September 2002 established legal rights for disabled students in pre and post-16 education, including further and higher education institutions and sixth form colleges. It is unlawful for responsible bodies to treat a disabled person less favourably than a non-disabled person for a reason that relates to the person's disability (SENDA 2001). Disability means mobility, physical, psychiatric,

neurological, sensory (visual, hearing) and learning difficulties including dyslexia. In the United Kingdom 12.5% of the total population have a disability and 7% of the 18-30 age group state they have a disability. However, in higher education only 2% of students in 1996 and 4% of students in 1999 have identified themselves as having a disability (HEFCE 1996; CVCP 1999). Students with disabilities constitute an under-represented group. They have been targeted by the higher education funding councils and financial incentives have been offered to institutions that recruit more students with disabilities.

Ethnicity

The Race Relations Act 1976 regulates the legislation concerning race discrimination. In 1991 ethnic minorities accounted for 14% of the public sector's places in the United Kingdom compared to 8% of university places (Booth 1999). In 1994 ethnic minorities represented 12.1% of all first-year undergraduate admissions and in 1997 the percentage reached 13% (Coffield and Vignoles 1997). Since at that time the percentage of the ethnic minority population for young people aged 18-20 was around 7.3% in England and 1.3% in Scotland (Paterson 1997: 35), ethnic minorities appear to have been particularly well represented (Coffield and Vignoles 1997; Patterson 1997; HEFCE 2005).

The complex nature of ethnicity is that the picture is overall positive. However, ethnic minorities tend to be more represented and more likely to be accepted in post-1992 universities, especially in England. This is because a greater proportion of entrants from ethnic minorities than from non ethnic minorities do not have A-level qualifications, are more likely to enter as mature students and are clustered within local particular institutions (Hogarth *et al* 1997; DfES 2003; HEFCE 2005). While Asian groups in both England and Scotland have higher rates of progression to higher education than White or Afro-Caribbean (Gillborn and Gipps 1996), some ethnic minority groups are still under-represented. The interaction between ethnicity, sex and low socio-economic status may result in particularly low participation rates, for example Afro-Caribbean men and Bangladeshi women (Thomas 2001a, 2001b; DfES 2003; HEFCE 2005).

Sex

The participation rate of women went from non-existent until the late 19th century when legislation had to be passed by Parliament to allow women to graduate (McDermid 2000) to equalise and then overtake that of men in the mid and late 1990s respectively (Martin 1999, 2004). In 1953 when the API in the United Kingdom was just over 3% there were 2.3% of boys and 1% of girls aged 17-21 years who went to university (Byrne 1978). Women equalised their participation in higher education in the United Kingdom in 1994 with 51.5 % participation in 1994, 53% in 1998 and 55% in 2002 (DfES 2003; HEFCE 2005). In 2004 the figures for participation in higher education are 45% for men and 55% for women (DfES 2004b). In 1994 women made up half of an API of 32%. In 2001 when the API was 35% there were 18% of girls aged 17-21 who entered higher education in the United Kingdom (Martin 2004).

From mid 20th century to early 21st century the ever greater number of women students was particularly marked in the public sector higher education rather than in the universities (Booth 1999). The ever greater number of women in higher education also reflected a trend in the school system with an increasing number of girls gaining qualifications to enter higher education and even outperforming boys in gaining these qualifications (Martin 2004). Since they equalised their participation rate in 1994, women have had a proportional advantage and men a proportional disadvantage in terms of rates of participation (HEFCE 2005).

Age

The number of full-time mature students in higher education in the United Kingdom increased slowly but fairly steadily from 1971 to 1980. During that decade there was a sharp rise in the number of women over 25 and a fall in the proportion of men, especially those aged 21-24 (Squires 1987). In the decade 1979-1989 the number of young mature students increased by 9%, but the number of older mature students increased by 34% and most of them were women (Bligh 1990). In the polytechnics the percentage of mature students over 21 accounted for 28% of full-time students in 1965 and 49% in 1987 (Booth 1999).

The percentage of entrants aged 21 or over went from 16.8% in 1966 to 24% in 1980 (Williamson 1986). In 1996 nearly 30% of full-time first-degree entrants in the United Kingdom were 21 or over when they started their course (HEFCE 1999). The number of mature students has not significantly increased since 1998 and there has been little change in the age profile of students in the past five years (DfES 2004b; SHEFC 2004). There is a greater working-class representation among mature students than among younger students. By the mid 1990s half the mature students in the United Kingdom came from the working-class (Egerton and Halsey 1993).

Over half of the 21-24 year old mature students in the United Kingdom have A-level or Highers while most of those aged over 25 have non-traditional qualifications such access courses, Accreditation of Prior Learning and certificates (equivalent to 2 A-levels] or diplomas [equivalent to 3 A-levels] from BTEC (British Technical Education Council) and SCOTVEC (Scottish Vocational Education Council [now under SQA (Scottish Qualifications Authority)²] Advanced General National Vocational Qualifications (UCAS 1998). In 1991 a quarter of entrants most of whom were mature students had non-traditional qualifications and the figures had reached 33.4% in 1997 (UCAS 1998). The distribution of students with non-traditional qualifications between institutions is very uneven. Many pre-1992 universities consider a lack of A-level or Highers to be undesirable. In 1992 they admitted only 16% of students without A-levels whereas new universities admitted 41% (Coffield and Vignoles 1997: 12). In Scotland seven out of ten students had traditional qualifications compared to 63% in England, which has more entrants with vocational qualifications (National Certificate and National Diploma level) and access courses (9%) (Parry 1997).

The representation of mature students varies according to higher education institutions. Most British institutions take between 10 and 30% of mature students but some have less than 5% and others more than 50% (UCAS 1994). The University of East London counts 55.5 % of first-degree mature entrants and the University of Nottingham 3.6%, Cambridge 10% and Oxford 5%. The University of Paisley counts 40.2 % and the University of St Andrews 5.1% (HESA 2002).

² SCOTVEC merged with the Scottish Examinations Board in 1997 to form SQA

Geographical areas

In the 1970s and 1980s regional participation rate when known variations in social class composition were taken into account used to show that Scotland and the North West of England were doing better than expected on the basis of social class trends, while Northern England and East Anglia were doing rather worse (Williamson 1986). Geographical inequalities are changing and growing. A recent HEFCE (2005) report showed that in 2000 the highest young participation rates by real cohorts were found in Scotland with 38.7%, London with 36.4% the South East of England with 33.3%. The report also demonstrated simple regional comparisons can be misleading, because participation differentials are sharpest when looking at small areas such as parliamentary constituencies and wards rather than larger geographical areas. The fifth of young people living in the most advantaged neighbourhoods can look forward to a better than 50% chance of going to university. Other young people who live in the least advantaged fifth of neighbourhoods have only a 10% chance.

These contrasting areas can be found in most of Britain's cities and towns, sometimes right next to each other and the disparities in participation rates between them has remained constant over the last few years (HEFCE 2005). In Scotland because of the importance of higher education courses in local further education institutions such areas show young participation rates at twice the rate observed for similarly disadvantaged English constituencies (HEFCE 2005). This is due to the fact that a great number of higher education courses are offered in the further education sector (Arbuthnot 1997; Mackie 2001; SHEFC 2004; HEFCE 2005). Because of higher education in further education, the API was 32% in Scotland; that is, 6% higher than that of England in 1992/1993 and reached 52%, that is, 20% higher than that of England in 2000/2001 (Scottish Executive 2004).

Social Class

Table 2.1 below demonstrates that in the United Kingdom in 1960 young people from social classes 1, 2 and 3nm were 6.7 times more likely than those of social classes 3m, 4 and 5 to enter higher education. Forty years later social classes 1, 2 and 3nm are only 2.6 times more likely to enter higher education than social classes 3m, 4 and 5.

Table 2.2 *Probability of young people under 21 from social classes 3m, 4 and 5 in relation to social classes 1, 2 and 3nm to enter higher education in the UK*

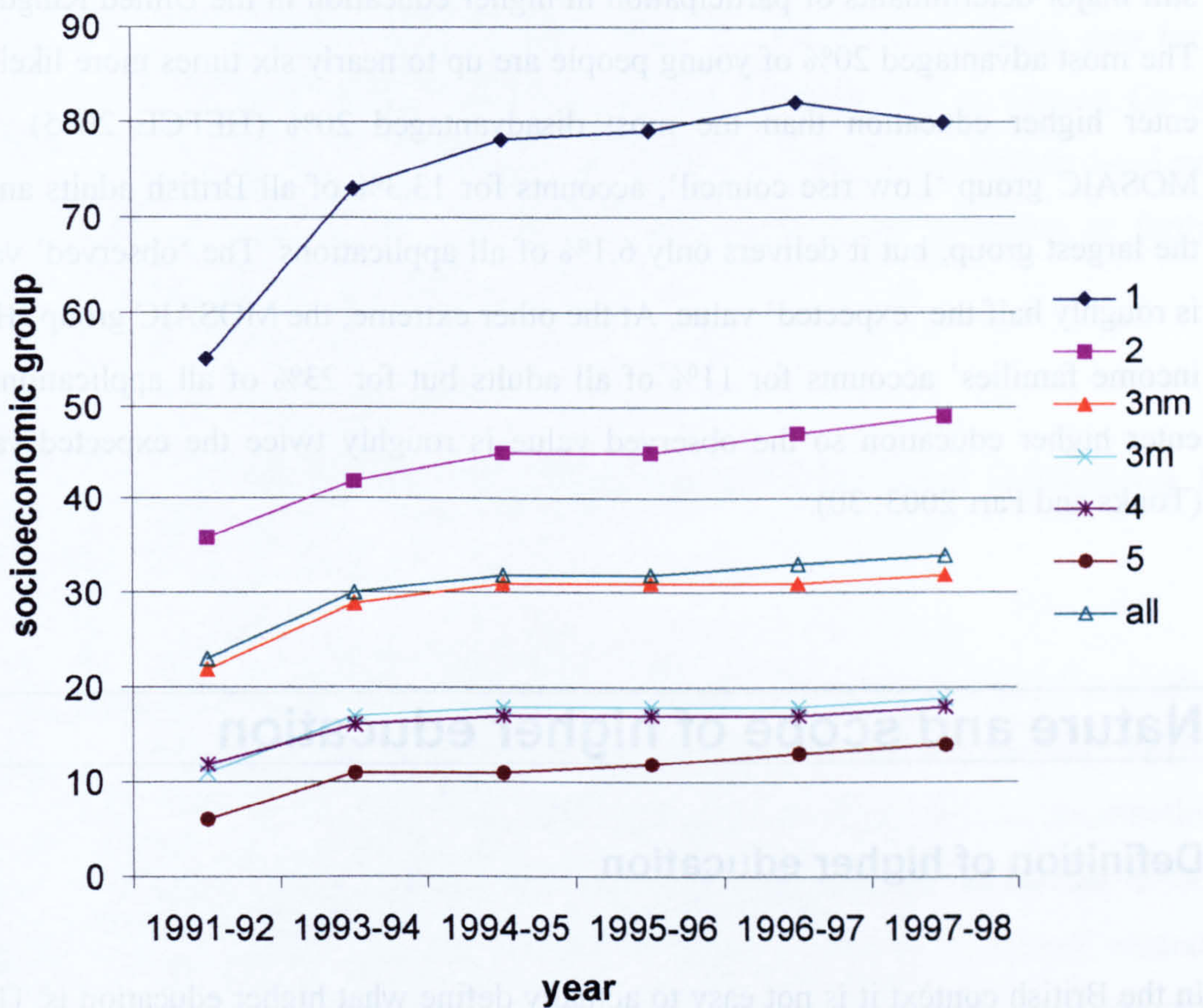
Year	API	API 1, 2 & 3nm [A]	API 3m, 4 & 5 [B]	Probability of entering HE [A : B]
1950	4%	18	3	A is 6.0 times more likely than B
1960	5%	27	4	A is 6.7 times more likely than B
1970	14%	32	6	A is 5.3 times more likely than B
1980	12%	33	8	A is 4.1 times more likely than B
1990	20%	37	10	A is 3.7 times more likely than B
2000	35%	49	18	A is 2.6 times more likely than B

Source: rounded up figures derived from DfES 2004b

Table 2.1 also shows that young people in social classes 3m, 4 and 5 have been significantly under-represented in higher education since 1960. Over a period of 30 years from 1960 to 1990 social classes 1, 2 and 3nm improved by 10 points (from 28% to 38%) and social classes 3nm, 4 and 5 by 6 points (from 4% to 10%). Over the last 10 years from 1990 to 2000 social classes 1, 2 and 3nm improved by 12 points (from 37% to 49%) while social classes 3nm, 4 and 5 improved by 8 points (from 10% to 18%). Only in the 1970s did proportional advantage of social classes 3m, 4 and 5 increased more than that of social classes 3nm, 4 and 5. They went up by two points (from 6% to 8%) while social classes 1, 2 and 3nm went up by only one point (from 33% to 34%).

Figure 2.1 below shows the evolution of the API by social class from 1991 to 1998. During this period, the overall participation rate went up by twelve points from 22% to 34%.

Figure 2.1 API to HE in the UK by social class 1991-1998



Source: derived from ONS (1999) and Ball *et al* (2002)

The above figure 2.1 underlines the extent of the increase in participation by social class 1. The rate went up by 20 points between 1991 and 1993 whereas social classes 2, 3nm and 3m saw their participation rate go up by 7 points each while social classes 4 and 5 followed closely by 4 and 5 points respectively.

If the highest and lowest social classes, that is, social classes 1 and 5, are compared in terms of the ratio of probability of entering higher education, we see the greatest differential in two groups that are very easily comparable as each constitutes about 5%-6% of the population (OECD 1999). In 1991 there were 56% of young people (aged 17-21) from social class 1 who entered higher education compared to 6% from social class 5 or a ratio of probability of 7 times more likely for the former to enter higher education. In 1997 there were 80% of young people (aged 17-21) from social class 1 who entered higher education compared to 14% from social class 5 or a ratio of probability of 5.5 times more likely for the former to enter higher education.

The data on geodemographic³ profiles confirm that social position and wealth are still major determinants of participation in higher education in the United Kingdom. The most advantaged 20% of young people are up to nearly six times more likely to enter higher education than the most disadvantaged 20% (HEFCE 2005). The MOSAIC group 'Low rise council', accounts for 13.3% of all British adults and is the largest group, but it delivers only 6.1% of all applications. The 'observed' value is roughly half the 'expected' value. At the other extreme, the MOSAIC group 'High income families' accounts for 11% of all adults but for 23% of all applications to enter higher education so the observed value is roughly twice the expected value (Tonks and Farr 2003: 30).

Nature and scope of higher education

Definition of higher education

In the British context it is not easy to actually define what higher education is. Until the 1960s 'higher education' meant the universities, although the phrase was not in common use. Not until the appointment in December 1960 of the Robbins Committee to review the pattern of full-time higher education in the United Kingdom did a conception of higher education embracing sectors other than the universities become the norm (Silver 1990). According to HEFCE (1999) in the United Kingdom higher education is therefore generally taken to refer to advanced courses, that is, degree level and above, as well as sub-degree level (HEFCE 1999) such as Higher National Diplomas (HND) and Higher National Certificates (HNC) and Foundation Degrees (which have largely replaced HNDs and HNCs in England since 2001). These advanced courses are provided mainly though not exclusively by universities, colleges of higher education and university colleges. The latter have degree awarding powers and have mostly replaced the former whose degrees were/are validated by a university or national accrediting body (HEFCE 1999). Things are made even more complicated by the fact that franchised higher education at both degree and

³ MOSAIC is a geodemographic classifier owned by Experian Limited. There is a 52 group version based on the 1991 Census and a current version which has 61 groups and is based on the 2001 Census. ACORN is a geodemographic classifier owned by CACI Limited. There is a 54 group version based on the 1991 Census and a current 56 group version based on the 2001 Census. Postcode research is now used by SHEFC and HEFCE. Postcodes are grouped into quintiles of population by level of deprivation matched against various deprivation indexes.

especially sub-degree level is also offered within the further education sector, but much more so in Scotland than in England (Dearing 1997; Bone 1999; Scottish Executive 2004; SHEFC 2004; HEFCE 2005). In relation to gathering data for a forthcoming Review of Widening Participation Research led by Steven Gorard addressing the barriers to higher education, higher education was interpreted as Level Four provision in any institution, whether designated higher education or further education (See Gorard 2004).

Access and widening participation policies and initiatives in historical context

In the United Kingdom before 1889 the universities were autonomous⁴ and relied entirely on student fees, endowments and the support of local communities.⁵ In 1889 the government offered £15,000 to help universities and from then on contributions escalated (Bell 2000). A British system of higher education was established in 1916 when the Universities Grants Committee (UGC) was created to channel centrally provided public funds to help finance universities. The UGC provided grants rather than payment for services and was only marginally accountable to the state (Smith 1999). In 1988 the UGC was replaced by the Universities Funding Council (UFC) which exerted tighter control on universities, but gave them better incentives to respond to student demand (Booth 1999). In 1966 the public sector institutions that offered degrees and higher national diplomas outside the university sector became autonomous corporate bodies (Pratt 1997). These were funded by local education authorities in England and local authorities in Scotland before being financed by central government through the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council (PCFC) in England and the Scottish Education Department (SED) in Scotland (Pratt 1997). In 1992, when higher education became funded by different national funding councils, the binary divide between universities and the public sector institutions disappeared. Consequently, the number of universities more than doubled when the public sector institutions became universities (Mackinnon *et al* 1999).

⁴ In continental Europe universities became completely state controlled with staff having the status of civil servants and ministries of education being closely involved in determining curriculum content. Students go as a right to the university of their choice rather than being selected by them.

⁵ In the case of Edinburgh, the very first civic university, the town council had a say in its financial and curricular policies. English civic universities followed a similar model since they were established at the initiative of local business and industry elites (See Bell 2000).

The concern for equality of opportunity in access and widening participation to higher education began in earnest with the Anderson Report (1960) that recommended the introduction of means tested mandatory rather than discretionary grants for all full time students in higher education to cover maintenance and fees (Schuller *et al* 1999). The students received maintenance grants and the higher education institutions received fees directly from the Local Education Authorities (LEAs) in England and Local Authorities (LAs) in Scotland (Longden 2002).

The Robbins Report (1963) found that the working-class participation had hardly changed since the beginning of the 20th century and that the working-class entrants were eight times less likely to enter higher education than were middle class entrants. Robbins (1963) recommended that higher education should broaden its social class intake to include more working-class students. Although it recommended a massive expansion of higher education in the grounds of equality of opportunity, Robbins (1963) did not actually generate the explosion in the number of students because this exponential growth actually had started about seven years prior to that date and was almost exactly duplicated throughout the individual countries in Europe (Edwards 1982). To increase its control of higher education the Labour government decided to expand the public sector (DES 1966)⁶ rather than the university sector (Pratt 1997).⁷ The public sector was advertised as more flexible and more localized and hence more responsive to social needs as well as to student demand (Booth 1999).

The demand for higher education places also came from adults who had left school without qualifications. From the late 1960s the success of the Fresh Horizons course at the City Literary Institute in London showed a substantial demand for second chance provision to enable mature entry to higher education (Benn 1996). Thus, in 1978 the Department of Education and Science asked seven selected local authorities⁸ to provide special access courses for mature potential entrants without formal qualifications to enable them to gain entry to higher education (Brennan 1989). The social groups to be targeted were women, ethnic minorities, disabled and

⁶ The public sector contained polytechnics, teacher training colleges, colleges of higher education and technical colleges

⁷ The 1966 White Paper *A Plan for Polytechnics and Other Colleges* (DES 1966) introduced two parallel forms of higher education: the binary system of universities and public sector institutions. The public sector institutions (teacher training colleges, colleges of higher education, technical colleges, and polytechnics) were under the control of the LEAs, or Local Authorities in Scotland, and funded by the National Advisory Body for public sector higher education (NAB) (Jackson 1999).

⁸ ILEA, Avon, Bedfordshire, Birmingham, Haringey, Leicestershire and Manchester and later Bradford

working-class potential entrants. The 1978 Green Paper *Higher Education into the 1990s* (DES/SED 1978) and a 1979 report *Future Trends in Higher Education* (DES 1979) suggested that a way of coping with the predicted demographic fall was to increase the number of mature students, especially those from working-class background as well as to further increase the participation of women. However, there were many obstacles to the effective implementation of these new access courses, not least of which were fears of lowering of standards, credential inflation and high drop out rate (Williams 1997), as well as a projected cut in student numbers in 1981. However, the public sector, which was funded through the LEAs or Local Authorities in Scotland, suffered from disincentives less immediately than the universities and thus expanded as fast as possible. Between 1965-1991 the number of students on higher education courses in the polytechnics “grew at twice the rate of the universities” (Booth 1999: 112) and the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA)⁹ awarded more degrees than all universities together (Pratt 1997).

The 1985 Green Paper *The Development of Higher Education into the 1990s* (DES 1985) reluctantly “accepted the ability to benefit from higher education as long as it was greater than the costs and not at the expense of standards, thus efficiency and a rather elitist concept of quality were emphasised” (DES 1985 quoted in Wagner 1989b: 155). The 1987 White Paper *Higher Education: Meeting the Challenge* (DES 1987) confirmed that places should be available “for all with the necessary qualities to benefit from higher education” (quoted in Wagner 1989b: 155). Access courses were thus officially recognised as an alternative route into higher education. A national framework for access courses recognition and quality assurance was set up through a network of Local Authorized Validating Agencies (Smith and Bocock 1999) and the Scottish Wider Access Programme in Scotland (Paterson 1997). By 1989, there were approximately 400 access courses (Smithers and Robinson 1989). The expansion of higher education in the 1990s was, in part, a consequence of access courses. Mature entry rose from approximately 10% of all graduates and diploma holders in 1980 to over 30% in 1990 (DfEE 1992). The 1991 White Paper *Higher Education: A New Framework* (DES 1991) went further still and stressed the importance of even more flexibility and accessibility.

⁹ The Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA) was established in 1964 to validate courses and make awards comparable to those in universities to replace the External London system that was rigidly centralized. The CNAA made it possible to take student needs as starting point. Proposals had to be defended in an open and visible peer review process. This helped good practice, and fostered a self-critical culture to regularly evaluate courses against student needs and was thus a precursor to a quality assurance culture (Pratt 1997).

From 1997 the Labour government has commissioned reports, responded to and produced reports that emphasised the importance of access and widening participation: The Kennedy Report *Learning Works: Widening Participation in Further Education* (FEFC 1997) and, more importantly, the Dearing Report (1997) based on two sub-reports on under-represented groups by Coffield and Vignoles (1997) and Robertson and Hillman (1997), recommended reducing the disparities in participation for those with the potential to benefit from higher education and also to provide the support necessary to maximise their chances of success. The government responded positively to Dearing in *Higher Education for the New Century: A Response to the Dearing Report* (DfEE 1998a) and also in *The Learning Age: A Renaissance for a New Britain* (DfEE 1998b) in which the government announced it aimed “to widen access to learning in further, higher and adult education” and “expand further and higher education to provide for an extra 500,000 young people and adults by 2002” (DfEE 1998b: 5 & 9). The government also set a target of 50% participation for those aged 18-30 by 2010 and as well as a target to increase participation amongst traditionally under-represented socio-economic groups (DfEE 1998b).

From 1960 to 1990 the expansion of full-time higher education had been fully funded by the state. The Education (Student Loans) Act 1990 introduced student loans and the Education (Student Loans) Act 1998 transferred the loans to the private sector. Following Dearing (1997), the Education (Student Support) Regulations 1998 introduced means tested tuition fees. Maintenance grants were discontinued with the Education (Student Support) Regulations 1998 to be replaced with larger student loans. Part of the funding was switched from the general taxpayer to graduates since economic studies had showed a high level of return for graduates (Adnett and Coates 2000). While Dearing (1997) had been concerned with not depriving students of low economic status of financial public support and did not recommend the abolition of means tested maintenance grants, the government ignored this recommendation and implemented what they had set out in a New Labour consultation paper *Lifelong Learning* (Blunkett 1996). In Scotland the upfront tuition fees were abolished in 2001 with the Graduate Endowment (Scotland) Regulations 2001 which set out the application of the Education (Graduate Endowment and Student Support) Act 2001.¹⁰

¹⁰ See later in this chapter for discussion of the Scottish policy context. See chapter 10 for an update on policy after 2001

In addition to the funding reforms, policies have been introduced to encourage access and widening participation at institutional level. Instead of maintenance grants, the funding councils use financial incentives for widening the participation of under-represented groups and for increasing regional partnerships with further education institutions and other organisations (Thomas 2001a). The first set of Performance Indicators (PIs) was published in December 1999 by HEFCE on behalf of all four funding councils in the United Kingdom. Performance indicators were access and widening participation especially from socio-economically under-represented groups,¹¹ non-continuation rates after first year, projected outcomes and efficiencies and research output. However, PIs differed according to the profile of the institution so that institutions could only be compared with institutions of a similar profile (Thomas 2001a).

The extent to which funding arrangement and performance indicators constitute barriers or opportunities is the subject of on-going debate [This is further developed below on page 33]. The introduction of tuition fees for students and the phasing out of maintenance grants appear to have deterred mature students and especially older mature students (Davies *et al* 2002) but not so much young applicants although the participation rate dipped in 1998 and did not show a marked increase until a few years later (Goddard 1998, 1999; HEFCE 2005).

Entry requirements and qualifications

The bare minimum requirement for entry to a degree level course is a pass in two subjects for A-levels or a pass in three subjects for Highers. An increasing number of potential entrants do A-levels in further education colleges and a steadily growing number of students now enter with alternative qualifications provided mainly by the further education sector. These are certificates and diplomas related to AGNVQ or Advanced General National Vocational Qualifications [now AVCE or Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education] and BTECs or British Technical Education Council in England and SCOTVEC or Scottish Vocational Education Council [now

¹¹ Access performance indicators were: the percentage of students who attended a school or college in the state sector; the percentage whose parents' occupation is classed as skilled manual, semi-skilled, or unskilled; and the percentage whose home area, as denoted by its postcode, is known to have a low proportion of 18 and 19 year olds in higher education (HEFCE 1999).

part of SQA or Scottish Qualifications Authority] in Scotland, Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning and access courses (*THES*, 21 August 1998, 1).

The A-level (and the Higher in Scotland) still dominate entry to higher education with 66.6% and 70% of entrants respectively, but their dominance is fading, especially that of the A-level in England. After 1998 when A-levels were criticised for their elitism by Tessa Blackstone, then Higher Education Minister, measures were taken to begin to broaden post-16 secondary education in England with the introduction of AS levels (Clare 1998). At the same time in Scotland the Higher Still programme emphasised the possibility of a more specialised approach to traditional qualifications for entry to higher education (Raffe *et al* 1999, 201).

While some mature students follow the traditional route and return to college or even to school to study A-levels or Highers, since 1978 mature students have entered university via access courses as an alternative route (Dearing 1997; HEFCE 2005). In both England and Scotland, entry qualifications to higher education often act as a barrier to access and widening participation because not having A-levels or Highers makes it more difficult to enter some pre 1992 universities that fear lowering their standards, quality and reputation. In these institutions non-traditional qualifications such as vocational qualifications or access courses are still seen as less desirable than the traditional A-levels and Highers (Coffield and Vignoles 1997).

Changes in the nature of acceptable knowledge and acceptable modes of study

From 1960 onwards the nature and scope of higher education changed substantially. Since maintenance grants were only available for full-time courses, many students who did not manage to secure a university place went to the polytechnics (Booth 1999). Consequently, polytechnics, which until then offered vocationally based science and technology courses, became more like universities because the student demand was for liberal humanities based courses (Pratt 1997). At the same time new subjects such as media studies, film and television studies, business studies, sport science and technology management and new ways of learning emerged from the polytechnics. Unlike in universities, modern languages were taught with an emphasis

on spoken language and study of contemporary society rather than on literature. Conventional subject materials were restructured by the creation of modular courses that were first introduced by Oxford Polytechnic in 1972 (Booth 1999).

By the 1980s media studies, film and television studies and more generally cultural studies were on offer in universities as well as in the polytechnics (Jackson 1999). Students in the public sector were first to be more actively involved in their learning through projects, group work, independent study and peer tutoring (Jackson 1999). Modular courses are now the norm in higher education which no longer means only a full-time three to four year residential narrowly focussed learning experience, at the expense of the state and with socially-advantaged elite (Finegold *et al* 1992: 24).

After the binary divide disappeared in 1992, the inclusion of professional training courses such as chiropody, nursing, occupational therapy and radiography, previously undertaken on a work-based learning and offered at diploma level, further modified the nature and scope of higher education (Merriman 1998). The expansion of higher education and the introduction of a quasi-market created opportunities for diplomas to become degrees, partly because these occupations wanted to enhance their professional status and partly because institutions were keen to increase their student numbers (Merriman 1998).

Changes in the nature of society and the labour market

Over the past 25 years the employment market has seen the manufacturing and heavy industries wither dramatically with a corresponding decrease in demand for semi-skilled and unskilled labour in the 1980s and 1990s (Banks *et al* 1992). This led to both unemployment and to a greatly increased requirement for people with good generic skills who were flexible and adaptable to the new economic circumstances (Thomas 2001a). The decline coincided with massive expansion of higher education in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Hodgson and Spours 1999).

Attitudes both to employment and to education and learning have changed since the school leaving age was raised to 11 in 1893 and 12 in 1899 and then to 14 in 1918, 15 in 1946 when secondary school became universal, and 16 in 1973. The school

leaving age will ‘effectively’ rise from 16 to 18 under new exam plans according to Education Secretary Ruth Kelly on 22 February 2005¹² (Price 2005). A preference for leaving school to enter full-time employment rather than staying on has long been linked to social class and is more common among potential entrants from under-represented groups (Robertson and Hillman 1997). Students from lower socio-economic groups are less likely to have financial support from their families. This may act as a barrier to participation because they are more likely to have to work during term time and to work many hours (Mecalf 2003). This can decrease their likelihood of going to higher education and/or favours higher drop-out rates because employment has more short-term advantages than higher education (Spours and Hodgson 2000; Thomas 2001a).

Changes in structures, processes, policies and purposes

The Labour government policies are based on theories of investing in human capital rather than on machinery for heavy industry and the perceived need for a learning society in a global market (See DfEE 1998b: 9). They articulate both the economic argument of better access to resources and the non-economic argument of changing attitudes to learning and fostering a love of learning to reduce disparities in participation and hence achieve greater social justice and social inclusion (DfEE 1998: 5, 9 and 10). Largely because of the introduction of tuition fees, these Labour policies were criticised by some researchers for asserting social justice, but being driven by economic considerations only, and for being self-contradictory, ineffective in reducing disparities in participation and even for having elitist assumptions (See for example Woodrow 1999b, 2000, 2001; Callender 2001; Thomas 2001a).

Although current government policy emphasises widening access and reducing disparities in participation, it did not generate numerical expansion because numerical expansion has always tended to be the consequence of student demand

¹² Education Secretary Ruth Kelly said on 22 February 2005 that a series of vocational qualifications were going to be introduced, designed to keep pupils in school past their 18th birthday, as part of the Education White Paper. Ministers want to stop children leaving education after their GCSEs. Only 71 per cent of 16-year-olds stay on, putting Britain 24th out of the top 28 industrialised nations. Mrs Kelly said: “We want the expectation to be that you continue in education. It means effectively raising the school leaving age to 18.” (quoted in Price 2005)

rather than of government policy. In the late 1950s the rate of numerical expansion was more pronounced before than after Robbins in 1963. Just before Labour government policies were articulated the participation rate had risen dramatically and reached 34% in 1997 for United Kingdom as a whole. In 1998 the participation rate dropped and only reached again 34% in 2000 and 35% in 2001 (DfES 2004b).

Since the 1980s there have been changes in the external structures of higher education. An unprecedented student expansion took place. Alternative entry routes with access courses and foundation degrees were created. There were changes in the nature of knowledge and modes of study. New funding arrangements were put in place along national lines. Loans and fees and performance indicators to monitor access and widening participation were introduced. Potential students can now select from over 30,000 undergraduate courses at 171 universities and colleges of higher education (Ramsden 2004). These courses are now overwhelmingly being offered on a modular basis with credit based work (UCAS 2001). Students' roles and lives have also changed significantly as a consequence of higher education operating in a quasi-market. They involve different roles, hierarchies and power relationships with for example student demand being allowed to play an even larger part in determining the shape of the system and with most students working part-time during the term and the holidays (Silver and Silver 1997). However, the internal issues of values and purpose have been subject to far less change than external structures. Although this is less evident in Scotland, a mass higher education within what is still in many ways an elitist system is causing many tensions and dysfunctions (Wagner 1995). Despite the apparent threshold of 15% age participation index being crossed in 1987, the cultural shift associated with a shift to a mass system has arguably yet to happen since socio-culturally entrenched disparities in participation remain (Scott 1995). From Robbins to Dearing and beyond it has proved impossible to shift the balance of opportunities between most social groups despite ideological shifts in policy

1. *from* emphasis on equality of opportunity for all those qualified able and willing to enter higher education (Robbins 1963)
2. *through* widening access and increasing participation for all those who have the qualities to benefit from higher education (DES 1978, 1985, 1987, 1991)

3. *to* reducing the disparities in participation for those with the potential to benefit and then to provide the support necessary to maximise their chances of success (Dearing 1997)

In a context of intellectual authority and little accountability Robbins (1963) addressed an independent and relatively homogeneous group of knowledge seekers. In a context of lack of resources and greater accountability Dearing (1997) addressed an association of chief executives fearful of the power of government and fragmented as they sought best competitive advantage (Kushner 1998). The underlying subtext of the expansion in student numbers and the successive structural changes in funding is that higher education went from being a private grant-aided trusted sphere of public activity accountable mainly to itself to a public agency paid to deliver what government wants through processes increasingly prescribed by the state (Jackson 1999), the role of which has been one of increasing control, but ever decreasing financial commitment (Wagner 1995).

Against this background, major policy concerns have been in reducing disparities in participation and making higher education appear less elitist to potential entrants from the lowest social classes (Scott 1995; HEFCE 1996, 1997a, 1997b; CVCP 1998). Expansion and structural change and even the recognition of alternative routes have however seemingly failed to change the culture of elitism and consequently how higher education might be perceived among non-participants (Williams 1997a: 19). Although access courses have helped many individuals pursue their education further than they might otherwise have been able to do, they have made little impact upon the assumptions of higher education perhaps because they sustain conventional perceptions of higher education (Halsey 1993; Stowell 1996; Tight 1994, 1995; 1996). Consequently, changes may have been framed within a discourse of social justice and equity, but national policies have seemingly tended to be driven by a preference for numerical growth (Fulton 1981, 1989; Scott 1995; Williams 1997a).

If the balance of opportunities between most social groups has not markedly changed since Robbins (1963) despite the changes in policy context, this is perhaps because of the inherent tensions and contradictions between the theory and practice access and widening participation. The key to the contradictions is that, more so in England and less so in Scotland, higher education is “a mass system in its public structures

but still an elite system in its private instincts” as many of its practices “remain rooted in an elite past” (Scott 1995: 2 and 23). Thus, a hierarchy of prestige survives within the higher education system in both England and Scotland in terms of institutions and subjects (Jary 2001). This hierarchy of prestige is at its most evident in the persistent socially biased pattern of Oxbridge admissions. In 2000 according to a post code analysis, 80% of applicants to Cambridge came from social classes 1 and 2 some 46% of entrants were state school applicants and 45% came from the independent sector (Lampl 1999, 2000). The hierarchy of prestige is closely linked to success in the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), which is a more of a concern in pre-1992 universities as it brings substantial financial rewards and favourable publicity in the national press while the Teaching Quality Assessment (TQA) brings far less financial reward and little media publicity (Smith 1999).

The Scottish policy context

From the 17th century onwards England and Scotland had university systems that had key differences in their structures and in their assumptions. In contrast to the English, the Scots enjoyed a better provision of universities, with a wider social class intake, a broader and more vocational curriculum, local students, links with the community and industry, no residential requirements, many part-time students and low fees, the possibility of entering directly from parish schools (Bell and Grant 1974, 1977; Scott 1998; Stephens 1998; Bell 2000). Before the university system was unified in 1916 with the creation of the UGC, the two systems had mutually influenced each other throughout the 19th century. In England middle class demand for a wider curriculum and broader social class intake to include more middle class students and in Scotland middle class demand for the introduction of Honours degrees managed to standardise the system (Anderson 1992). After 1916 the distinctiveness of each system became even less evident as differences between the two systems further eroded (Bell 2000). Nonetheless, to this day, the higher education system in Scotland has many features that distinguish it from that of England, especially in terms of different assumptions about higher education and in particular what higher education is and who it is for. These key differences are:

- a separate funding council since 1992 and a separate legislation since the re-introduction of the Scottish Parliament in 1999 and the removal of upfront tuition fees in 2001
- a more uniform and universal system¹³ of comprehensive education¹⁴ (McPherson and Willms 1987; Macbeth *et al* 1995), earlier transfer to secondary education (McPherson *et al* 1990) and only one year of post-compulsory education before entry to higher education is possible (McPherson *et al* 1990)
- a broader upper secondary curriculum (Paterson 1997)
- a broad generalist tradition in higher education derived from a distinctive educational tradition (Paterson 1997) and a four year-honours degree courses and a three year ordinary degree course¹⁵ (McPherson *et al* 1972; 1990)
- the fact that the four ancient universities¹⁶ developed as community resources and never acquired the social remoteness of Oxford and Cambridge and of those English universities strongly influenced by Oxbridge, means that localism continues to be important for nearly all Scottish higher education institutions excepted Stirling and St Andrews. (Paterson 1997)
- the fact that the binary divide was less evident than in England since non-university institutions had a more distinct purpose in science and technology (Bell 2000)
- the fact that there has been a large number of English academics in Scottish higher education since 1960s and that in some institutions such as Edinburgh and St Andrews nearly a third of students are English (Paterson 1997)
- a universal system of higher education with a high participation rate of 52% in 2001 due primarily to the close articulation between higher and further education and the fact that in 2001 the proportion of higher education courses in further education was around 30% but only 8% for England (Arbuthnott 1997; Smith and Boccock 1999)

¹³ As Scotland has had more than 40% API since the mid 1990s its higher education system is universal rather than a mass system – more than 15% API as has been the case for England and the UK since 1987

¹⁴ Scottish state education is less diversified than in England due to the historical uniformity of the system and early re-organisation to a more completely comprehensive system. Schools are less autonomous but the headteacher has gained in decision-making power. Schools were encouraged, rather than required, to implement the 5-14 guidelines introduced gradually and with extensive consultation (Macbeth *et al* 1995).

¹⁵ The Ordinary degree is the traditional broad general Scottish degree where in the Faculty of Arts of traditional universities students had to take a first year philosophy course as a compulsory subject as well as a modern language or English language or mathematics. Honours were introduced in 1889 but only after 1918 did the number of students taking Honours significantly increase. Now very few students take Ordinary degrees in Scotland. In the 1960s, however, many people still took Ordinary degrees and there was a strong correlation between sex and degree taken with 70% of women taking Ordinary degrees in the Humanities and 60% in the Sciences (McPherson *et al* 1972)

¹⁶ St Andrews, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Aberdeen

- a larger and more standardised provision at sub-degree level with a national framework of Higher National Diplomas (HNDs) and Higher National Certificates (HNCs) awarded by the Scottish Vocational Educational Council (SCOTVEC) now fully integrated into the Scottish Qualification Authority (SQA) (Paterson 1997; Bocock and Smith 1999; SHEFC 2004; HEFCE 2005)

Robbins (1963) underlined the better equality of opportunity and the broad generalist tradition of the Scottish higher education system. Garrick and Dearing (1997) praised the close relations and easy articulation between further education and higher education in Scotland and higher education courses in further education. In Scotland such courses are funded by the Scottish Office Education Department (and now the Scottish Executive Education Department) while in England they are funded by HEFCE (Smith and Bocock 1999; SHEFC 2004). Largely because of the different funding arrangements, there are almost four times more higher education courses in further education in Scotland than in England (SHEFC 2004; HEFCE 2005). This goes some way to providing the seamless transition from advanced school level to higher education level where the boundaries between 'higher' and 'further' education are swept away and going to college becomes the norm rather than the exception (Arbuthnott 1997; Schuller and Bamford 1999). This particular feature of Scottish participation is especially marked in socio-economically disadvantaged areas such as Glasgow Springburn and Glasgow Shettleston. These areas record young participation rate to higher education at twice the rate observed for similarly disadvantaged English constituencies, because half the participation of young people takes place through higher education courses in predominantly local further education colleges (HEFCE 2005).

In 1999 tuition fees became a key issue for the newly re-created Scottish Parliament. The Scottish Executive Education Department (SEED) set up the Cubie Committee. Most of the recommendations of the Cubie Report (1999) were accepted by the Scottish Executive Education Department. The Graduate Endowment (Scotland) Regulations 2001 set out the application of the Education (Graduate Endowment and Student Support) Act 2001. Bursaries for low-income independent students and those with additional needs were reintroduced, the fees were abolished at the point of delivery for all students domiciled in Scotland and attending Scottish universities, but the repayment threshold was lowered from £25,000 as proposed by Cubie to

£15,000. Finally the further education system was restructured to further reinforce the seamless transition between further and higher education (Mackie 2001).

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the evolution of patterns of participation using the key variables of disability, ethnicity, sex, age, geography and social class. This chapter has also discussed changes in external structures and in the nature and scope of higher education by focussing on the evolution of access and widening participation policies, entry requirement and qualifications, changes in the nature of acceptable knowledge and acceptable modes of study, changes in the nature of society and the labour market, and finally the key features of the Scottish policy context.

The problematic definition of what constitutes higher education was examined, as were access and widening participation policies in historical context, entry requirements and qualifications, changes in the nature of acceptable knowledge and changes in the nature of society and labour market. The more recent British policy context was then discussed as was the Scottish policy context in order to underline the major recent differences between England and Scotland.

The evolution of patterns of participation by key variables showed that in the United Kingdom higher education has expanded dramatically since 1950. This expansion has most benefited social classes 1 and 2, women, mature students and some ethnic minorities (CVCP 1998; HEFCE 2005). Social classes 1 and 2, women and some ethnic minorities such as Asians are now over-represented in relation to their representation in the general population. Under-represented groups are: social classes 3m, 3nm, 4 and more especially social class 5; men; some ethnic minorities such as Afro-Caribbean and disabled students. Potential entrants in Scotland and London are far more likely to enter higher education than anywhere else in the United Kingdom (HESA 2002; DfES 2004b; Scottish Executive 2004; SHEFC 2004; HEFCE 2005).

The evolution of patterns of participation by key variables and the changes in external structures and in the nature and scope of higher education indicates that many opportunities were created and many barriers removed as policies have

increasingly prioritised access and widening participation. However, although various government initiatives were introduced to improve disparities in participation, the funding arrangements that removed grants in 1999 and introduced student fees in 1998 have been criticised for not being effective and even for maintaining the disparities in participation (Woodrow 2001; Callender 2001). It is not easy to disentangle the impact of all these opportunities and barriers because they are closely entangled with each other. For example, policy responds to labour market, societal changes and student demand, but at the same time will also attempt to set the tone and wants to be seen to do so (Thomas 2001a). However, policy is circumscribed by external factors such as labour market, student demand, the contextual features of individual institutions and the implementation of government policy within these institutions in relation to access and progression routes, flexible learning opportunities and effective student support (Keep and Mayhew 1994, 2004).

The expansion of higher education led to a significant improvement in relative participation rates for women, most minority ethnic groups and mature students (CVCP 1998), but men are now under-represented and some ethnic minorities also remain under-represented (HEFCE 2005). Ethnic minorities and non-traditional students are concentrated in the less prestigious courses and institutions and are therefore more visible in some subject areas and in the more inclusive post-1992 institutions (CVCP 1998). Ideological shifts from Robbins (1963) to Dearing (1997) have contributed to changes more in external structures than in lesser internal values and purposes (Morley 1997) because of the interplay of the competing discourses of selectivity and equity and economic benefit of higher education (Williams 1997a). Changes may have been framed within a discourse of social justice and equity, with the creation of alternative entrance routes, but national policies have seemingly tended to be driven by a preference for numerical growth (Fulton 1981, 1989; Scott 1995; Williams 1997a: 19). Also, changes in internal values and purpose have not matched external changes in funding arrangements. The greatest problem though is that entrenched disparities in participation remain (HEFCE 2005) and that a hierarchy persists in terms of the differential status of higher education institutions and the more elitist practices associated with pre-1992 universities (See Jary 2001).

In contextualising the aims and objectives and in examining the evolution of patterns of participation by key variables as well as the changes in external structures and in

the nature and scope of higher education, this chapter has underlined the key importance of assumptions and life history factors in shaping the perception of higher education by potential entrants. In the light of both this chapter and the aims of this research (to investigate the factors/mechanisms/processes associated with greater and/or lesser likelihood of participation in higher education by potential entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups to formulate an explanatory conceptual model of greater and lesser likelihood of participation), the three objectives that were chosen to achieve these aims can now be more precisely articulated:

1. To examine the assumptions that determine greater or lesser likelihood of participation
 - a. Drivers and barriers
 - b. Constructions of students and of higher education
 - c. Impact of public discourses on private narratives
2. To examine the influence of life history factors on greater or lesser likelihood of participation
 - a. Initial education
 - b. Family
3. To investigate the interaction of assumptions and life history factors on greater or lesser likelihood of participation
 - a. Point of optimal cultural distance at which higher education becomes for oneself rather than not for oneself
 - b. Factors that lessen cultural distance and internalised barriers and make it more likely to reach this point and hence to enter higher education
 - c. Extent to which entering higher education is a decision or a non-decision

The purpose of the next chapter is to analyse what is known about these more clearly defined objectives through a review of the literature. This review will focus on of the main trends in access and widening participation research in terms of the type of questions have been asked and the type of knowledge has been gained. The review will also examine what is known about the more clearly defined objectives and identify gaps in knowledge.

3

ACCESS AND WIDENING PARTICIPATION RESEARCH

The previous chapter examined the evolution of patterns of participation by key variables and changes in external structures and in the nature and scope of higher education. The previous chapter showed that an unprecedented exponential numerical growth of student numbers took place over the past fifteen years and that the barriers of sex, ethnicity and age were overall removed, but that the social class barrier remained firmly entrenched.

This chapter examines access and widening participation research according to the following outline:

- review of general trends in access and widening participation research
- review of the literature around what is known about the research objectives and identify what is not known about the research objectives

This chapter is one of two chapters that examine the existing literature. The next chapter will discuss existing sociological theories and models and offer a preliminary conceptual model.

Access and widening participation research

From Robbins (1963) and even more so from Dearing (1997) onwards there has been an unprecedented ever-increasing amount of research into access and widening participation, which was paralleled by an unprecedented growth in the number of students. The development of this body of research began the process towards the establishment of access and widening participation as an accepted field of study. Several academic journals have been devoted solely to access and widening participation. The first was the *Journal of Access Studies* launched in the early 1980s

and which became the *Journal of Access and Credit Studies*. While this journal is no longer published, the *Journal of Access Policy and Practice* and *Access and Widening Participation* are becoming ever more influential. Notwithstanding this, a characteristic of the field of access and widening participation is that it still retains “overlapping and all-embracing boundaries” (Parry 1997: 108).

The early research into access and widening participation was typically by assessment of future demand and analyses of past and present demographic trends and trends in admissions (Robbins 1963; DES 1978; SED 1978; DES 1979; DES 1983, 1984, 1985, 1987, 1991; UGC 1984; Edwards 1980; Smithers and Robinson 1995; HEFCE 1996; Dearing 1997). While yearly publications by UCAS and HESA (since 1992) and DfES continue to monitor the size and shape of higher education in the United Kingdom, a substantial amount of large-scale investigations has also examined key variables and differential rates of access to higher education (Robbins 1963; Jackson and Marsden 1966; Halsey, Heath and Ridge 1980; Fulton 1981, 1989, Redpath and Harevey 1987; Burnhill *et al* 1988; 1990; Parry and Wake 1990; Halsey 1992, 1993; Blackburn and Jarman 1993; Modood 1993; Egerton and Halsey 1993; Davies 1994; HEFCE 1996, 1997, 1999; Savage and Egerton 1997; Dearing 1997; Parry 1997; Batey and Brown 1997; Metcalf 1997; Reay and Ball 1997; CVCP 1998; Osborne 1999, 2001; Tonks 1998, 1999; Adnett and Coates 2000; Coates and Adnett 2000; Lewis and Ramsden 2000; Ball *et al* 2000, 2002; HEFCE 2005). A smaller amount of large-scale investigations has examined key variables and differential rates of access to higher education in Scotland (Paterson 1992, 1993, 1997, Raab 1998, 1999; Johnston *et al* 1999; SHEFC 1999; Tinklin 2000; SHEFC 2004). Although all these studies examined trends in participation in higher education, their primary focus was not always the higher education system, but also social policy or social class analysis or social mobility. The disparate nature of the data sources, samples and methodologies means that precise comparisons are difficult, apart from the fact that all these studies agree that widespread social class disparities of participation remain.

Youth transition and progression to higher education represent a major trend of research into access and widening participation (Jesson and Gray 1990; Burnhill *et al* 1990; Taylor 1990, 1992; Paterson 1991; Banks *et al* 1992, Sammons 1995; Fergusson and Unwin 1996, Bynner *et al* 1997; Furlong and Cartmel 1997,

Hodkinson and Sparkes 1997; Lawy 1999; Hall and Marsh 1999; Marsh and Low 1999; Bloomer and Hodkinson 1999; Furlong and Biggart 1999; Hodkinson and Bloomer 2000; Power *et al* 1998, 1999, 2003; Hodgson and Spours 2000; Leeney and Watson 2000; Gayle *et al* 2000, 2002; Ball *et al* 2000, 2002, Bloomer 2001).

Closely related to youth transition and progression, young people's experience and decisions about higher education have also typically been examined by large-scale research with quantitative emphasis and possibly some qualitative element (Robbins 1963; Donaldson 1973, 1975, Gordon and Williams 1977, Adelman and Gibbs 1979; Kogan and Boys 1984; Redpath and Harvey 1987; Robert and Higgins 1992; Preston *et al* 1992; Taylor 1992, 1993; Blackman and Jarman 1993; Metcalf 1993; Halsey 1993; Blaxter and Tight 1993, 1995; Gerwitz *et al* 1995; Smithers and Robinson 1995; Macrea *et al* 1996a, 1996b; Connor *et al* 1996; Dearing 1997; Hesketh 1999; Arnot *et al* 1999; Roberts and Allen 1997; Connor *et al* 1999b, Connor 2001).

Research about mature students' transition and progression to higher education has been less of a major trend. However, a well-rehearsed topic has been the higher education experience and decision-making of mature and/or non-traditional students. Such research generally took the form of largely qualitative smaller scale research rather than research about young people (See White 1986; Woodley *et al* 1987; Duke 1987; Weil 1986, 1988; Edwards 1990, 1993; Pascal and Cox 1993; Metcalf 1993; Ainley 1994; Mackenzie and Karkalas 1995; McFadden 1995; West 1996; Bamber *et al* 1997; Lynch and O'Riordan 1998; Reay 1998; Pugsley 1998; Tett 1999; Bamber and Tett 1999; Merrill 1999; Power *et al* 1998, 1999; Power 2000; Tett 2000; Archer and Hutchins 2000; Bamber and Tett 2000; Hutchins and Archer 2001; Macdonald and Stratta 2001; Archer *et al* 2001; Tett *et al* 2001; Egerton 2001a, 2001b; Baxter and Britton 2001; Marks 1998, 1999, 2000; Reay 2001; Bowl 2001; Layer and Smith 2001; Reay *et al* 2002; Ball *et al* 2000, 2002). While most of the research about mature student looked at full-time students, there has been little research on part-time provision and part-time students except for a few attempts such as those of Tight (1993), Hogarth *et al* (1997), Schuller *et al* (1999) and Davies (1999).

Critique and analysis of higher education policies in the British/English context is another major aspect of the research into access and widening participation in the

British context (Robbins 1963; Fulton 1981, 1989; Dearing 1997, Williams 1997a, 1997b; CVCP 1998; Woodrow 1999, 2000a, 2000b, 2001; Watt 2001; Taylor 2000; Smith 2000; Hodgson and Spours 1999; 2000; Callender 2001; Longden 2001) and more specifically in the Scottish context (Hartley 1997; Garrick 1997; Cubie 1999; Watt and Paterson 2000; Mackie 2001). Policy discussions have focussed on the lack of effectiveness of government and institutional policies (Barnett 1990; Scott 1995, 1998; Marks 2000; Watt and Paterson 2000; MacDonald and Stratta 2001; Callender 2001; Woodrow 2001). Funding policies have been widely criticised (Woodrow 1999, 2000a, 2000b, 2001; Callender 2001; Longden 2001). Suggestions have been made on how to make higher education more accessible and how to ensure progression to higher education through access courses, modular and credit based courses, part-time courses, fairer admission systems, Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL), special entry schemes, summer schools, franchising to further education (Fulton 1981, 1988, 1989; Farrant 1981; Finch and Rustin 1986; Parry 1986; Ball and Eggins 1989; Brennan 1989; Duke 1989; Parry and Wake 1990; Chitty 1991; Spours 1991; Robertson 1992, 1994, 1997; Stowell 1992; Scott 1995, 1998; Smith *et al* 1996; Tight 1996; Williams 1997b; Schuller *et al* 1999; Steele and Ward 1999; Smith and Bocock 1999, Crowther 2000; Smith 2000; Fuller 2001; Parnham 2001; Trim 2001).

Surprisingly, there have been relatively few in-depth evaluations of strategic approaches to widen participation. Thomas (2000, 2001a, 2001b) in England has extensively analysed various strategic approaches both at the level of project and regionally or nationally and both conceptually and by using case studies and participatory action research. Bamber *et al* (1997), Bamber and Tett (1999), Bamber and Tett (2000, 2001) in Scotland have investigated various aspects of a case study concerning a special access scheme for working class community activists to undertake a degree in community education.

A substantial amount of research has been produced on delivery and accreditation of access courses (Parry 1996; Ward and Steele 1999 *inter alia*) and how they have influenced conceptions of socio-educational relationships in which such courses are embedded (Stowell 1992). Earlier research was based on a discourse of second chance education through alternative approach (Weil 1993; Munn and McFadden 2000; Duke 1987) and was framed within theories of sub-cultures and resistance

theories in which stories of struggle dominated (Woodley 1987; Weil 1989; Edwards 1993; Pascall and Cox 1993; McFadden 1995; West 1996; Lea 1996; Lynch 1999 *inter alia*). Access and second chance education were normalised by policy makers and incorporated within a discourse of the promotion of lifelong learning (DfEE 1996; Kennedy 1997; Fryer 1997; Dearing 1997, DfEE 1998a, 1998b, DfES 2003). A substantial amount of research is still framed within resistance theories (Munn and McFadden 2000; Baxter and Britton 2001; Hutchings and Archer 2001; Archer and Hutchings 2000; James 2000; Archer *et al* 2001; Tett *et al* 2001; Bowl 2001; Reay *et al* 2001; *inter alia*). There have also been some inclusion narratives such as those of Brown (1987), Bates and Riseborough (1993) and Blackman (1991, 1995).

A recent addition to access and widening participation has been the use of geodemographics to examine rates of entry to higher education (Tonks and Farr 1995, Batey and Brown 1997; Tonks and Clarkston 1997; Raab 1997, 1998; SHEFC 1999; Tonks 1999; Johnston *et al* 1999; Farr 2001; SHEFC 2001). Its main advantage over using social class based on father's occupation is the postcode link to identify location on the ground. It also offers more detail and accuracy and is based on a range of census and non-census variables rather than a single measure. However, twelve main types subdivided into a total of 52 groups and later 64 groups could arguably provide too much detail and hence confusion and a less than meaningful overall picture.

Another recent addition to the range of research into access and widening participation is that of student progression and retention and in particular retention rates by the most vulnerable or at risk students from the lower socio-economic groups (Mackenzie and Karkalas 1995; Walker 1999; Thomas 2001a, 2001b; Tresman 2001; Grant 2001; Palmer 2001; Smyth and Hattam 2001; Hodgkinson and Bloomer 2001). Most studies of student progression and retention rates are quantitative and correlate progression with age, sex and social class, ethnicity or other factors. HEFCE (1997, 1999, 2000a, 2000b, 2001) found that the main factors in student retention were qualifications on entry, subject studied and age of student with mature students more likely to drop out. Other researchers found that mature students were as academically successful and sometimes even more successful despite greater domestic responsibilities (Walker 1975; Knowles 1983; Woodley 1984; Lucas and Ward 1985; Smithers and Griffin 1986, Woodley 1991; Archer *et al*

1999). Earlier research such as that of Tinto (1975, 1982, 1993) demonstrated importance of student engagement and interaction with staff and other students at both formal and informal level. Later research, for example Yorke (1999, 2004), also underlined poor quality of student experience, academic inability to cope, unhappiness with social environment, institutional disappointment as reasons for dropping out, but also wrong choice of subject and financial problems. Palmer (2001) and Thomas (2001a, 2001b) too underlined financial reasons linked to part-time work as well as institutional reasons such as poor quality of teaching and support while Walker (1999) argued that the decision to drop out involved a multi-layered set of factors.

The effect of part-time employment on the experience of higher education has generated a substantial amount of literature in only a few years (Lamont and Lucas 1998; Hodgson and Spours 2000; Callender 2001). Changes in funding have increased the necessity for term-time employment (McCarthy and Humphrey 1995; Callender and Kemp 2000), but the extent of the increase in indebtedness over time is difficult to quantify precisely. In the early 1990s only about a quarter of students worked during term time (Sorenson and Wyn 1993; Deacon 1994; Christie *et al* 2001). A decade later the percentage has grown to nearly half and students work on average eleven hours per week (McCarthy and Humphrey 1995; Callender and Kemp 2000; Curtis and Lucas 2001; Curtis and Williams 2002, Curtis and Atkinson 2004). Most studies have found that working during term time impacts on studies and is linked to lower academic success and higher dropout rate with students missing lectures and seminars, having problems with completion of assignments and having less time to study and suffering more stress (Leonard 1996; Lucas and Lamont 1998; Cubie 1999; Callender and Kemp 2000; Christie *et al* 2001). While most studies underlined that only a minority of students believed that work had positive effect (McCarthy and Humphrey 1995; Callender and Kemp 2000; *inter alia*), only rarely was working during term time highlighted as positive factor because it meant more money, more skills, greater understanding of workplace, increased confidence and ability to deal with people (Lucas and Lamont 1998; Curtis and Atkinson 2004).

In recent years a great amount of research has been generated into the effect of the abolition of grants, the introduction of student loans and fees and consequently of student debt on the higher education system, primarily in terms of students' attitudes

and completion rates (Leonard 1995; McGivney 1996, 1999, Paterson 1997; Hesketh 1999; Ahier 2000; Turner *et al* 2000; Marks 2001; Christie *et al* 2001). Some large-scale studies have underlined that financial hardship has become more common and more widespread (McCarthy and Humphrey 1995; Callender and Kempson 1996; Humphrey and McCarthy 1997; Payne and Callender 1995; Callender and Kemp 2000; Callender 2001), but Ahier (2000) found that despite new funding arrangements, old practices and old family forms of thinking and doing persist, advantaging some and disadvantaging others such as non-traditional entrants.

Far less common has been research about the nature and scope of higher education (Scott 1984, 1995, 1998; Barnett 1990; Schuller 1991a, 1991b; Coffield 1995; 1997, 1999; Williams 1997b; Coffield and Williamson 1997; Lea 1999; Fox 1999; Warwick 1999; Pakes 1999 *inter alia*). The shift from an elite to mass system of higher education which took place in 1987 when 15% API was reached (See Trow 1970, 1973) has remained under-theorised except by Ainley (1994); Brown and Scase (1994), Scott (1995, 1998), Parry (1997) and McNay (2005). Equally uncommon is work aimed at re-evaluating the purpose of higher education (Bown 1989; Steele and Ward 1999; Crowther 2000; Marks 2000, 2001; Bentley 2000; Barfels and Delucchi 2000; Parnham 2001). Much of this type of research has specifically underlined the need to create greater links between further education and higher education and highlighted the importance of a seamless web (Smith and Bocock 1999; Marks 2000, 2001, 2002; Parnham 2001).

Scott (1995, 1998) has pointed out that there has been little exploration of the fundamental values of higher education except by the literature of broader social and cultural analysis such as Archer (1979), Habermas (1987, 1999), Giddens (1990) and literature about higher education such as Barnett (1990) and Barnett (1997). Much of the available research has mostly focussed on examining the structure of the system, the management of funding and the practical application of access and widening participation policy. Yet the concept of higher education and issues concerning its nature and its scope and internal values of purpose are clearly contested insofar as there are legitimate alternative points of views or conflicting ideologies about what higher education is, or should be, who it is for or should be for and especially what it is for, or should be for. A very small minority of researchers have directly questioned the benefits of the expansion of higher education and denounced a credentialism that

is deemed to devalue degree level qualifications (Fox 1999). Three different discourses concerning access and widening participation can be identified: firstly, modernisers who favour human capital theories and emphasise the value of higher education to the economy; secondly, progressives who underline the promotion of social justice and self-realisation; and thirdly, cultural restorationists who want to preserve traditional values and academic standards (Sand 1998). These three main discourses cut across policy and institutional level and create many tensions within the higher education system (Sand 1998, Watt and Patterson 2000; MacDonald and Stratta 2001; Thomas 2001a, 2001b, 2002)

A small minority of researchers have examined the issue of mature students having differential learning needs from younger students. Duke (1987) is a rare example of research that underlines the tension between the ideology of access and widening participation in terms of asking whether the needs and expectations of mature students are indeed compatible with those of school leavers instead of blaming institutions for not meeting the needs of non-standard entrants. The issue of adults having differential learning needs from younger students or pupils has been regularly examined within the field of adult education (Knowles 1983, Brookfield 1986 and Tight 1993, 1996 *inter alia*).

Related to tensions between mature and younger students, Wall *et al* (1991) and Tett (2004) are rare if not unique examples of investigating a particularly Scottish aspect of higher education, that of the cultural tension between English and Scottish students and lecturers/tutors in Scottish pre-1992 universities. This particular aspect of higher education has many similarities with the relationships between younger and mature students and also relationships of students with A-levels or those with Highers with those students who came with vocational qualifications. To date these issues have receive little attention.

Even less common are systematic attempts to compare patterns of achievement in compulsory education and access and participation in post-compulsory education and vocational training between England and Scotland (Raffe *et al* 1998; Raffe *et al* 2001a, 2001b). However in these studies higher education is not examined in any depth. A few large-scale studies used questionnaires, focus groups and interviews explored motivations to enter higher education in both England and Scotland.

Roberts and Higgins (1992) and Roberts and Allen (1997) looked at the experience of higher education and retrospective motivations to enter among mostly young as well as a small number of mature students while Connor *et al* (1996) and Connor *et al* (1999a, 1999b, 1999c) looked at how applicants chose universities and colleges.

Researchers disagree about the changes in internal values and purpose of higher education and its degree of inclusiveness and exclusiveness. Researchers agree about who is excluded and who is included and on the fact that there have been changes in nature, scale and scope of higher education. They agree that, despite enormous growth and despite passing from an elite system to a mass system of higher education and even a universal system in Scotland and significantly reducing ethnic inequalities and female inequalities to the extent that males are now under-represented in higher education and under-achieving before they reach higher education, there remain significant disparities in participation by social class and hence the relative social class inequality has remained fairly constant since 1960. Researchers also agree that the essential access and widening participation problematic as defined by educationalists and policy makers is that there still remains a disproportionate number of students from professional and managerial background as opposed to partly skilled and unskilled background (Robbins 1963; Halsey *et al* 1980; Halsey 1992; Smithers and Robinson 1996; HEFCE 1996, 1997a, 1997b; Dearing 1997; CVCP 1998; UCAS 1999; Tonks 1999; Ahier 2000; Turner *et al* 2000; Taylor 2000, Smith 2000; Jary 2000, 2001; Woodrow 2000a, 2000b; 2001, Longden 2001; Thomas 2001a, 2002; Watt 2001; Callender 2001; Reay *et al* 2001).

The failure to achieve significant increases of relative participation from less affluent backgrounds is seen as the most persistent failure in the battle to create inclusiveness and the single greatest challenge of higher education (Robbins 1963; Halsey *et al* 1980; Edwards and Roberts 1980; Edwards 1982; Blackburn and Jarman 1993; Egerton and Halsey 1993; Smithers and Robertson 1996; Dearing 1997; Williams 1997b; HEFCE 1997a; Reay and Ball 1997; Metcalf 1997; Robertson 1997; Robertson and Hillman 1997; CVCP 1998, 1999; Woodrow 1999, 2000a, 2001).

Researchers also tend to agree on the fact that the expansion of higher education has benefited the middle classes more than any other socio-economic groups and the class differentials in participation have increased in terms of vertical and horizontal

segmentation within middle class and working-class (Ball *et al* 2000, 2002; Archer and Hutchings 2000; Hutchings and Archer 2001; Bowl 2001; Reay *et al* 2001, 2002). Researchers furthermore concur that higher education is going through a process of stratification and is a much more differentiated field despite changes in its nature, scale and scope with continuing and developing forms of social stratification within higher education (Collins 1999; Reay *et al* 2001). Since the disappearance of the binary divide between universities and public sector institutions, a new hierarchy of institutions has emerged with prestigious research institutions considered as the most desirable of the elite institutions. These universities remain primarily white middle-class institutions (HEFCE 2000; Lampl 2000).

Access and widening participation research has moved from a concern with the exclusion of under-represented groups such as lower socio-economic groups, women and mature students to a concern with the exclusion of under-represented groups such as lower socio-economic groups, men, and those with disabilities (Robbins 1963, Jackson and Marsden 1966; Byrne 1978; Deem 1978; Griffin 1985; Dearing 1997; Hodgkinson and Sparks 1997; Skeggs 1997; Lynch and O’Riordan 1998; Pugsley 1998; Reay 1998, 2001; Woodrow 1999, 2001; Tett 1999, 2000; Bamber and Tett 1999; Power 2000; Archer and Hutchins 2000; Bowl 2001; Hutchins and Archer 2001; Archer *et al* 2001; Tett *et al* 2001; Ball *et al* 2000, 2002; Callender 2001; Reay *et al* 2001). Access and widening participation research has mostly focussed on the London area (Reay 1998; Power *et al* 1998, 1999, 2003; Ball *et al* 2000, 2002; Archer and Hutchins 2000; Hutchins and Archer 2001; Archer *et al* 2001; Reay 2001; Reay *et al* 2001). There have been far fewer major research projects on social class dynamics outside of the London area. Bamber *et al* (1997), Tett (1999), Bamber and Tett (1999, 2000), Tett (2000), Tett *et al* (2001) have examined the Edinburgh area. Pugsley (1998) has investigated Wales, Bowl (2001) the Birmingham area, while Lynch and O’Riordan (1998) have looked at Ireland.

The research objectives and the literature

The aim of the research is to develop a comparative conceptual model of greater or lesser likelihood of participation in higher education among potentially qualified

potential entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups. In order to achieve this aim the following research objectives were selected:

1. To examine the assumptions that determine greater or lesser likelihood of participation
 - a. Drivers and barriers
 - b. Constructions of students and of higher education
 - c. Impact of public discourses on private narratives
2. To examine the influence of life history factors on greater or lesser likelihood of participation
 - a. Initial education
 - b. Family
3. To investigate the interaction of assumptions and life history factors on greater or lesser likelihood of participation
 - a. Point of optimal cultural distance at which higher education becomes for oneself rather than not for oneself
 - b. Factors that lessen cultural distance and internalised barriers and make it more likely to reach this point and hence to enter higher education
 - c. Extent to which entering higher education is a decision or a non-decision

Existing research is now examined in terms of what is known and not known about the initial research questions before reviewing the literature on what it has to say about explaining non-participation.

Assumptions that inform the higher education decision-making process

Drivers or 'push towards' factors

Young potential entrants

The greater number of studies of motivations to enter higher education has taken the form of large and medium scale surveys that used self-completing questionnaires and/or structured interviews. The large and medium scale surveys of motivation to enter higher education can be divided into three main trends: the first trend is research on youth transition from school in terms of intended destinations (Banks *et*

al 1992; Furlong 1992; Taylor 1992; Fergusson and Unwin 1996; Bynner *et al* 1997; Hodkinson and Sparks 1997; Furlong and Cartmel 1997; Gayle 1998; Gayle *et al* 2000, 2002); the second trend is research on young people's intentions to enter (Furneaux 1961; Morris 1969; Williams 1974; Gordon and Williams 1977; Fidler 1979; Redpath and Harvey 1987; Roberts 1993; Banks *et al* 1992; Savage and Egerton 1993; MacDonald *et al* 1993; Evans and Furlong 1994; Connor *et al* 1996; Bynner *et al* 1997; Robertson and Hillman 1997; Hodkinson and Sparkes 1997; Furlong and Cartmel 1997; Rees *et al* 1997; Gayle 1998; Ball *et al* 1996; Ball and Vincent 1998; Ball *et al* 2000, 2002; Connor *et al* 1999a; Hodgson and Spours 2000; Connor 2001; Reay *et al* 2001); the third trend is research on retrospective motivations for having entered (Donaldson 1973; Startup 1972; Brennan and Percy 1976; Adelman and Gibbs 1979; Boys and Kogan 1984; Roberts and Higgins 1992).

While later research also had a qualitative dimension and focussed more on embedded socio-cultural assumptions (See Boys and Kogan 1984; Roberts and Higgins 1992; Robertson and Hillman 1997; Roberts and Allen 1996, 1997; Hodkinson and Sparkes 1997; Connor *et al* 1996, 1999a; Hodgson and Spours 1999, 2000; Power 2000; Power *et al* 1998, 1999, 2003; Ball *et al* 2000, 2002, Reay *et al* 2001 *inter alia*) earlier research provided only a very limited understanding of how higher education was conceptualised and how the interplay of incentives and disincentives shaped motivations (Williams 1974; Gordon and Williams 1977; Fidler 1979; Redpath and Harvey 1987 *inter alia*). In both the earlier and the later research key motivational factors were identified as instrumental or vocational and were related to better employment prospects. In later research key socio-cultural drivers were identified as implicit expectations to enter higher education (Roberts and Higgins 1992; Roberts and Allen 1996, 1997; Ball *et al* 2002, Reay *et al* 2001). A small number of applicants from independent schools were found not to have an instrumental approach to higher education choice while traditional applicants emphasised social life more than non-traditional applicants (Reay 1998; Connor *et al* 1999a; Connor 2001; Ball *et al* 2000, 2002; Power *et al* 1998, 1999, 2003). A localised high unemployment effect has also been identified as a driver to participation that increased both the rate of staying on after 16 and the likelihood of entering higher education (Raffe and Willms 1989) while a localised buoyant labour market was deemed to act as a barrier to participation (Hodgson and Spours 1999).

Mature potential entrants

Unlike research on young people, most of the research on the motivations of mature students or intentions of mature potential entrants has been done through small and medium scale qualitative research except for Woodley *et al* (1987) and Bourner *et al* (1991) who undertook large-scale quantitative surveys. Large scale quantitative studies with a qualitative dimension have been even less common except for Reay *et al* (2002); Davies *et al* (2002); Marks *et al* (2003). Research on young people found that, although some working-class students were limiting their horizons geographically (Reay 1998; Archer and Hutchings 2000; Ball *et al* 2000; Ray *et al* 2001 *inter alia*), overall young people were constructing higher education as something for which many choices were available to them (Bynner *et al* 1997; Furlong and Cartmel 1997; Du Bois-Reymond 1998; Ball *et al* 2000, 2002 *inter alia*). In contrast research on mature students underlined that they constructed higher education as something for which they felt they had very few choices available to them, largely because the location of higher education institutions which greatly circumscribed their options (Reay 1998; Tett 1999; Reay *et al* 2001; Hutchings and Archer 2001; Davies *et al* 2002; Marks *et al* 2003 *inter alia*).

Apart from Macrae *et al* (1997) and Bowl (2001, 2003) who found that mature students' motivations for entering higher education were unambiguously pragmatic and instrumental, most researchers agreed with West (1996: 10) who suggested that respondents were "likely to assume that instrumental motivations were more acceptable than enjoyment and self-development" (See also Woodley *et al* 1987; Edwards 1993 Pascall and Cox 1993; Maynard and Pearsall 1994; West 1995; Leonard 1996; Merril 1999, 2001; Baxter and Britton 2001). Furthermore, West (1996) identified two contrasting discourses of motivations: an instrumental discourse that favours extrinsic incentives of better paid employment and a more intrinsic personal discourse of self-improvement where higher education was an emancipatory quest for knowledge and the meaning of life. Blaxter and Tight (1993, 1995), who looked at the 36 mature students on part-time degree programmes found that half the participants showed a clear link between educational participation and life transitional events while the other half appeared to participate for intrinsic interest with no immediate instrumental goal.

Some research showed that mature students had far lower rates of return largely because of discrimination by private sector employers and hence they tended to work in the public sector after graduation (Steel and Sausman 1997; Pitcher and Purcell 1998; Purcell *et al* 1999; Adnett and Coates 2000). If instrumental motivations were more important than intrinsic motivations the lower rate of return would be a powerful barrier to enter higher education. This would indicate that intrinsic motivations such as self-development must be more important than instrumental motivations of better qualifications for better employment.

A possible starting point for a conceptual model is Turner *et al* (2000) who compared two different models of higher education participation: a market model investment in the USA and public service consumption model in Japan. In the USA where higher education gave high returns most college students cited better employment as main reason to go to college. In Japan the rates of return of going to higher education have declined by almost half in the last ten years, so the economic value of higher education has decreased. However, the number of students and especially women students entering higher education has increased and yet women earn less than men. Investment for better employment was not the reason for going. Rather, higher education was viewed not as an investment but as consumption in terms of buying oneself four years of rewarding and enjoyable life to broaden one's intellectual scope and life experience and to keep up with fashion trends. These two contrasting models of market investment in the USA and public consumption in Japan seem to fit the young and mature differential model of motivations to enter higher education as underlined by many studies (See Woodley *et al* 1987; Edwards 1993 Pascall and Cox 1993; Maynard and Pearsall 1994; West 1995; West 1996; Leonard 1996; Merrill 1999, 2001; Baxter and Britton 2001).

Some researchers have also emphasised a gender dimension to mature potential entrants' motivations. Men were more likely to give instrumental motivations. Women were more likely to enter higher education following life-changing events or simply because they wanted to break out of domesticity (Whitehead *et al* 1984; Osborne *et al* 1984; Woodley *et al* 1987; Reay 1998, 2001; Baxter and Hatt 1999; Tett 2001, Archer *et al* 2001; Reay *et al* 2002). Wanting to be a role model for their children was a strong motivation for women (Pascall and Cox 1993; Edwards 1993; West 1996; Baxter and Britton 2001; Tett 1999, 2000; Reay 1998, 2001). According

to Reay *et al* (2002) mature women often prioritised the process of doing a degree more than the outcome and applied to institutions because of the expected sense of community they hope to encounter.

The above-mentioned research on motivations used different methodologies and sample groups and the findings may have been influenced by the way in which the questions were framed. The above-mentioned research also covers a period of time in which the nature of higher education changed significantly. Nonetheless, the motivations identified are strikingly similar. They are summarised and divided into three broad categories in table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1 Drivers to higher education derived from the literature

External Extrinsic	<i>Vocational and instrumental</i>	Qualifications Better and more rewarding employment	Both young and mature
Internal Intrinsic	<i>Personal factors</i>	Self-improvement Subject knowledge Be a role model	Especially mature/especially women mature
Internal Intrinsic	<i>Socio-cultural factors [informed by social norms]</i>	The inevitable step The normal thing to do	Mostly young from social classes 1 and 2 [after A-levels or Highers]

Source: summary of all the above-mentioned research on drivers to participation

In the above table 3.1 the colour green highlights key drivers. It is worth noting that in much of the research retrospective motivations for having entered and surveyed entrants to higher education, the views outlined are primarily those of potential and students who are not from under-represented socio-economic groups. Consequently, a lot more is known about motivations of potential entrants and students from over-represented groups rather than from under-represented groups.

Barriers or ‘pull away’ factors

As lesser likelihood of participation by potential entrants from under-represented groups has been the problematic identified by government and most researchers, the emphasis has overwhelmingly tended to be on barriers rather than drivers. For the purpose of clarity, barriers can differentiated into external and internal(ised) barriers although barriers are highly interactive and so entangled that it is difficult to establish

proper boundaries and distinctions between them. Although it is sometimes difficult to establish the extent to which a barrier or opportunity is external or internal, this differentiation is adopted in the present review of the literature.

External barriers

Some researchers have suggested that interventionist tendencies could constitute barriers to higher education because they prevent market forces from operating properly (Tight 1998; Ecclestone 2000, Walford 2000; Avis 2000). However, most researchers have blamed policy for not being interventionist enough and not making sure that structures can enable genuine individual empowerment with adequate grants for low-income students and a larger contribution from affluent students (McCarthy and Humphrey 1995; Payne and Callender 1995; Davies and Lea 1995; Callender and Kempson 1996; Webb 1997; Humphrey and McCarthy 1997; Coffield 1998; Ainley 1999; Hodgkinson 1999; Callender and Kemp 2000; Hodgson and Spours 2000; Watson 2000; Leeney 2000; Cubie 2000; Callender 2001; Woodrow 1999, 2001; Watt 2001; Mackie 2001; Osborne 2001; Reynolds 2001).

Institutional barriers have been directly linked to the structure of compulsory education because there is longstanding evidence that people from advantaged background do rather better in the formal education system in terms of educational achievement than those from disadvantaged background in terms of educational experience (Weil 1986, 1988; McGivney 1992; Skeggs 1997; Lynch and O'Riordan 1998; Pugsley 1998; Archer and Hutchings 2000; Bowl 2001) and in terms of educational attainment (Roberts and Parsells 1988, 1994; Gray and Sime 1989; Mortimore and Whitty 1997; OECD 1999).

Institutional barriers were also identified in terms of an awareness by potential entrants of the hierarchical structure of the higher education market with the greater desirability of A-levels and the greater perceived value of degrees from elite universities (McPherson 1991; Edwards 1993; Ainley 1994; Brown and Scase 1994; Paterson 1997; Robertson and Hillman 1997; Tett 1999; Archer and Hutchings 2000; Hutchins and Archer 2001; Ball *et al* 2000, 2002; Reay *et al* 2001).

Institutional barriers were underlined by the fact that the application of access and widening participation policy tends to be circumscribed by the contextual features of

institutions and the interpretations of those who deliver policy within them (Woodley 1987; Brennan 1989; McGivney 1990; Williams 1997; Trowler 1998; Tett 1999; Merrill 1999, 2001; Preece 2000; Reay *et al* 2001). Non-standard students' perceptions of the discordance between the rhetoric of access and widening participation and its practical application was alluded to in many studies, especially lack of flexibility and negative staff attitude (Weil 1986, 1988, 1989; Edwards 1990, 1993; Metcalf 1993; Ainley 1994; West 1996; Bamber *et al* 1997; Reay 1998; Merrill 1999, Macdonald and Stratta 2001; Baxter and Britton 2001; Bowl 2001; Marks 1998, 1999, 2000). Research on institutional attitudes by Macdonald and Strata (1998, 2001) in English post-1992 institution and Watts and Paterson (2000) in Scottish institutions confirmed that staff felt a tension between access and widening participation and the need to maintain both academic standards and student retention.

Financial barriers have overwhelmingly been highlighted as the main barrier to participation (Egerton and Halsey 1993; Blaxter and Tight 1993, 1995; Blackburn and Jarman 1993; McGivney 1996; Paterson 1997; Tett 1999; West 1996; Trotman 1998; McKee and Merrill 1998; Lynch and O'Riordan 1998; Watt and Paterson 2000; 2001; Bowl 2001). Financial hardship was found to have become more widespread with students having increasing level of debts. Socially constructed differences in attitudes to borrowing money were identified. Students from lower socio-economic groups were more afraid of borrowing money than those from higher socio-economic who can see beyond immediate financial worries to the long-term benefits (Merriam and Caffarella 1991; McCarthy and Humphrey 1995; Payne and Callender 1995; Callender and Kempson 1996; Humphrey and McCarthy 1997; Lynch and O'Riordan 1998; Hesketh 1999; Callender and Kemp 2000; Callender 2001). Financial costs were also found to mask more socially complex reasons and possibly unrecognised reasons (West 1996; Herbert and Callender 1997).

Labour market barriers, embodied in a desire to leave school as early as possible to work and earn money, have long been a main reason for leaving education, especially amongst under-represented groups (Hagell and Shaw 1996; Robertson and Hillman 1997). The desire to earn money was shown to be stronger within a buoyant localised labour market. An increased demand for low skill casualised labour was highlighted as a powerful barrier to participation in higher education (Corr *et al* 1989, Taylor 1992, Bynner and Roberts 1992; Fergusson and Unwin 1996; Hodgson

and Spours 2000). Working more than a small number of part-time hours was found to negatively affect educational performance even before entering higher education while working more than 15 hours a week could reduce attainment at A-level by one or two grades (Ashton *et al* 1988; Hodgson and Spours 2000; Metcalf 2003).

Internalised barriers

According to McGivney (1990) and Tett (1999) dispositional or attitudinal factors (attitudes, perceptions, expectations) appear to be the most powerful barrier of non-participation in higher education. These internalised barriers were found to arise from socio-economic and socio-cultural divisions (Munn and Macdonald 1988; Webb *et al* 1988; McGivney 1990; Banks *et al* 1992, Taylor and Spencer 1994; Taylor 1996; Webb 1997; Raab 1998; Lynch and O'Riordan 1998; Clarke 1998; Pugsley 1998; Reay 1998; Tett 1999, 2000; 2004; Ball *et al* 2000, 2002; Bowl 2001; Reay 2001; Reay *et al* 2001, 2002; Davies *et al* 2002; Marks *et al* 2003) as well as gender divisions (Deem 1978; Byrne 1978; Griffin 1985; Edwards 1993; Reay 2001; Reay *et al* 2001; Archer *et al* 2001; Tett *et al* 2001; Walkerdine *et al* 2001).

Dispositional barriers have been variously explained as negative attitudes towards higher education because of a lack of drive for learning (Banks *et al* 1992; Taylor and Spencer 1994; Taylor 1998; Clarke 1998); lack of confidence in ability to learn (Edwards 1993; West 1996; Reay 1998; Tett 1999); lack of relevance of learning opportunities (Munn and MacDonald 1988; Webb *et al* 1988; Reay 1998; Tett 1999; Bowl 2001); and lack of a sense of entitlement (Tett 2004). These barriers were often linked to negative school experience (McGivney 1992, Edwards 1993; West 1996; Lynch and O'Riordan 1998, Bowl 2001) and to a perceived lack of ability to control life and anticipate the future (McGivney 1990; Tett 1999).

The dominant cultural metaphor of a university still imbued with mystique was found to maintain and reinforce socio-cultural and psychological barriers among under-represented groups (Scott 1995, 1998; Lynch and O'Riordan 1998; Reay 1998; Tett 1999; Marks 2000, 2002; Ball *et al* 2002). This is because it is still perceived as an embodiment of the way privilege operates and as part of the cultural pattern of the middle class. Consequently it has the effect of making higher education seem inappropriate, irrelevant, superfluous and even a luxury that could only be purchased

to the detriment of other family members (Bamber *et al* 1997; Skeggs 1997; Pugsley 1998; Lynch and O’Riordan 1998; Reay 1998, 2001; Tett 1999).

Until the mid-1990s gender barriers, mediated through school, family and peers, were affecting females (Griffin 1985; Skeggs 1997; Walkerdine *et al* 2001; David *et al* 2001; Reay *et al* 2001, 2002; Ball *et al* 2002; Lucey *et al* 2003). Since then the focus of gender barriers has shifted to boys who have increasingly been described not only as under-achieving at school (Martin 1999, 2004; Arnot 2000; Skelton 2000), but also, and more importantly, as under-represented and as less likely to want to enter higher education (West 1996; Sargant *et al* 1997; Macrae and Maguire 1999; Maguire *et al* 2000; Jackson and Warin 2000; Watt and Paterson 2000; Archer *et al* 2001; Tett 2000; Martin 2004; Osborne *et al* 2001).

One explanation for the under-achievement and under-representation of young working-class males in higher education has been that they were more likely to be negatively influenced by peers into not going to higher education (Reay 1998; Ball *et al* 2000, Tett 2000; Archer *et al* 2001). However, since the early 1970s mature males had often been depicted as more reluctant to enter higher education than women despite the fact that domestic constraints were more likely to affect women (Byrne 1978; Deem 1978, 1980, 1981; Fewell and Paterson 1990; Purvis 1991; Lather 1991; Metcalf 1993; Pascall and Cox 1993; Edwards 1990, 1993; Wakeford 1993, 1994; Maynard and Pearsall 1994; West 1996; Leonard 1996; Macrae *et al* 1999; Maguire *et al* 1999; Merril 1999; Tett 2000; Archer *et al* 2001;). Other researchers such as Skeggs (1997), Walkerdine *et al* (2001) and Lucey *et al* (2003) have even suggested that the discourse of social mobility and bettering oneself has now become a central aspect of middle class femininity and increasingly of working class femininity (Mann 1998; McCulloch 1998; Lawler 1999; Francis 2000).

Table 3.2 below shows that barriers can be variously divided into internal/external, direct/indirect, economic/financial, labour market, institutional, socio-cultural and personal. Key barriers are highlighted in red.

Table 3.2 Barriers to higher education derived from the literature

External Direct cost	Economic	Financial [cost] [Travel, accommodation] [Childcare] Labour market [need or desire to work] Time and family.	Young and mature Mature
External Indirect cost	Institutional Policy Educational	Unwelcoming institutions Structure of compulsory and post compulsory education Desire to leave school early Not having qualifications needed	Young and mature
Internal Indirect cost [emotional and psychological risks and costs]	Socio-cultural	Working class, male, Afro Caribbean, disabled	Young and mature
	Personal dispositional, or attitudinal	Negative attitudes to HE Lack of relevance of HE <u>Academic factors</u> ←lack of drive for learning ←lack of confidence in ability to learn ←negative experience of school and teachers <u>Social class factors</u> ←lack of sense of entitlement ←luxury at the expense of family ←powerlessness linked with lack of a future perspective ←way privilege operates with HE seen as for middle class and <i>not for me</i> so <u>Both academic and social class factors</u> ←concept of university imbued with mystique → self positioned as outside HE =< 'emotional and cultural distances' → HE as unlikely	

Source: summary of all the above-mentioned research on barriers to participation

It is worth noting that previous researchers tended not to separate external and internal barriers, because they preferred to explain greater and lesser likelihood of participation in higher education in terms of differential decision-making processes moderated by institutional and socio-cultural factors.

Interaction of drivers and barriers

Reay *et al* (2002), Davies *et al* (2002) and Marks *et al* (2003) are among the few researchers who have set out to systematically investigate the interaction of drivers and barriers. They found that for mature potential entrants key drivers such as financial and employment factors as well as familial were also key barriers. Researchers have highlighted that for potential entrants from under-represented groups choice was seen as an uncertain process because mediated by external and internal barriers, risks and costs (Bamber *et al* 1997; Reay 1998; Lynch and O’Riordan 1998; Archer and Hutchings 2000; Reay *et al* 2001, 2002; Hutchings and Archer 2001; Ball *et al* 2002). Because of too great emotional and cultural distances (Raab 1998; Tett 1999), working-class potential entrants were described as situating themselves outside of higher education both explicitly or implicitly (Willis 1977; Griffin 1985; Woodrow 1996; Bourdieu 1990b; Williams 1997; Tett 1999, 2004; Watt and Paterson 2000; Ball *et al* 2000, 2002; Archer and Hutchings 2000; Hutchins and Archer 2001; Bowl 2001, 2003; Reay *et al* 2001, 2002).

A gap in the literature exists since few researchers have systematically examined the interaction of drivers and barriers to higher education. Rather, they have tended to explain greater and lesser likelihood of participation by focussing socially embedded differential decision-making processes. Nonetheless, the decision process remains a consequence of the outcome of the interplay of barriers and drivers that start by being outside oneself, but since they are culturally constructed they are ultimately internalised. Barriers and drivers are also directly related to constructions of higher education and constructions of students, in other words, to views about what higher education is for, whom it is for and how worthwhile or difficult it might be.

Constructions of higher education and of students

Knowledge and understanding of higher education

A few large-scale surveys have investigated knowledge and understanding of potential entrants about higher education. Munn and Macdonald (1988) showed that non-participants had little or no knowledge of higher education opportunities available. Keen and Higgins (1990, 1992) discovered serious gaps in knowledge and

understanding of quantifiable facts about higher education in sixth-formers and adults. Roberts and Allen (1997) found that knowledge about higher education among pupils was directly linked to socio-economic status. Keen and Higgins (1990, 1992) and Roberts and Allen (1997) also uncovered that respondents from lower socio-economic groups perceived an exaggerated rate of failure and drop out and that this had a negative impact of their decision making process. However, a major problem with surveys looking at factual knowledge of higher education is that they do not explain either the overestimation of the rate of failure or why young people and adults with less knowledge are less likely to participate.

Differential Institutional hierarchies

Large and medium scale research into higher education choice and decision-making found that students separated into different constituencies linked to socio-cultural background. The greater percentage of working-class students and the increasing presence of mature students were highlighted as typical features of polytechnics and colleges of higher education (Donaldson 1973, 1975; Gordon and Williams 1977; Adelman and Gibbs 1979; Kogan and Boys 1984; Redpath and Harvey 1987). Qualitative studies of mature students confirmed these findings and pointed out that polytechnics tended to be perceived by potential entrants and by students who attended them as working-class institutions that were open to and encouraged mature and non-standard entrants (Edwards 1993; Ainley 1994). More recently research has suggested that students from lower socio-economic groups still tended to go to their local less prestigious institutions (Paterson 1997; Robertson and Hillman 1997; Reay 1998, Ball *et al* 2002). One reason for this was explained by Halsey (1992: 15) as the fact that elite universities were still perceived as “the cultural possession of traditionally advantaged groups”. According to Tebutt (1997: 45) “a desire to be a member of a relatively homogeneous group plays a major role in college going decisions.” Students match their ‘image’ of the subject and of the institution with their abilities, wants and needs. In other words, potential entrants avoid both subjects and higher education institutions that they feel are not for people like themselves.

Metcalf (1997), Lynch and O’Riordan (1998), Reay (1998, 2001) and Tett (1999, 2000) have argued that working-class potential entrants and students see higher education as a cultural space dominated by the middle class and in which they expect to feel alienated. Tett (1999: 113) found that mature students from social classes 4

and 5 thought that higher education was for “middle-class people with money”, the only exception being “really clever people whose families were willing to make enormous sacrifices”. Jackson and Warren (2000) and Reay *et al* (2000) *inter alia* found that the best universities were constructed in terms of being both white and middle class. Whereas for middle class families success meant going to a good university, for working-class families all higher education institutions were “ivory towers” and hence “an alien environment” (Pugsley 1998: 79).

Many studies have suggested that many non-participants, potential entrants and students believed that degrees from polytechnics/ new universities were of a lesser status than those of elite universities (Edwards 1993; Ainley 1994; Brown and Scase 1994, Hutchings and Archer 2001; Reay *et al* 2001; Ball *et al* 2000, 2002). Consequently, working-class potential entrants and students often constructed their academic identity as incompatible with their working class identity. They feared remaining as ‘others’ or ‘outsiders’ in higher education while becoming ‘others’ or ‘outsiders’ within their families and social networks (Edwards 1993; West 1996; Reay 1996, 1998, 2001; Bamber and Tett 1999, 2000, 2001; Archer and Hutchings 2000; Baxter and Britton 2001). While Roberts and Allen (1997) and Reay (1998) explained this differential awareness as largely due to the different cultural resources that entrants had to draw upon within family and friends, Savage *et al* (1992) found that such statements were far too general and simplistic since they suggest heterogeneity both of the middle class and of the working class. Middle class young respondents in Savage *et al* (1992) constructed higher education in very different ways, had very different aspirations and made different choices. Similarly, Hatcher (1998) found a considerable variety in the way in which young people from working-class backgrounds made educational choices.

Images of higher education and images of students

Heathfield and Wakeford (1991) represent a rare attempt of research set to specifically investigate conceptualisation and constructions of higher education. Using drama as a methodology along with group and individual interviews and questionnaires with a sample group of 32 academically able pupils selected by their teachers, they explored in some depth images of university among their small sample group of working-class pupils. Their respondents depicted a world with which they failed to identify. Images of idle, dissolute, drunken and drug-taking students were

contrasted with images of bespectacled book-laden and hard-working students. Students were seen as “dissolute, superior or just part of a different culture, with books under their arms and eating green apples” (Heathfield and Wakeford 1991: 52). Most of the respondents did not consider themselves to be the kind of person who could ever be a university student. Heathfield and Wakeford (1991) concluded that such images were heavily based on images from the media since none of the respondents had had direct contact with either staff, students or had ever been near a university campus. However, it is quite possible that asked the same questions middle class respondents may have described similar images, whether or not they had had direct contact with staff and other students or visited a university campus. Nonetheless, Heathfield and Wakeford (1991) in their small-scale research demonstrated the value of using both group interactions and interviews to investigate constructions of higher education and students.

Archer and Hutchings (2000) and Hutchings and Archer (2001) are two other rare examples of research that specifically set out to investigate constructions of higher education among working-class non-participants and potential entrants. They conducted 14 focus groups with 109 respondents who were Londoners, aged between 16 and 30 and who came from a range of working-class backgrounds. They found that higher education was constructed as demanding time, effort, financial and emotional costs, something to be endured even for those who considered the possibility of going. Greater than financial costs were the fear of academic failure and then the fear that employment aspired for might not be available as well as the fear of being overqualified for other employment. Hutchings and Archer (2001) identified two discourses that were similar to those found by Heathfield and Wakeford (1991), namely upper and middle class dissolute and middle class studious. They also identified a third discourse, mainly articulated by potential entrants from Asian and Afro-Caribbean background, which was that of poor working class students who are hard-working and valued qualifications because they mean well-paid employment rather than dead end jobs.

A gap in the literature exists since little research has set out to specifically examine constructions of higher education and the assumptions that shape these constructions. The conceptualisation of higher education involves knowledge of the higher education system, understanding of how the system works and its relationship to

wider society. It also involves what and whom one sees higher education as being for and, most importantly for the present purposes, whether one sees that higher education is intended for people like oneself. Constructions of higher education as well as participation in higher education are a factor of the socially embedded nature of decision-making patterned by gender, ethnicity and more especially social class. The assumptions that shape the socially embedded nature of higher education constructions and decision-making are also a factor of the interaction of gender, ethnicity and social class with societal forces such as ideologies and discourses. Examining constructions of higher education and students will enable a better understanding of what people think and feel and will also help to better understand tacit and semi-tacit taken-for-granted-knowledge [See chapter 9 page pages 334-335 for full definition of tacit and semi-tacit knowledge] generated by life history factors and by the impact of public discourses on private narratives.

Impact of public discourses on private narratives

Public discourses are sets of beliefs or packages of ideas embodied by broad and historically derived linguistic and discursive practices shaped by power relation which constrain people into particular ways of thinking (Foucault 1972, 1977; Hall 1978). Public discourses are not necessarily directly linked to policy, but they may have become part of the national or regional culture or even have acquired a quasi-mythical status. Thus, they can persist over time and can compete with each other (Barthes 1993; Foucault 1977, 1982, 1988). According to Gambetta (1987: 170-171) participation in higher education was influenced by powerful but invisible societal forces and public discourses that shape values and assumptions.

Relatively little research has focussed on the impact of public discourses on greater and lesser likelihood of participation by under-represented socio-economic groups. Robbins (1963) drew attention to the elitist discourse of selectivity that led of grammar school boys to think Oxbridge was not for them but for boys who had attended public schools. Willis (1977) suggested that the boys he studied had rejected the dominant elitist educational discourse and instead internalised the working-class ethos of the factory. Robertson and Hillman (1997) found that the discourse of leaving school as early as possible to enter full-time employment was more likely

among potential entrants from lower socio-economic groups. British studies from the 1960s to the 1980s claimed that the reason girls of all classes, but more especially working-class girls, were not interested in education and did not use their academic abilities efficiently was because they had internalised the discourse of domesticity and the notion that marriage and motherhood were more important and more valuable than academic success (Deem 1978; Byrne 1978; Griffin 1985).

West (1996) identified two contrasting discourses of retrospective motivations among mature students: an instrumental discourse of economic benefit of higher education or better-paid employment and a more personal discourse of self-improvement. Usher and Edwards (1994), West (1996) and Usher (1998) have suggested that there has been an increasing societal pressure on the self to become an object of knowledge in order to discover the truth with the help of a counsellor and/or by reading self-help books. Foucault (1972) would argue that this is an example of the power of the normalising gaze that replaces externally imposed discipline with a self-regulating confessional practice that is ultimately disempowering because it creates dependency although encouraged in the name of self-improvement and personal growth.

Hodkinson *et al* (1996), Dwyer and Wyn (2001), Reay (1998, 2001) and Furlong and Cartmel (1997) found evidence of the power of the normalising gaze insofar as young people tended to increasingly downplay the significance of structural factors in their lives and to individualize their own successes and failures. They explained that the use of individualistic explanations for their own actions was to a great extent the reflection both of the assumptions that inform much educational policy and of the language of the human capital theory that underpins the dominant higher education as used by politicians, educationalists, teachers and careers advisers. This individualisation was explained as the consequence of the construction of education as a consumer product within a market environment with a variety of routes and qualifications available to young people.

Willis (2000) and Morley (1991) argued that the influence of the media and consumer culture could make higher education choice and decision-making more complex than previously thought. Heathfield and Wakeford (1991), Ball *et al* (2000) and Hodgson and Spours (1999, 2000) are among the few researchers to underline

the importance of the consumer culture in shaping the perceptions of university of working-class pupils at 15-18. They drew attention to the increasingly conflicting messages from peers, parents, schools, and employers about life priorities. Reay (2001) claimed that the lack of a positive image of the working class within the dominant policy discourse and dominant media representations has played a role in contributing to working class lesser likelihood of entering higher education.

Cohen (1988), Skeggs (1997), Reay (1998), Pugsley (1998) Archer and Hutchings (2000) and Hutchings and Archers (2001) found that the dominant policy discourse of economic benefit of higher education was generating resistance among working-class non-participants. Archer and Hutchings (2000) and Hutchings and Archer (2001) discovered that although young people from working-class background tended to agree in principle with the dominant discourses of individual economic benefit of higher education, they nevertheless associated higher education with few benefits for themselves. Even those interested in going talked in terms of something to be suffered as a means to an end. For those less or not interested, higher education was constructed as risky, demanding great investment in time, effort and financial and emotional costs and yielding uncertain returns. The possibility of academic failure was seen as the greatest risk followed by the risk that the employment aspired for might not be available and also the possibility of being overqualified for other employment. Whereas Archer and Hutchings (2000) and Archer and Hutchings (2001) explained the resistance to the dominant policy discourse in terms of potential entrants not having internalised its assumptions enough to override their own internalised barriers of economic and cultural risks associated with going to higher education, Blackman (1995) found that lower middle class girls in fifth form valued meritocracy and especially the importance of self-discipline in order to do well and enter higher education despite family and educational tensions. On the one hand, potential entrants agreed with and had internalised the policy discourse but they were not likely to enter higher education. On the other hand, potential entrants were found to disagree with the elitism of the policy discourse but they were determined to enter higher education.

Human capital theory/rational action theory (Goldthorpe 1997, 2000) and research on school choice (Stuart Wells 1997) found that a belief in meritocracy was a key factor for doing well at school and for participating in higher education. Roberts (1993) and

Beck (1992) claimed that in order to do well at school the expectation of upward mobility was needed. Beck (1992: 94) added that the expectations of upward mobility remained effective “even in cases where upward mobility through education is an illusion, since education is little more than a protection against downward mobility”. According to Brown (1997: 741) a consequence of mass higher education and credential inflation is the importance of educational qualifications, but at the same time credential inflation is intensifying the competition for qualifications from elite universities because degrees stand in a hierarchy of academic and social worth.

Myths are closely linked to educational discourses because they too are sets of beliefs and values that are maintained and valued because of their usefulness to those who benefit from them (Barthes 1957). The discourse of meritocracy is closely linked to that of economic benefit of higher education and to that of the belief in the value of educational qualifications and hence to national educational myths. The influence of the English and Scottish educational myths has rarely been investigated although the effect of the exclusive cultural mystique of Oxbridge on potential entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups has been alluded to occasionally, but not investigated (See for example by Robbins 1963; Brown and Scase 1994; Lampl 2000, Marks 2000; Hutchings and Archer 2001; Ball *et al* 2000, 2002; Brooks 2003a, 2003b). The more inclusive cultural meritocracy of Scottish democratic intellectualism has been even less frequently mentioned (See for example McCrone 1995; Paterson 1997; Bone 1999 and Anderson 1999).

A major gap in the literature exists as very little research has specifically examined the influence of public discourses on private narratives of higher education decision-making. More research is therefore needed on the influence of public discourses on greater and lesser likelihood of participation from potential entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups.

Life history factors

Initial education

Quantitative research has extensively established that people from lower socio-economic groups are less likely to gain the necessary minimum qualifications of two A-levels / 3 Highers or equivalent for higher education and hence less likely to enter higher education (Burnhill *et al* 1990; Garner 1988; Jesson and Gray 1990; Paterson 1991, 1992; Egerton and Halsey 1993; Blackburn and Jarman 1993; Smithers and Robinson 1996; Sammons 1995; Scottish Office 1997; Metcalf 1997; Bynner *et al* 1998; Johnston *et al* 1999; Tinklin 2000). Qualitative research has overwhelmingly underlined the negative role of school and teachers in both young and mature potential entrants or students in higher education from under-represented socio-economic groups (Brennan 1989; Banks *et al* 1992; Edwards 1993; Pascal and Cox 1993; Taylor and Spencer 1994; Wakeford 1994; Ainley 1994; McFadden 1995; Taylor 1996; Clarke 1998; West 1996; Green and Webb 1997; Lynch and O'Riordan 1998; Reay 1998; Tett 1999, 2000; Munns and McFadden 2000; Baxter and Britton 2001; Bowl 2001; Davies *et al* 2002; Marks *et al* 2003).

Only a few researchers have underlined the positive role of initial education to increase the likelihood of entering higher education by potential entrants from under-represented socio-cultural groups (See Furneaux 1961; Morris 1969; Halsey *et al* 1980; Gambetta 1987; Roker 1993; Darling-Hammond 1997; Power *et al* 1998, 1999, 2003; Hodgkinson and Bloomer 2000; Warmington 2002). Most researchers have argued that initial education served to maintain social class divisions by making potential entrants to higher education think about themselves primarily in terms of academic success or failure. Explanations have been that working-class culture is not valued by schools and teachers and is explicitly excluded from the curriculum (Edwards 1993; Pascal and Cox 1993; Whitty *et al* 1993, 1998; Gewirtz *et al* 1992, 1993, 1995; Ball *et al* 1995; McFadden 1995; West 1996; Lynch and O'Riordan 1998; Reay 1998; Power *et al* 1998, 1999, 2003; Ball and Vincent 2001; Bowl 2001; Whitty 2001; Davies *et al* 2002; Marks *et al* 2003).

A gap in the literature exists because those who have examined the positive role of initial education focussed mainly on independent and grammar school while those

who have underlined the negative role of initial education have tended to use previous research to confirm the negative impact of school and teachers who maintain social class divisions rather than convincingly explaining how this happens.

Familial influences

Quantitative research has long underlined entrenched social class differentials in higher education participation despite the expansion of higher education (Burnhill *et al* 1989, 1990; Jesson and Gray 1990; Paterson 1992; Kysel *et al* 1992; Drew, Gary and Sime 1992; Egerton and Halsey 1993; Blackburn and Jarman 1993; Gray, Jesson and Tranmer 1994; Smithers and Robinson 1996; Hagell and Shaw 1996; Metcalf 1997; Paterson 1997; Parry 1997; Batey and Brown 1997; Raab 1997, 1998; Tonks 1998; Johnston *et al* 1999; Tinklin 2000; Gayle *et al* 2000, 2002). Quantitative research has found a clear correlation between familial background, social class, low income, unemployment, educational underachievement and lesser likelihood of participation in lifelong learning (Gorard *et al* 1997, 1998; 1999a, 1999b, Rees *et al* 1997; Fevre *et al* 1999) and in higher education (Ashton *et al* 1986, 1988; Ashton and Maguire 1986; Payne 1987; Drew *et al* 1992; Breen and Goldthorpe 1997; Gayle *et al* 2000, 2002). Region, place of residence, type of residence and post code have increasingly been used as more precise ways of evaluating familial background and the likelihood of entering higher education (Brown and Batey 1997; Tonks 1998; Tonks and Farr 1999; Raab 1998; Johnston *et al* 1999; Tinklin 2000; HEFCE 2005).

According to these studies, social class and attainment are the more strongly correlated factors, followed by level of parental educational qualifications (Rudd 1987; Roberts and Parsells 1988, 1989, 1990; Burnhill *et al* 1989, 1990; Roberts *et al* 1990; Jesson and Gray 1990; Kysel *et al* 1992; Payne 1995; Fergusson and Unwin 1996; Payne *et al* 1996; Paterson 1997; Raab 1997, 1998; Robertson and Hillman 1997; Watt 1998; Pearson *et al* 1999; Johnston *et al* 1999). Other factors over and above familial background and social class and educational qualifications were found to have a more indirect effect on participation. These factors are a great number of siblings, lack of home ownership and living on a council housing estate which had a negative correlation (Drew, Gary and Sime 1992) while a well-educated mother could significantly increase the probability of entering higher education (Tinklin

2000) as did going to an independent school (Drew, Gary and Sime 1992; Power *et al* 1998, 1999, 2003). In their large-scale research in Wales using structured interviews Gorard *et al* (1997, 1998, 1999a, 1999b), Rees *et al* (1997) and Fevre *et al* (1999) found evidence of continuity between the post-compulsory learning trajectories of grandparents, parents and children.

Correlational research can give useful background information on trends, but is clearly uninformative of underlying complex social processes, socio-cultural factors and societal forces that influence greater or lesser likelihood of participation. There have been relatively few qualitative studies that focussed on the influence of life history factors on greater or lesser likelihood of participation. However, many quantitative studies with a qualitative element have confirmed the importance of familial background such as parental support and encouragement, expectations or pressure to go to higher education and fear of potential parental disappointment. as key factors to greater likelihood of participation (Floud, Halsey and Martin 1957; Bene 1959; Furneaux 1961; Morris 1969; Kogan and Boys 1984; Kysel *et al* 1992; Roberts and Higgins 1992; Hagell and Shaw 1996; Dearing 1997; Paterson 1997; Reay 1998, 2001; Power *et al* 1998, 1999, 2003; Tinklin 2000; Reay *et al* 2001; Ball *et al* 2002). Initial education and familial factors having an effect on participation in higher education derived from the literature are summarised in table 3.3 below.

Table 3.3 *Initial education and familial factors affecting participation in higher education derived from the literature*

Social class [father's occupation]	Number of siblings
Educational attainment/qualifications	Single parent family
Sex	Free school meals
Ethnicity	Home ownership
Geographic region but not post-code	Parents with educational qualifications
Post code	Mother with educational qualifications
Parliamentary constituency	Parental expectations of higher education
Electoral ward	Parental support and encouragement
Living on council housing estate	Parental reading when young
Parental unemployment	Parental interest in homework
Low birth weight	Independent or grammar school

Source: summary of all the above mentioned research

In the above table 3.3 factors with a positive effect are highlighted in green while factors with negative effect are highlighted in red. Other factors can have either a positive or negative effect depending on their position in the hierarchy. The key factors are highlighted in bold.

Previous research has alluded to the role of familial influences and structural factors on the socio-culturally embedded nature of educational choice (Skeggs 1997; Lynch and O’Riordan 1998; Puglsey 1998; Reay 1998; Tett 1999, 2000; Ball *et al* 2000; Reay 2001; Reay *et al* 2001, Ball *et al* 2002). More research is needed to identify underlying complex social processes, socio-cultural factors and societal forces that influence greater or lesser likelihood of participation among potential entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups. More research is also needed into assumptions embedded in social class and family processes in such a way that they function without the need to be explicitly articulated (Allat 1993, 1996; West *et al* 1998). It goes without saying that in order to achieve the aims of the present research more research is needed, especially research that examines the interaction of assumptions and life history factors.

Interaction of assumptions and life history factors

Point of optimal cultural distance at which higher education becomes for oneself instead of not for oneself

One-dimensional explanations of lesser likelihood of participation

A substantial amount of research has attempted to explain lesser likelihood of participation among under-represented socio-economic groups. Policy literature, policy commissioned literature and policy analysis and critique are examples of research that used one-dimensional explanations in which one single factor shoulders the burden of responsibility for lesser likelihood of participation.

Robbins (1963) acknowledged that social class disparities in participation, and especially lesser likelihood of grammar school boys of applying to Oxford and Cambridge, arose from internalised barriers derived primarily from low aspirations and perceived institutional barriers. Dearing (1997) highlighted that the problem of

under-representation in higher education stemmed largely from attitudes in schools, amongst parents and in local communities where low aspirations and low self-confidence were the norm. The blame for low aspirations was attributed primarily to the shortcomings of those who were less likely to participate, but this was moderated to a small extent by the acknowledgement that institutional and financial factors also play their part.

The current policy discourse on access and widening participation is derived from human capital theory and articulated primarily in terms of economic prosperity although personal development and social cohesion or inclusion are also emphasised (DfEE 1998a, 1998b; DfEE 2000; DfES 2004a, 200b). Because of benefit penalties for those on low income, a lack of adequate grants for low-income students and the same contribution from affluent students as from low-income students, policies have been criticised for being unfair to those who are financially disadvantaged and for rewarding those who are already financially well off (Williams 1997b; Woodrow 1996, 1999a, 1999b, 2000, 2001; Callender and Kemp 2000; Callender 2001). Many policy analysts have argued that a main assumption behind the current higher education policies is that it conceptualises barriers that are external to both higher education policy and institutions. Barriers are thus seen as primarily the consequence of the limitations of certain socio-economic groups and their lack of ability, qualifications, information, motivation, self-confidence and hence low aspirations (Williams 1997; Woodrow 1996, 1999b, 2000, 2001; Callender 2001). Yet, aspirations have rarely been investigated. While Power *et al* (1998, 1999, 2003) and Ball *et al* (2000, 2002) alluded to the gap between desire and economic reality and/or academic aspirations and reality, only Furlong and Biggart (1999: 33) investigated aspirations among 13 to 16 years olds. They suggested that “irrespective of expected academic attainment and area of residence young people have relatively high expectations and expectations which are likely to prove difficult to attain.”

While policy tends to blame low aspirations for under-representation of potential entrants from lower socio-economic groups, policy analysts have blamed inflexible entry criteria that fail to recognise the potential of under-represented socio-economic groups and protect middle class privilege (Paterson 1997; Lynch and O’Riordan 1998; Reay 1998; Tett 1999, 2000; Ball *et al* 2000; Callender and Kemp 2000; Callender 2001; Woodrow 2001; Reay *et al* 2001; Ball *et al* 2002). Policy analysts

have also blamed the failure by higher education institutions to successfully target, guide and meet post-entry needs to enable success (Callender and Kemp 2000; Callender 2001; Woodrow 2001). Policy analysts have furthermore blamed the failure of institutions to acknowledge diverse cultural backgrounds or to target potential entrants effectively (Williams 1997; Woodrow 1999, 2000, 2001; Tett 1999, 2000; Callender 2001).

Multi-dimensional explanations of lesser likelihood of participation

A substantial amount of research has proposed multi-dimensional explanations of greater and lesser likelihood of participation in higher education. According to Ball *et al* (2000, 2002) barriers are only a small part of the explanation for lesser likelihood of participation as socially embedded processes that lead to self-exclusion moderate them. Hence, recent research has emphasised the socially embedded nature of educational choices, unevenly distributed capacity for choice across the social classes; highly differentiated unequal socio-cultural processes; and differential patterns of awareness, preferences, intentions, and motivations (Robbins 1963; Bourdieu and Passeron 1979; Dearing 1997; Roberts and Allen 1996, 1997; Skeggs 1997; Lynch and O'Riordan 1998; Puglsey 1998; Reay 1998, 2001; Du Bois-Reymond 1998; Puglsey 1998; Ball *et al* 2000, 2002; Archer and Hutchings 2000; Hutchings and Archer 2001; Reay *et al* 2001, 2002, Ball *et al* 2002 *inter alia*).

Research into the processes involved in educational choice and persistence of social inequalities in education has attempted to explain lesser likelihood of participation by under-represented socio-economic groups by focussing increasingly on the strategies adopted by the middle class to retain its social advantage. These strategies were identified as ensuring their children went to independent schools, grammar schools or the best comprehensive schools and thus avoid schools with too many pupils from less affluent backgrounds who might interfere with their children gaining good qualifications (Jackson and Marsden 1966; Halsey *et al* 1980; Willms and Echols 1992; Ball 1993; Whitty *et al* 1993; Gewirtz *et al* 1992, 1993, 1995; Alatt 1993, 1996; Ball *et al* 1995; Maguire *et al* 1999, 2000; Macrae *et al* 1996a, 1996b; Bowe *et al* 1995; Reay and Ball 1997; Reay 1996, Ball *et al* 1996; Carroll and Walford 1997; David *et al* 1994, 2001; Brown 1997; Ball *et al* 1997; Reay and Ball 1997; Power *et al* 1998, 1999, 2003; Teelken 2000; Reay and Lucey 2000; Ball and Vincent 2001).

Unlike middle-class parents who guided their children to ensure positive acceptance of their choice of a good school (Vincent 1996; Ball *et al* 1996; Reay and Ball 1997; Reay 1996; Ball and Gewirtz 1997; Ball *et al* 1997; Reay and Ball 1998; Power *et al* 1998, 1999, 2003; Reay and Lucey 2000; Vincent and Ball 2001; Power 2000; Whitty 2002) working-class parents thought academic ability was fixed and feared their children would feel alienated in predominantly middle class schools (Gewirtz *et al* 1995; Savage and Egerton 1997; Whitty *et al* 1998; Power *et al* 1998, 1999, 2003). Unlike middle-class families who had wider physical and emotional horizons and focus on the long-term, working class families had limited horizons and geographical constraints due to both financial considerations and a wish to remain near home and have close contact with family and friends (Gewirtz *et al* 1995; Reay and Ball 1997; Ball and Vincent 1998; Reay and Lucey 2000).

Middle-class families seem to be involved in similar dynamics in relation to higher education choice. They guide their children to avoid post-1992 institutions and vocational qualifications and instead to go to pre-1992 institutions and study traditional subjects. They focus on the long term, have wider emotional and cultural horizons and their children travel greater distances to university (Robbins 1963; Allat 1996; Ainley 1994; Brown and Scase 1994; Dearing 1997; Skeggs 1997; Sargant *et al* 1997; Hatcher 1998; Pugsley 1998; Reay 1998, 2001; Savage 2000; Ball *et al* 2000; Archer and Hutchings 2000; Walkerdine *et al* 2001; Farr 2001; Reay *et al* 2001). According to Farr (2001) students from high-income families in exclusive suburban detached houses travelled an average of 74 miles while those from lowest-income families living in council flats travelled an average of 28 miles.

The geographical constraints of working class families are due to both financial considerations and a need to maintain close familial emotional ties (Skeggs 1997; Lynch and O'Riordan 1998; Pugsley 1998; Reay 1998; Tett 1999, 2000; Ball *et al* 2000, 2002; Reay *et al* 2001, 2002). Working-class choices and decisions are related to a lack of factual and procedural access to knowledge about higher education and student life. This creates fears and anxieties that make practical difficulties worse and results in a lack of confidence in their own abilities to successfully gain a degree (McGivney 1996; Reay 1998; Lynch and O'Riordan 1998; Archer and Hutchings 2000; Ball *et al* 2000, 2002; Reay *et al* 2001). Du Bois-Reymond (1998) and Ball *et al* (2002) underlined the role of middle class familial scripts using linear narratives

because they expected to enter higher education while working-class entrants used broken narratives because they did not expect to enter higher education. For middle-class potential entrants key factors are more intrinsic and internal to the institution, but for working-class more external and extrinsic instrumental constraints prevailed (Reay 1998; Archer and Huchings 2000; Ball *et al* 2002).

Middle class and working class entrants and potential entrants were therefore often described by researchers as having sharply contrasting assumptions. Middle class entrants and potential entrants tended to see entering higher education as more natural, more clear-cut and almost beyond question. They were more likely to be guided by parents towards going to a good university. They tended to position themselves as insiders (Robbins 1963; Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Brown and Scase 1994; Skeggs 1997; Dearing 1997; Allat 1996; Puglsey 1998; Du Bois-Reymond 1998; Lynch and O'Riordan 1998; Reay 1998, 2001; Maguire *et al* 1999; Tett 1999, 2000; Archer and Hutchings 2000; Ball *et al* 2000, 2002; Power 2000; Power *et al* 1998, 1999, 2003).

Working-class potential entrants tended to position themselves as outsiders who perceived entering higher education as more risky, costly, and uncertain. They constructed higher education as culturally distant because it epitomised middle class values. If they did enter higher education, it was more often than not the consequence of a decision largely made alone (See Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Heathfield and Wakeford 1991; Skeggs 1997; Allat 1996; Puglsey 1998; Du Bois-Reymond 1998; Lynch and O'Riordan 1998; Reay 1998, 2001; Maguire *et al* 1999; Tett 1999, 2000; Archer and Hutchings 2000; Ball *et al* 2000, 2002; Hutchings and Archer 2001; Power *et al* 1998, 1999, 2003).

Reay (2001) claimed that working class entrants and potential entrants wanted the material benefits of higher education but fear the cultural losses and subordination that going to higher education would entail. They feared being outside of higher education, but also of being lost inside higher education. They had a desire to invest in a new and improved identity but also a fear of a new identity that places the self outside of the family and friends. Consequently, they struggled to hold on to a coherent self as they found and lost themselves in a higher education meant for the middle class others. West (1995: 133) underlined that for working-class mature

students there was no linear progression to a better self-image and better employment, but that they underwent “more fragmentary and fragmenting processes” in which the self is divided to greater or lesser degree between the public and private sphere and between experiential knowledge and academic knowledge.

Table 3.4 below shows a comparison of the contrasting and polarised middle and working-class assumptions that have been described in the literature.

Table 3. 4 *Comparative table of middle and working class educational assumptions derived from the literature*

MIDDLE CLASS	WORKING-CLASS
School choice	School choice
Unlimited horizons	Limited horizons
Independent, grammar /best comprehensives	Local comprehensive
Avoidance of vocational qualifications	No avoidance of vocational qualifications
Guided by parents to accept school choice	Make decision alone
Parent fear disruption by pupils from less affluent backgrounds and less good qualifications Parents think academic ability is not fixed	Parents fear alienation of children if away from limited horizons of local comprehensives Parents think academic ability is fixed
HE choice	HE choice
Unlimited horizons /greater distance travelled	Limited horizons/local HE institution
Pre1992 universities/elite universities	Post 1992 universities
Traditional subjects	New subjects
Avoidance of vocational subjects	Vocational subjects
Factual and procedural knowledge of HE	Lack of HE factual and procedural knowledge
Confidence in own ability to enter HE	Lack of confidence in own ability to enter HE
Easy linear transitions and narratives	Difficult transitions and broken narratives
Key factors intrinsic and internal to HE	Key factors extrinsic and external to HE
Guided by parents to go to good university	Make decision alone/drift into HE
Better A levels/Highers	Lower A-levels/Highers or equivalent
Insider	Outsider

Source: summary of all the above mentioned qualitative research

In the above table 3.4 the colour green highlights the prime middle class trajectory from school to higher education while the colour red highlights the working class trajectory.

The above table 3.4 shows while the socially embedded nature of educational decision-making has been extensively discussed, working class and the middle class have tended to be conceptualised in polarised terms as outsiders and insiders (Bowe *et al* 1995; Hodkinson *et al* 1996; Reay and Ball 1997; Hodkinson and Sparkes 1997; Gorard *et al* 1997, 1998, 1999a, 1999b; Pugley 1998; Reay 1998, 2001, Archer and Hutchings 2000; Ball *et al* 2000, 2002; Hutchings and Archer 2001; Bowl 2001; Britton and Baxter 1999; Baxter and Britton 2001; Reay *et al* 2001, 2002; Lucey *et al* 2003). Indeed, Savage (1995, 2000) noted that as consequence of a strong tendency to conflate class in general with working class, the construction of middle-class identities has primarily been related to the fact of not being working-class and vice versa.

A few researchers have attempted to go beyond these stereotypical working-class and middle-class assumptions. They asserted that the intersection of social class, gender, ethnicity was key to understand the decision-making process about higher education in the context of expansion, growing diversity, credential inflation and continuing social class disparities in participation (Reay 1998, Reay *et al* 2001; Ball *et al* 2002). The same researchers also asserted that a matrix of influences represented by overlapping circles of individual, family, friends and institutions were the key to understand higher education choice (Reay 1998, Reay *et al* 2001; Ball *et al* 2002).

Apart from Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997), who have proposed a conceptual model of careership, other researchers in access and widening participation have not offered conceptual models but used Bourdieu's ideas of *habitus* and cultural capital and Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) to legitimise their conclusions (See Bourdieu 1974, 1976, 1977c, 1986, 1990c, 1993a, 1993b, 1997 *inter alia*) [See chapter 4 for a discussion of Bourdieu and other sociological theories and conceptual models].

A gap in the literature exists insofar as previous research did not satisfactorily explain and/or present a conceptual model of greater or lesser likelihood of participation in higher education by potential entrants from under-represented groups. Rather middle and working class have mostly been conceptualised in stereotypical polarised terms. Consequently, no researcher has examined whether there was a point of *optimal cultural distance* or the point at which higher education becomes for oneself as opposed to not for oneself. *Cultural distance* is derived both

from all the above concepts, which emphasise the importance of notions of ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ and from Bourdieu’s notion of cultural capital and *habitus*. Researchers that came the closest to using cultural distance and internalised barriers as conceptual instruments are Tett (1999) and Raab (1998) who underlined their importance for potential entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups.

Instrumental motivations and intrinsic motivations ‘push’ potential entrants ‘towards’ higher education interacting with barriers both external and especially internalised and in particular with internalised notions of ‘outsider’ to higher education which is ‘not for me’. This exerts a ‘pulling away’ force from higher education. It is therefore suggested that *optimal cultural distance* could be usefully taken as the starting point for theorising a conceptual model. Another useful conceptual instrument to better understand the interaction of push towards and pull away factors is that of the concept of *internalised barriers* [See table 3.2] because it is closely linked to cultural distance. Whenever cultural distance is lessened so are internalised barriers while the likelihood of entering higher education is increased.

Factors that lessen cultural distance and internalised barriers and make it more likely to reach this point and hence enter higher education

Previous research has underlined specific examples where educational and institutional factors could act to reduce internalised barriers. In a large scale correlational research Tinklin (2000) discovered that over and above social class more educated parents and in particular a well-educated mother could significantly increase the probability of entering higher education. Bourdieu (1974, 1976), Bourdieu and Passeron (1979), Power *et al* (1998, 1999, 2003) and Power (2000) found that the children of parents with a cultural and symbolic production background such as teachers had more cultural capital, lesser internalised barriers and less cultural distance than the children of parents with organisational, property and economic background who might earn far more money. Bourdieu and Passeron (1979: 26) found that familial factors such as “having a member of their extended family who had been to university” increased the likelihood of non-traditional students to enter higher education.

Coleman (1988) found that that high school graduation was considerably increased and drop out similarly decreased if parents took an active interest in the education of their child[ren]. Activities that were most effective were reading to their children, helping with homework and discussing educational issues with their children. Attending religious services was also effective, because pressure to remain at school and to do well was done through a mechanism of intergenerational closure that involved obligations and expectations.

Halsey *et al* (1980) demonstrated that working-class boys that went to grammar school had better chance of joining the service class (social classes 1 and 2) than middle class boys who had failed their eleven plus exams. Based on a large-scale study involving surveys and interviews over several years, Power (2000) and Power *et al* (1998, 1999, 2003) looked at the biographies of academically able pupils from various socio-cultural backgrounds. They found that if they stayed in an independent school until the sixth-form, the most academically able children from less advantaged homes were 'pushed towards' higher education although at first they may have struggled to fit in socially and academically. Academic ethos, homework, travelling and extra-curricular activities made it difficult to have an external social life. Consequently, the pupils were carried along by a tide that made dropping out unlikely and going to higher education in general more likely and going to pre-1992 universities especially more likely.

Lindsay (1982), Gambetta (1987), Chubb and Moe (1990) and Darling-Hammond (1997) claimed that all things being equal smaller schools were associated with higher achievement and greater likelihood of entering higher education, largely because the relationship children had built with teachers and other members of the community. Hodkinson and Bloomer (2000) showed how a particular positive institutional culture of learning in a sixth form college had the potential to reduce cultural distance and remove dispositional barriers to participation in higher education by fostering an ethos that managed to neutralise discouragement and hopelessness among students. The institutional culture, which mirrored that of independent schools made students feel valued, encouraged learning and the goal of going to higher education. In the Scottish context it was found that higher education in further education could reduce physical, emotional and cultural distance among

the most socio-economically disadvantaged groups (Arbuthnott 1997; Paterson 1997; Smith and Bocock 1999; SHEFC 2004; HEFCE 2005).

Research in Scotland by Bamber *et al* (1997), Bamber and Tett (1999, 2000, 2001) and Tett (1999, 2000) reported on various aspects of an institutional and community scheme, based on an inclusive ideology, specifically designed to *lessen* a lack of sense of entitlement or, in other words, reduce or lessen cultural distance. The research project investigated the experience of a small group of 18 working-class mature students from social classes 4 and 5 who had strong internalised barriers to participation, but had entered higher education through a scheme based on the assumption that the difference between participation and non-participation was minimising barriers as much as possible, thereby also reducing cultural distance between potential entrants and higher education sufficiently to render the idea of doing a degree acceptable. Despite the reduction or lessening of cultural distance, students still felt they had many institutional and internalised barriers to overcome in order to successfully progress and finally graduate.

A significant amount of research found that previous initial education barriers could become drivers for mature students wanting to prove their teachers wrong for having made them feel stupid and so was often underlined as a driver to higher education participation (Brennan 1989; Edwards 1993; Pascal and Cox 1993; Wakeford 1994; Ainley 1994; McFadden 1995; West 1996; Green and Webb 1997; Tett 1999, 2000; Munns and McFadden 2000; Baxter and Britton 2001).

Goldthorpe (1996) and Stuart Wells (1997) argued that it was a necessary factor that individuals should believe in the worth of educational achievement, that educational achievement was the route to upwards social mobility, that the education system is meritocratic, and that their well-being depends primarily on their own efforts and decisions. Such a belief made the difference between people from under-represented socio-economic groups who went to higher education and those who did not.

Table 3.5 below summarises the key findings of both correlational and qualitative research about the factors that have the potential to reduce internalised barriers and increase likelihood of entering higher education.

Table 3.5 Factors derived from the literature that can lessen internalised barriers and increase the likelihood of entering higher education

A well-educated mother	<i>Family factors</i>
Parental involvement in homework and reading to children	
Parents with a cultural and symbolic background (e.g. teachers)	
Member of immediate/extended family in HE	
Belonging to religious communities	
Smaller schools	<i>Institutional factors</i>
Grammar schools	
Independent schools	
Six-form colleges	
FE in HE [Scotland only]	
Inclusive institutional and community scheme	
Good educational experiences	
Bad educational experiences and wanting to prove teachers wrong [mature only]	<i>Public discourses</i>
Belief in meritocracy and value of educational attainment for upwards social mobility	

Source: summary of the above mentioned research

To emphasise their importance, the factors that can lessen internalised barriers shown in the above table 3.5 have been highlighted in green and the most important factors are indicated in bold. Table 3.5 underlines the potential role of ideologies and discourses in influencing greater or lesser likelihood of participation by potential entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups, which is now examined.

A gap in the literature exists because except for *inter alia* Heathfield and Wakeford (1991), Bamber *et al* (1997), Tett (1999, 2000), Charlesworth (2000) and Thompson (2000) most research about factors that make participation to higher education more likely have taken over-represented socio-economic groups as the norm or have compared them with under-represented groups. Factors that make participation more likely have therefore rarely been examined from the point of view of under-represented socio-economic groups. More importantly, these factors have not been investigated in relation to a point of optimal cultural distance where higher education becomes for oneself as opposed to not for oneself.

Extent to which entering higher education is a decision or a non-decision

While a great amount of research has investigated higher education choice and socially embedded patterns of decision-making process, very little has been written explicitly about the concepts of *decisions* and *non-decisions*. What little has been written shows that these concepts have been used in very different ways. Du Bois-Reymond (1998) explicitly discussed decisions and non-decisions. A non-decision is the consequence of the fact that socio-culturally advantaged potential entrants see higher education as an inevitable step or the natural thing to do typical of a 'normal biography' characterised by linear, anticipated and predictable, unreflexive transitions. These transitions are often gender and class specific and rooted in well-established life-worlds. 'Normal' biographies are often driven by an absence of decisions. For them the decision to go to university is a non-decision. Such young people used closed narratives and talked of going to university as automatic, taken for granted or always assumed (See also Kogan and Boys 1984; Roberts and Higgins 1992); Power *et al* 1998, 1999, 2003; Ball *et al* 2002). Such a non-decision contrasts with the doubts, ambivalences and very deliberate decision-making of many of the working-class and ethnic minority young people who are the first in their families to consider going to higher education. These young people used open narrative forms that are more fragmentary and discontinuous because the path to higher education is unimagined or vague. Theirs is thus not a 'normal' but a 'choice' biography, because they are forced to make a decision and hence to reflect on the available options and justify their decision.

According to Du Bois-Reymond (1998) for the majority of working-class young people, *not* going to university is part of a 'normal biography'. It is a non-decision. (Similarly for middle class young people *not* going to university is a decision since it goes against expectations.) In studies of mature students' motivations and experience the majority of the respondents who had not entered higher education directly from school described themselves as rolling with the flow of their familial and peer group. For them not going to higher education was a non-decision (Weil 1986, 1988; Fewell and Paterson 1990; Edwards 1990, 1993; Pascal and Cox 1993; West 1996; Merrill 1999; Baxter and Britton 2001; Bowl 2001; Reay 1998, 2001; Reay *et al* 2001).

Hodgson and Spours (1999, 2000) gave a different twist to the notions of *decisions* and *non-decisions*. They found that young people were often unsure and undecided and drifted along not fully engaged in work or in studying for their A-levels and had little sense of purpose to the extent that they often ended up in higher education usually in local post 1992 institutions. The process of allowing oneself to be drifted along indicates that higher education choice and decision-making in this instance are really more like *non-decisions*. Paterson (1997) and Robertson and Hillman (1997) pointed out that students and institutions tended to match each other and were mutually self-reinforcing. Giddens (1994: 90) explained this as “the process of subjection to modes of power coming from the technical control of knowledge based systems can also be internalised by individual actors”. For Ball *et al* (2002) choice is embedded in social class to the extent that perceptions and expectations play a key role in the reproduction of divisions and hierarchies in higher education, largely because certain choices are obvious and others unthinkable. Bourdieu (1990c: 108) describes this as “intentionality without intention” as there is no need to “engage in rational computation in order to reach the goals that best suit their interests”.

A gap in the literature exists because while some researchers have alluded to decisions and non-decisions (Kogan and Boys 1984; Roberts and Higgins 1992; Power *et al* 1998, 1999, 2003; Ball *et al* 2002; Brooks 2003a), only Du-Bois-Reymond (1998) has explicitly theorised about this. However, no researcher has examined how are decisions and non-decisions related to optimal cultural distance and to internalised barriers.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined access and widening participation research by reviewing general trends in access and widening participation research, reviewing the literature around what is known about the selected research objectives. The aim of the research is to develop a comparative conceptual model to explain greater or less likelihood of participation of qualified potential entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups. The literature review of access and widening participation examined what is known about assumptions that shape the decision-making process, life history factors and the interaction of assumptions and life history factors. The literature review

indicated that drivers and barriers have been widely examined, but often in isolation rather than examining both barriers and drivers together. Constructions of higher education have received little attention and so has the impact of public discourses on private narratives. Initial education and familial influences have been extensively investigated, but more in terms of longitudinal studies and experiences of higher education rather than in terms of greater or lesser likelihood of participation by potential entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups.

Most current researchers have dealt with greater and lesser likelihood of participation in higher education by focussing on the socially embedded nature of educational decision-making. Their explanations of working class and the middle class pathways and attitudes have tended to be conceptualised in polarised terms such as outsiders and insiders respectively. The question concerning whether there is a specific point or optimal cultural distance when factors interact in such a way that higher education becomes *for* oneself as opposed to *not* for oneself has not been asked, although the factors make potential entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups more likely to enter higher education has to some extent been examined. The extent to which entering higher education is a decision or a non-decision has received even less attention. Of the many who have investigated higher education choice and why under-represented socio-economic groups are less likely to enter higher education, none has yet examined all the research questions asked by the present research, and none has compared under-represented socio-economic groups and both young and mature potential entrants in England and Scotland.

This chapter was one of two chapters analysing the existing literature. The next chapter will now evaluate sociological theories and conceptual models that have been used to explain social class inequalities in general and social class disparities in higher education participation in particular in order to formulate a tentative conceptual model of non-participation or lesser likelihood of participation by lower socio-economic groups.

4

PRELIMINARY CONCEPTUAL MODEL

The previous chapter examined what was known about the research questions by reviewing the literature on access and widening participation before analysing the literature around the research questions and suggesting new concepts to better understand greater or lesser likelihood of participation by potential entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups.

This chapter is the second of two chapters that examine the existing literature. This chapter is divided according to the following outline:

- general sociological theories
- educationally based conceptual models that have been used to explain social class disparities in education including participation in higher education
- preliminary conceptual model of greater and lesser likelihood of participation by potential entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups

A chapter on sociological theories and conceptual models was necessary as most explanations of greater or lesser likelihood of participation in higher education did not offer conceptual models.

General sociological theories

Theories of structure

Marxism (Marx, Althusser, Bowles and Gintis) and Functionalism (Durkheim and Parsons)

Theories of structure explain social life in terms of economic determinism and the importance of structure over agency. Structures are reproduced because individuals

are 'driven' or 'pushed' by invisible but powerful external societal forces (See Gambetta 1987). Marxism and functionalism are two structuralist theories that explain social inequalities differently. Marxism condemns capitalism for reproducing social inequalities (Marx 1967, 1973; Althusser 1972; Bowles and Gintis 1976). Functionalism justifies capitalism and the reproduction of social class inequalities that are deemed to be the inevitable and necessary outcome of educational selection to maintain the social order (Durkheim 1952, 1982, 1984; Parsons 1949, 1951, 1966, 1971, 1977). The structural approach emphasises an 'objective' macro-social order that largely determines social action (Craib 1992: 55; Sibeon 2004:37). Structuralism neglects agency in the ordinary course of human interaction, but collective awareness and strategic resistance make it possible to transform structures at least in theory (Gramsci 1971, 1985; Apple 1982, 1990, 1993; Bernstein 1971, 1975, 1977).

Theories of action

Weber (dynamic nature of social life) and Blumer, Goffman and Garfinkel (symbolic interactionism)

Primarily in response to structuralism and its neglect of agency and micro-social processes, various theories of action have explained the dynamics of social life by emphasising the power of individuals to shape their environment (Craib 1992; Baert 1998; Jones 2003). As a reaction against structuralism, Weber (1932, 1946, 1947, 1948, 1978) underlined the dynamic nature of social life by emphasising the importance of agency and an individualist and micro-oriented 'bottom-up' approach to the study of social structure. Blumer (1969) and Goffman (1963, 1967, 1969, 1971, 1981, 1983) and Garfinkel (1967, 1974) are theories of action based on symbolic interactionism, which understands social reality as determined by background understanding, shared sense making, taken for granted knowledge and practical reasoning (See Craib 1992; Baert 1998; Jones 2003; Sibeon 2004).

Resistance theory (Gramsci and Freire)

Resistance theory is derived from Gramsci's (1971) ideas on *hegemony* and from Freire's (1970, 1972, 1973, 1994) ideas on *conscientisation*. *Hegemony* underlines how the dominant bourgeois ideology works to distort beliefs to the extent that it is difficult to even think differently, never mind act differently. Following Gramsci, Freire (1970, 1972, 1973, 1994) raised awareness of hegemonic processes through *conscientisation* and successfully challenged bourgeois hegemony in the Brazilian context of agrarian community structures. Resistance theory aims to transform oppressive social structures through notions of critical pedagogy and class inspired transformative action with teachers acting as agents of transformation (Willis 1977; McRobbie 1978; McRobbie and Garber 1982; Griffin 1985; Giroux 1981, 1983, 1992; McLaren 1997). Resistance theory has been criticised for being more about advocating ways to effect social change than explaining social processes and for being based on an assumption of political interest among the working-class in capitalist societies (See Tight 1996; Bullock and Trombley 2000; Sibeon 2004).

Rational Action Theory (Becker, Boudon and Goldthorpe)

Rational action theory is a theory of action derived from human capital theory. It explains social behaviour by assuming that individuals act intentionally and rationally by taking into account risks and probability of outcome (Becker 1976, 1993; Elster 1986; Coleman 1990). While sociology has tended to be framed within a broadly structuralist and largely deterministic paradigm that emphasised the importance of socially constructed pathways (Banks *et al* 1992) government policy has been increasingly framed within a rational action theory or human capital theory, because these theories enable the application of free market principles to the provision of public services (Hodkinson *et al* 1996; Reay 1998, 2001; Dwyer and Wyn 2001; Ball *et al* 2002). Rational Action Theory explains persistent social inequalities as the consequence of intentionality and rationality since each choice is the consequence of an evaluation of the projected future costs and benefits (Boudon 1974, 1982; Goldthorpe 1982, 1995, 1996, 1997, 2000; Breen and Goldthorpe 1997). Rational action theory has been challenged for ignoring structural and social constraints as well as cultural diversity. It does not explain what conditions choice in

a particular way, but assumes preconceived preferences for different social classes. Rational action theory tends to attribute rationality after the event, by looking at patterns from quantitative research and explaining motivations retrospectively (Baert 1998; Craib 1992; Jones 2003; Sibeon 2004)

Theories attempting to combine action and structure

Theories of structure assume that life chances can be predicted according to social class and largely denies the freedom or agency of actors. Structuralist models have been challenged for failing to recognise the dynamic nature of social processes itself and the role of micro-processes (Craib 1992; Baert 1998; Jones 2003; Sibeon 2004). Theories of action presume that individuals are capable of reflecting and understanding their motivations and the consequences of their actions and that life chances need not be predictable according to class, race and gender and other socio-cultural factors. Theories of action have been challenged for overestimating the freedom or agency of actors and failing to recognise the importance of structures and the structural nature of the education process itself (Craib 1992; Baert 1998; Jones 2003; Sibeon 2004). Various theorists such as Weber, Elias, Foucault, Habermas, Giddens, and Bhaksar have attempted with various degrees of success to efface the opposition between macro and micro and between structure and agency.

Weber and social closure

Although his early work emphasised agency, Weber (1946, 1947, 1948, 1978, 2001) was empirically open to the possibility that social phenomena may have a structural basis. In his theory of social closure, he suggests that society is stable because individuals act rationally whether rationality is traditional, affective, based on values or based on practical considerations. While the Weberian model of *social closure* emphasises the importance of structure and power relations, these are understood as empowering some and constraining others. The model underlined the importance of unintentionally buying into unwritten rules, which ultimately enable dominant groups to rely on unwritten structures and values to defend their interests and exclude alternative claims (Weber 1978).

Elias

Elias (1956, 1991, 1983, 1994) emphasises the importance of the interdependence of human beings whose identity only exists as part of their social networks. Elias also underlines the unplanned and unintended outcome of the interweaving of intentional human actions and that “power fluctuates within social networks through the interweaving of countless individual interests and intention” (Elias 1994: 389) and that the less powerful groups also exercise power on those with greater apparent power. Nonetheless, opportunities to exercise agency “are prescribed and limited by the specific structure of society and the nature of the functions the people exercise within it” (Elias 1983: 265).

Postmodernism

Postmodernist and poststructuralist perspectives (Barthes 1957; Baudrillard 1988; Lyotard 1984; Derrida 1976, 1996; Foucault 1962, 1967, 1970, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1977, 1980, 1982, 1985, 1986, 1988) suggest that structures such as class are discursive representations of life and not real life. Foucault (1980) argues that knowledge is produced by discourse about things and not by the things themselves. Power operates within institutional apparatus and techniques (discourses, institutions, laws, regulations, administrative arrangements, educational research, sociological and philosophic propositions), not necessarily from top down, but by circulating in such a way that people are in turn oppressors and oppressed. Foucault acknowledges that social actors have a certain amount of reflexive awareness but are guided by dominant discourses to think in particular ways. Postmodernists have been criticised for unwittingly reinforcing the structure side of the debate (Baert 1998, Hall 2001; Jones 2003).

Habermas, Bhaksar and Giddens

Habermas (1986, 1987) argues that distorted communication develops as part of psychological repression, repressive societal forces and ideological hegemony. These have limited the inner self, social interactions, imagination and options for people in

such a way that certain forms of communication are excluded or disallowed. Habermas overemphasises macro-structural phenomena but neglects the institutional dimension despite the fact that his theory attempted to combine a theory of action with a deterministic systems theory (Craib 1992; Jones 2003).

Bhaksar (1978) in his realist theory of social science and *transformational model of social action* rejects post-modernism as he attempts to resolve the opposition of agency and structure, individual and society, objectivism and subjectivism. His transformative model of social action (like the theory of structuration) asserts that structures are constraining, enabling and transformed by action. Bhaksar believes that individuals have tacit and semi-tacit knowledge concerning the rules of social life [See chapter 9 page pages 334-335 for full definition of tacit and semi-tacit knowledge]. Bhaksar does not think that individuals are able to stand back from structures and develop discursive knowledge regarding previously tacit rules and assumptions (Baert 1998; Potter 2000).

Giddens (1976, 1977, 1979, 1984, 1987, 1990, 1991, 1993, 1994, 1998, 2000) also rejects post-modernist ideas. In his *theory of structuration* he attempts to reconcile opposite views within the agency/structure debate by emphasising the interplay between agency and structure. He asserts that social structures are not external to individuals, but exist through the activities of individuals (Stones 1998; Baert 1998). Choices and decisions are made in specific structural circumstances and no structures can exist, except as a consequence of intentional action. Structures both constrain and enable as they provide opportunities and limitations. Agency can redefine and transform structures. Structures are both reproduced and changed. This view assumes a high degree of self-awareness on the part of the individual (Hughes 1998; Stones 1998). According to Giddens (1984, 1991, 1994) the importance of *reflexivity* is a characteristic of contemporary society. Giddens saw *reflexivity* as a search for security in the absence of traditional external and culturally defined signposts such as marriage, the traditional family and traditional employment structures. A consequence of reflexivity is greater personal uncertainty, the rise of therapy and the self revealed through consumerism as material elements become expressions of identity and physical appearance becomes emblematic of our sense of self (Baert 1998; Sibeon 2004).

Theories attempting to combine action and structure have been criticised for being confused and self-contradictory, but more often for emphasising either agency at the expense of structure or structure at the expense of agency and hence turning into either theories of action or theories of structure (Hughes 1998; Stones 1998; Baert 1998; Craib 1992; Jones 2003; Sibeon 2004).

Educationally based conceptual models

Jackson and the *hidden curriculum*

Jackson (1968, 1971) first coined the term of *hidden curriculum* to explain the unofficial three Rs of rules, regulations and routines that must be learnt by pupils in order to survive comfortably in most classrooms. The hidden curriculum draws attention to the fact that pupils learn things that are not actually directly taught and that schools do more than simply transmit an approved body of knowledge. They also transmit implicit messages arising from the structure of schooling. Differential achievement can be explained because education is a process of socialisation or socialising practices that pass on norms and values and maintain cultural reproduction.

Bowles and Gintis (1976) and Apple (1982, 1990, 1993) suggest that the hidden curriculum plays a key role in helping cultural reproduction and that schools give more encouragement to those with more cultural resources. Some particular types of schools such as small schools, independent and grammar schools can help pupils acquire cultural resources (Lindsay 1982; Darling-Hammond 1997; Power *et al* 2003). Attitudes engendered by most schools correspond directly to the social stratification in a capitalist society and constitute an attitudinal preparation for life in a socially stratified society. Bernstein (1971, 1975, 1977) also theorises about the fact that classroom learning is interactive and the language used in the classroom draws unevenly from the sociolinguistic and socio-cultural experiences of children. He suggests that restricted and elaborate linguistic codes were closely related to social class and schools were deemed to favour pupils who possessed an elaborate code which demonstrated the effect of invisible pedagogies that rest upon implicit hierarchies that do not require legitimation by explicit values.

Lareau (1981) set out to investigate the underlying mechanisms of the *hidden curriculum* or the hidden curriculum in action. She compared parental attitudes and assumptions with those of school and teachers. She found that school and middle class assumptions matched closely. Both parents and teachers expected that pupils would get parental help to do their homework. Working-class parents assumed their child could do their homework on their own since they had been told at school by their teacher how to do it. Middle class parents who had the same or better qualifications than teachers saw education as shared enterprise while those working-class parents who had fewer educational qualifications than teachers turned over the responsibility to the school. She also found that working-class parents had limited information about school, their child's experience and general interactions while at school. Middle class parents gained a lot of information from their child and from other middle class parents with whom they socialised while working class parents socialised with mainly with their family. Middle class patterns of behaviour were more congruent with teachers' views of appropriate behaviour. Educational values and aspirations were similar although working-class parents had lower expectation of success. West *et al* (1998) came to similar conclusions. They found that 96% of parents in private schools and 71% of parents in state schools wanted their child to stay on after 16 and 85% of parents in private schools against 73% of parents in state schools wanted their child to go to higher education. More parents in state schools thought their child would get less than 6 GCSEs.

To summarise, the hidden curriculum assumes that children from higher social classes are more familiar with, or culturally closer, to linguistic structures, authority patterns, norms and values and to the curriculum. This facilitates their adjustment to the culture of the school in terms of rules, regulations and routines and helps them achieving better qualifications than children from less affluent backgrounds.

Foucault and *disciplinary power* and *finely graded hierarchy*

According to Foucault (1977: 222) at a time when an egalitarian system of human rights in all domains is increasingly guaranteed through legislation, the systems of the micro-power by which the apparatus of *disciplinary power* operates are essentially "non-egalitarian and asymmetrical". Foucault (1977: 184) considers

school and examinations as an apparatus of disciplinary power because they combine “the techniques of an observing hierarchy and those of normalising judgement” (Foucault 1977: 184). School evaluations and examinations place individuals at what they perceive to be a particular point on a *finely graded hierarchy* that becomes part of their identity. This shapes their expectations, and in a meritocratic system should correspond to that of ability and effort, but in fact tends to closely match established social hierarchies.

Tebutt (1997), Bourdieu (1990b), Ball *et al* (2002) and Power *et al* (1998, 1999, 2003) showed *disciplinary power* and *finely graded hierarchies* in action. Tebutt (1997: 45) suggested that expectations are adjusted to what is seen as appropriate and that students do not wish to be in competition with those whose aptitude or social class is very much greater than their own. Hence, a major factor in the decision-making process was “a desire to be a member of a relatively homogenous group”. (Bourdieu 1990b: 64-65) drew attention to the “class strategies” of middle-class parents “to achieve a class fit between the *habitus* of home and institution and avoid social mixing”. Ball *et al* (2002) pointed out the continued dominance of particular elite routes by the wealthy middle classes which ensured the reproduction of class privilege within an expanded system of elite universities that continue to play a fundamental part in facilitating access to the sort of educational process which influences entry to elite positions. Power *et al* (2003) highlighted that the less wealthy middle class entrants were not willing to consider post-1992 institutions but Oxbridge was often seen as unattainable or inappropriate for them: Bourdieu (1990b), Ball *et al* (2002) and Power *et al* (1998, 1999, 2003) underlined the importance of *disciplinary power* and *finely graded hierarchies* seen by the fact that by the time they embark upon the higher educational decision-making process, young people already have an acute awareness of issues of similarity and difference and how these relate to educational choices and selection.

Foucault’s concepts of concepts of *disciplinary power* and *finely graded hierarchy* are also echoed by Giddens (1994: 90) who asserts that “the process of subjection to modes of power coming from the technical control of knowledge based systems can be internalised by individual actors” to the extent that school experience serves to maintain social class divisions by making pupils and hence potential entrants to higher education derive their sense of identity in terms of their place on the finely

graded hierarchy of academic success or failure (See Jackson 1968, 1971; Bourdieu 1971, 1974, 1975, 1976, 1977a, 1977b, 1977c, 1979, 1984, 1988, 1989, 1990b, 1993b, 1997; 1998a, Bourdieu and Passeron 1968, 1970, 1977, 1979).

Bourdieu and *habitus*, *practice*, *field* and *cultural capital*

Bourdieu rejects the opposition of structure and action and focuses instead on the connection between objectivism and subjectivism. Objectivism concerns the underlying structures independent of people's knowledge. Subjectivism concerns the way people understand and conceptualise the world and act in accordance with it (Bourdieu 1977a, 1977b, 1990c).

In order to comprehend more fully the concepts of objectivism and subjectivism, Bourdieu utilises a trio of original conceptual instruments, which are *practice*, *field* and *habitus* (Bourdieu 1977a). Practices are our day-to-day actions, the things we do automatically without even thinking about them, based on taken for granted assumptions that go beyond reflection. Practices are not objectively determined or the product of freewill, but the consequence of the interplay between objective and subjective social realities. Practice represents agency and structure in the field, which is where the practice takes place (Bourdieu 1977a). A field is thus a structured system of power relations and social positions occupied by individuals or institutions. There is a field for every different social circumstance and they all have different rules. Fields change over time and have the capacity to insulate themselves from external influences and uphold their own criteria against those of intruding fields. Positions in the field direct individuals towards particular patterns of conduct (Bourdieu 1977a). Finally, there is *habitus*, the way that we learn the rules and the way they affect us. *Habitus* is a system of deeply ingrained structured and structuring attitudinal dispositions subconsciously acquired from early socio-cultural experiences and social conditionings (Bourdieu 1977a, 1990c). These dispositions structure practice from within, because they are acquired through the internalisation of external constraints and possibilities that dictate thinking and doing, how we perceive the world and act in the world (Bourdieu 1977a). The layering of the schemata that compose the dispositions of *habitus* display various degrees of integration. However, *habitus* is not only a product of early influences and

experiences, but it is also subject to transformations brought about by social forces and later experiences. For example the *habitus* of those who are upwardly mobile is segmented and conflictive (Bourdieu 1990b). Together *habitus*, practice and field explain both reproduction and transformation. *Habitus* mediates between structure and agency and provides the ground for agency within a limited area of choice. This hypothetical escape from structural determinism happens when discordance occurs between *habitus* and field leading to structural change by transformation of *habitus* (Bourdieu 1977a, 1977b).

Habitus, practice and field are also related to forms of capital, which are goods and resources within a particular field. Bourdieu distinguishes four types of capital: economic, social, symbolic and cultural (Bourdieu 1997). Broadly speaking, economic capital is related to money, social capital to whom you know, for example your friendship group(s) and symbolic capital has to do with honour and prestige, for example how one is considered by others which is closely associated with occupational and educational status (Bourdieu 1997). Bourdieu particularly underlines the importance of cultural capital or broadly speaking educational credentials and familiarity with bourgeois culture (Bourdieu 1976, 1977a). Bourdieu came up with the idea of goods and resources within the educational field or *cultural capital* to explain why, despite an alleged academic meritocratic system, a social hierarchy of academic achievement at all levels of education was maintained (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). Cultural capital is linked to *habitus*, social class, parental occupation and education, in terms of language, authority and curriculum. Middle class individuals are already familiar with these aspects of education and because of their greater cultural capital (Bourdieu 1977a, Bourdieu and Passeron 1977, 1979; Bourdieu 1990a, 1990b, 1993a).

Cultural capital is unequally distributed but its possession is a key factor of life chances, all the more powerful because its transmission is largely hidden (Bourdieu 1997). Schools draw unevenly on cultural capital and subtle mechanisms ensure cultural reproduction through the official and hidden curriculum (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977, 1979). Social inequalities therefore persist overall as does the superiority of the culture that sets the framework for a particular field (Bourdieu 1966, 1971, 1974, 1976, 1977a, 1979, 1984, 1997, 1998a). If someone from a less privileged background enters into the struggle to enhance social mobility, then the

differences in *habitus*, practice and amount of various forms of capital within the field ensure an unequal struggle. The unequal outcome of the unequal struggle is made even more unequal because in order to compete in the field an individual is often forced to deny his or her own *habitus* because he or she has to adjust culturally to the institutional *habitus* causing tensions and uncertainty (Bourdieu 1997: 280).

Bourdieu's (1984) concepts of *judgement*, *classification* and *distinction* support his work on habitus, practice, field and forms of capital. Social existence implies hierarchies and social classifications, which constitute a central aspect of the struggle between social classes and social class fractions (See Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Individuals and groups adjust to a perceived socio-cultural hierarchy through the internalisation of the expectations about the future articulated explicitly or implicitly by significant others and through institutional *habitus*. Each field or institutional *habitus* has rules, values and assumptions that are only ever half-articulated and are implicit rather than explicit (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Those from privileged background have values and assumptions and behaviour that help them benefit most from interacting with institutional *habitus* (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). The familial *habitus* of the middle-class students "exerts a regulative influence on higher education decision-making because of the threat of downward social mobility or loss of status" (Bourdieu (1988: 163). The *habitus* of the working class exerts an opposite influence because they fear losing family and friends if they go to higher education. Despite new policies, trans-generational ways of thinking persist, advantaging some and disadvantaging others (Bourdieu 1988).

Bourdieu has been criticised for being overly deterministic and for not sufficiently explaining the ways in which *habitus* might be changed by circumstances (See Giroux 1983; Brown 1987; Jones 2003; Jenkins 2002, Brooks 2003a; Sibeon 2004). According to Brown and Lauder (1997) Bourdieu has exaggerated the inevitability of cultural reproduction because there is not only a substantial amount of both upward and downward mobility (Jackson and Marsden 1966; Goldthorpe 1980; Fielding 1995), but also because *habitus* and cultural capital contradict the changing models of managerial and professional competence (Brown and Lauder 1996). *Habitus* has been used both to argue that it allowed for agency and to claim that it does not explain changes in *habitus*. Jenkins (1992) and Brooks (2003a) argued that Bourdieu does not appropriately explain changes in *habitus* or deliberate decisions to improve

socio-cultural status. Stuart Wells (1997) demonstrated that *habitus* does account for human agency because it explains how individuals from similar backgrounds could react differently when they were offered the opportunity to leave their neighbourhood comprehensive to attend a suburban grammar school. Some young people did not take up the opportunity, some took it but they dropped out after a few weeks and some stayed on. The key difference was in their level of internalisation of the discourse of individualism and educational achievement, which also correlated to socio-economic and socio-cultural variables, such as parental education and parental involvement.

More importantly critics also pointed out that it is difficult to know where to place conscious deliberation and awareness within Bourdieu's conceptual model (See Jones 2003; Jenkins 2002 Brooks 2003a; Sibeon 2004). For his part, Bourdieu (1977a, 1990c) acknowledges that, although fluid, *habitus* had mainly a reproductive role, at times of crisis, when a significant adjustment between objective and subjective structures may be needed, *habitus* might have a transformative role. Unlike Giddens (1984, 1991), Bourdieu (1977a, 1990c) does not address how the mostly tacit and semi-tacit knowledge associated with practice and *habitus* can be turned into discursive knowledge [See chapter 9 page pages 333-334 for discussion on practical and discursive consciousness and 334-335 for full definition of tacit and semi-tacit knowledge]. For Bourdieu reflexivity, calculative intentionality and rationality are not particularly important since individuals are heavily circumscribed by their *habitus*, hence social behaviour is the consequence of *habitus* and practical consciousness, rather than discursive consciousness and consciously learned rules and principles (Bourdieu 1977a).

Gorard, Rees and Fevre and *familial learning trajectories*

Gorard *et al* (1997, 1998, 1999a, 1999b), Fevre *et al* (1999) and Rees *et al* (1997) based their research from a large study that collected structured interviews through a door-to-door survey of a systematic stratified sample of 1,104 outlines of life histories from people aged 15-65 in industrial South Wales. Although they theorised about greater or lesser likelihood of participation in lifelong learning rather than in higher education, their framework is nonetheless useful in the present research.

Drawing on Bourdieuan *habitus* and cultural capital, Gorard *et al* (1997, 1998, 1999a, 1999b), Fevre *et al* (1999) and Rees *et al* (1997) built on Halsey *et al* 1980; Bynner *et al* (1992) Furlong (1992) and Banks *et al* (1992). In particular, they proposed the idea of predictable career trajectories that could be mapped according to socio-cultural factors of sex, class, race, education, labour market, geography and personal history. They suggest that individual autonomy is bounded by external structural and social constraints mediated by internalised views of value and availability of opportunities understood as culturally permissible variations within a preset trajectory. They found that individual participation trajectories remained very similar within families. Gorard *et al* (1997, 1999a) identified five types of familial learning trajectories: disaffected, delayed, immature, transitional, lifetime. These trajectories are derived from factors of gender, age, place of birth, family religion, parents' occupation and education and the type of school attended. For example a man who attended grammar school and passed 7 O levels and whose father was a dentist has 99% probability of participating in lifelong learning and a woman who attended a comprehensive school and gained no qualifications with her father a security guard had 1% probability. Lifetime learners were also more likely to be born outside of where they live, have older parents of a higher social class and with better educational qualifications.

Gorard *et al* (1997, 1998, 1999a, 1999b), Fevre *et al* (1999) and Rees *et al* (1997) concluded that key factors were early familial influences and initial education. The latter is a good indicator of the shape of the learning trajectory but this was partly predicable because social class is closely correlated to educational achievement. Later determinants are social class, the influence of siblings, partner, children, leisure interests, motivation and social mobility, hence the attitude to learning is more important than the structural and social factors. The main barrier to participation in lifelong learning was found to be a psychological barrier to learning because of the internalisation of a sense of educational failure correlated to academic achievement and socio-cultural factors. Gorard *et al* (1997, 1998, 1999a, 1999b), Fevre *et al* (1999) and Rees *et al* (1997) explained that motivation and availability of opportunity were needed for participation, but that many people were not aware of opportunities changing or if aware then they evaluated the change using obsolete criteria that increased the likelihood of educational profiles being handed down over generations through a process of intergenerational familial learning trajectories.

Finally, they pointed out that *cultural shifts* or collective changes in *habitus* could occur when groups became participants in education for ideological or political reasons in order to raise their collective status, as was the case with the growth of worker education in South Wales at the end of the 19th century.

Du Bois-Reymond and *intergenerational family scripts* and *decisions* and *non-decisions*

Also broadly drawing on Bourdieuan concepts of *habitus* and cultural capital, Du Bois-Reymond (1998) uses the concepts of *normal* and *choice* biographies and *intergenerational family scripts* and *decisions* and *non-decisions* to explain greater and lesser likelihood of participation. Middle class potential entrants and students have 'normal' biographies and talk in terms of higher education as automatic, taken for granted, always assumed, inevitable step or the natural thing to do. Their narratives are characterised by linear, anticipated and predictable, unreflexive transitions talked about using transgenerational family scripts of closed narratives. For them going to higher education is a non-decision. Working-class potential entrants and students talk in more open narrative forms that are more fragmentary, disjointed and discontinuous because they have no trans-generational family script to draw from and hence are forced to reflect on the available options and justify their decisions, at least to themselves and sometimes to others. For them going to higher education is a deliberate decision.

Hodgson and Spours (1999, 2000) used non-decision in a different way from Du Bois Reymond (1998). Young working class people are often undecided and go with the flow, neither fully engaged in work nor in studying for their A-levels. They have little sense of purpose and they often drift into higher education, usually in local post 1992 institutions. They make non-decisions because they just end up there to see what it is like. They have little anxiety because they leave higher education if they do not like it or if it is too difficult.

Hodkinson and Sparkes *careership, horizons for action and pragmatically rational decision-making*

Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) conceptual model of careership and pragmatically rational decision-making is the most elaborate and sophisticated attempt at a conceptual model since Bourdieu. Although Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) theorised about career decision making of young people rather than greater or lesser likelihood of participation in higher education, their framework is nonetheless useful in the present research. Their conceptual model is derived from a larger study using life histories to investigate career decision among young people in the context of a pilot study of a voucher scheme for Youth [Training] Credits (See also Hodkinson and Sparkes 1993, 1994, 1995a, 1995b; Hodkinson and Hodkinson 1995; Hodkinson 1996; Hodkinson *et al* 1996; Hodkinson and Sparkes 1996). Their model attempts to incorporate a human capital theory/rational action theory approach with the Bourdieuan conceptual model of cultural capital and *habitus* (See Bourdieu 1977a, 1977c, 1984, 1990a, 1990b, 1990c, 1993a, 1997 and Bourdieu and Passeron 1975, 1977, 1979) and the theory of structuration (See Giddens 1984, 1987, 1990, 1991).

Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) conceptual model has three integrated or inter-related dimensions: firstly, a pragmatically oriented rational decision making located within the *habitus*; secondly, choices as interactions within a field relating to unequal resources each possesses; and thirdly, the location of decision within the partly unpredictable life course pattern of interlinked turning-points and routines (See Strauss 1962 and Denzin 1989). Turning points can be self-initiated or forced or planned and expected or only identified in hindsight. The former are interspersed with periods of routine, which can be confirmatory [matched decision], contradictory [does not match decision], socialising [acceptance of identity not intended], dislocating [hate identity] or evolutionary [socialising over long period]. Career decisions are made within *horizons for action* (See Hodkinson *et al* 1996), which are the consequence of educational qualifications and experience, *habitus*, labour market *opportunity structures* (See Roberts 1968). *Horizons for action* are segmented (as the whole range of options cannot be considered) in terms of social class, ethnicity, gender, geography and the nature of labour market (middle class children in some parts of England are less fortunate than working-class children – see Ashton and Maguire 1986; Ashton *et al* 1986, 1988; Hodgson and Spours 1999, 2000).

Educational decisions are context-related, located in the familiar and the known and linked to family background and life history. The decisions are often opportunistic, being based on fortuitous contacts and experiences. Decisions are neither technically rational nor irrational. Rather, they are only partly rational, being also influenced by feelings and emotions, which often involves making the best of the only real option rather than choosing between many possible options. Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) suggest that within *horizons for actions* young people make *pragmatically rational decisions* either or both through deliberate discursive consciousness (See Giddens 1984) or unconsciously through Bourdieuan practical consciousness or tacit and semi-tacit knowledge (Bourdieu 2000).

Bloomer (2001) used Bourdieuan *habitus* and symbolic interactionism (Blumer (1969; Goffman 1963, 1967, 1969, 1971, 1981, 1983; Garfinkel 1967, 1974) to build on Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) model of careership. Bloomer (2001) underlined the importance of *backgrounding* and *foregrounding* whereby decisions were taken within a context of continually changing configurations of meanings, interests, values and perceptions which could pass from the foreground to the background and vice versa. These continually changing configurations shape and re-shape *horizons for action* in ways that are subtle, irregular, unpredictable and multi-dimensional (Hodkinson *et al* 1996).

Hatcher (1998), Reay (1998, 2001), Power *et al* (1998, 1999, 2003) and Ball *et al* (2000, 2002) used Bourdieuan conceptual model of *habitus* as well as Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) conceptual model of *careership*. Ball *et al* (2002) and Reay (1998, 2001) found that the perceptions, distinctions and choices of entrants and potential entrants to higher education institutions reproduced the divisions and hierarchies in higher education. Power *et al* (1998, 1999, 2003) suggested that academically able working-class potential entrants are more likely to have better A-levels, go to university and go to a better university if they attend an independent school, and to a lesser extent to a grammar school, rather than their local comprehensive school. Hatcher (1998) underlined the important role of non-rational aspects of choice. Young and mature potential entrants did not simply weigh courses of action in terms of their utility and cost effectiveness in achieving a desired goal, they evaluate the desired goals themselves in relation to a framework of personal values not conceptualised only in terms of their economic usefulness. Hatcher (1998), Reay

(1998, 2001), Power *et al* (1998, 1999, 2003) and Ball *et al* (2000, 2002) confirmed Bourdieu's conceptual model of *habitus* and cultural capital and Hodgkinson and Sparkes (1997) conceptual model of careership, but rejected human capital theory to explain greater and lesser likelihood of participation.

Hodgkinson and Sparkes (1997) conceptual model of career decision-making by young people is cogently argued and emphasised both the rational and non-rational aspect of choice. However, their model is not totally satisfactory. A main problem with their conceptual model is that they claim that the type of decisions made and how they are made are directly derived from *habitus*. However, they also claim that "at a turning point a person goes through a significant transformation of identity and "the *habitus* of the person is changed" (Hodgkinson and Sparkes 1997: 39), either progressively or dramatically, depending on how well the decision matches the expected decision for a particular type of *habitus*. Yet, it is not clear whether and how at a turning point, which is when the *habitus* and hence identity is deemed to have suddenly or progressively changed, *habitus* and hence identity is changed as a reason *for* or a consequence *of* a turning point. In other words, it is not clear whether a change of *habitus* and hence identity takes place before or after having made a decision within a turning point. It is also not clear how in a case of a sudden change of *habitus* within a turning point, knowledge is transferred from practical consciousness to discursive consciousness. The present conceptual model will therefore attempt to clarify this issue by taking into account the extent to which decisions and non-decisions are made within practical or discursive consciousness.

Preliminary conceptual model

The importance of Bourdieu

Unlike many researcher and policy analysts, policy makers and economists have not used Bourdieu's conceptual model of *habitus* and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1966, 1971, 1974, 1975, 1976, 1977a, 1977b, 1977c, 1979, 1984, 1987, 1988, 1990a, 1990b, 1990c, 1993a, 1993b, 1997, 2000; Bourdieu and Passeron 1970, 1977, 1979). Instead they have used rational action theory and human capital theory (Boudon 1974, 1982; Becker 1976, 1993; Elster 1986; Goldthorpe 1982, 1995, 1996, 1997,

2000; Breen and Goldthorpe 1997). Human capital theory and rational action theory were adopted because they link economic growth a high participation rate in higher education. These economically based models presuppose that individuals participate in higher education to gain qualifications in order to maximise their future income and status. Intentionality and rationality are assumed and participation is understood as the consequence of an evaluation of the projected future costs and benefits. Non-participation and inequalities of participation are explained in terms of too high a cost relative to available resources.

Many researchers, if not most researchers, and all the educationally based conceptual models mentioned in this chapter, are strongly related to Bourdieu's conceptual model of *habitus* and cultural capital. Jackson's (1968, 1971) *hidden curriculum* is very similar to *cultural capital* and *habitus* taken together and to Foucault's (1972, 1977) *disciplinary power*, whereas Foucault's (1972, 1977) *finely graded hierarchy* closely matches Bourdieu's *judgement, classification and distinction*. These two models also match Weber's (1946, 2001) theory of *social closure*. Also, Gorard *et al* (1997, 1998, 1999a, 1999b), Fevre *et al* (1999) and Rees *et al* (1997) concept of *familial learning trajectories* and Du Bois-Reymond (1998) *family scripts* closely resemble familial *habitus*. Furthermore, Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) *careership* attempted to merge *habitus*, and Boudon's (1974) and Goldthorpe's (1995, 1996, 1997) human capital theory. Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) emphasise *pragmatically rational decisions* within *horizons of action*, and hence they ultimately reject rational action theory for assuming intentionality, rationality and equality of choice within a level playing field because of the importance of the non-rational aspect of choice.

Bourdieu (2000) himself rejects human capital theory as an explanatory model because it assumes a level playing field and ignores individual context. For him "the apparent equality of rational action theory legitimates and obscures the effects of real inequality" (Bourdieu 2000: 76). Thus, a key explanation of persistent social class inequalities in higher education participation is that choice is unequal and embedded in socio-cultural *habitus* and material, discursive and psychological class differences. Young and mature potential entrants do not simply weigh courses of action in terms of their utility and cost effectiveness in achieving a desired goal, they evaluate the desired goals in relation to a framework of personal values not always understood in terms of their usefulness (See Heathfield and Wakeford 1991; Edwards 1993; West

1996; Savage and Butler 1995; Skeggs 1997; Reay 1998, 2001; Archer and Hutchings 2000; Hutchings and Archer 2001; Reay *et al* 2001, 2002; Davies *et al* 2002; Marks *et al* 2003). Whether the Bourdieuan conceptual model is ultimately more persuasive than rational action theory is something the present empirical investigation might help to determinate.

Bourdieu's main contribution to the sociology of education is the idea that *habitus* is both durable and can adjust to external socio-cultural constraints or social classes and the idea that the practical sense or tacit and taken-for-granted-knowledge of individuals and groups unintentionally reproduces social class inequalities (Bourdieu 1966, 1971, 1974, 1976, 1977c, 1984, 1990a, 1990b, 1990c, 1997, 2000). The Bourdieuan conceptual model has been extensively drawn upon and referred to by other researchers, because it provides the best explanatory mechanisms for the reproduction of social class inequality in higher education. His explanations of the role of agency in changes in *habitus* have been both defended (Stuart Wells 1997) and criticised (Jenkins 1992). There is an unresolved difference between Giddens and Bourdieu concerning agency. Giddens (1984, 1991) argues that agency can transform structures and that this implies reflexivity which in turn assumes a high degree of individual self-awareness. Jenkins (1992) and Brooks (2003a) criticised Bourdieu for emphasising the importance of practical consciousness, whereby decisions are made with little or no reflexivity, thus neglecting the possibility that, as claimed by Giddens (1984, 1991), decisions imply reflexivity and discursive consciousness. The present conceptual model will thus attempt to clarify this controversy by taking into account the extent to which decisions and non-decisions are made within practical or discursive consciousness.

Cultural distance, internalised barriers and decisions and non-decisions

As seen in the previous chapter a number of researchers have emphasised the importance of *internalised barriers* in greater or lesser likelihood of participation (See Robbins 1963, Bourdieu and Passeron 1975, 1977; Bourdieu 1979, 1984; 1990c, 1993b, 2000; Dearing 1997; Raab 1998; Lynch and O'Riordan 1998; Reay 1998, 2001; Tett 1999, 2004; Power *et al* 1998, 1999, 2003). Objective limits

“become transformed into practical anticipation of objective limits and lead to self-exclusion from places where the self is excluded” (Bourdieu 1984: 471). Choices are governed “by what is within reach and reasonable to expect” (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977: 226). Anxiety about the future is typical of students who have come from “the social strata furthest away from academic culture and who are condemned to experience that culture as unreal” (Bourdieu and Passeron 1975: 53). Only Du Bois-Reymond (1998) discussed *decisions* and *non-decisions* although Bourdieu (1979, 1990c, 1993), Ball *et al* (2002) and Brooks (2003a) also alluded to them. Although access and widening participation research has made numerous references to insiders and outsiders to higher education (See Reay 1998; Lynch and O’Riordan 1998; Archer and Hutchings 2000; Ball *et al* 2002), only Tett (1999) and Raab (1998) have used the terms *internalised barriers* and *cultural distance*. However, neither the literature nor the conceptual models reviewed have examined *optimal cultural distance*, a hypothetical specific point when various factors interact in such a way as higher education becomes *for* oneself as opposed to *not* for oneself, still less what factors might make potential entrants more likely to reach this point. Finally, none of the previous conceptual models were based on research examining primarily under-represented socio-economic groups and comparing the English and Scottish context.

Because of gaps in the literature highlighted in the previous chapter and in this chapter, the key concepts of *optimal cultural distance*, *internalised barriers* and *decisions and non-decisions* have been selected as the theoretical framework for the conceptual model of greater or lesser likelihood of participation by potential entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups. *Cultural distance* was chosen rather than *cultural proximity* because the present conceptual model focuses on under-represented socio-economic groups. *Cultural distance* is derived from Bourdieu’s *cultural capital* and *habitus*, Foucault’s *finely graded hierarchies* and Jackson’s *hidden curriculum* as well as from references to insider and outsider in much of the research on higher education decision-making. Gambetta (1987: 170-171) argues that educational choice is the result of “what one can do, what one wants to do and indirectly of the conditions that shape preferences and intentions which are powerful but invisible societal forces, all the more powerful because invisible”, that shape values and assumptions. Thus, if all actions are guided by internalised representations, then that all actions are ultimately guided by internalised barriers/drivers and hence by cultural distance/proximity to higher education.

Constructing a preliminary conceptual model

Measurable, less measurable and other significant key variables linked to participation in higher education

Quantitative research about trends and patterns of participation correlates key variables, such as social class, sex, ethnicity, age, disability and geographical location to predict greater and lesser likelihood of participation in higher education (See Banks *et al* 1992; Parry 1997; Paterson 1997; HEFCE 1997; SHEFC 1998; Tonks 1998; Tonks and Farr 1999; Farr 2001; SHEFC 2004; HEFCE 2005 as well as the yearly HESA and UCAS publications). Table 4.1 below shows the most significant key variables derived from such research.

Table 4.1 *Most important measurable key variables derived from the literature*

<div>D1</div>	Social class
	Educational qualifications
	Sex
	Parental occupation
	Post code
	Ethnicity
	Disability
	Age
	Region/country

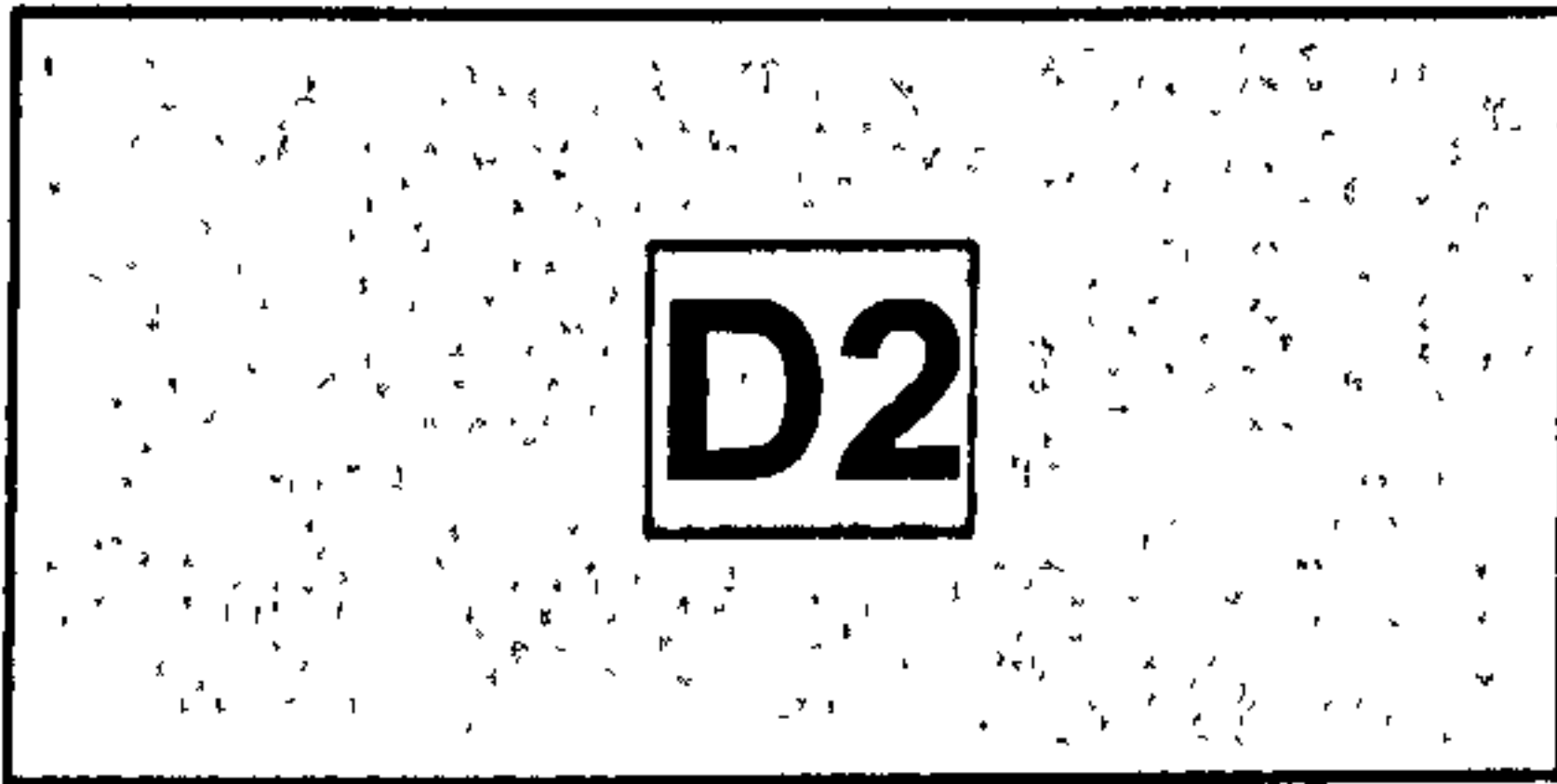
Source: summary of the above-mentioned research on measurable key variables

Highlighted in grey in the above table 4.1 are the most important key variables linked to likelihood of having a prime education trajectory of participation in higher education immediately after leaving school or after one gap year (CVCP 1998; Power *et al* 1999, 2003; Gorard and Selwyn 2005; HEFCE 2005 *inter alia*). This means that a potential entrant from social class 1 is four and five times more likely to enter higher education than a potential entrant from social class 3m and 5 respectively (Robertson and Hillman 1997; Ball *et al* 2002). Taken together these variables can predict initial cultural distance or D1.

In addition to key variables under D1, researchers have also underlined the importance of mother’s educational qualifications and type of school attended (Power *et al* 1999, 2003; Johnston *et al* 1999; Tinklin 2000), father’s educational

qualifications (Gorard and Selwyn 2005; HEFCE 2005), parliamentary constituency and electoral ward (HEFCE 2005) These additional measurable key variables are outlined in table 4.2 below where the most important variables are highlighted in grey.

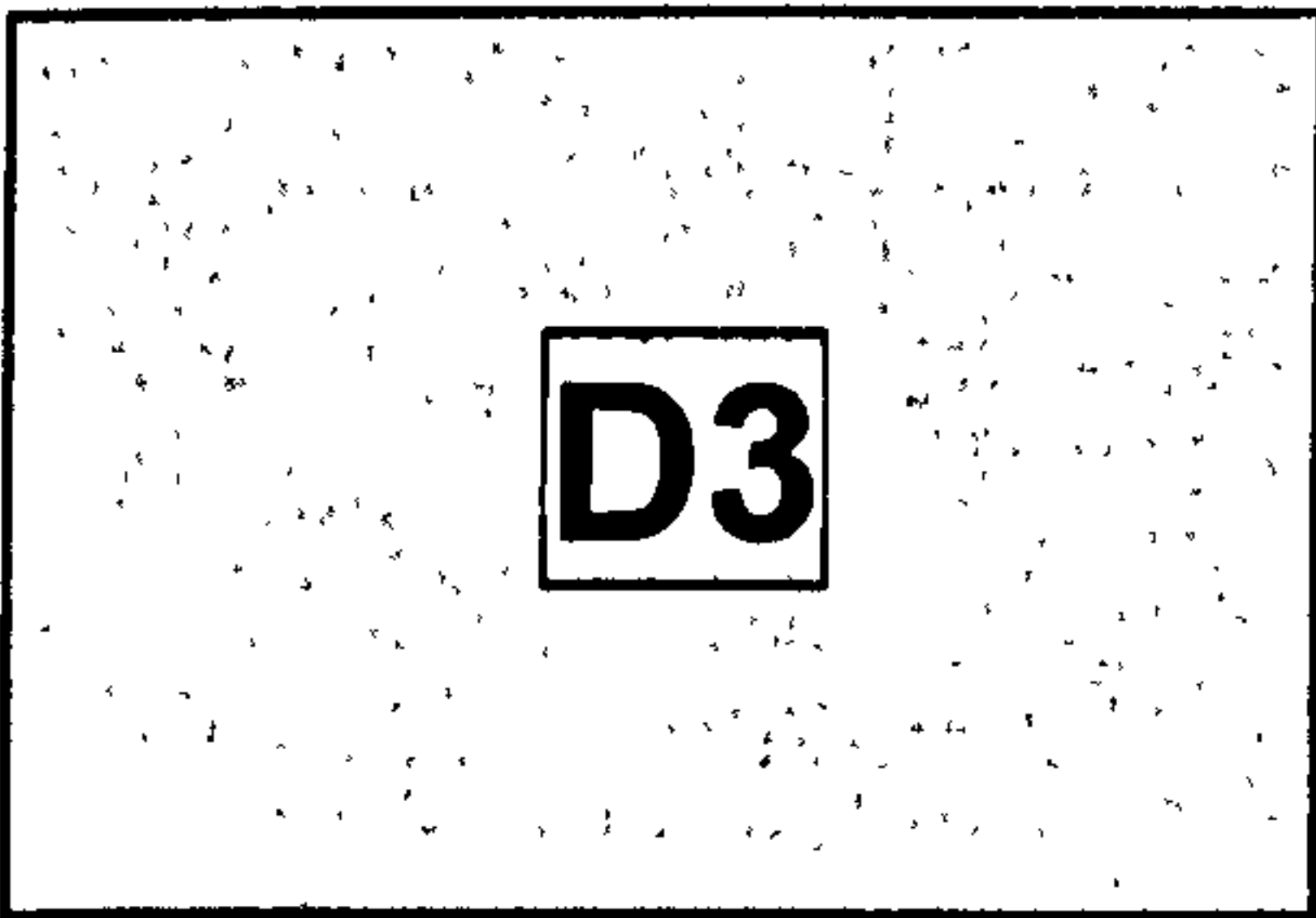
Table 4.2 Additional measurable key variables derived from the literature

<div>  </div>	Mother's educational qualifications
	Type of school attended
	Father's educational qualifications
	Parliamentary constituency
	Electoral wards

Source: summarised from the above-mentioned research on additional key variables

In addition to D1 and D2, qualitative research found that other less measurable factors, based on memories and lived experiences, were also significant. Keen and Higgins (1990, 1992) investigated factual knowledge of higher education. Taylor (1992) and Hodgson and Spours (1999) analysed the impact of labour market opportunities, Brooks (2003a, 2003b) the influence of peers and Lynch and O’Riordan (1998) and Warmington (2002) the influence of school and teachers. Skeggs (1997), Pugsely (1998), Reay (1998) and Ball *et al* (2002) examined familial influences. All these factors are outlined in table 4.3:

Table 4.3 Other less measurable significant factors derived from the literature

<div>  </div>	Parental expectations/pressure
	Parental encouragement and involvement in homework
	Influence of peers
	Experience of school and teachers
	Labour market opportunities
	Factual knowledge of HE

Source: summary of above mentioned research on less measurable significant factors

In table 4.3 the most important significant factors are highlighted in grey. Unlike D3, which is based on memories and lived experiences, D1 and D2 are based on quantitative research about trends and are statistically significant. However, they do not explain how cultural factors and societal forces shape the assumptions that inform the decision-making process.

Constructions of students and of higher education

Table 4.4 below shows constructions of students described by potential entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups (See Heathfield and Wakeford 1991, Archer and Hutchings 2000 and Hutchings and Archer 2001). The colour green highlights positive constructions while the colour red highlights less positive constructions of students.

Table 4.4 *Constructions of students derived from the literature*

Middle class boffin who goes to pre-1992 university	C1
Middle class debauched who goes to pre-1992 university	
Working class dedicated with part-time employment who goes to post-1992 institution	

Source: summary of above mentioned research

Table 4.5 below summarises constructions of higher education derived from research on constructions of higher education and research on drivers and barriers or higher education decision-making (See Heathfield and Wakeford 1991; Edwards 1993; West 1996; Lynch and O’Riordan; Tett 1999, Reay 1998, 2001; Archer and Hutchins 2000; Hutchings and Archer 2001; Reay *et al* 2001, 2002; Ball *et al* 2002; Davies *et al* 2002, Marks *et al* 2003). In table 4.5 less positive constructions of students in relation to under-represented in higher education are highlighted in red.

Table 4.5 *Constructions of higher education by under-represented socio-economic groups derived from the literature*

Differential institutional hierarchies [Oxbridge, pre1992, post 1992]	C2
Differential socio-cultural types of students for different institutions	
Imbued with mystique because cultural possession of traditionally advantaged groups	
For white middle class with money	
For really clever people whose families were willing to make enormous sacrifices	
Too many financial and emotional risks and luxury that can only be purchased at expense of other family members	
For those who want better employment and more money but not for oneself	

Source: summary of above mentioned research

Public discourses

Barthes (1957), Foucault (1980, 1982) and Wetherell and Potter (1992) argue that majority discourses are maintained because of their usefulness to those who benefit from them and hence tend to render other discourses unthinkable. Public discourses permeate our daily existence through the influence of the media, literature, school, family and peers. Table 4.6 below shows public discourses highlighted by previous research.

Table 4.6 Public discourses and participation and non-participation in higher education derived from the literature

Domesticity
Leave school as early as possible to enter full-time employment
English exclusive/public school ethos/Oxford mystique/higher education as badge of middle class superiority
Economic benefit of higher education
Credentialism
Self-improvement
Bettering oneself through educational achievement
Meritocracy
Scottish inclusive/egalitarianism/democratic intellectualism/higher education as escape from poverty for those academically able and badge of nationality

Source: summary of above mentioned research

In the above table 4.6 positive public discourses that encourage participation in higher education are highlighted in green while negative public discourses that discourage participation in higher education are highlighted in red. Leaving school early to enter full-time employment (Robertson and Hillman 1997), domesticity (See Byrne 1978; Griffin 1985; Martin 2004) and the Oxbridge mystique (Marks 2002) have been identified as likely to exert a ‘pull away’ force from higher education. The economic benefit of higher education (Archer and Hutchings 2000), credentialism (Brown and Lauder 1997; Hutchings and Archer 2001), self-improvement/bettering oneself (See West 1996; Archer and Hutchings 2000), meritocracy (Goldthorpe 1997; Stuart Wells 1997) and democratic intellectualism (McCrone 1992; Matheson 2004) are likely to exert a ‘push towards’ force in relation to higher education.

The English exclusive public school discourse with higher education as a badge of middle class superiority and the Scottish more inclusive discourse of the democratic

intellect and higher education as an escape from poverty and badge of nationality are older and narrower discourses that are more controversial than other discourses because they are tied in to nationality as well as to social class. These two discourses have been frequently alluded to, but have rarely been analysed in empirical research (See Davie 1961; Bell and Grant 1974; McCrone 1992; Weiner 1994; Lockhardt-Walker 1994; Power *et al* 1999, 2003; McDiarmid 2000; Hutchings and Archer 2001; Marks 2002; HEFCE 2005). The colour red indicates a negative.

Assumptions (drivers and barriers) and life history factors (family and initial education)

Table 4.7 below is derived from the findings of previous research. They indicates that middle class and working-class educational life trajectories tend to be described in polarised terms and are set in opposition to each other (See Jackson and Marsden 1966; Coffield *et al* 1980; Bourdieu 1976, 1977c; 1984, 1988, 1990b; Heathfield and Wakeford 1991; Keen and Higgins 1990, 1992; Taylor 1992; Ball *et al* 1995; Bowe *et al* 1993, 1995; Connor *et al* 1996; Mecalf 1997; Skeggs 1997; Roberts 1997; Reich 1997; Gorard *et al* 1997, 1998, 1999a, 1999b; Du Bois-Reymond 1998; Raab 1998; Reay 1998, 2001; Lynch and O'Riordan 1998; Johnston *et al* 1999; Tett 1999; Connor *et al* 1999a; Connor 2001; Tett 1999; Power *et al* 1998, 1999, 2003; Reay and Lucey 2000; Connor 2001; Archer and Hutchings 2000; Power 2000; Ball and Vincent 2001; Reay *et al* 2001; Hutchings and Archer 2001; Ball *et al* 2000, 2002; Reay *et al* 2001, 2002; Brooks 2003a, 2003b; Lucey *et al* 2003; Archer *et al* 2003; Gorard and Selwyn 2005; HEFCE 2005).

In table 4.7 the prime middle class trajectory from school to higher education is highlighted in green while the working class trajectory that does not expect entry to higher education is highlighted in red. The literature described T1 as culturally close to higher education while T2 is culturally distant from higher education and not expected to enter. If higher education is entered then for T2 the transition is difficult and fragmented while T1 it is easy and linear.

Table 4.7 Middle and working class educational trajectories derived from the literature

MIDDLE-CLASS	WORKING-CLASS
T1 Prime trajectory to elite HE	T2 Non-participation in HE
More economic capital	Less economic capital
No pressing needs to make ends meet	More pressing needs to make ends meet
Long term thinking	Short-term thinking
Future is imagined and precise	Future is unimagined and vague
Unlimited geographical horizons	Limited geographical horizons
More cultural capital	Less cultural capital
Culturally close to HE	Culturally distant to HE
Insider	Outsider
No anxiety about HE	Anxiety about HE
Expect to succeed	Fear of failure
Few internalised barriers	Many internalised barriers
Less cultural distance	More cultural distance
Better A-levels/Highers	Lower A-levels/Highers
Expected to enter HE	Not expected to enter HE
<i>Traditional subjects</i>	<i>New and vocational subjects</i>
More Intrinsic motivations	Instrumental motivations
More subject interest per say	Less subject interest per say
More personal development	Qualifications
Pre-1992 universities	Post-1992 higher education institutions
Normal biography	Choice biography
Linear unreflexive transition	Fragmented reflexive transition
Easy transitions and linear narratives	Difficult transitions and broken narratives
Confidence in ability to enter and succeed in HE	Lack of confidence in ability to enter and succeed in HE
HE as natural thing to do	HE as something that involves risks
No ambivalence	Ambivalence
Non decision	Deliberate decision
Decision really made by family	Decision made alone
Guided by parents to go to good university	Goes to local HE
Become same as parents	Become different from parents
Fear of downward mobility or fear of becoming different	Fear of risks and cost (failure/money) and fear and attraction of becoming different
Factual and procedural knowledge of higher education and student life	Lack of factual and procedural knowledge of higher education and student life
Key factors internal to HE	Key factors external to HE

Source: summary of the above-mentioned research

T1 and T2 represent two polarised educational life trajectories associated with middle class and working-class. T2 is depicted as culturally distant and struggling while T1 is depicted as culturally close to higher education and at ease.

Explanatory mechanisms

Researchers have used various mechanisms or conceptual models to explain greater or lesser likelihood of participation in higher education and to explain the higher education decision-making process. Some explanatory mechanisms focus more on the influence of family and some more on the influence of initial education while only Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), Bourdieu (1971, 1974, 1976, 1977c, 1984, 1990c, 1993b) and to a lesser extent Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) emphasise both life history factors and assumptions derived from their interaction.

Tables 4.8 and 4.9 below summarise the two main types of explanatory mechanisms that of lesser likelihood of participation in higher education and that of educational decision-making.

Table 4.8 *Explanatory mechanisms of lesser likelihood of educational attainment and participation in higher education derived from the literature*

Robbins (1963) and Dearing (1997) <i>low aspirations and lack of ambition</i> [family and school]
Weber (1932; 1946, 1978) <i>social closure</i>
Bourdieu (1976, 1977c) <i>cultural capital and habitus</i> [family and school]
Jackson (1968; 1971) <i>hidden curriculum</i> [school]
Foucault (1972; 1980, 1988) <i>disciplinary power and finely graded hierarchy</i> [school]
Gorard <i>et al</i> (1997; 1998, 1999a, 1999b) <i>familial educational trajectories</i> [family]
Du Bois-Reymond (1998) <i>intergenerational family scripts</i> [family]

Table 4.9 *Explanatory mechanisms of educational decision-making processes derived from the literature*

Godthorpe (1995; 1996, 1997, 2000) <i>rational action theory</i> [assumptions]
Du Bois-Reymond (1998) <i>decisions and non-decisions</i> [assumptions]
Bourdieu (1976, 1990b) <i>practical consciousness</i> [assumptions and life history factors]
Giddens (1991) <i>reflexivity and discursive consciousness</i> [assumptions]
Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) <i>pragmatically rational decision-making within horizons for actions</i> [assumptions and life history factors]

As research has shown that many potential entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups never get to a position where they can contemplate higher education (Bourdieu 1975, 1977; Gambetta 1987; Lynch and O’Riordan 1998; Reay 1998; Tett 1999, 2000, 2004; Archer and Hutchings 2000; Hutchings and Archer 2001; Ball *et al* 2000, 2002; Reay *et al* 2001, 2002; Davies *et al* 2002; Marks *et al* 2003), a conceptual

model emphasising cultural distance, internalised barriers and decisions and non-decisions as a starting point seems therefore a useful way to better understand and better explain mechanisms of greater and lesser likelihood of participation by potential entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined various sociological theories, explanations and/or conceptual models that have been used to explain social class inequalities in general as well as non-participation or lesser likelihood of participation by potential qualified entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups. The conceptual models and/or theorising of Bourdieu, Jackson, Foucault, Hodgkinson and Sparkes, Gorard *et al* and Du Bois-Reymond were evaluated to determine the extent of their usefulness.

A preliminary conceptual model of greater or lesser likelihood of participation by potential entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups was formulated. It was derived from other conceptual models and from key findings from the literature. The preliminary conceptual model takes the concepts of cultural distance, internalised barriers and decisions and non-decisions as a starting point. The preliminary model will be matched to empirical investigation to inductively arrive at the finalised conceptual model and specify more carefully the circumstances in which it does or not offer potential for explanation.

Before the next chapter on methodology it might be useful to re-state the main gaps in the literature as well as the aim and finalised objectives of this research.

In the previous chapter it was highlighted that there have been very few systematic qualitative examinations of assumptions and in particular of the interaction of barriers and drivers, except for McGivney (1990, 1996), Davies *et al* (2002), Marks *et al* (2002). Similarly, images and constructions of higher education among potential entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups have been primarily derived from research on the decision-making process rather than by attempting to directly elicit them (except for Heathfield and Wakeford 1991, Archer and Hutchings 2000; Hutchings and Archer 2001). While life history factors have been more widely

researched than assumptions, most of the studies did not focus on potential entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups and also tended to assume a unitary and homogeneous middle class, defined primarily in terms of its difference from the working class (Savage 1995, 2000).

Although factors that make entry to higher education more likely have been investigated, this was primarily through correlational large-scale quantitative research, many of which, although they had a qualitative element, took over-represented groups as the norm rather than potential entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups. The point of optimal cultural distance was not investigated. The impact of public discourses on greater or lesser likelihood of participation had been largely neglected, except by Blackman (1995), West (1996) and Hutchings and Archer (2001). The extent to which entering higher education was a decision or a non-decision has been even more neglected, except by Du Bois-Reymond (1998) and to a lesser extent by Hodgson and Spours (1999).

As a consequence of the review of sociological theories and conceptual models, a further gap in the literature has come to light: an unresolved key difference between Giddens (1991) and Bourdieu concerning agency and decision-making. Bourdieu (1966, 1971, 1974, 1975, 1976, 1977a, 1977b, 1977c, 1979, 1984, 1987, 1988, 1989, 1990a, 1990b, 1990c, 1993a, 1993b, 1997; 1998a, 1998b, 2000) and Bourdieu and Passeron (1968, 1970, 1977, 1979) have been criticised by Jenkins (1992) and Brooks (2003a) for emphasising the importance of practical consciousness whereby decisions are made as a consequence of *habitus* with little or no reflexivity, thus neglecting the possibility that, as claimed by Giddens (1984, 1991), decisions are often reflexive and thus are made within discursive consciousness. Consequently, the objectives now count a further subdivision that investigates “the extent to which decisions and non-decisions are made within practical or discursive consciousness” [See under 3.d below].

In order to formulate an explanatory conceptual model of greater and lesser likelihood of participation by potential entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups, the selected finalised objectives are:

1. To examine the assumptions that inform greater or lesser likelihood of participation
 - a. Drivers and barriers
 - b. Constructions of students and of higher education
 - c. Impact of public discourses on private narratives
2. To examine the influence of life history factors on greater or lesser likelihood of participation
 - a. Initial education
 - b. Family
3. To investigate the interaction of assumptions and life history factors on greater or lesser likelihood of participation
 - a. Point of optimal cultural distance at which higher education becomes for oneself rather than not for oneself
 - b. Factors that lessen cultural distance and internalised barriers and make it more likely to reach this point and hence to enter higher education
 - c. Extent to which entering higher education is a decision or a non-decision
 - d. Extent to which decisions and non-decisions are made within practical or discursive consciousness

The next chapter will now turn to the methodology used for the empirical investigation of these research objectives. It will set out the framework for the empirical investigation, explain how the data was collected and analysed and justify the research methods used to investigate the research objectives before discussing the problems encountered during the empirical work as well as ethical issues.

5

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

The previous chapter examined sociological theories and models and formulated a preliminary theoretical model. The present chapter discusses the methodology, that is, the framework for both the documentary analysis and the empirical investigation. The chapter is divided into three sections:

- ontological and epistemological issues (review of explicit and implicit claims about the nature of reality and the nature of knowledge)
- research design (data collection, sampling strategies, data analysis)
- methodological issues (trustworthiness, reliability, validity, generalisability, the influence of the researcher, bias and prejudice)
- ethical issues

Ontological and epistemological issues

A research paradigm is a set of overarching and interconnected assumptions about ontological assumptions (the nature of reality), which in turn influences epistemological assumptions (nature of knowledge) and methodological assumptions (research design, data collection and analysis). The two main epistemological paradigms are the positivist or hypothetico-deductive and the interpretative or naturalistic (Guba and Lincoln 1989, 1994; Cohen and Manion 1995). The former has its roots in the natural science model and is based on testing theories and hypotheses.¹ It seeks absolute truth, avoids explaining non-observable phenomena, aims to predict phenomena and to have symmetry between causal explanation and prediction, and above all strives to separate facts from values (Woods and Hammersley 1977; Maykut and Morehouse 1994; Baert 1998). As seeking absolute

¹ The word positivism was first coined by August Comte in the early 1830s and was synonymous with natural science and observable facts (See Stromberg 1986).

truth in research became no longer tenable, a diluted version of positivism, known as post-positivism, has superseded positivism (Denzin and Lincoln 1994). Post-positivism is just as concerned with validity, reliability, objectivity, generalisability and with theory rather than description (Lincoln and Guba 1994). The interpretative paradigm draws upon humanistic and critical approaches and has its roots in philosophy, history, anthropology sociology and also to some extent psychology (Henwood and Pidgeon 1992). The interpretative paradigm is based on interpretation and creation of meaning by human beings (Creswell 1998). The basic premise is that language and history both condition and limit interpretation. Researchers must engage in reflexivity and meanings are inter-subjectively shared. Constructions are not separate from those who make the constructions and “are not part of some objective world that exists apart from their constructors” (Guba and Lincoln 1989: 143).

Broadly overlapping the positivist and interpretive paradigms are the macro and micro perspectives or “high level of abstraction” and “a concern with specific settings at particular times and the way in which individuals construct their own meanings about something” (Woods and Hammersley 1977: 15). Also broadly overlapping the macro and micro perspectives are the quantitative and qualitative approaches to research, which reflect not only differences in data collection and data analysis techniques, but also different theoretical underpinnings informed by different views as to what counts as valid data (Bryman 1988; Maykut and Morehouse 1994). Quantitative techniques typically involve using questionnaires, surveys and structured interviews to undertake large-scale comparative studies to find correlations and patterns in which phenomena are codified along with numerical and statistical analysis (Denzin and Lincoln 1994b; Creswell 1998). Qualitative research typically involves more open-ended questions based on informal and loosely structured interviews, observation, diaries, focus groups, and informal discussions to produce a coherent and illuminating description of a perspective on a situation that is based on and consistent with a detailed study of that situation (Cohen and Manion 1995). Qualitative research often uses a purposive sample and an emergent design that not only evolves over time, but is also highly responsive and flexible (Bodgan and Biklen 1992). Important issues are identified in the early phases of data analysis and discoveries are pursued as the focus of what is important is broadened or narrowed accordingly (Maykut and Morehouse 1994). There have been

considerable disputes in the literature about the differing benefits and values of post-positivist and interpretative paradigms (Sapsford and Jupp 1996). The post-positivist paradigm has been criticised for being too restrictive as it ignores individual ability to interpret experiences because of lack of contextual information, lack of explanation of meaning and purpose into human behaviour and attitudes, lack of fit between theory and local contexts, lack of applicability of general data to individual cases (Guba and Lincoln 1994). Values and facts are seen as independent rather than interdependent. A final assumption is that objectivity is possible and that the inquirer does not influence phenomena (Cohen and Manion 1995). The interpretative paradigm has also been criticised, but for different reasons, such as for its potential deficiency in areas such as sampling, reliability and validity as well as too much importance being placed on the meanings of what participants say, which might have been interpreted differently (Clarke 1992; Guba and Lincoln 1989, 1994).

It is worth noting that positivism and post-positivism (also known as hypothetico-deductivism) has tended to dominate publication outlets, funding sources and other sources of power and influence (Polgar and Thomas 1988; Guba and Lincoln 1989, 1994; Lincoln and Guba 1982, 1985). The interpretative paradigm has tended to be seen as subordinate because seen by its critics as a less objective, valid and reliable approach that has consequently often been relegated to preliminary pilot studies as sources of 'rich' anecdotal 'soft data' (Griffin 1985: 100). Yet qualitative research has a long and distinguished history such as in the sociological work of the Chicago school in the 1920s and 1930s and in anthropology in the work of Margaret Mead who charted the outlines of the fieldwork method in a foreign setting (Schofield 1993; Denzin and Lincoln 1994b). Although subordinate to post-positivism, interpretative research has increasingly become a field of inquiry in its own right cutting across disciplines, fields and subject matters (Lincoln and Guba 1985).

The grounded theory approach introduced by Glaser and Strauss (1967) attempted to make qualitative research more 'objective' and more 'scientific'. The original aim of grounded theory was to free researchers from the theoretical straitjackets of grand sociological theories. Instead, theory was to be grounded in the data systematically gathered and analysed in order to reliably identify phenomena inductively and deductively before generating theory using the constant comparative method before comparing the grounded theory to other existing theories. Strauss and Corbin (1990,

1997) were especially concerned with using even more systematic and complex coding procedures to analyse the data to increase reliability, validity, and generalisability. These ideas have now become central to interpretative research. However, it is worth noting that using a comparative approach in social science predates grounded theory and has a long history since it was used by sociologists such as Marx, Durkheim and Weber and more recently Bourdieu. A comparative approach enables similarities and differences between cases and concepts to be identified and allows the full diversity and complexity of the data to be explored (Maykut and Morehouse 1994; Cresswell 1998).

The critical realist approach also endeavoured to make qualitative research more rigorous by advocating a unity of method between social science and natural science (Baert 1998; Potter 2000). Reality is deemed to exist as separate from individuals and must be subjected to the greatest possible examination to apprehend it as closely as possible but this can never be done completely or perfectly (See Baert 1998). Critical realists argue that theories need to be judged according to whether they survive empirical testing despite the fact that they are not immediately accessible to observation and then on the basis of their objectivity and explanatory power (Potter 2000). The major criteria of reliability, validity, objectivity and generalisability are the extent to which theories fit with pre-existing knowledge and replicated findings are deemed to be *probably true* (See Baert 1998; Potter 2000).

Although the interpretative paradigm has tended to be seen as subordinate and often been relegated to preliminary pilot studies, it has increasingly become a field of inquiry in its own right. More recently, grounded theory and critical realism have put post-positivism back firmly on the agenda. Despite two opposing paradigms on what is deemed to be the nature of reality and warrantable knowledge, in practice, a great amount of research has increasingly used an integrated approach to the extent that boundaries between ontological and epistemological divisions have become less and less well defined (Henwood and Pidgeon 1992; Maykut and Morehouse 1994; Gorard 2002a). Many scholars and researchers even find that it is not useful to differentiate between paradigms. However, as paradigms and approaches are closely interlinked, the position of the researcher is understood differently between the quantitative and qualitative approach. The former aims to prevent the researcher from influencing participants and data collection by attempting to remove all

personal bias and values. The latter understands the position of the researcher as the very instrument of data collection and personal interpretations are key in understanding and analysing data (Burgess *et al* 2006). Notions of reliability and validity are ambiguous and controversial. They also differ between approaches and paradigms. Reliability applies to quantitative research based on probability sampling and means representativeness and replicability (Hammersley 1992). In quantitative research validity is the consequence of the research instruments doing what they are claiming to do. In qualitative research validity might be the consequence of honesty, richness and scope of data and the objectivity of the researcher (Cohen *et al* 2000).

Research design

An integrated approach

A combination of the two main paradigms makes use of the most valuable features of each and hence the use of an integrated approach increases the likelihood of gaining breadth and depth, richness and wholeness of data (Begley 1996; Smeyers 2001; Gorard 2002a). An integrated approach was thought to be well suited to the aim and objectives of the present research, which are to develop a conceptual model to explain the greater or lesser likelihood of participation by potential entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups according to the following objectives:

1. To examine the assumptions that determine greater or lesser likelihood of participation
 - a. Drivers and barriers
 - b. Constructions of students and of higher education
 - c. Impact of public discourses on private narratives
2. To examine the influence of life history factors on greater or lesser likelihood of participation
 - a. Initial education
 - b. Family
3. To investigate the interaction of assumptions and life history factors on greater or lesser likelihood of participation

- a. Point of optimal cultural distance at which higher education becomes for oneself rather than not for oneself
- b. Factors that lessen cultural distance and internalised barriers and make it more likely to reach this point and hence to enter higher education
- c. Extent to which entering higher education a decision or a non-decision
- d. Extent to which decisions and non-decisions are made within practical or discursive consciousness

Since the purpose of qualitative enquiry is to “accumulate sufficient knowledge to lead to understanding” (Lincoln and Guba 1985: 227), an integrated approach with a mainly qualitative focus was selected in order to achieve the aim and objectives of the present research. While correlational and statistical research can usefully examine how trends evolve and what factors seemed to be associated with a reduction of internalised barriers and hence greater likelihood of participation, it cannot account for underlying complex social processes. While qualitative research cannot so well examine trends, it can better account for examining underlying social processes (Bogdan and Biklen 1992; Denzin and Lincoln 1994b).

The first stage of the research involved identifying the aim of the research and selecting the initial objectives. Documentary analysis was then used to examine the structures, policies, purposes and patterns of participation in both England and Scotland. Documentary analysis was also used to review access and widening participation research as well as reviewing sociological theories, previous conceptual models of greater and lesser likelihood of participation in higher education. The following types of materials were analysed: public documents such as government white papers, research reports from higher education funding bodies, academic books, academic articles in edited volumes, articles in academic journals, unpublished academic theses and educational newspaper articles. Also used was relevant documentation about two institutions of higher education, four schools and two further education colleges where the research took place to provide a contextually detailed information to enrich and validate the theorising. The first stage culminated with a preliminary conceptual model of greater and lesser likelihood of participation in higher education by potential entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups. This preliminary model was derived from the literature reviewed especially the literature concerning sociological theories and previous conceptual

models. At the end of the review of the literature and sociological theories and conceptual models, the objectives selected to achieve the aims of the research were finalised [See above pages 121-122]

The second stage involved an empirical investigation that contained elements of the techniques of life history, phenomenology and grounded theory. To enhance the presentation of multiple realities and the validity of the participants' views, several methods of data collection were used:

- documentary analysis for institutional context of focus groups
- focus groups brainstorming and ranking exercises to generate data that could be used numerically
- followed by focus group discussion to investigate social processes unattainable by strictly quantitative methods
- semi-structured individual interviews to get an in-depth individual perspective unattainable by quantitative methods

In relation to the above-mentioned objectives of the research the focus groups investigated the assumptions, that is, the drivers and barriers [1a], constructions of higher education and students [1b] and the influence of public discourses [1c]. [The focus group schedule can be found in appendix 1.1] The interviews examined life history factors [2a and 2b] as well as on constructions of higher education and of students [1b] and on the impact of public discourses on private narratives [1c]. [The interview schedule can be found in appendix 1.2]

The third stage consisted in formulating the conceptual model, which was based on the interaction of the assumptions and life history factors [3a, 3b, 3c and 3d]. The preliminary conceptual model was then adjusted to the empirical findings to derive the finalised theoretical model of optimal cultural distance that explains greater or lesser likelihood of participation of mature and young potential entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups.

Data collection and sampling strategies

Documentary analysis

All research uses to a greater or lesser extent documentary analysis (Smeyers 2001; Burgess *et al* 2006). The literature review is a form of documentary analysis where the researcher is expected to critically analyse other research (Creswell 1998; Blaxter *et al* 2001). In the present research documentary analysis also used annual reports, inspection reports [HMI Scotland, OFSTED and QAA], prospectuses and websites to provide the institutional context of the focus groups.

Surveys

Survey research has been very successful in establishing itself as a self-sufficient source of social science data (Morgan and Krueger 1998). Surveys can be done by ways of questionnaires or structured interviews. They can be used on their own or to complement interviews and focus groups (Cohen and Manion 1995; Burgess *et al* 2006). Surveys vary in complexity, scope and scale. They are used to find patterns and make comparisons to see how the patterns correlate with one or more variables using statistical analysis (Gillham 2000a; Bell 2002). The main advantage of surveys is that analysis of the findings can be easily structured and that the findings are reliable and externally valid and if the sample is representative then the findings are generalisable (Cohen and Manion 1995; Smeyers 2001). Disadvantages of surveys are that they do not give an in-depth understanding or even explanation of how and why variables may be correlated (Morgan and Krueger 1998). Also, survey questionnaires need careful design, because vague or leading questions could distort the results (Blaxter *et al* 2001). However, the greatest drawback is the financial cost of designing and planning a survey as well as accessing the participants and gaining a representative sample (Cohen and Manion 1995; Bell 2002; Burgess *et al* 2006). Thus it was thought that focus groups and semi-structured interviews would be more effective for tapping into collective and individual drivers, barriers and constructions of students and higher education. Also, schools, further education colleges and higher education institutions were willing to 'lend' the pupils/students only about one hour, but they were more reluctant to grant permission to do a survey.

Focus groups

Focus groups are well established in market research, social anthropology, and health studies and have become increasingly popular in the social sciences (Morgan 1988; Gowdy 1996). Focus groups can be used as the principal source of data. They may also be used as a supplementary source of data that rely on some other method such as surveys or interviews (Morgan 1998). Focus groups can inform the construction of questionnaire and interview schedules. They can be used in pilot studies before undertaking surveys or interviews or help follow up paths uncovered by interviews or surveys (Stewart and Shamdasani 1994). The average size of focus group varies from three to up to 15. Focus groups last from about 45 minutes to up to two hours. They generate data to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest, to elicit feelings, ideas, attitudes and explore specific questions. They can also involve one or several types of collective activities which include brainstorming, ranking exercises and attempting to reach a consensus (Myers 1988; Morgan 1998). Discussion may be relatively unstructured and open-ended with the moderator facilitating the participants' wide-ranging explorations of their thoughts and experiences. Alternatively, discussion may be more structured to provide both depth and detail on precisely the questions of interest (Morgan and Krueger 1998). The group composition may range from total strangers to friends or family or work colleagues. In most studies the participants are strangers who do not have to think about the consequences of what they say, because their main aim is to display opinions for a moderator and tape recorder (Myers and McNaghten 1999 Bloor *et al* 2002).

A main advantage of focus groups is relative cost-effectiveness and speed in obtaining insights that would be difficult and time consuming to elicit by other means. Focus groups are more efficient in terms of time and budgetary considerations for providing a quick overview of differences, range of ideas and so on (Morgan and Krueger 1998). Although focus groups cannot really substitute for the kind of research that is best done by individual interviews, their main advantage is the nature and character of the data generated. Focus groups give a concentrated richness of data on the thoughts and feelings of the participants expressed in their own words, own categories and perceived associations (Stewart and Shamdasani 1994). In surveys the researcher prescribes the categories. Thus, there is a minimum of artificiality in the interactions, unlike in structured interviews or survey

questionnaires with rating scales and other constrained response categories (Krippendorff 1980). Participants can qualify their response just as in semi-structured questionnaires (Stewart and Shamdasani 1994). Liveliness and interplay give a sense of immediacy (Burgess *et al* 1988). Another important advantage of focus groups is the implicit tension between a carefully planned and permissive environment, which is arguably what gives strength to focus group research (Myers 1988).

The main disadvantages of focus group research are powerful positive and negative group dynamics that might lead participants to understate or exaggerate because they are either intimidated or want to show off (Bloor *et al* 2001). Also, men and women may respond differently in single sex or mixed groups (Myers 1988). The level of involvement of the group with the topic can also makes the researcher work hard at controlling the discussion, if the level is too high, or collect only scattered data, if the level is too low. The moderator might also unduly influence the group interaction (Morgan 1988). However, the influence of the researcher on the participants is hardly unique to focus groups as it affects all research and especially qualitative research because of direct interaction with participants (Stewart and Shamdasani 1998).

As in many other small-scale studies using focus groups, the sampling strategy in the present research was purposive and theoretical, that is, non-probability sampling that did not attempt to be representative in the statistical sense, because the research was mainly qualitative and limited in terms of time and especially resources. Since the research compared England and Scotland and young and mature qualified potential entrants, focus groups were selected accordingly. Half of the sample was from an urban area in Western Scotland (36). The other half of the sample was from an urban area in the East Midlands (42). Similarly, half the sample was composed of young participants (42) and the other half of mature participants (36). Since the research aimed to explain greater and lesser likelihood of participation by potentially qualified entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups, the researcher aimed to select young people and mature students that were not from the over-represented social classes 1 and 2. Eight focus groups were thus held from November 1999 to May 2000. Out of 78 participants, 66 were on their way to achieve qualifications that would give them entry to higher education and 12 were already in higher education. An outline of the profile of the focus groups is shown in table 5.1 below [More detailed profiles of the focus groups can be found in chapter 6 on pages 154-156].

Table 5.1 *General profile of focus groups*

Group	M	F	Group	M	F
YSD [Young Scottish Deprived] Fifth year doing Highers	2	6	YED [Young English Deprived] Lower Sixth doing A levels	5	7
YS [Young Scottish] Fifth year doing Highers	3	7	YE [Young English] Lower Sixth doing A levels	4	8
MSFE [Mature Scottish in FE] Access course [aged 26-43]	0	12	MEFE [Mature English in FE] Access course [aged 25-50]	4	8
MSHE [Mature Scottish in HE] 3 rd year of 4 year Joint Hons (social sciences) [aged 28-40]	3	3	MEHE [Mature English in HE] 3 rd year Combined Hons (social sciences) [aged 35-45]	3	3

Table 5.1 shows that the focus group sample contained two groups of mature students on their way to higher education and doing Access courses in further education colleges: Mature English in Further Education [MEFE] and Mature Scottish in Further Education [MSFE]. The sample also counted two groups of mature students already in higher education who attended broadly similar post 1992 institutions: Mature English in Higher Education [MEHE] and Mature Scottish in Higher Education [MSHE]. In addition, the sample included two groups of young people on a qualifying route (studying at least two GCSE A-level/SQA Highers from a school situated in a mixed area with a minority of pupils from social class 1 and 2: Young English [YE] and Young Scottish [YS]. Finally, the sample counted two groups of young people from a school situated in a more deprived area with an even smaller proportion of social class 1 and 2 and a greater proportion of social class 4 and 5: Young English Deprived [YED] and Young Scottish Deprived [YSD] [See chapter 6 on page 149-152 for social class profile of institutions and page 153 for social class profile of all groups]

Precise control over the composition of the groups was not possible because access to focus groups was only through gatekeepers. Groups ranged from 6 to 12 participants. In the young focus groups two-thirds were girls and one-third boys reflecting the fact that in the schools in question more girls than boys stay on to do A-levels or Highers. Those doing access courses were predominantly women reflecting the gender balance in such courses. Only the focus groups of mature students in higher education in both England and Scotland [MEHE and MSHE] were gender balanced. Only the English samples [YE, YED and MEHE] contained Asian and/or Afro-Caribbean participants. The socio-economic composition of the groups remained stable among the groups regardless of size.

All the young people and mature students doing access courses knew each other well. The mature students in higher education knew each other less well as they studied a variety of subjects. The fact that participants knew each other meant that they did not have to establish relationships and were more likely to feel comfortable in discussing topics without undue restraint due to having to adapt to unknown group dynamics. As in all qualitative research the researcher interacted with participants and brought her own social background and personality into the equation. The participants did not know the researcher, thus the sincerity and truthfulness of the participants was in all likelihood further enhanced, especially since the researcher presented a non-threatening student persona that was more likely to reduce inhibition among the participants even further than if the researcher had been someone in a position of authority.

The focus groups were highly structured in the first phase, which investigated drivers and barriers to higher education through brainstorming and ranking exercises. The second phase was less structured as the discussion centred on construction of higher education and constructions of students. The third phase dealt with how the broad institutional context could increase the likelihood of young people like them going to higher education.

The focus groups brainstorming and doing ranking exercises followed a model derived from that used by Davies *et al* (2002). In order to make the best of the time available and provide both maximum inclusiveness and maximum individuality before participants risk being unduly influenced by others, a structured task was undertaken at the beginning of the focus group. After a short introduction in which the researcher said she was interested in finding out the barriers and drivers to entering higher education as seen by the participants, the focus group session, which lasted about one hour, began with a structured task. Participants were asked to write down one different driver on each of four post-its and then one different barrier on each of four post-its and to limit what they wrote to only a few words. These post-its were categorised by the participants into rough groups and then into final groups after discussion and clarification of meanings. Each participant then voted for what they thought was the most important categories of drivers and then barriers by distributing their 3 stickers on whatever category of drivers they thought most important. The same was done for barriers. The participants were then asked to

decide what key factor among the drivers could overcome all the barriers and what key factor among the barriers was powerful enough to override all the drivers and could make them change their mind about going to higher education. The third phase was more structured as participants were asked to write down what they thought national policy, higher education institutions, further education colleges and schools could do to make it more likely for them and people like them to enter higher education. This was followed by a discussion based around what they had written. At the end of the focus group those who wanted to be interviewed were asked to write down their address and telephone number as well as their previous educational qualifications and parental occupations. Particular attention was paid to the way in which the participants expressed their thoughts and feelings in terms of the kind of metaphors, discourses, stereotypes and myths that would be mentioned.

Brainstorming and ranking exercises followed by discussion were thought both to provide optimal tension between a carefully planned and a permissive environment and to offer the most appropriate way to access assumptions and hence semi-tacit and taken for granted knowledge derived from the schemata within the *habitus* (See Bourdieu 1974, 1977a, 1977c, 1990b). [See chapter 9 page pages 334-335 for full definition of tacit and semi-tacit knowledge] This is because events and concepts are organised within the *habitus* into regular templates or schemata that inform drivers and barriers to participation as well as construction of higher education. Since only a few words were expected to be written for each of four drivers and barriers, it was possible to compare findings across different groups more easily than in typical group interview/discussion. It was also thought that the data generated would have more validity for a conceptual model than would questionnaires, as these normally impose pre-determined concepts on the respondents rather than eliciting the respondents' own concepts. A major advantage was that this methodology very quickly gave hard data that could stand on its own without reference to the group discussion. When the data was categorised by the group during the ranking exercises, key drivers and barriers and their interaction were highlighted much more quickly giving both better breadth and depth than questionnaires. The brainstorming and ranking exercises also facilitated later discussion that was grounded in the data gathered and categories created at the beginning of the focus group. Because of the large sheets of brown paper stuck to the wall with blu-tack, the post-its and the coloured self-adhesive dots made people feel both at ease and focussed on the task,

there was no need for contrived ice-breaking exercise. More importantly, this methodology made possible access semi-tacit and taken-for-granted knowledge [See chapter 9 page pages 334-335 for full definition of tacit and semi-tacit knowledge]. The researcher followed Morgan and Krueger (1993: 3) and Goodwin and Goodwin (1992: 166) who advise to explicitly encourage the expressing of disagreement, which is to be elicited and noted with the moderator acting as a buffer in order to explore a range of different attitudes and responses.

Interviews

Interviews are extensively used in social science research. Interviews range from individual to group interviews and from structured interviews serving as general guides, to semi-formal and informal unstructured interviews like those of the non-directive person-centred counselling approaches advocated by Carl Rogers and his followers (Rogers 1951). Structured interviews deal primarily with quantitative data and the interviewee has a more subordinate position. The interviewer has control over primarily closed questions that have to be answered rather than discussed (Burgess 1984). Semi-structured and unstructured interviews deal primarily with qualitative data. They have been perceived as “conversations with a purpose” (Burgess 1984: 102) or “exchange of views” on a given topic (Zweig 1948: 1) or “an agreeable form of social intercourse” (Webb and Webb 1932: 139). The participants have the opportunity to develop their answers. The researcher becomes a friend or a confidant who shows understanding and sympathy. Unlike in structured interviews, information and narratives are created and shared rather than elicited (Burgess 1984, 1986, 1991; Gillham 2000b). For Webb and Webb (1932) conversations where the interviewer responds naturally were of greater value than a question and answer session. However, no matter the purpose and the sensitivity of the interviewer the relationship is essentially a controlling one as some structure is always present, but used more or less flexibly during the process of interviewing (Gillham 2000b).

The main advantage of using semi-structured interviews is that the use of open-ended questions allows for the possibility of gathering rich data and in-depth exploration of issues leading to new insights in understanding complex issues relating to feelings, attitudes and individual life experiences (Blumer 1969; Denzin 1970; Bogdan and

Bilken 1992; Hammersely 1992; Burgess 1984; Gillham 2000b). Main disadvantages are that face-to-face interviews are very time-consuming. Developing and piloting interviews, travelling to and from, getting access to participants, transcribing and analysing the data, all take an enormous amount of time, But the insights gained far outweigh the possible disadvantages (Bogdan and Bilken 1992; Gillham 2000b).

The sampling strategy in the present research was a non-probability sampling because the research was limited in terms of time and especially resources. The sampling strategy was purposive (made to suit the purpose) and theoretical (to help the researcher best form the theory). Interviews were held with a sample of those who had participated in focus groups. Interviewees were self-selected, so it was not possible to have interviewees who were primarily from social class 4 and 5, as originally intended.

Two pilot individual interviews were held in June 2000. They ended with interviewees asked to evaluate on a scale of 1-5 the likelihood of entering higher education of self and friends and of self and friends as perceived by parents, teachers and society. These questions were subsequently dropped as they did not prove to be useful and they confused the interviewees. The pilot interviews were followed by another fourteen interviews that took place between September 2000 and September 2001. The profile of the interviewees from focus groups is shown in table 5.2 below:

Table 5.2 *Interviewees who had taken part in focus groups*

Groups	M	F	Groups	M	F
YSD Fifth year doing 3 Highers	1	1	YED Sixth form doing 3 A-levels	1	1
YS Fifth year each doing 5 Highers	0	2	YE Sixth form doing 3 A-levels	1	2
MSFE F aged 29 doing Access course	0	1	MEFE F aged 36 doing Access course	0	1
MSHE 3 rd year of 4 year Joint Hons (social sciences) M aged 34 F aged 33	1	1	MEHE 3 rd year Combined Hons (social sciences) M aged 40 Fs aged 36 and 38	1	2

Data collection and preliminary analysis were at times simultaneous activities. This allowed for important understandings to be discovered and then pursued in additional

efforts to collect more data. As the first set of interviews underlined a generational link between constructions of higher education and between the evolution of optimal cultural distance evolved through the generations, another eleven interviews were held with participants who had not taken part in focus groups and were parents, grandparents and neighbours of some of the focus groups participants who had been interviewed as shown in table 5.3 below [See chapter 8 page 232 for detailed social class profile of the interviewees]

Table 5.3 Additional interviewees who had not taken part in focus groups

Groups	M	F	Groups	M	F
YSD N/a	0	0	YED N/a	0	0
YS uncle aged 47 grandfather 74	2	0	YE father aged 45 mother aged 42 mother aged 47 grand-mother aged 74 grandfather aged 75	3	2
MSFE N/a	0	0	MEFE friend aged 40 BTEC/HNC	0	1
MSHE neighbour aged 81	1	0	MEHE neighbour aged 84	1	0

The initial sampling strategy was that in order to explore the generational link in terms of familial scripts about [constructions of] higher education, parents and grandparents of young people and children of mature students who had taken part in the focus groups would be interviewed. For various reasons this was not fully achievable, either because of lack of parents, grandparents and children or because it was not possible to organise a suitable time. In order to remedy this lack several friends/neighbours of mature participants from similar social class backgrounds were interviewed as they were close neighbours/friends two of whom could have could have been grandfathers of mature participants.

The interviews explored the socio-cultural background of self, parents and friends as well as experience of school/initial education and other education if applicable of self and parents. Drivers and barriers to higher education and more especially constructions of higher education and constructions of students had been discussed in the focus groups were explored in greater depth. Special attention was given to the

way in which participants expressed their thoughts and feelings in terms of the kind of metaphors, discourses, stereotypes and myths that participants might talk about.

All the interviews took place in the participants' own homes. The researcher did not have to establish a relationship with the participants from the focus groups as they had met during the focus groups. Family and friends introduced the second set of interviewees to the researcher so by the time the second set of interviews took place they too had met the researcher. Most of the interviewees were articulate and talkative, though some were less so and did not always respond fluently to prompts. It was found that interviewees who had a greater level of self-awareness and a good ability to be reflective generated a greater amount of data.

Researchers tend to assume that people know themselves and are able to reflect about their thoughts, feelings and choices they have made. There is also the problem of mismatch between what people say and what they do, between intentions and behaviour (Bogdan and Bilken 1992; Hammersley 1992; Burgess 1984). Interviewees may not even be aware that their behaviour is not congruent with their words and neither is the interviewer who can only rely on what interviewees say. Recollections might be incomplete or unreliable or the interviewees may not be able to recognise easily the factors that influence their behaviour, attitudes, motivations and then the decisions they made (Blaxter *et al* 2001). All data being context-bound, the same people may give or are likely to give different responses to the same questions to a different interviewer or the same interviewer on another day whether individually or as part of a group (Barbour and Kitzinger 1999).

The researcher attempted to make the interviews "an exchange of views on a given topic" (Zweig 1948: 1) and "an agreeable form of social intercourse" (Webb and Webb 1932: 139). In most interviews the researcher felt perceived as a friend or a confidant, especially since she also disclosed some personal information about her familial background and school experience as one does in social intercourse. This made it more likely that narratives would be created and shared rather than elicited. The researcher was nonetheless aware that she might also unduly influence the participants. Interviewees through their own prejudices and interviewers through their opinions and expectations can be sources of distortion and error especially when they ask a question or probe for clarification (Moser and Kalton 1977). Age,

social status, ethnicity, gender and personal experience create an impression of the interviewer, who might be perceived as expecting particular opinions (Bogdan and Bilken 1992; Hammersley 1992; Burgess 1984; Burgess *et al* 1988, 2006). This was remedied by not giving the participants a list of questions before the interview and by the fact that the researcher presented a non-threatening student persona, especially since she had gained her degree as a mature student only a few years previously. The non-threatening student persona and personal disclosure from the researcher was more likely to make the participants feel comfortable and encourage self-disclosure. The researcher was nevertheless aware that influence of researcher affects all research and especially qualitative research because of direct interaction with participants (Bogdan and Bilken 1992; Hammersley 1992; Burgess *et al* 1988, 2006).

Data analysis

Focus group brainstorming and ranking exercises

Analysis of the data generated by the tasks that the participants did in the focus groups was done using the constant comparative method and inductive reasoning (See Glaser and Strauss 1967; Lincoln and Guba 1985; Strauss and Corbin 1990, Maykut and Morehouse 1994). The drivers and barriers had been sorted and put into categories by the participants who then voted for what they saw as the key driver and barriers which were then ranked according to the number of votes received. These brainstorming and ranking exercises were typed on spreadsheets and tables by the researcher [See appendix 3 on page 459]. The key drivers and barriers written down by the participants were also transcribed on spreadsheets and tables [See appendix 4 on page 473] as were the suggestions about how institutions of higher education and government could make higher education more accessible and more attractive for young people [See appendix 5 on page 475]. All this data was then subjected to multi-level comparisons about similarities and differences. Driver and barriers categories ranked by votes were analysed overall, by groups and by sub-groups according to nationality, age and social class. Categories were also examined according to the number of words used overall, per group, per sub-group and per participant.

Focus groups and interviews

The data generated by focus group discussions and interviews was analysed using content analysis (Krippendorff 1980; Hamersley and Atkinson 1995; Myers 1998), metaphor-based analysis (Burgess *et al* 2006) and a diluted version of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Sivesind 1999). The latter is an inductive approach to data analysis where theories are generated from the data. This approach stands in opposition to the hypothetico-deductive approach where hypotheses are generated prior to the research indicating the relevant data or variables to be collected which are then mathematically analysed to confirm or refute hypotheses (Maykut and Morehouse 1994; Blaxter *et al* 2001). Grounded theory uses the constant comparative method which combines inductive category coding with a simultaneous comparison of all units of meaning (Lincoln and Guba 1982, 1985). Data is analysed question by question and line by line. All answers to a particular question are compared and then divided into units of meaning. As each new unit is selected, it is compared to all other units of meaning and then categorised or indexed with similar units of meaning. If they are no similar units of meaning a new category is formed. Initial categories are constantly refined and new relationships can be discovered when comparisons are made across categories. Each unit must stand by itself and be understandable without any additional information. Some data fit into more than one category.

The next step is to discover the properties of groups of data clustered together under a category. The rule for inclusion is inductively derived from the properties of the set statements under a category. The rule is stated as a propositional statement that summarises the meaning contained in the statements. Propositional statements of fact grounded in the data and hence inductively derived from rigorous and systematic analysis of data that convey meaning of what is conveyed in data under a category (Maykut and Morehouse 1994). Propositional statements are roughly formed outcomes of research but are yet unconnected to each other in a meaningful way. Some stand alone and some relate to each other in important ways. Fractured data that was analysed line by line is reassembled. A story is built up which connects the categories and ends up with a discursive set of propositions (See Glaser and Strauss 1967; Lincoln and Guba 1982, 1985). These propositional statements or explanatory hypotheses are then confirmed because of the substantial accumulation of similar

instances or are revised so they account for *all* cases and either the theory is amended or the definition of the phenomena is revised. Comparing explanatory hypotheses to available evidence is progressive and done inductively (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995; Bloor *et al* 2002).

Advantages of grounded theory or constant comparative method are that it offers a systematic process of analysis that provides a number of clear steps to follow. It allows maximum flexibility and rich, in-depth understanding. The method prevents closure of analysis too early as well as the selective use of evidence to support the hypothesis (Atkinson and Hammersley 1995; Bloor *et al* 2002). While theoretical reflection is delayed until late in the process of research, the focus is constantly sharpened and this avoids premature formulation of theory before new insights arise (Strauss and Corbin 1990; Cresswell 1998). The main disadvantage is making sense of a vast amount of unstructured data. Concepts or categories must fit the data well and the integration of categories must also fit into a coherent theoretical account (Lincoln and Guba 1982, 1985; Strauss and Corbin 1990).

All focus groups and interviews were recorded and transcribed. All the transcribed data were then photocopied and read many times before the metaphors, discourses, stereotypes and myths or any points that surprised the researcher were highlighted. Each question or topic was then examined separately and answers were compared in between the interviewees and in between the focus groups. A line-by-line examination was necessary to generate initial categories. The data was fragmented into units of meaning. All units of meaning relating to a particular theme, metaphor, discourse and stereotype was put together under a category or code. Using the constant comparative method of similarities and differences and theoretically oriented questions data were compared to emerging categories. Coded extracts were then compared to each other and initial propositional statements were formulated.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) advise that in grounded theory the theoretical literature and presuppositions should be avoided in order to maximise the inductive process and the grounding of the theory into the empirical data. However this aspect of grounded theory failed to acknowledge the fact that a literature review was institutionally expected to take place early in the research process, as was an outline of a conceptual framework. Thus by the time focus groups and pilot interviews took

place the literature review was more an outline of a review, although several major empirical studies had deliberately not been taken into account and not even read although they had been gathered and photocopied. The data generated by the focus groups and interviews were analysed as it were gathered. Some initial categories and propositional statements emerged from the on-going analysis and categorisation of the data and then contrasted and compared to categories and propositional statements in the on-going literature review and previous research.

The interplay between data gathering and analysis and on-going literature review enabled categories and propositional statements to be elaborated and modified as data collection, data analysis and on-going literature review fed into each other. The objectives of the research were also adjusted as a consequence of this process. The researcher worked at two levels simultaneously: categorisation and interpretation. As time is needed for the unconscious part of the process, the researcher was consequently better able to adjust objectives, to conduct the later focus groups and interviews and to compare the on-going analysis with other theories and conclusions reached by other researchers. In practice it was found that the researcher moved back and forth from inductive to deductive thinking and the theory was elaborated when the data was matched against both emerging theories derived from propositional statements and the literature review and pre-existing empirically derived theories and other similar findings in the literature (Creswell 1998).

Methodological issues

Trustworthiness, reliability, validity and generalisability

Trustworthiness, reliability, validity are ambiguous and contested concepts. There have been many inconsistencies in their definition and application (Hammersley 1992). Reliability, validity and generalisability are often seen as main advantages of large-scale quantitative research with a probability sample (Burgess *et al* 2006). Numerous characteristics that typify the qualitative approach are not consistent with achieving external validity and generalisability as conceptualised by the positivist paradigm. Indeed, the major criticism of qualitative methods is that they are

impressionistic, non-verifiable and lack reliability, validity, objectivity and generalisability (Cohen and Manion 1995; Blaxter *et al* 2001). However, Guba and Lincoln (1994: 106-107) argue that disadvantages of quantitative research, such as “context skipping” or lack contextual information, “lack of explanation of meaning and purpose into human attitudes and behaviour”, “disjunction between grand theories and local contexts”, “inapplicability of general data to individual cases” and “exclusion of the discovery dimension of inquiry”, are addressed by qualitative research and therefore implicitly increase its validity. Guba and Lincoln (1994: 107) also suggest that the validity of qualitative research is further enhanced by its acknowledgement of the “interdependence” of theory and facts and facts and values and that different “theory windows” may support the same facts.

Guba and Lincoln (1982) underline that since it is virtually impossible to imagine human behaviour other than heavily influenced by its context, then generalisations that are intended to be context-free will have little useful to say about human behaviour. Thus, Lincoln and Guba (1982) suggest that the concept of fittingness should replace the concept of generalisability, especially since fittingness emphasises analysing the degree to which the situation studied matches other situations in which one is interested. Lincoln and Guba (1985) advocate that researchers talk in terms of transferability to similar contexts rather than generalisability while for Goetz and LeCompte (1981) the potential for applicability to other similar situations is provided by comparability and translatability. Allan (1991) argued that with systematic data collection and analysis, it is quite possible for qualitative approaches to generate investigations that are in general terms replicable in purpose and in procedures and cumulative. The same range of phenomena can be studied and can generate analyses with a slightly different focus perhaps, but which can inform new studies which themselves may result in further modification to our understanding. According to Guba (1981), Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Lincoln (1995), validity can be replaced by credibility, transferability and context embeddedness while reliability can be replaced by dependability or genuineness.

Notwithstanding the above, most researchers agree that the most important aspect of the research is the validity and reliability of the research design and whether it provides evidence that can bear the weight of the interpretation that is put on it and lead to credible conclusions (See Lincoln and Guba 1985; Sapsford and Jupp 1996;

Gorard 2002a). Triangulation has often been considered as a way of validating the design of qualitative research (See Cohen and Manion 1995; Bell 2002; Bell and Opie 2002). According to Denzin (1989) and Gorard (2000a) having a multiplicity of methods and a sound design adds rigour, breadth and depth, reliability and validity to any investigation. Flick (1998), Bridges (2001), Winch (2001) and Gorard (2002a) argue that independently of the paradigms, perspectives and methods used, research should have an explicit warrant in the form of a logical and persuasive link between the evidence produced and the conclusions drawn. Gorard (2000a) underlines that research should be rigorous with explicit hypotheses, transparent, logical, fully specified and plausible. Alternative explanations for the evidence should be eliminated. When drawing conclusions from evidence, attention should be drawn to the parts of the chain of reasoning that could be disputed.

In the present research reliability and validity were achieved through plausibility and context-embeddedness because of clear and detailed description (Guba 1981; Lincoln and Guba 1982, 1985; Lincoln 1995), a sound research design and quality data (Bridges 1999), a multiplicity of methods and a logical and persuasive link between the evidence produced and the conclusions drawn (Gorard 2002a). According to Lincoln and Guba (1982: 238) generalisations are impossible in social science since “phenomena are neither time nor context free”. Notwithstanding this, the present research has a good degree of fittingness with other research while also creating new knowledge and new ways of understanding a phenomena by formulating a conceptual model of optimal cultural distance to explain greater or lesser likelihood of participation in higher education by qualified potential entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups.

The role of the researcher, bias and prejudice

In conducting and writing up the research the researcher takes on a variety of roles, the most important of which is to produce an original contribution to knowledge. In order to do so, the researcher needs to read the literature, identify aims, set research objectives, write a draft of the literature review, revisit the research aims and objectives, select research design and methodology, conduct fieldwork, analyse data and redraft the literature review before finding a voice and a style in which to

construct a linear narrative using non-discriminatory writing to present an argument based on evidence, raise important questions and discuss them (See Maykut and Morehouse 1994; Blaxter *et al* 2001; Barnes 1995; Burgess; Schostak 2002).

Both the overall research process and the writing up are complicated, multidimensional and non-linear activities that involve reading, planning, structuring, drafting, editing, redrafting in such a way as to engage the whole self to the extent that the overall research process, the writing up and the final thesis are expressions of the self who has to negotiate how to present the findings with the rich detail and liveliness that characterises qualitative research (See Burgess *et al* 2006).. In other words the researcher “has to weave together the outcome propositions and the illustrative data into an interesting and informative narrative” with people’s thoughts, feelings and experiences to be conveyed in their own words whenever possible” (See Maykut and Morehouse 1994: 159). In doing so the researcher has to decide what to include and not to include, integrate into the discussion relevant aspects of other research to give a broader context to the thesis and finally leave open space for inclusion of as yet undiscovered others (Schostak 2002).

According to Burgess (1989) and Homan (1991, 1998, 2001) discussions about the influence of the researcher on the participants have usually revolved around overt and covert research and participant and non-participant observation. Bridges (2001) is of the opinion that only insiders can show enough sensitivity and properly represent the experience of a community. Sparkes (1994) on the other hand highlights that the outsider who asks dumb questions might better illuminate the research to the extent that first principles have to be returned to in reviewing the story. In other words, outsiders do not know the meanings of patterns, but insiders share assumptions and might not be aware of patterns because they are not conscious of them. While it is true that significant cultural differences such as membership of subculture or allegiance to social group between researcher and researched may militate against valid interpretations from the researcher and may influence the manner in which the respondents provide data, it is also true that researchers as insiders or outsiders equally liable to be prejudiced, but in different ways.

The present research did not involve observation. However, it was mainly outsider research since the researcher was not born and brought up in Britain and only insider

research to the extent that the researcher had been a mature student and has thus shared similar experiences with the mature participants. The researcher was aware of the power relationship between researcher and participants and that this may have a negative effect on what was said during focus groups and interviews. [How this issue was addressed is described under ethical issues below]. The researcher was aware of the need to minimise bias and prejudice, which can appear in all aspects of the research (from research objectives, literature review, methodology, research design to conducting focus groups and interviews and finally to analysing the data, formulating conclusions and writing the thesis). Being aware of the possibility of bias increases the reliability and validity of the research (Bourdieu 1990c; Bryman 1988, 2001). Assumptions about all aspects of the research were closely examined to minimise bias and prejudice. Although the researcher attempted to eradicate preconceptions as much as it was possible, she was also aware that all bias and prejudice couldn't be eliminated completely, because research is an interactive process, which is neither context nor value free.

I was aware that as the 'instrument' of data collection I might potentially influence focus groups participants and interviewees. Nonetheless I took care to make sure that participants and interviewees were able to fully to understand what was being asked and feel free to speak. I also took care not to exert undue influence in order to reduce potential bias. For example, before the focus groups started, I did not state that doing a degree was better than not doing a degree, only that I was interested in finding out about drivers and barriers and constructions of higher education as seen by the focus group participants and interviewees. The question as to what the institutional context could do to increase the likelihood of potential entrants going to higher education might have given the impression that going to higher education was more desirable than not going. However, this came well after ranking exercises where participants were asked to write down drivers and then barriers to higher education. This also came after the discussion about drivers and barriers and after discussions about constructions of students and constructions of higher education.

The assumptions that have guided the present research enquiry are related to the nature of reality (ontological issue), the relationship of the researcher with that being researched (epistemological issue), the role of values (axiological issue) and the process of research (methodological issue) (Hammersley 1995). The ontological

assumption acknowledges that interpretations of reality are subjective and multiple and so is that of the participants. The epistemological assumption acknowledges that researchers attempt both to lessen the distance between themselves and the participants and to increase the distance to enable reflection. The axiological assumption acknowledges that research is always value-laden and that it is not possible that all alternatives might be considered (Hammersley 1995). Finally, because of the interactive nature of qualitative research, there is also the possibility that the researcher might influence the participants and introduce bias and distortions. However, these will be minimised by checking assumptions and presenting warranted claims based on evidence and acknowledgement of the possibility of bias will increase the reliability and validity of the research (See Guba 1981; Lincoln and Guba 1982, 1985; Lincoln 1995; Bassey 1995; Sapsford and Jupp 1996; Bridges 1999; Bryman 2001; Gorard 2002a)

Ethical issues

Until recently there was little discussion of ethical issues beyond the application of ethics to social science (See Adelman 1984; Burgess 1989; Homan 1991, 1998, 2001; Oliver 2003). Some researchers have argued that the freedom to ask questions, express ideas and criticise the ideas of others comes with responsibilities imposed by ethical guiding principles (Bassey 1995; Homan 1998, 2001; Winch 2001). These responsibilities are: respect for respondents who are entitled to dignity and privacy; respect for truth in data collection and in portraying richness and complexity and showing empathy and imagination; truth and accuracy analysis and the reporting of finding and making these understandable and honesty about shortcomings of the research (Bassey 1995; Homan 1998, 2001; Winch 2001).

Only a few researchers assert that self-indulgence, irrelevance, selective presentation of evidence, careless empirical work and illogical argumentation are ethical violations and particular dispositions and qualities of character are to be cultivated to meet standards internal to research activity (See Winch 2001; Bridges 2001). For most researchers, thoroughness, truthfulness, relevance and logical argumentation are

epistemological and methodological rather than ethical issues (See Lincoln and Guba 1985; Lincoln 1995; Bassey 1995; Bridges 1999; Gorard 2002; Burgess *et al* 2006)

It appears that in practice the principal ethical issues are anonymity, confidentiality and informed consent as well as potential deception (Homan 1991, 1998, Bryman 2001; Oliver 2003). Since this research did not involve deception by going undercover, and since the researcher was careful to be fair and truthful with the participants and to not attempt to unduly influence them in any particular way, the issue of potential deception was not relevant to the present research.

Following Bryman (2001) and Oliver (2003) the issues of anonymity and confidentiality were addressed by guaranteeing to respect confidentiality, to limit access to raw data and to change names and specific geographical or other identifying information to protect the anonymity of persons and institutions. The issue of informed consent was addressed by informing participants, both individual and institutional, of their rights in taking part in the research. Homan (1998, 2001) advises that the use of gatekeepers fulfils the obligation of obtaining consent directly from the respondents. Research in schools or other institutions of learning normally proceeds on the basis of consent by gatekeepers who volunteer the co-operation of pupils or learners without, it is assumed, asking their opinion as to whether they want to take part or by asking for volunteers.

In this research access to the focus groups sample was through school, further education and higher education gatekeepers. Having asked for mixed ability and gender balanced groups of around eight to ten people, I conducted the focus groups with whoever was sent to me. The size of the groups ranged from six to twelve participants. The groups were only gender balanced in two instances. The young people in schools were told to go to a particular room to talk to someone who was doing research. They had not been told what the research was about. I briefly explained that the research was about drivers and barriers to higher education and about how people construct or conceptualise higher education. I ascertained whether they were happy to participate in the focus group. All the groups responded that they were very happy as they thought it was a better alternative than what they should normally have had, a personal and social development session, which they thought was terminally boring and of not much use.

Unlike the young people, the mature participants were self-selected and had volunteered to participate in the focus groups. They too had not been told what the research was about, so I gave them the same brief explanation as I had given to the younger participants. As recommended by Creswell (1998) and Strauss and Corbin (1997), institutions who asked for it were provided with a summary of the focus groups ranking exercises pertaining to their institution [See the appendix 3 for a transcription of the ranking exercises].

Participants who had taken part in focus groups and who were interviewed for the present research had volunteered to take part and were therefore self-selected. They were eager to be interviewed with full parental consent for those under the age of 18. The name of additional interviewees were suggested those interviewees who had taken part in the focus groups. The potential additional interviewees were given a brief outline of the research and asked if they wanted to be interviewed. All potential interviewees were therefore able to make an informed choice about taking part in the interviews. Informed consent was done orally. The interviewees were again briefly informed about the key aims of the research before they took part. They were informed of their right to withdraw at any time or to not answer questions they did not want to answer. They were assured confidentiality and anonymity. As recommended by Creswell (1998) and Strauss and Corbin (1997), in offering interviewees the right to review tape transcripts and to comment on them, the ethic of respondent validation and respect for truth was upheld. In practice, however, interviewees had little interest in reviewing tape transcripts. Many participants seemed confused at the idea of signing consent forms and reviewing transcripts, but expressed an interest in seeing the final thesis.

Homan (1998, 2001), Pring (2000, 2001) and Winch (2001), among others, warn about protecting respondents from harm including loss of self-esteem and invasion of privacy. They underlined that taking part in research and being interviewed can bring about negative psychological, emotional and social repercussions. However, this is more likely to happen when interviewing employees in case study about institutional practices. Roper-Huilman (1999), on the other hand, argues that respondent can benefit from the research by having a thirst for greater knowledge and an increased ability to critically scrutinise former understandings and assumptions. Oliver (2003)

underlines the potential positive (better knowledge of self and others) and negative (emotional strain and over involvement) effects of the research on the researcher.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed the methodology and research design or framework for both the documentary analysis and the empirical investigation. It discussed general ontological and epistemological issues or explicit and implicit claims about the nature of reality and the nature of knowledge. The research design, data collection and data analysis were described and justified. Finally, methodological issues of trustworthiness, reliability and validity, philosophical assumptions, the influence of the researcher, bias and prejudice and ethical issues were examined.

The chosen methodology was justified in terms of design, scope, sampling strategies and methodological assumptions. The scope of the proposed research project was limited in terms of time and resources available. In particular the breadth of focus, scope of the fieldwork and sampling are necessarily restricted. Focus group tasks and focus group discussions were used to reveal underlying attitudes and perspectives, thus providing new insights on the problem. Focus group discussions were then enhanced by semi-structured interviews. This combination of empirical methods was chosen in order to yield more useful data than any one method alone (Denzin 1970; Silverman 1993; Cohen and Manion 1996). A possible limitation of the research was that the focus groups and individual interviews were held at a moment of optimism as potential entrants were on their way to gain qualifications to enter higher education. Had the focus groups or interviews taken place just after they had received their A-levels or Higher grades results, they may have expressed less optimistic perspectives.

The next chapter will contextualise the focus groups tasks and discussions by describing the background of each focus group before investigating the focus group brainstorming and ranking exercises.

6

FOCUS GROUPS 1: CONTEXT AND CATEGORIES

The previous chapter explained and justified the methodological framework and research design of the present research. This chapter is the first of two chapters that examine the focus groups. This chapter is divided into three sections:

- institutional contexts of focus groups
- profiles of the eight focus groups
- barrier and driver categories generated by the brainstorming and ranking exercises

During the brainstorming and ranking exercises the participants generated the drivers and barriers and the categories they fitted into [See chapter 5 for full details]. The analysis of the categories emphasises how they were ranked and evaluated.

Institutional contexts of focus groups

Young Scottish Deprived and Young Scottish

The Young Scottish Deprived (YSD) school was a small state-maintained 12-18 comprehensive school situated in a recognised area of socio-economic deprivation in a suburban housing estate in Western Scotland. The school roll had decreased steadily over the previous years and counted 600 pupils. Around 80% of pupils were from low-income families and eligible for free school meals, which was far higher than the national and Local Authority averages. As there was little local employment available in the area, only a minority of pupils had Saturday jobs and these were in the city centre. General attendance remained well below the national average,¹

¹ *HMI Report* (2000) available at www.scotland.gov.uk (accessed 21 October 2002)

The Young Scottish (YS) school was a large state-maintained 12-18 comprehensive school situated in a mixed socio-economic suburban area in Western Scotland. The school was oversubscribed. The school roll counted 1500 pupils. Around 50% of the pupils were from households suffering from socio-economically disadvantage and hence eligible for free school meals. This percentage was above both the national and Local Authority averages. Just over half the pupils worked at the weekend.²

A comparison of the attainment between the YS and YSD schools (neither of which was situated in an affluent area) is shown in table 6.1 below:

Table 6.1 *YS and YSD achievement at Standard Grades and Higher Grades*³

Groups	% of S4 with 5+ Standard Grades 1-2	% of S4 with 3+Highers A-C in S5	% of S4 with 2+ Highers A-C in S6
School YS	20	18	16
School YSD	15	2	5
LA average	20	11	11
National average	31	20	17

As shown in table 6.1 above, both the YS and YSD schools were below the national average, but the YS school was above the while the YSD school was below the Local Authority average. Also, most pupils in YSD fifth year (S5) did two or three Highers. It was hoped that pupils would gain at least three Highers by the time they left sixth year (S6). Pupils in the YS fifth year (S5) did between three and five Highers. Only the most academically able pupils were expected to do five Highers and enter higher education directly after S5. Others were expected to stay on in S6 to improve their Highers and/or to add more Highers to their record of achievement.

Young English Deprived and Young English groups

The Young English Deprived (YSD) school was a small state maintained 14-18 comprehensive situated in a deprived socio-economic suburban area in Western Scotland. The school roll had decreased steadily over the previous years and counted 500 pupils. There were significantly more girls than boys in year 11. More than a

² *HMI Report* (1999) available at www.scotland.gov.uk (accessed 21 October 2002)
³ *Achievement at Standard Grades and Higher Grades in Scotland 1999-2000* available at <http://www.scotland.gov.uk> (accessed 21 October 2002)

quarter of the pupils were from households suffering from socio-economic disadvantage. Around 30% of pupils were eligible for free school meals, which was far higher than the national average and very high for the Local Education Authority. Standards on entry were low in relation to the national average. Non-attendance figures were twice the national average.⁴

The Young English (YE) school was a large state maintained 14-18 comprehensive situated in a suburban area in a city in the Midlands. The school was popular and counted 1400 pupils. A significant minority of the pupils were from households suffering from socio-economic disadvantage. About 20% of pupils were eligible for free school meals. This percentage was broadly average for an English comprehensive school, but high for the Local Education Authority. There were 10% or more girls than boys, because of the effect of a boys' grant maintained/foundation school nearby. The gender imbalance was even more evident in sixth form with 80 boys and 140 girls. Although the general attainment of pupils on entry matched the national average [in Key Stage 3 National Tests], there were fewer students of very high attainment and more of lower attainment than expected.⁵

A comparison of the attainment between YED with 27% of pupils eligible for free meals and YE with 19% of pupils eligible for free meals is summarised in table 6.2:

Table 6.2 *Comparative table of achievement YE and YED at GCSE and A-level⁶*

Groups	% of pupils entered for GCSE/GNVQ who gained 5+ GCSE/GNVQ A*-C	% of pupils entered for GCE A/AS levels who gained 2+ GCE A/AS Levels A*-C
School YE	38	16
School YED	18	10
LEA average	47	16
National average	48	18

Table 6.2 above shows that both the YE and YED schools were below the national average and below that of the LEA at both GCSE and A-level, although the A-level results of the YE school were only marginally below the national average and almost at the LEA average.

⁴ OFSTED Report (2001)
⁵ OFSTED Report (1997)
⁶ *Achievement at GCSE and A level in England* available at www.dfes.gov.uk/cgi-bin (accessed 21 October 2002)

Overall comparison English and Scottish school contexts

Table 6.3 below shows a comparison between the English and Scottish schools in terms of A-level/Higher Grade achievement. The percentage of free school meals is indicated in brackets.

Table 6.3 *Comparative table of achievement at Higher Grade and A-level⁷*

% free school meals/groups		% of S4 who gained 3+ Highers A-C in S5	% of S4 who gained 2+ Highers A-C in S6	% free school meals/groups		% of pupils entered for GCE A/AS Level who gained 2+ GCE A/AS Levels A*-C
48	YS	18	16	19	YE	16
80	YSD	2	5	27	YED	10
40	LA	11	11	14	LEA	16
17	Scotland	20	17	19	England	18

As outlined in the above table 6.3 the national average of the percentage of pupils gaining minimum higher education entry qualifications is slightly higher in Scotland. However, this figure only takes into account the percentage of S4 pupils with three or more Highers in S5. Many Scottish pupils do additional Highers in S6 and by the end of S6 have attained at least three Highers, that being the minimum qualification to enter higher education at the end of S6. Therefore, only looking at the percentage of pupils with three or more Highers at the end of S5 underestimates the number of pupils who achieve minimum higher education entry qualifications as it ignores those who gain three Highers at the end of S6. Adding to this the fact that the YS school had 48% of pupils eligible for free school meals while the YE and YED schools had 19% and 27% respectively, the YS school managed to count 18% of pupils who obtained minimum higher education entry qualifications in S5 against 16% and 10% for the YE and YED groups.

In England the achievement relates to the percentage of pupils *entered* for A-level. So in order to improve figures some less academically able students may be discouraged from taking A-levels or to take particular A-levels. In Scotland on the other hand, as the achievement relates to the percentage of pupils who were on the

⁷ *Achievement at GCSE and A level in England* available at www.dfes.gov.uk/cgi-bin (accessed 21 October 2002) and *Achievement at Standard Grades and Higher Grades in Scotland 1999-2000* available at <http://www.scotland.gov.uk> (accessed 21 October 2002)

S4 roll, pressure is exerted on schools to convince pupils to stay on after 16. A greater encouragement to stay on need not mean greater achievement. The YED with 27% of pupils with free school had just over half the achievement in comparison to the national average while the YSD with 80% of free school meals had, at the end of S5, only one-tenth of the achievement of the national average. The YS school had also nine times the achievement of the YSD, at the end of S5, and the YED school five times the achievement of the YSD school but almost two and three times fewer pupils respectively who were eligible for free school meals.

Mature Scottish in Further Education and Mature English in Further Education

The MSFE institution was a further education college in an urban area in Western Scotland. The access courses on offer were available on both a full-time and part-time basis. Students chose between access to media and arts, media and ceramic design, communication and core skills, general studies and languages, social sciences, training and developing and access to health and biological sciences. The college was praised for the flexible timetabling of classes and the provision of subsidised childcare. In 2000-2001 the college recruited 55% of its students from areas of high deprivation and 20% from areas of above average deprivation.⁸

The MEFE institution was a further education college in an urban area in the East Midlands. The access courses on offer were available full time or part-time and were made up of core units and then various pathways could be selected such as business, health, humanities and social sciences, science, social work and teaching were available. The MEFE college recruited 16% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment's *Index of Local Conditions*.⁹

The MSFE college of further education website and prospectus underlined inclusiveness and responsiveness to students' needs, the importance of guidance and

⁸ Scottish Further Education Funding Council (2000) *Infact Database* available at <http://www.sfefc.ac.uk> (accessed 21 October 2002).

⁹ FEFC Inspection Report (2000) also available at <http://www.lscdata.gov.uk> (accessed 12/10/2002)

support to helping to build their confidence and acquire skills to help with social and economic regeneration within the community. The main focus was on the experience of further education as opposed to outcomes and on the ‘togetherness’ of students and staff rather than staff as ‘specialists’ who help going in ‘the right direction’.

The MEFE prospectus and website underlined competitiveness, vocationalism, linearity, and individualism. The discourse was that of business and managerialism, using key terms such as goals, outcomes, qualifications and the acquisition skills. Tutors were specialists needed by potential students. The assumption was that the college was primarily for young people and professionals. Mature students or other non-traditional students were thus not properly ‘included’ in the same way as young people and professionals.

Table 6.4 Comparative age profiles of students in MSFE and MEFE institutions ¹⁰

Age	% of students in MSFE college of FE in 1999	Age	% of students in MEFE college of FE in 2000
<18	7	≤18	21
18-24	10	19-24	13
≥25	83	≥25	66

Comparing the MSFE and the MEFE institutions, it appears that the MSFE institution had a far greater proportion of students over 25 years of age and a greater proportion of students aged 18-24 while the MEFE institution had a greater proportion of students aged 18 and under. The proportion of students from highly deprived background was 55% in the MSFE and 16% in the MEFE institution.¹¹

Mature Scottish and Mature English in Higher Education

The MEHE higher education institution was a post 1992 institution situated in an urban area in the East Midlands that contained a faculty of arts and social sciences, a faculty of applied sciences and a business school. The MSHE higher education institution was a post 1992 institution situated in an urban area in Western Scotland

¹⁰ Sources: Scottish Further Education Funding Council *Infact Database* and College data from *FEFC Inspection Report* (2000)

¹¹ SFEFC FES Returns (2000-2001) available at <http://www.sfcfc.ac.uk> and FEFC Inspection Report (2000) available at <http://www.lscdata.gov.uk> (accessed 12/10/2002)

that contained a faculty of health, a faculty of science and technology and a business School.

Table 6.5 below compares various facts and figures between the MSHE and the MEHE higher education institutions.

Table 6.5 *Comparative profile of the MSHE and MEHE institutions¹²*

	MSHE	MEHE
Student numbers	13,000	9,000
% male students	39	38
% female students	61	62
% full time students	74	66
% part-time students	26	33
% local students	80	21
Students over 21 as % of full-time undergraduates	40	40

As shown in table 6.5 the two institutions had many similarities. The gender balance was about the same in both institutions. The MEHE institution had slightly more part-time students and slightly more overseas students but four times fewer local students. The MSHE institution had more full-time students, fewer overseas students and 80% of its intake was made up of local students. The percentage of mature students was the same in both institutions which were nearly twice the UK average of 22.6% (HESA 2002).

The MSHE mission statement, found on the website and prospectus, highlights working together with professional bodies, employers and others in education to support students to gain nationally recognised qualifications, enhancing their skills and advancing their career as well as promoting the regeneration of the West of Scotland through the generation and transference of higher skill levels, partnering others in applied research and more especially the commercial development of the regional knowledge base. The website underlined a full commitment to widening access and participation as well as success in recruiting students from non-traditional backgrounds and especially under-represented neighbourhoods.

¹² Sources: QAA Audits March 2000 and 2001 and HESA 2002-2003 using rounded figures

The MEHE mission statement found in the prospectus and website underlined excellence, quality of teaching and academic standards, teaching taking part in an environment of scholarship and research and defined academic programmes with clear learning outcomes, committed and competent teaching, a caring and supporting academic culture and an attractive and facilitating friendly and relaxed physical and social environment. The local social scene was presented as an important part of the higher education experience almost as important as academic life.

The contrasting discourse evident in the MSHE and MEHE as well as in the MSFE and MEFE prospectuses and websites arguably reflect the fact that England and Scotland have different national educational policies and structures based on different philosophical assumptions, educational ideologies, discourses and myths. An enduring difference has been a greater inclusiveness and greater interaction with the local community in Scotland than in England, which helps Scotland's high participation rate in higher education (Davie 1961; McCrone 1992; Paterson 1992, 1997; Sutherland 1999; Bone 1999; Anderson 1992, 1995, 1999).

Profile of the focus groups

Sex, age and entry routes/courses

As shown in table 6.6 below the size of the focus groups ranged from six to twelve participants. Only two groups, MSHE and MEHE, achieved a gender balanced with three women and three men in each group. In all the other groups the gender balance was between one third and one-quarter male or between two thirds and three quarter female with the exception of the MSFE group that counted only females. , the mature English participants were on average older than the Scottish mature participants.

Table 6.6 Sex, age and entry routes/courses profile of focus groups

Group	M	F	Course/entry route	Group	M	F	Course/entry route
YSD	2	6	8 participants Fifth year doing Highers 4x 1 Higher + additional modules 2 x 2 Highers 4 x 3 Highers	YED	5	7	12 participants Lower Sixth doing A levels 2x 1 A-level and various GNVQ/NC modules 2x 2 A-levels 8x 3 A-levels
YS	3	7	10 participants Fifth year doing Highers 5 x 3 Highers 2 x 4 Highers 3 x 5 Highers	YE	4	8	12 participants Lower Sixth doing A levels 2x 2 A-levels 10x 3 A-levels
MSFE	0	12	12 participants Access course aged 26-43	MEFE	4	8	12 participants Access course aged 25-50
MSHE	3	3	6 participants 3 rd year of 4 year Joint Hons (social sciences) Access /Highers aged 28-40	MEHE	3	3	6 participants 3 rd year Combined Hons (social sciences) Access /A levels aged 35-45

Young people in the English schools had a greater degree of choice in the subjects of their A-levels. Subjects such as Sociology, Psychology, Politics Photography and Philosophy are unavailable for Higher Grade. English language and English literature are separate subjects in England while in Scotland Higher Grade English includes both language and literature. Modern Studies, which looks at different countries' recent history and political system, is only available in Scotland.

The MSFE group was on an Access course with 'reserved' places for them on various courses in a post-1992 Scottish university, although they could also apply elsewhere. The MEFE group was drawn from an Access course with no reserved places for any courses in any institution. The MSHE participants were doing Joint Honours (social sciences). The MEHE participants were doing a Combined Honours Degree (social science).

Social class and ethnicity

The YE school counted far more pupils with families from social classes 1 and 2 although they only constituted about 25% of the intake while the YED had only a handful of families from social classes 1 and 2. The YSD school had 45% of pupils

from social classes 4 and 5 while the YS school counted 20% of pupils from social classes 4 and 5. The social class background of each focus group broadly matched the profile of each focus groups.¹³

The social class background of the participants for each focus group as defined by their fathers' occupation is given in table 6.7 below which shows that only 11% of the focus group sample and only the YS and the YE and the MSFE groups had participants whose fathers' occupations were from social classes 1 and 2 or professional and managerial classes such as teacher, engineer, project supervisor, company managers, lecturer at art college, architect, accountant. In several instances mothers had social class 1 or 2 occupations such as teacher, audiologist, and pharmacist while fathers belonged to a lower socio-economic group.

Table 6.7 Social class and ethnic profile of each focus group

Focus groups	Overall	YS	YSD	YE	YED	MSFE	MEFE	MSHE	MEHE
TOTAL	78 [100%]	10	8	12	12	12	12	6	6
Social classes 1+2	9 [11%]	4 [40%]	-	4 [33%]	-	1 [9%]	-	-	-
Social classes 3nm +3m	34 [43%]	3 [30%]	2 [25%]	5 [41%]	6 [50%]	5 [41%]	7 [59%]	2 [33%]	3 [50%]
Social classes 4+5	35 [45%]	3 [30%]	6 [75%]	2 [16%]	6 [50%]	6 [50%]	5 [41%]	4 [67%]	3 [50%]
Asian	2	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	-
Afro-Caribbean	3	1	1	1	1	-	-	-	1

As see in the above table 6.7 The majority of the participants were from social classes 3nm, 3m and 4 and 5. Young English Deprived (YED) and the Young Scottish Deprived (YSD) groups had a significantly greater proportion of participants who came from social classes 4 and 5, as did the MSFE and MSHE groups.

In terms of ethnicity, only the Young English, Young English Deprived and Mature English in Higher Education groups included participants of Asian and African Caribbean origin. The Scottish sample had no participant of Asian or African Caribbean origin. Ethnic minorities constitute only around 1% of the population in Scotland as opposed to 8% in England (SHEFC 2004; HEFCE 2005)

¹³ HMI Reports 1999 and 2000; OFSTED Reports 1997 and 2001

Family background

An outline of the familial backgrounds of the participants is outlined in the table 6.8 below. In the YS, YE and YED groups the majority of the participants lived with two parents while in the YSD group only one third lived with two parents.

Table 6.8 Family background profile of each focus group

Group	M	F	Family	Group	M	F	Family
YSD	2	8	aged 16-17 3 live with 2 parents 3 live with mother 1 lives with grandmother 1 lives with aunt	YED	5	7	aged 17 7 live with 2 parents 4 live with mother 1 lives with father
YS	3	7	aged 17 9x live with 2 parents 1 lives with mother and step-father	YE	4	8	aged 17 7 live with 2 parents/step-parents 4 live with mother 1 lives with father
MSFE	0	12	aged 26-43 7 with children 5 with no children 2 single mothers 9 with partners	MEFE	4	8	aged 25-50 6 with children 6 with no children 2 single mothers 8 with partners
MSHE	3	3	aged 28-40 3 with children 2 single mothers 4 with partners	MEHE	3	3	aged 35-45 4 with children 1 single mother 5 with partners

The above table 6.8 also shows that in each mature focus group there were two single mothers except in the MEHE group, which counted only one single mother. In each mature focus group most participants were married or had partners and half or more had children. The mature English groups had a greater age differential among participants as well as marginally older participants.

Categories generated by brainstorming and ranking exercises

Each focus group started with a brainstorming exercise in which participants were asked to write down four drivers and four barriers to participation in higher education that were categorised and then ranked by the participants.

Driver categories

Ranking by number of votes

Table 6.9 below gives the ranking of each driver category for each focus group and the number of votes each category received:

Table 6.9 Ranking order of driver categories by number of votes for each focus group

Group	Ranking order	Votes	Group	Ranking order	Votes
YE	1 SOCIAL LIFE	10	YS	1 BETTER JOB PROSPECTS	9
	2 Better employment prospects	6		2 Money	7
	3 Qualifications	5		3 Self-improvement	6
	4 Money	5		4 Social life	5
	5 Knowledge	2		5 Stepping stone	2
	6 Self-improvement	2			
	7 Independence	1			
YED	1 QUALIFICATIONS	12	YSD	1 BETTER JOB OPPORTUNITIES	7
	2 Better employment	9		2 Qualifications	3
	3 Social life	9		3 Money	3
	4 Knowledge	2		4 Courses	2
	5 New places	2		5 Distance	1
	6 Self-improvement	2			
MEFE	1 BETTER EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES	11	MSFE	1 CAREER	12
	2 Qualifications	8		2 Confidence	8
	3 Knowledge	5		3 Money	7
	4 Money	5		4 Challenge	4
	5 Self-improvement	3		5 Knowledge	2
	6 Career	2		6 Setting an example	1
	7 Socio-cultural	1		7 Validation	1
MEHE	1 MONEY	10	MSHE	1 SELF-DEVELOPMENT	7
	2 Personal growth	4		2 Money	4
	3 Qualifications	3		3 Better job	3
	4 Socio-cultural reasons	1		4 Socio-cultural	2
				5 Challenge	2

external/instrumental/employment

internal

other internal

Table 6.9 indicates that each group identified between four and seven driver categories that can be separated into 17 different categories with nine categories

mentioned at least twice and eight categories mentioned only once. (By comparison, the barrier categories were separated into 13 different categories with six categories mentioned at least twice and five categories mentioned only once.)

‘Money’ ranked first overall as a driver category. It was identified by seven of the groups or 66 out of 78 participants. ‘Money’ was ranked first once, second twice, third twice and fourth twice. ‘Better job/employment prospects/opportunities’ ranked second and was identified by six of the groups. This category was ranked first three times, second twice and third once. ‘Qualifications’ ranked third overall and appeared in five of the groups and was ranked first once, second twice and third twice. ‘Career’ came sixth with 14 votes. ‘Career’ was not mentioned by the young people groups but was mentioned by all mature groups except the MSHE group.

The driver category ‘self-improvement/self-development/personal growth’ appeared in six groups and was ranked fifth overall and first once, second once, third once, fifth once and sixth twice. Only the MSFE and YSD groups did not identify this particular driver category. However, some categories, although not labelled ‘self-improvement’, were very closely related to self-improvement. For example ‘challenge’ was ranked ninth and was identified by the MSFE and MSHE groups, instead of self-improvement for the MSFE group and in addition to ‘self-development’ for the MSHE group. Another example is the fact that the category ‘knowledge’ that ranked in seventh position overall and which was identified by the MSFE, MEFE, YE and YED groups somewhat overlaps with self-improvement. Some participants understood ‘knowledge’ as self-improvement while others thought of self-improvement in terms of gaining more knowledge.

The category ‘socio-cultural reasons’ ranked in tenth position and appeared in all the mature groups except the MSFE group. It too can be linked to ‘self-improvement’ in terms of improving socio-cultural status and social skills. [See chapter 7 for more on socio-cultural reasons]

Other driver categories received very few votes. ‘Validation’ in fifteenth position was identified only by MSFE group, as was ‘confidence’ in eighth position. These two categories can also be linked to ‘self-improvement’ while ‘setting an example’ also identified only by the MSFE group can be linked to both ‘self-improvement’ and

‘family’. Other group specific driver were ‘courses’ and ‘[lack of] distance’ which were identified only by YSD group, ‘new places’ which were selected only by the YED group as was ‘independence’ while ‘stepping stone’ was chosen only by the YS group. All these categories evoke linearity and the notion of projection into the future and turning point, which is not surprising as the young participants were at the structural turning point of what to do post A-levels or post Highers.

In terms of types of motivations there was a greater contrast between YE and YED groups, who put in first place ‘social life’ and ‘qualifications’ respectively, than between the YS and YSD groups who ranked first ‘better job prospects’ and ‘better opportunities’ respectively. Out of the mature participants only the MSHE group ranked ‘self-improvement’ as the top driver category while all others chose external instrumental employment related categories such as ‘money’ and ‘better employment opportunities ’ and ‘career’. However, the MEFÉ and the MEHE groups gave seven votes to intrinsic drivers such as ‘self-improvement’, ‘confidence’ and ‘challenge’ against 19 votes for the MSFE and MEHE groups.

Out of 218 votes cast, 132 or 61% concerned driver categories that were external factors related to employment such as ‘money’, ‘better employment prospects’, ‘qualifications’ and ‘career’. Whereas 60% of the votes cast were concentrated into four categories, the other 40% were spread over 13 categories. These 13 categories represent the more internalised and more intrinsic factors that have to do with various aspects of self-improvement. This indicates that taking into account only the top driver categories only gives half the picture.

Table 6.10 and 6.11 below show the overall ranking order of the driver categories by number of votes and how the votes were divided by major subgroups

Table 6.10 Overall ranking order of driver categories by number of votes

Rank	Driver categories	Number of groups with category	Number of votes	% of votes cast
1	Better employment	7	45	21
2	Money	6	41	19
3	Qualifications	5	31	14
4	Social life	3	24	11
5	Self-improvement	6	24	11
6	Career	3	14	6.4
7	Knowledge	4	11	5.0
8	Confidence	1	8	3.7
9	Challenge	2	6	2.8
10	Socio-cultural reasons	3	4	1.8
11	Courses	1	2	0.9
12	New places	1	2	0.9
13	Stepping stone	1	2	0.9
14	Setting an example	1	1	0.4
15	Validation	1	1	0.4
16	Distance	1	1	0.4
17	Independence	1	1	0.4
			218	100

external/instrumental/employment

top internal

other internal

Table 6.11 Ranking order of driver categories by number of votes and by sub-groups

Driver Categories	Overall	Young	Mature	English	Scottish
1 Better employment	45	31	14	26	19
2 Money	41	15	26	20	21
3 Qualifications	31	20	11	28	3
4 Social life	24	24	0	19	5
5 Self-improvement	24	10	14	11	13
6 Career	14	0	14	2	12
7 Knowledge	11	4	7	9	2
8 Confidence	8	0	8	0	8
9 Challenge	6	0	6	0	6
10 Socio-cultural reasons	4	0	4	2	2
11 Courses	2	2	0	0	2
12 New places	2	2	0	2	0
13 Stepping stone	2	2	0	0	2
14 Distance	1	1	0	0	1
15 Validation	1	0	1	0	1
16 Setting an example	1	0	1	0	1
17 Independence	1	1	0	1	0
	218	112	106	120	98

external/instrumental/employment

top internal

other internal

Table 6.10 and 6.11 show that ‘money’ remained in first place in the mature Scottish sub-groups, but ranked fourth in the young people and English sub-groups.

‘Employment’ [as in ‘better job prospects’ or better employment opportunities] stayed in second position in all the sub-groups except the Scottish sub-group. ‘Social life’ reached first place in the young people sub-group and, together with ‘independence’ and ‘new places’, was especially important for the young English sub-group. ‘Qualifications’ came first in the English sub-group while the Scottish sub-group ranked ‘qualifications’ in the lowest position, but gave the highest ranking for ‘self-improvement’ which came in second position. It might be suggested that perhaps the English sub-group focussed more on social aspects and on qualifications while the Scottish sub-group focussed more on processes. To some extent this mirrors the English and Scottish national educational mythologies and in particular the idea of the democratic intellect and a distinctive university tradition that put the benefits of going through the processes of higher education before the qualifications (See Davie 1961, 1993 and Lockhart-Walker 1994).

‘Courses’ and ‘distance’ only appeared in the YSD group. This suggests the importance for the YSD group of having to travel as little distance as possible, and hence of studying for higher education courses as near to home as possible. This also suggests the importance of finding a course that fits needs and interests. The concern for reducing distance travelled as much as possible points to the role of higher education in further education, a main reason for the higher participation rate in Scotland (See Paterson 1992, 1997; Arbuthnott 1997; Smith and Bocock 1999; Bone 1999; Schuller and Bamford 1999; Mackie 2001, SHEFC 2004; HEFCE 2005). In a survey of around 1,900 pupils in S4/year 11, Scottish pupils were found to have a likelihood of 69% of going on to higher education compared to 61% for English pupils (Connor *et al* 1999b: 23).

‘Confidence’ was only identified by the MSFE group who had gained so much of it in doing the access course that they felt it literally propelled them further on in spite of themselves, largely because it greatly increased their perceived ability to translate aspirations into action. Only the YS group underlined ‘stepping stone’ as a driver category. Yet Roberts and Higgins (1992) and Roberts and Allen (1997) found this to be a usual explanation when students in higher education were asked about retrospective motivations. Young people who were traditional entrants most frequently mentioned ‘stepping-stone’ as a motivating factor for entering higher education. The idea of ‘stepping-stone’ fits in with the notion of a ‘normal’

biography as opposed to ‘choice’ biography or non-decision rather than decision (Du Bois-Reymond 1998). It suggests a particular educational trajectory, in this instance the prime trajectory of going to higher education, as something ineluctable (See Power *et al* 1999; 2000; 2003 and Ball *et al* 2000, 2002). Ranked third by mature participants, ‘career’ was not selected by the young participants. Connor *et al* (1999a: 11-15) who investigated the factors influencing entry to higher education and surveyed 16 different schools found that “to have a professional career” came second in the ranking behind “to study a subject that really interests me”.¹⁴ Perhaps the discrepancy can be explained by the way in which questions were framed or because of the different social class profile of the sample. In the present focus group sample 34% rather than 43% of the participants were from social classes 1, 2 and 3nm and 66% rather than 52% were from social classes 3m, 4 and 5. In particular the discrepancy could be the consequence not so much of the smaller percentage of social classes 1 and 2, but more especially of the greater percentage (three times as many) of social classes 4 and 5 in the present focus group sample.¹⁵

Unused votes

As the participants had three stickers to use for distributing votes among the driver categories, the total number of votes available was 234. However, only 218 were cast, leaving 20 votes unused. This gives an average of 2.8 votes per participant, which was unequally distributed among the focus groups. Table 6.12 below shows the distribution of the unused votes.

Table 6.12 *Number of unused votes for each group*

Group	Total no of votes available	No of votes unused	% of votes unused
YE	36	5	14
YED	36	0	0
YS	30	1	3
YSD	24	8	33
MEFE	36	1	0
MEHE	18	0	0
MSFE	36	1	3
MSHE	18	0	0
TOTAL	234	16	7

¹⁴ 48% found it extremely important [83% extremely and/or very important] compared to 44% [82% extremely and/or very important] for the former statement
¹⁵ 1+2 = 32% [IES] and 22% [YS, YSD, YE, YED]; 3nm=11% and 12% respectively; 3m=30% and 28%; 4+5= 13% and 38%

Table 6.12 indicates that only the YE and YSD groups had more than two unused votes. They could use their votes as they wanted and select to attribute all three votes to one category. Some participants, however, did not cast all their votes because they seemingly could not decide to which category they should allocate their third vote. The YE and especially the YED group found it particularly difficult to make that decision. Perhaps, this was due to the participants having to walk to the sheets stuck on the walls and place their stickers beside the name of categories which made it more difficult to think or to the fact that they were not able or could not be bothered going beyond allocating two stickers or that they lost some of their stickers.

Ranking by number of words

When analysing the driver categories the researcher was struck by a discrepancy between the ranking of categories and the number of words they generated. It appeared odd that participants would give more votes for particular driver categories for which they had not written many words. If participants had written so many words about drivers before they knew they would be categorised and then ranked, then the drivers they wrote so much about must have been important to them. It seemed paradoxical that they would then decide that the driver category they wrote a lot about would be ranked as less important than categories for they wrote far less or nothing at all. A possible explanation was the influence of group dynamics that might have pressured participants to choose more socially acceptable drivers or alternatively a lack of self-awareness. Consequently, it was decided to compare the ranking by number of words to the ranking by number of votes in order to investigate how ranking by number of words might affect the comparative ranking of driver categories both overall and within each individual focus group.

Table 6.13 below shows the comparative ranking of driver categories by votes and by number of words.

Table 6.13 Comparative table of driver categories for each group ranked by total number of votes cast and total number of words

Driver category	No. of Votes	Driver category	No. of Words	Driver category	No. of Votes	Driver category	No. of Words
YE		YE		YS		YS	
Social life	10	Social life	31	Better job	9	Better job	16
Better job	6	Independence	29	Money	7	Self-impr'ment	10
Qualifications	5	Knowledge	22	Self-impr'ment	6	Social life	10
Money	5	Better job	15	Social life	5	Money	7
Knowledge	2	Self-impr'ment	13	Stepping stone	2	Stepping stone	7
Self impr'ment	2	Money	10				
Independence	1	Qualifications	5				
YED		YED		YSD		YSD	
Qualifications	12	Self-impr'ment	65	Better job	7	Distance	19
Better job	9	New places	65	Qualifications	3	Better job	12
Social life	9	Qualifications	63	Money	3	Qualifications	12
Knowledge	2	Social life	58	Courses	2	Courses	10
New places	2	Better job	28	Distance	1	Money	9
Self impr'ment	2	Knowledge	26				
MEFE		MEFE		MSFE		MSFE	
Better job	11	Better job	48	Career	12	Career	73
Qualifications	8	Knowledge	32	Confidence	8	Confidence	29
Knowledge	5	Socio-cultural	27	Money	7	Money	28
Money	5	Qualifications	22	Challenge	4	Challenge	19
Self impr'ment	3	Self-impr'ment	19	Knowledge	2	Knowledge	10
Career	2	Career	16	Example	1	Example	10
Socio- cultural	1	Money	12	Validation	1	Validation	6
MEHE		MEHE		MSHE		MSHE	
Money	10	Self impr'ment	32	Self impr'ment	7	Better job	57
Self impr'ment	4	Money	27	Money	4	Self-impr'ment	28
Qualifications	3	Qualifications	8	Better job	3	Challenge	28
Socio-cultural	1	Socio-cultural	8	Socio-cultural	2	Socio-cultural	18
				Challenge	2	Money	11

external/instrumental/employment internal other internal

Table 6.13 indicates that the changes brought about by ranking the number of words, rather than votes, favoured internal/intrinsic/non-employment related driver categories and more especially self-improvement related categories. The mature participants showed fewer changes than the younger participants. The MSFE group was the only group with no changes in the rankings when words replaced votes. This might indicate a greater level of congruency and self-awareness. In the MEHE group 'self-improvement' replaced 'money' in first place while in the MSHE group the top driver category 'better job' was replaced by 'self-improvement'. In the MSHE and

MEFE groups ‘money’ saw the greatest change as it went from second and fourth place respectively to the bottom place. In the MSHE ‘self-improvement’ went from top to second place but ‘challenge’ went up one place. In the MEFE socio-cultural reasons went up several places but ‘better job’, ‘career’ and ‘self-improvement’ stayed as before in first, sixth and fifth place respectively. In the MEHE group ‘money’ and ‘self-improvement’, which were in first and second position, switched to second and first position respectively.

Tables 6.13 also indicates that in the YED group ‘self-improvement’ went from bottom to top position while in the YSD group ‘distance’ did likewise. In these two groups ‘qualifications’ went down by two and one place respectively. In the YED group ‘new places’ went up from fifth place to second place while in the YE group ‘independence’ went from seventh to second place. In both the YE and YS ‘self-improvement’ went up one place while ‘money’ went down two places. However, ‘better employment’ remained in first place in the YS group, which was the only group of younger participants in which an external instrumental employment related driver category was not displaced by an internal intrinsic category.

After examining the changes in each group, the changes between the overall ranking of the driver categories by number of votes and number of words are investigated. These are set out in Table 6.14 below which shows that when comparing the ranking by votes cast and by number of words, ‘employment’ remains as the first driver category, ‘socio-cultural reasons’ moves up the ranking from eighth to tenth position while ‘social life’ and ‘knowledge’ show little or no change. The most significant change, however, concerns ‘self-improvement’ which goes up from fourth place to second place overall very closely behind ‘better employment’. The difference between employment and instrumental driver categories and self-improvement related categories was far greater when votes were taken into account than when the number of words is taken into account. While employment related categories obtained 131 out of 218 votes or 60%, employment related categories counted 469 words out of a total of 1110 words or 43% of the total number of words.

Table 6.14 Comparative table of the overall ranking of driver categories by number of words and by number of votes

Ranking by number of words				Ranking by number of votes cast		
Rank		Words	% of words		Votes	% of votes
1	Better employment	176	16	Better employment	45	21
2	Self-improvement	167	15	Money	41	19
3	Money	104	9.5	Qualifications	31	14
4	Qualifications	100	9.1	Social life	24	11
5	Knowledge	100	9.1	Self-improvement	23	10
6	Social life	99	9.0	Career	14	6.4
7	Career	89	8.2	Knowledge	11	5.0
8	New places	65	6.0	Confidence	8	3.7
9	Socio-cultural reasons	53	4.9	Challenge	6	2.8
10	Challenge	47	4	Socio-cultural reasons	4	1.8
11	Independence	29	2.7	Courses	2	0.9
12	Confidence	29	2.7	New places	2	0.9
13	Distance	19	1.7	Stepping stone	2	0.9
14	Courses	10	0.9	Distance	1	0.4
15	Setting an example	10	0.9	Validation	1	0.4
16	Stepping stone	7	0.6	Setting an example	1	0.4
17	Validation	6	0.5	Independence	1	0.4
		1110	100		218	100

 external/instrumental/employment  top internal  other internal

Key drivers that could override all the barriers

A further dimension to the analysis was added by taking into account the one key driver that participants were asked to identify towards the end of the focus groups and which should be powerful enough to override all the other barriers. For comparative purposes these key barriers were classified by their nature under the driver categories generated by the groups at the beginning of the focus group. Table 6.15 shows the comparative weighing of each category by percentage of words, percentage of votes and percentage of finalised additional ranking. [The key drivers are further discussed in chapter 7 and all the key drivers statements can be found in appendix 4 on pages 473-474.]

Table 6.15 Comparative table of the overall ranking of driver categories by number of words, votes cast and by statements of key drivers

Categories			Categories		Categories		
Rank		% of words		% of votes		No statements	% of statements
1	Employment	16	Employment	21	Employment	23	31
2	Self-improvt	15	Money	19	Career	11	15
3	Money	9.5	Qualifications	14	Self-improvt	8	11
4	Qualifications	9.1	Social life	11	Social life	7	9.3
5	Knowledge	9.1	Self-improvt	10	Qualifications	6	8.0
6	Social life	9.0	Career	6.4	Knowledge	6	8.0
7	Career	8.2	Knowledge	5.0	Money	5	6.6
8	New places	6.0	Confidence	3.7	Validation	3	4.0
9	Socio-cultural	4.9	Challenge	2.8	Distance	2	2.6
10	Challenge	4	Socio-cultural	1.8	Family	2	2.6
11	Independence	2.7	Courses	0.9	Socio-cultural	1	1.3
12	Confidence	2.7	New places	0.9	New places	1	1.3
13	Distance	1.7	Stepping stone	0.9			
14	Courses	0.9	Distance	0.4			
15	Setting example	0.9	Validation	0.4			
16	Stepping stone	0.6	Setting example	0.4			
17	Validation	0.5	Independence	0.4			
		100		100		75	100

external/instrumental/employment
 Top internal
 other internal

Table 6.15 shows that when participants were asked to identity one key driver powerful enough to override all the barriers, the range of categories was narrower than ranking by number of votes and number of words. Whereas the instrumental employment-related and the top internal categories still occupy the first seven places in the ranking, the number of the other internal categories is reduced by half. In comparison to the percentage of the ranking by number of votes ‘better employment’ is consolidated in first place by ten points. ‘Self-improvement’ is up by one point from fifth to third place. ‘Career’ is up by nine points and climbs up from sixth to second place. ‘Money’ is up by two points and down from second place to seventh place. It is worth noting that the distribution of instrumental employment-related and internal intrinsic factors mirrors that of the ranking by number of votes with 60% and 61% for the former and 40% and 39% respectively for the latter. [All the driver statements can be found in appendix 3 on pages 459-472]

Barrier categories

Ranking by number of words

Table 6.16 below shows the ranking order of the barrier categories by number of distributed votes for each focus group.

Table 6.16 Ranking order of barrier categories by number of votes for each focus group

Group	Ranking order	Votes	Group	Ranking order	Votes
YE	1 MONEY	12	YS	1 EFFORT	11
	2 Isolation/independence	8		2 Money	9
	3 Effort	5		3 Time	7
	4 Time	3		4 Confidence	0
YED		12	YSD	1 MONEY	8
	2 Family and friends	7		2 Distance	4
	3 Confidence	5		3 Difficulty	2
	4 Effort	3		4 Friendships and family	2
	5 Work	3		5 Courses	1
MEFE	1 MONEY	12	MSFE	1 Children	8
	2 Confidence	11		2 Ability/effort	7
	3 Family	8		3 Confidence	6
	4 Time	5		4 Money	6
MEHE	1 TIME	7	MSHE	1 MONEY	5
	2 Money	5		2 Experiences of education	2
	3 Confidence	3		3 Family	2
	4 Socio-cultural reasons	1		4 Work	2
	5 Qualifications	1		5 Discipline/effort	2
				6 Peer pressure	2
				7 Status of not earning	1
				8 Confidence	1

 = instrumental  = top intrinsic  = other intrinsic

Table 6.16 shows that except for the MSHE group with eight categories, all the other groups selected four or five barrier categories. Overall the barriers were separated into 13 different categories (against 17 for the incentives) with six categories mentioned at least twice and five categories mentioned only once. All the groups selected ‘money’ as a barrier category. In 5 of the groups ‘money’ came first and in two groups it came second. Except in the case of the MEHE group where it ranked second, in all the other English groups ‘money’ ranked first. In the Scottish groups

'money' ranked first in the YSD and MSHE groups, second in the YS group and only fourth in MSFE group.

A total of 36 out of 42 English participants ranked 'money' or financial issues first (or three of the four English groups) while only 14 out of 36 Scottish participants (or two out of four Scottish groups) did likewise. Other barrier categories that ranked first were 'time' for MEHE, 'effort' for YS and 'children' for MSFE. Closely related to 'money' because they are both external and employment related barriers, the barrier category 'work' appeared only in the YED and MSHE groups where it ranked fourth out of five for YED and fourth out of eight categories in MSHE. 'Work' can be either part-time to finance lifestyle or studies or full-time employment as opposed to being a student. The expectation of going to 'work' was more important for the YED group in a context of a buoyant labour market while the YSD group fits the theory that a less buoyant labour market encourages participation in higher education.

Robertson and Hillman suggest (1997) that students from lower socio-economic groups are more likely to anticipate initial entry to the labour market rather than higher education because of peer, parental and school expectation.' 'Work' as a barrier to higher education is also directly linked to the availability of local employment opportunities. Corr *et al* (1989), Taylor (1992), Fergusson and Unwin (1996), Hodgson and Spours (2000) found that a buoyant labour market could act as a barrier to participation while Roberts and Parsell (1988), Raffe and Willms (1989), Bynner and Roberts (1991) and Furlong and Raffe (1992) discovered that a less buoyant labour market was a driver to staying on in education and to participation in higher education.

For the YED and YSD groups 'money' was the number one barrier category. The number two was 'family and friends' for the YED group and 'distance' for the YSD group. Both concepts are linked insofar as they imply a fear or reluctance of moving away from familiar surroundings. The YSD group emphasised the process, that is, travelling distance, while the YED group underlined the consequence, that is, loss of 'family and friends'. Higher education was perceived as more intellectually demanding by the YSD group, but more socially demanding for the YED group, reflecting the respective educational myths of each country, again underlining that

social barriers come before academic barriers for England and while the opposite was true for Scotland.

Table 6.17 and 6.18 below indicate the overall ranking order of the barrier categories by number of votes and how the votes were divided by major subgroups

Table 6.17 Overall ranking order of barrier categories by number of votes

Rank	Barrier categories	Number of groups with category	Number of votes	% of votes
1	Money	8	69	35
2	Family/friends/isolation/independence	5	35	18
3	Effort/difficulty/ability/discipline	6	30	15
4	Confidence	6	26	13
5	Time	4	22	11
6	Work	2	5	2.5
7	Distance	1	4	2.0
8	Experiences of education	1	2	1.0
9	Peer pressure	1	2	1.0
10	Qualifications	1	1	0.5
11	Courses	1	1	0.5
12	Status of not earning	1	1	0.5
13	Socio-cultural reasons	1	1	0.5
			199	100

= instrumental = top intrinsic = other intrinsic

Table 6.18 Ranking of barrier categories by number of votes and by sub-groups

Barrier categories	All	Young	Mature	English	Scottish
1 Money	69	41	28	41	28
2 Family/friends/isolation/independence	35	17	18	23	12
3 Effort/difficulty/ability	30	21	9	8	22
4 Confidence	26	5	21	19	7
5 Time	22	10	12	15	7
6 Work	5	3	2	3	2
7 Distance	4	4	0	0	4
8 Experience of education	2	0	2	0	2
9 Peer pressure	2	0	2	0	2
10 Qualifications	1	0	1	1	0
11 Course	1	1	0	0	1
12 Status of not earning	1	0	1	0	1
13 Socio-cultural reasons	1	0	1	1	0
	199	102	97	111	88

= instrumental = top intrinsic = other intrinsic

Tables 6. 17 and 6.18 show that while ‘money’ ranked first overall, ‘family/children/friends’ ranked second overall. It appeared in 5 groups, including three of the Scottish groups. ‘Isolation/independence’ emerged only in the YE group. In order to avoid having too great a number of categories, it was put under the ‘family/children/friends’.

The barrier category ‘effort/difficulty’ ranked third overall. It came up in six of the groups. Also, included under this category are ‘ability’ from the MSFE group and ‘discipline’ from the MSHE group. Only MEFE and MEHE did not have this category. The barrier category ‘confidence’ ranked fourth overall. It appeared in six of the groups. Only YE and YSD did not mention this barrier category as such although YE focussed instead on fear of ‘isolation/independence’ and YSD focussed on lack of fit between themselves and ‘courses’ and the problem of physical and emotional ‘distance’. The barrier category ‘time’ ranked fifth overall. It appeared in half the groups including all three English groups except YE. Among the Scottish groups, only YS did mention ‘time’ as a barrier category. Ironically, ‘time’ figures more prominently in England than in Scotland and yet the English Honours degree lasts three years while the Scottish Honours degree last four years. Only the YED and MSHE groups mentioned the barrier category ‘work’. ‘Qualifications’ appeared only in the MEHE group, ‘courses’ and ‘distance’ only the YSD group, ‘experience of education’ in MSHE group and ‘socio-cultural reasons’ only in the MEHE group.

Out of 199 votes cast, 75 or 37% concerned barrier categories linked to external factors concentrated into two categories: ‘money’ and ‘work’. The remainder 124 votes or 63% was spread among 11 barrier categories, which represent non-financial internalised factors ranging from issues relating to family and friends, effort and time, ability and confidence, lack of qualifications, peer pressure, negative experiences of education, distance, courses and socio-cultural reasons (including negative stereotypes of students and of higher education). Whereas external financial and employment drivers were aggregated into 4 categories representing 51% of the drivers with the remaining 49% spread into 13 categories, the financial and employment barriers were divided into two categories which only constituted 43% of the barriers while 57% of barriers were spread into 11 categories. This indicates that only taking into account the top barrier categories would only give half the picture as

participants were pulled away from and pushed towards higher education by more than just top drivers and barriers.

The YE group saw higher education as more socially challenging while it was more intellectually challenging for the YS group, reflecting the fact that intellectual ability matters more in the Scottish educational mythology as opposed to wealth or social class in the English educational mythology. ‘Effort’ was ranked first by the YS group while ‘Isolation/[fear of] Independence’ appeared only in the YE group reflecting the fact that English potential are expected to go to higher education away from home, but this is not expected of Scottish potential entrants who might fear alienation from family and friends. Similarly for the MEFЕ and MEHE groups the emphasis was more on socio-cultural confidence while for the MSFE and MSHE groups the emphasis was on academic effort. ‘Confidence’ and ‘effort’ ranked second for MEFЕ and MSFE respectively while for the MEHE and MSHE groups ‘confidence’ ranked third and eighth respectively and ‘effort’ did not appear in the MEHE group but appeared in fifth position in MSHE. In both the MEHE and MSHE groups ‘money’ came second and first respectively. Yet, these two groups were still in receipt of income based student grants having started their degrees in 1997.

Unused votes

As the participants could distribute three stickers among the barrier categories, the total number of votes available was 234. However, only 199 were votes cast, leaving 35 votes unused. This gives an average of 2.6 votes per participant. The unused votes were unequally distributed among the focus groups as shown in table 6.19 below.

Table 6.19 *Number of unused votes for each focus group*

Group	Total no of votes available	No of votes unused	% of votes unused
YE	36	8	22
YED	36	6	17
YS	30	3	10
YSD	24	7	29
MEFE	36	0	0
MEHE	18	1	6
MSFE	36	9	25
MSHE	18	1	6
TOTAL	234	35	11

Table 6.19 indicates that the overall percentage of unused votes was 11%. Only the MEFE, MEHE and MSHE groups had fewer than three unused votes. There were 15 more unused votes for the barrier than for driver categories. Thus, participants had greater difficulty in deciding to which barrier category they should give their third vote than they had for the driver category.

Ranking by number of words




When examining the barrier categories, the researcher was struck by a discrepancy or lack of congruency between the ranking of the categories and the number of words they generated. It seemed that if participants had written so many words about barriers before they knew they would be categorised and then ranked, then this must indicate that the barriers for which they wrote so many words must have been important to them.

A possible explanation was that the discrepancy might indicate the influence of group dynamics and of choosing more socially acceptable barriers rather than the barriers that really pulled participants away from higher education, and of which the participants might not even be fully aware. Consequently, it was decided to attempt to override a possible influence of group dynamics by comparing the number of words generated by each barrier category to the ranking of barrier categories.

Table 6.20 below gives the comparative ranking of driver categories by votes and by number of words and shows that a major overall change when comparing ranking by words written and ranking by votes cast is that out of the six groups who selected lack of confidence as a barrier, four groups saw this barrier category move up the ranking order. Out of these four, the YED, MSFE and MEFE groups saw ‘confidence’ reach the top position. ‘Confidence’ thus became the first barrier category for the young people sub-group. ‘Money’ remained first for mature and English subgroups and ‘effort’ remains first for the Scottish sub-group. The only group with no changes at all in the ranking when words written replaced votes cast was the YE group

Table 6.20 Comparative ranking order of barrier categories by number of votes and by number of words

Driver category	No. of Votes	Driver category	No. of Words	Driver category	No. of Votes	Driver category	No. of Words
YE		YE		YS		YS	
Money	12	Money	66	Effort	11	Effort	23
Isolation/independence	8	Isolation/independence	60	Money	9	Time	20
Effort	5	Effort	55	Time	7	Money	19
Time	3	Time	29	Confidence	0	Confidence	8
YED		YED		YSD		YSD	
Money	12	Confidence	154	Money	8	Courses	19
Family/friends	7	Family/friends	78	Distance	4	Money	12
Confidence	5	Work	49	Difficulty	2	Distance	12
Effort	3	Money	32	Friends/family	2	Friends/family	10
Work	3	Effort	26	Course	1	Difficulty	9
MEFE		MEFE		MSFE		MSFE	
Money	12	Confidence	60	Children	8	Confidence	52
Confidence	11	Money	55	Ability/effort	7	Ability	51
Family	8	Family	7	Confidence	6	Money	32
Time	5	Time	7	Money	6	Children	19
MEHE		MEHE		MSHE		MSHE	
Time	7	Money	30	Money	5	Work	20
Money	5	Time	23	Education	2	Money	19
Confidence	2	Confidence	18	Family	2	Education	16
Socio-cultural	2	Socio-cultural	13	Work	2	Confidence	12
Qualifications	1	Qualifications	9	Discipline/effort	2	Peer pressure	11
				Peer pressure	2	Family	6
				Status of not earning	1	Status of not earning	6
				Confidence	1	Discipline/effort	3

 = external/instrumental  = top intrinsic  = other intrinsic

The above table 6.21 shows that the main difference in ranking the barrier categories by number of words is that overall ‘confidence’ becomes the first barrier category pushing ‘money’ into second place. ‘Work’, ‘experiences of education’ and ‘time’ were the only barrier categories to remain at exactly in the same positions when ranked by number of words rather than by votes.

Table 6.21 Comparative table of the overall ranking of barrier categories by number of words and by number of votes

Ranking by number of words				Ranking by number of votes		
Rank		Words	% of words		Votes	% of votes
1	Confidence	304	26	Money	69	35
2	Money	253	22	Family/friends/isolation	35	17
3	Family/friends/isolation	240	21	Effort/difficulty	30	15
4	Effort/difficulty	127	11	Confidence	26	13
5	Time	79	6.9	Time	22	11
6	Work	69	6.0	Work	5	2.5
7	Courses	16	1.4	Distance	4	2.0
8	Experience of education	16	1.4	Experience of education	2	1.0
9	Socio-cultural reasons	13	1.1	Peer pressure	2	1.0
10	Distance	12	1.0	Qualifications	1	0.5
11	Peer pressure	11	0.9	Course	1	0.5
12	Qualifications	9	0.8	Status of not earning	1	0.5
13	Status of not earning	6	0.5	Socio-cultural reasons	1	0.5
		1155	100		199	100

= external/employment
 = top internal
 = other internal

The difference between external financial or employment-related instrumental and internal barrier categories was far greater when the number of votes was taken into account than when the number of words was taken into account. External financial and employment-related barrier categories obtained 75 out of 199 votes or 43% while internal non-employment-related driver categories obtained or 57% or 124 votes.

When the number of words was taken into account external financial and employment-related barriers counted 322 votes out of a total of 1155 votes or 29% while internal non-employment related drivers were divided into 11 wide ranging categories counted 733 words or 71%. Yet when taking into account the ranking order by votes, 'money' came first as a barrier category in each sub-group and was ranked first by five groups, second by two groups and fourth by one group.

The ranking order by number of votes showed that 'money' was the main barrier. This fits in with many studies where financial issues were often highlighted as the main barrier to participation (See Egerton and Halsey 1993; Blackburn and Jarman

1993; McCarthy and Humphrey 1995; Payne and Callender 1995; Callender and Kempson 1996; McGivney 1996; Connor *et al* 1996; Metcalf 1997; Hogarth *et al* 1997; Paterson 1997; Humphrey and McCarthy 1997; Lynch and O’Riordan 1998; Hesketh 1999; Johnston *et al* 1999; Callender and Kemp 2000; Ahier 2000; Marks 2001; Bowl 2001; Callender 2001; Davies *et al* 2002; Marks *et al* 2003).

However, taking into account both the percentage of the votes cast and of words used and not just the ranking order gives a more complex picture in which the internal barriers play a greater role than both the external financial barriers and the internal drivers. The discrepancy between ranking by votes and by number of words illustrates Bourdieu’s conceptual model of *habitus* (Bourdieu 1977a, 1990b). In this model individuals and groups make decisions, not as a consequence of reflection but as the consequence of semi-conscious or sub-conscious socio-cultural factors derived from their familial background. Merriam and Caffarella (1991), West (1996) and Herbert and Callender (1997) found that articulating barriers in financial terms was a more socially acceptable way of masking more complex and possibly unrecognised reasons. In the present research the differential rankings of barrier categories suggest that these more socially complex reasons might be linked to a lack of social confidence for the four English sub-groups and of a lack of academic confidence for the four Scottish sub-groups. [These issues are further developed in chapter 7]

Key barriers that can override all the drivers

A further dimension to the analysis was added by taking into account what the participants said when they were asked to re-assess key drivers and key barriers towards the end of the focus groups. They were asked to identify one key driver and one key barrier that could be powerful enough to override all the other barriers and drivers respectively. For comparative purposes the key barriers and drivers were slotted into the categories generated by the groups earlier on during the focus groups. [The key barriers are further discussed in chapter 7 and all the key barriers statements can be found in appendix 4 on page 473-474]

Table 6.22 below shows the comparative weighing of each category by percentage of words, percentage of votes and percentage of finalised additional ranking. The latter

refers to the key barriers powerful enough to override all the drivers. The statements used by the participants ranged from the cost of tuition fees and lack of income to lack of entry qualification or being tempted away from higher education by employment that would be rewarding and well paid without having to do a degree. [All the barrier statements can be found in appendix 3 on pages 459-472]

Table 6.22 Comparative table of the overall ranking of barrier categories by number of words, number of votes cast and by statements of key barriers

Categories			Categories		Categories		
Rank		% of words		% of v votes		No of statements	% of statements
1	Confidence	26	Money	35	Money	37	49
2	Money	22	Family/friends/ isolation	17	Family/friends/ isolation	11	14
3	Family/friends/ isolation	21	Effort/difficulty	15	Confidence	10	13
4	Effort/difficulty	11	Confidence	13	Effort	6	7.9
5	Time	6.9	Time	11	Work	5	6.6
6	Work	6.0	Work	2.5	Courses	3	3.9
7	Courses	1.4	Distance	2.0	Socio-cultural reasons	2	2.6
8	Experience of education	1.4	Experience of education	1.0	Qualifications	2	2.6
9	Socio-cultural reasons	1.1	Peer pressure	1.0			
10	Distance	1.0	Qualifications	0.5			
11	Peer pressure	0.9	Course	0.5			
12	Qualifications	0.5	Status of not earning	0.5			
13	Status of not earning	0.5	Socio-cultural reasons	0.5			
		100		100		76	100




 = external  = top internal  = other internal

Table 6.22 indicates that the range of categories became narrower when the key barriers are taken into account. The external factors ‘money’, ‘work’ and ‘qualifications’ consolidated their importance as their percentage increased from 38.5% to 57%. ‘Effort’ lost seven points and went down from third place to fourth place while ‘socio-cultural reasons’ (such as negative images of education) went up from thirteenth position to seventh position. ‘Family/friends/isolation’ was much

more in evidence among the mature participants who provided 9 out of statements and among the YE and YED groups who provided 1 statement each. Only the YE and YED groups selected wanting to ‘work’, but lack of ‘confidence’ was spread evenly among all the groups.

Interactions between drivers and barriers

Verbosity of the groups

Following on from looking at the ranking of driver and barrier categories by number of words, it seemed worth paying attention to the overall verbosity of the groups in terms of total number of words used to generate the statements divided by the number of participants. As shown in table 6.23 below, the verbosity of the groups differed markedly as shown in the table below:

Table 6.23 Comparative table of verbosity for each group – average number of words per post-it

Groups	Barriers	Drivers	Groups
YS	7	4.3	YS
YSD	8.2	6.6	YSD
MEFE	11	10.3	YE
MSFE	13	12.5	MEHE
MEHE	15.5	14.3	MSFE
YE	17.6	15.6	MEFE
MSHE	20.5	24	MSHE
YED	27.7	25.5	YED

Except for the MSHE group, the other Scottish groups used far fewer words than the English groups. The greatest difference is between the young English groups (YE and YED) and the young Scottish groups (YS and YSD) with an average of 22.6 words compared to 7.6 respectively. In other words, the young English groups used three times more words than the young Scottish groups. One possible explanation is that young Scottish participants feel some sort of cultural inferiority when discussing their thoughts and feelings and more especially when writing about themselves (See Bell and Grant 1974; Beveridge and Turnbull 1989; Crowther and Tett 1997).

The mature Scottish groups on the other hand used more words per person than the mature English groups with an average of 16.6 words against that of 13.2 words. Except for MSHE each group wrote more words for drivers than for barriers. So the pattern is similar for both drivers and barriers with the Scottish groups using fewer words than the Scottish groups. This is more marked for the younger groups so that YS and YSD are the groups with the fewest words for both incentives and disincentives while MSHE and YED are the group with the greatest number of words per person for both incentives and disincentives. The YED show the greatest differential between the number of words per person for drivers and barriers.

Same factors as both drivers and barriers

The two tables 6.24a and 6.24b below are discussed together. They compare the incentive and disincentive categories for each focus group. The categories that are both drivers and barriers are highlighted in green for drivers and orange for barriers.

Tables 6.24a and 6.24b show that factors such as ‘money’, ‘employment’, ‘qualifications’, ‘socio-cultural reasons’ and ‘family/children’ appeared in both the driver and barrier categories. ‘Money’ was identified seven times as an driver category and eight times as a barrier category (so, in all groups except the YED group, ‘money’ was both a driver and a barrier category); ‘qualifications’ was five times an driver and twice a barrier category, ‘employment’ was six times a driver and three times a barrier category (under the label of ‘work’ twice and ‘status of not earning’ once); ‘socio-cultural reasons’ was twice a driver and once a barrier category. ‘Family/children’ was identified five times as a barrier category but ‘setting example’ was selected once as a driver category as were ‘independence/isolation’ and ‘new places’. Similarly, ‘social life’ appeared as a driver category three times but ‘independence/isolation’ and ‘family and friends’ were each selected as barrier category once. ‘Challenge’ was identified twice as a driver and ‘validation’ once while effort/difficulty/time’ were identified ten times and ‘confidence’ six times as barrier categories.

Table 6.24a Interaction of driver and barrier categories for the young focus groups

% of group votes	Driver categories	Barrier categories	% of group votes
	YE	YE	
32	Social life	Money	43
19	Better employment prospects	Isolation/independence	29
16	Qualifications	3 Effort	18
16	Money	4 Time	11
6.4	Knowledge		
6.4	Self-improvement		
3.2	Independence/isolation		
	YED	YED	
33	Qualifications	Money	40
25	Better employment prospects	Family and friends	23
25	Social life	Confidence	17
5.6	Knowledge	Effort	10
5.6	New places	Work	10
5.6	Self-improvement		
	YS	YS	
31	Better job prospects	Effort	41
24	Money	Money	33
21	Self-improvement	Time	26
17	Social life	Confidence	0
6.8	Stepping stone		
	YSD	YSD	
44	Better opportunities	Money	47
19	Qualifications	Distance	24
19	Money	Difficulty	12
12	Courses	Friendships and family	12
6.3	Distance	Courses	6

Table 6.24b Interaction of driver and barrier categories for the mature focus groups

% of group votes	Driver categories	Barrier categories	% of group votes
	MEFE	MEFE	
31	Better employment	Money	33
23	Qualifications	Confidence	31
14	Money	Family	22
17	Knowledge	Time	14
8.6	Self-improvement		
5.7	Career		
2.8	Socio-cultural		
	MSFE	MSFE	
34	Career	Children/[family]	30
23	Confidence	Ability/effort	26
20	Money	Confidence	22
11	Challenge	Money	22
5.7	Knowledge		
2.8	Setting an example		
2.8	Validation		
	MEHE	MEHE	
56	Money/career	Time	41
22	Personal growth	Money	29
17	Qualifications	Confidence	18
5.6	Socio-cultural reasons	Socio-cultural reasons	5.8
		Qualifications	5.8
	MSHE	MSHE	
39	Self-development	Money	29
22	Money	Experiences of education	12
17	Better job	Family	12
11	Socio-cultural	Work	12
11	Challenge	Discipline/effort	12
		Peer pressure	12
		Status of not earning	5.8
		Confidence	5.8

Perhaps the most striking examples of factors that were both incentives and disincentives categories were ‘independence/isolation’ in the YE group, ‘confidence’ in the MSFE group and both ‘courses’ and ‘distance’ in the YSD group and ‘socio-

cultural reasons' and 'qualifications' in the MEHE group. It is worth underlining that these groups articulated more defined collective 'story lines' linked to the categories that were identified as both drivers and barriers. [These are examined in the next chapter.]

Conclusion

This chapter has analysed the institutional context and described the profiles of the eight focus groups that had a total of 78 participants. This chapter then compared the driver and barrier categories that were generated by the participants themselves during the ranking exercises undertaken at the beginning of each focus group. The chapter ended with an examination of the interaction of driver and barrier categories.

The main points highlighted were that the main driver and barrier categories identified by the respondents tended to be more similar than different. The same words were often used or the words were different but the ideas were similar, as in for example 'self-improvement', 'personal growth', 'self-development' and 'challenge'. The same categories tended to be come up regularly: six out of twelve barrier categories were used more than twice and five more than four times (money, family, effort, confidence and time); eight out of seventeen disincentives were used more than twice and seven more than three times (money, employment, career, qualifications, social life, self-improvement and knowledge). Comparing the participants ranking their own categories and the researcher ranking of these categories by number of words showed that 'better employment' as driver and 'money' as barrier were moderated and overtaken respectively by 'self-improvement' and 'confidence'. This might suggest a tendency to consciously choose the more socially accepted instrumental external and extrinsic drivers such as better employment whereas sub-consciously diminishing the importance of intrinsic drivers such as self-improvement.

Similarly, there was a greater tendency to rate highly external barriers such as financial cost and lack of money whereas being seemingly sub-consciously driven by more internal and socially complex largely unacknowledged reasons such as lack of confidence (See Merriam and Caffarella 1991; West 1996; Herbert and Callender

1997). The complexity of the interaction of barriers and drivers was therefore underlined, as was the importance of financial and employment-related and internal and non-employment related factors (See McGivney 1990, 1996; West 1996; Lynch and O'Riordan 1998; Puglsey 1998; Connor *et al* 1999a, 1999b; Tett 1999; Reay *et al* 2001, 2002; Davies *et al* 2002; Marks *et al* 2003).

This chapter also highlighted that the same factors acted as both drivers and barriers. Other research such as that of Reay *et al* (2002), Davies *et al* (2002) and Marks *et al* (2003) had also highlighted that personal and employment factors, especially employment/career and role model were moderated by family responsibilities which limit participation and increase stress and a desire to get away from current employment to get better employment, but the current employment and financial necessity which acted as drivers often also acted as barriers. Reay *et al* (2002) drew attention to the fact that issues surrounding paid work, time to study and childcare were inextricably enmeshed with what were often precarious financial situations and literally juggling labour market commitments and/or childcare and/or domestic responsibilities with studying.

As in Robert and Higgins (1992) and Connor *et al* (1999a), this chapter showed that all the young people groups except the YSD group identified 'self-improvement' as an incentive category but did not give it as much importance as did the mature groups. Such a finding does not fit in with Reay *et al* (2002) who concluded that an emphasis on the process rather than the outcome constituted a clear distinction between the mature students and their younger counterparts. Moreover, the importance of 'self-improvement' among mature focus group participants does not fit in with Macrae *et al* (1997), Archer and Hutchings (2000) and Bowl (2001) who found that their mature respondents showed an unambiguously pragmatic attitude in terms of their drivers to participation in higher education.

Finally, this chapter has suggested that the brainstorming and ranking exercises were a particularly useful way of better understanding the decision-making process, because when participations first write the drivers and barriers, they do not yet know that they will have to generate categories and then rank them. Brainstorming and ranking exercise are thus a useful way to tap into individual and collective interconnected structure of meaning made up of ideas, pictures or images and

memories (derived largely from *habitus*) that inform the process of deciding what to do, usually without the individual becoming fully conscious, just by putting the interpretation into action while the chosen interpretation is aimed at least in part at holding ourselves/our meaning structure together (Bourdieu 1977a, 1990b).

The next chapter aims to further understand the interaction of factors that influence greater and lesser likelihood of participation in higher education that have been outlined in the present chapter by analysing what was said during the eight focus group discussions. The drivers (or motivations or push towards factors) and barriers (or constraints or pull away factors) will be examined by types of factors that are on the one hand more external (employment, national policy and institutional) and on the other hand more internal(ised) (personal and dispositional), including assumptions about drivers and barriers, constructions of higher education and of students and life history factors.

7

FOCUS GROUPS 2: DISCUSSIONS

The previous chapter was the first of two chapters that discussed the focus groups. It described the institutional context and the profiles of the eight focus groups before examining the barriers and drivers categories.

This chapter continues to examine what took place during the eight focus groups. It is divided into three sections:

- drivers and barriers to participation
- constructions of higher education and of students
- life history factors and participation

In this chapter the analysis emphasises main similarities and differences between focus groups as well as the participants' use of metaphors and discourses.

Drivers and barriers to participation

Although drivers and barriers and types of drivers and barriers have fluid boundaries and are difficult to disentangle, for the purpose of clarity they are divided into external and internal drivers and barriers.

External drivers and barriers

National policy factors as barriers

During the discussions, many of the younger participants said that tuition fees, student loans and fear of debt and lack of grants were barriers to higher education. The younger Scottish participants were particularly against fees as a matter of principle.

They strongly believed education was an entitlement and that ability to pay should not come into it. The Cubie Report (1999) had recommended for Scotland the abolition of upfront tuition fees, introduced in the whole of United Kingdom in 1998. At the time of the focus groups, Cubie's recommendations were being considered by the Scottish Executive but no legislation had yet been drafted. The publication of Cubie (1999) might have helped to particularly sensitise the young Scottish participants.

The fees are putting me off ... there should not be any fees to pay ... Education is for everyone with ability, they have a right to receive an education, regardless of how well off they are. ... They should go back to having grants not fees and student loans because with loans people might take a loan from the government to pay the fees for the government... I mean it's complete madness. [YS girl]

Although the YSD group knew that most of them would not have to pay any fees because of low parental income, they still were very uncomfortable with the idea of having to pay fees and getting into debt.

I can't face the idea of being a few thousand in debt. I've only been alive a few years and I'm in debt already and I don't want to be in debt so I'd have to save up to pay fees before I went because my mum's always been in debt and I don't want this. [YSD boy]

Although in theory fees were seen by many participants as a major barrier, especially for prospective students who had parents with low incomes and/or who did not want to be a burden to their parents, in practice fees were not deemed to prevent most of the participants from entering higher education because they wanted to enter higher education regardless. None of the seven young people [two in each of YED, YE, YSD and one in YS] who did not want to go to higher education said it was because of the fees and overall cost. Rather it was mainly for reasons of having no interest in going to university because studying was too boring and demanded too much effort.

The MEHE and MSHE groups were in their third year in higher education, and did not pay fees. They received maintenance grants and were eligible for student loans,

although most of them had not taken up loans. These two groups said tuition fees would have been a major disincentive for them. The MEFE and MSFE groups had more contrasting views. The MEFE participants thought fees, the abolition of maintenance grants and the inadequacy of loans were unfair, because of having to work part-time for a substantial number of hours which restricted their higher education options:

You have to earn a living since there's no grants so obviously that's limiting the courses you can take. [MSFE woman]

The MSFE participants were much happier with fees, loans and did not think that contributing to the cost of higher education was unfair:

That's how it should be [Others nod in agreement]. When you're a graduate, you should be earning more and when you're earning more then you should pay back some of the costs. [MSFE woman]

No pain, no gain. We're thinking of short-term strain for long term gain. It's a gamble but the odds are good and it's all down to us to get through. [MSFE woman]

Perhaps because of Cubie (1999) and/or the vocational path they were following, the MSFE participants had more fully internalised not only the discourse of the economic benefit of higher education, but also that of meritocracy. In contrast, the MEFE group had a greater fear of failing and/or of not being able to gain better employment. They worried that they might accumulate debt while studying in higher education and get nothing in return:

And this could be for nothing ... I mean there's no guarantee we're even going to pass ... there's absolutely no guarantee you're even going to get a job. [MEFE woman]

The MEFE and MSFE groups constructed the risks to be negotiated when considering entering higher education in different ways. The former had less confidence in their abilities and thought it was more of a gamble with uncertain

returns. The latter had more confidence in guaranteed returns and hence higher education was seen as less of a gamble. However, despite differential attitudes and fears all the MEFE and MSFE participants really wanted to enter higher education and gain a degree.

Institutional factors

Drivers

Unlike for mature participants, whether English or Scottish, social life was an important institutional incentive for the YE, YED and YS groups, but not for the YSD group. Social life meant different things according to national context. Unlike the YE and YED groups, the YS group did not associate 'social life' with going away from home, but with meeting new people and socialising with them at a local university. Previous research had tended to underline the importance of social life as a driver to participation, but almost exclusively for potential entrants from over-represented socio-economic groups (See Robert and Higgins 1992; Reay 1998; Connor *et al* 1999a; Power *et al* 1998, 1999, 2003; Ball *et al* 2000, 2002 *inter alia*). As did the young Scottish participants, mature participants whether English or Scottish, went to local higher education institutions, largely because of family, existing partners/relationships or especially in the case of England because of the cost of mortgages (See Reay 1998; Reay *et al* 2002; Davies *et al* 2002; Marks *et al* 2003). The mature English participants were prepared to travel a greater distance, between 10 to 30 miles as opposed to less than 10 miles for the Scottish participants.

Only some YSD participants thought higher education in further education to be a major institutional driver to participation, because it meant travelling as little a distance as possible and encountering students from the same socio-cultural background. Previous research had underlined the importance of further education in higher education especially for those from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds (See Paterson 1997; Smith and Bocock 1999; Bone 1999; Raffe *et al* 1999; Schuller and Bamford 1999; Mackie 2001, SHEFC 2004; HEFCE 2005).

As found in previous research, both the mature English and mature Scottish participants thought that Access courses were key drivers to their participation in

higher education (See Edwards 1993, West 1996, Bowl 2001; Davies *et al* 2002). Unlike the respondents in Hutchings and Archer (2001), the participants in the present research did not see Access courses as another hurdle to be overcome, as institutional moneymaking ventures or as putting them at a disadvantage because of mixed ability classes.

All the young participants often aspired to go to the same higher education institution as their brothers and/or sisters or cousins. The mature participants too felt channelled towards particular higher education institutions which were post-1992 institutions. This was because previous access students they knew had gone to these institutions and because tutors had also recommended post-1992 institutions as being more student-friendly for mature students. Also, mature Scottish participants had benefited from links between further education and higher education, such as special entry schemes and summer schools. However, the vocational access course of the MSFE group was linked to a guaranteed place at a particular university, provided they passed the course.

Barriers

Out of 78 participants only eight younger and one mature participant had at least one parent who went to university, although about two-thirds of the overall sample had brothers, sisters, cousins and friends who had gone to higher education. Especially in the YSD and YED groups, a minority of young participants had anxiety about not getting higher education entry qualifications, being rejected by institutions, dropping out and/or failing to get a degree. They were also anxious about not selecting the right course. Many mature participants had similar fears and little direct knowledge of higher education. The MEFE participants were particularly anxious about failing, finding the right course and matching the reality of doing a course with expectations:

*And there's the fear that you may have not picked the right subject.
[...] It's only once you've started university, you realise what they're
like and you may not know if you've chosen the right course until it's
too late to change. Ideally I'd like a clearer picture before I start.*
[MEFE man]

Very few younger participants had visited prospective higher education institutions. Those who had were not impressed. They described the lecturers as pompous, too well dressed, full of themselves and looking down on them. Very few mature participants had attempted to get a clearer picture before starting or had visited higher education institutions, those who did found that lecturers were pompous and not dressed well enough.

A MEFE woman remarked ironically that lecturers seemed ignorant of the reality of student life and the necessity to have part-time employment.

I spoke to a lecturer and they said you've to work over 15 hours a week during your degree [in addition to attend lectures]. They don't recommend to any of their students to have employment! [MEFE woman]

A MEHE woman told of how she was interviewed for BAQTS [Bachelor of Arts in Education with Teaching Qualification] and didn't get a place. However, she phoned up at Clearing and was surprised to be offered a place on a Combined Honours course without even being interviewed.

They wanted me only to sign a form here quick and I would be in no problem. [...] They seemed rather desperate. [MEHE woman]

As the above examples show that staff in higher education can put potential entrants off before they have even entered higher education. Although the participants in the present research acknowledged that such institutional barriers in terms of staff attitude were not enough to prevent them from going to higher education, they pointed out that this made them think about how higher institutions put themselves across and how they might be perceived by those who are less motivated to enter higher education. The negative impact of staff attitude on access and widening participation has also been highlighted by previous research (See Archer and Hutchings 2000; Marks 2000; Watt and Paterson 2000 *inter alia*).

Policy and institutional incentives that would make entry to higher education more likely

All the focus group participants were asked to write down one suggestion each about what the government and higher education could do to make it easier, more attractive and more likely for them or for people like them to enter higher education. The suggestions were then discussed and/or summed up as time permitted. Some groups had more time to do this than others and this may have influenced the outcome. As shown in table 7.1 below, suggestions could be divided into three main categories: financial incentives; better information and improved recruitment procedures; and improvement in courses in terms of content, structure, timetable and institutional attitude. [See appendix 5 on page 475 for a complete outline of suggestions]

Table 7.1 Policy and institutional incentives that would make entry to higher education more likely

Suggestions to make higher education more likely and more attractive for potential entrants		Number of statements	%	%
More financial incentives		45 out of 74		61
Mature		20 out of 34	50	
MEFE	42%			
MSFE	50%			
MEHE	17%			
MSHE	100%			
Young		26 out of 40	76	
YE	33%			
YED	67%			
YS	80%			
YSD	75%			
Better general information and better recruitment procedures		16 out of 74		22
Mature		7 out of 34	21	
Young		8 out of 40	20	
Improvement in content, structure and timetable of courses as well as in institutional attitude		13 out of 74		17
Mature		7 out of 34	21	
Young		6 out of 40	15	



Mature participants



Young participants

Better financial incentives

The above table 7.1 shows that most participants gave suggestions about giving more financial incentives to higher education students. Out of 74 suggestions, 45 (61%) concerned financial incentives and varied within the groups from 33% from YE to

80% from YS and even to 100% for MSHE. The statements ranged from general suggestions such as more affordable and more financial help to a more specific focus on having grants and bursaries for poorer students and to the removal upfront tuition fees.

The preponderance of financial incentives confirmed the findings of other research about the importance of financial barriers and lack of financial incentives (See McGivney 1990; Lynch and O'Riordan 1988; McGivney 2000; Davies *et al* 2002; Marks *et al* 2003). The emphasis on financial incentives was more pronounced in the Scottish groups, whether mature or young. This may have been because higher education is commonly seen as more egalitarian and less elitist in Scotland than in England (See McCrone 1992; Paterson 1997; Mackie 2001 *inter alia*). This was certainly due to the influence of Cubie (1999), itself the consequence of the lesser elitism of the Scottish cultural attitude to education as shown by the fact that the first thing that the re-instated Scottish Parliament did in 1999 was to commission a report which recommended the removal of upfront tuition fees.

Despite the great majority of participants suggesting better financial incentives, only 5 mature participants and 8 younger participants specifically mentioned getting rid of fees as a potential incentive. Out of the 13 statements, 10 were from Scottish participants and mostly from younger participants. There is therefore a discrepancy between the preponderance of participants suggesting better financial incentives and the low number of participants who suggested that fees should be abolished.

Better information and improved recruitment procedures

The next category of suggestions concerned better information and improved recruitment procedures, such as open days and visits to school and further education colleges. These were highlighted by 16 out of 78 participants overall. There were eight suggestions out of a possible 42 from the young participants. Suggestions could be divided into those that focussed on better information and in making clearer what is required from students for each course, more friendly open days and more visits to schools. There were eight suggestions overall about better information and improved recruitment from the mature participants out of a possible 36. Suggestions concerned better childcare facilities, getting university tutors to visit, having the opportunity to

meet mature students who are actually doing courses during open days and using mature students in prospectuses and have pictures and stories about them.

he lack of visibility of mature students in prospectuses and in the media in general, especially mature students from under-represented groups, has been highlighted by previous research which points towards a lack of proper acknowledgement of mature students by higher education institutions that still think in terms of students as late adolescents with no responsibilities and no commitments (See Weil 1986, 1988, Edwards 1993; West 1996; Tett 1999, 2004; Watt and Paterson 2000; Marks 2000; Reay 2001; Warmington 2002; Davies *et al* 2002) despite mature students often having abilities that outweigh their confidence (Egerton 1997; Murphy and Roopchand 2003) whilst outperforming traditional students (Woodley 1984, 1991; Lucas and Ward 1985, Brennan 1986).

Improve content, structure, timetables and institutional attitude

The third category of suggestions concerned improvement of courses in terms of content, structure, timetable and institutional attitude. These were underlined by 13 out of 78 suggestions. The younger participants wrote six suggestions out of a possible 42. These ranged from making higher education more exciting; having more connections with industry to lowering the grade expectations. The mature participants wrote seven suggestions out of a possible 36 about improvement in courses. Suggestions included a greater choice of courses especially for part-time students, parent-friendly timetables available before the course in order to arrange childcare.

All these suggestions raise several questions, such as the extent to which institutions should go to make everyone think higher education is for them by making it more consumer-friendly. A true market ideology would suggest that if potential entrants want courses ever more exciting, flexible and shorter, because of the cost and because they are not quite sure what to do and are easily bored, then that is what they should have (See Tooley 1998). However, as higher education does not operate as a true market in the first place, most researchers would underline to blindly follow student demand would only undermine standards and credibility and only increase the differential status of higher education institutions and courses to the detriment of those who do not belong to the privileged classes (See Winch 1998), since students from

higher social classes aim to go to high status institutions and study traditional subjects (See Reay 1998; Connor *et al* 1999b; Power *et al* 1998, 1999, 2003; Ball *et al* 2002).

Employment and financial factors

Drivers

The previous section showed that financial incentives amounted to 61% of suggestions that the participants would recommend to government and institutions of higher education to make higher education more accessible and more attractive for potential entrants. The previous chapter underlined that financial and employment barriers counted 38% of the votes and 55% of the key disincentive factors that could override all the incentives. The previous chapter also highlighted that financial and employment incentive categories totalled 60% of the votes and 61% of the key incentives that could override all the disincentives. Financial and employment drivers were nearly equally represented among young and mature participants with 59% and 61% of the votes by category for young and mature participants respectively.

Among younger potential entrants statements about employment and financial drivers were typically in the shape of better job prospects mean more money in the long term because of better qualifications. For the YED and YSD group qualifications were especially important (they ranked first and second as incentive categories). The YED and YSD groups thought the qualifications in themselves earned respect because *people respect university grades* and therefore *qualifications would help in future*, because they were *proof of a decent education* that would help ensure *good connections with employers* and *avoid dead-end jobs and/or unemployment*. The YSD group in which five out of eight participants had parents/mother/father who were unemployed was the only group who underlined that their teachers had specifically and purposefully highlighted the importance of qualifications for better employment.

Career as a driver category or specifically career-related statements were completely absent among the young participants, yet “to have a professional career” and “to gain entrance to a well-paid career” were the second and third top incentives identified by Connor *et al* (1999c: 26) in their research about what motivates applicants and potential entrants to higher education. This underlines the problematic nature of rating statements that have been generated by someone else. Respondents might agree with

them but they may not be as important to them as statements they have themselves generated when asked more open-ended questions that allow what is on the respondents' mind and even what is on their subconscious mind to emerge naturally.

Out of the whole sample only three boys from the YS group had purely instrumental motivations. They were choosing their particular subjects because of perceived shortages in the employment market. One boy explained that business was always a good choice of subject because there were plenty of opportunities afterwards. The other two boys wanted to study engineering and chemical engineering respectively, because of shortages in these subjects in the employment market, even though they did not think these subjects were particularly exciting or even interesting:

If job prospects changed then I wouldn't go to university. If there's no job prospects, then there's no point in going and getting the qualifications [YS boy]

In common with the younger participants, the mature participants were motivated to enter higher education because of the greater chance of getting a well-paid job. However, mature participants also emphasised family and children as drivers to participation because a degree meant better prospects for oneself and for the whole family and more importantly job security. Mature participants also underlined a desire for more satisfying employment and for a career and not just more security or more money. Many wanted job satisfaction because they did not enjoy their current job and wanted more interesting and more rewarding employment.

For the MSFE group higher education meant a career, because of the certainty of a professional qualification in a paramedical profession, guaranteed employment, professional status and hence validation through societal recognition. They aimed for a professional career and felt that the vocational nature of their intended courses was a major driver:

Female 1: *It's the job at the end of it. [General agreement]*

Female 2: *We'd no be doing the Access course if there wasn't a course at the end and we'd no be wanting to do the course if there wasn't a job.*

Interviewer: So it's the prospect of a job that attracts you?

Female 1: *Aye, but no just any job. I'm wanting a job that's helping people, where ye're trusted to get on with it and where people look up to ye for help. [MSFE]*

For the MSFE group the uncertainty that would have surrounded a less vocational course was held to be a major reason for them not having pursued such a path. However, most of the other 24 mature participants wanted to become teachers or social workers, because they wanted to put something back into society and also because these were well-paid and rewarding professions with good employment and career prospects. Mature participants were also aware that they would not have the same amount of career choice as young people, because the private sector was less likely to employ them, but they did not mind as they preferred working as professionals in the public sector.

Overall the desire to escape boring and unrewarding employment and/or social exclusion was a powerful driver for many mature participants. Single mature women in the MSHE group in particular feared low income and dependency on state benefit, which they saw as inevitable unless they obtained a degree. Some of their statements, which underline employment factors as driving them towards higher education, read like mini-life stories:

To avoid working in a dead end job or claiming benefit. [MSHE woman]

A personal need not to be a state dependent single parent; to attempt to gain qualifications that would make me more employable. [MSHE woman]

Wanting an improved chance of providing a secure future for my daughter after separation from my husband. [MSHE woman]

These statements illustrate the discourses of self-improvement and economic benefit of higher education (See West 1996; Archer and Hutchings 2000; Reay *et al* 2002) and especially that of social exclusion or fear of low income and dependency on state

benefit, inevitable without a degree (See Preece 1999; Thomas 2001) together with break-ups in relationships as an incentive to gain more education, or as a consequence of it (See Duke 1987, Edwards 1993, West 1996 *inter alia*).

Barriers

Financial and employment barriers meant different things to young English and young Scottish participants. Both groups made general comments about higher education costing too much and having to get into debt. However, financial and employment barriers were constructed differently. A majority of young Scottish participants did not want to be a burden to their parents and depend on their parents for the payment of fees. A minority of the young English participants did not want to enter higher education if they could be earning hard cash and thought that higher education was time consuming if one could already find a job. Since jobs were readily available, they would rather have a full-time job so they could have more money sooner.

This differential construction of financial barriers can be partially explained by a more buoyant labour market in the English context (See for example Hodgson and Spours 1999, 2000). While most of the YE and YED participants worked part-time, far fewer of the YS and YSD participants worked part-time and when they did it was for far fewer hours per week. Hence, in order to maximise chances in the long term, the YSD and YED participants who lived within the context of a less buoyant labour market accepted more readily to have less money in the short term. For a minority of the YSD and YED participants the possibility of well-paid employment after leaving school without any further study was made even more attractive by the fear of not getting the qualifications studied for, not being able to use a degree to find worthwhile employment and the fear of having missed out on valuable work experience if not suited to higher education. Brothers, sisters or cousins and acquaintances that had dropped out of university were depicted as having managed to gain well paid employment without having to go to higher education.

For the YSD group disincentives related to financial barriers, not in terms of missing out on well-paid employment, but rather in terms of the cost of doing a degree. They were not concerned about having to pay tuition fees since they would not have to do

so because of low parental income, but with the associated costs of buying books or travelling. Rather than focussing on employment barriers, some of the YSD participants highlighted institutional factors such as distance to be travelled and lack of suitable or attractive courses. Their assumption was that higher education would be more attractive if institutions catered for their needs. For a minority of YED participants the assumption was that paid employment was much more attractive than higher education. Such different assumptions are arguably not only influenced by national discourses and mythologies, teachers, family expectations and peer pressure, but also depend on the range and availability of local employment opportunities and it is notable that in the English context there was a more buoyant labour market than in the Scottish context (See Raffe and Willms 1989; Bynner and Roberts 1992; Hodgson and Spours 1999, 2000).

All the mature participants acknowledged that employment factors had been the most important disincentives when they left school. At that time the expectations were to gain employment as soon as possible and to leave school as early as possible. Now they thought that going to higher education was the only way to have a proper career and gain proper societal recognition. The mature participants were aware of a socio-cultural shift in expectations of going to higher education, which they highlighted as a key difference between now and then. Then it was possible to have satisfying and well-paid employment without a degree. Now the general consensus was that without a degree employment prospects were restricted.

All the mature participants thought therefore that now some sacrifice in the short term was necessary for long-term benefit. A few mature participants had had well paid but unfulfilling employment before deciding to enter higher education and had taken measures such as saving up and making greater mortgage repayments than was necessary. For them being a student meant a temporary loss of autonomy and status as the price to be paid for doing a degree. The remainder of the mature students were either on benefit or did casual and/or part-time work. For them being a student was more a matter of having less money but a higher societal status. Having less money meant different things to different participants: from being more limited in what they were able to do compared to having to count every penny and even getting into debt. The MSFE group were less afraid of debt and of failing than the MEFE group who were more worried about failing and not being able to gain better employment after

their degree. This can be explained by the vocational nature of the degrees that the MSFE group were aiming to study and by a different attitude towards debt

Debt's all that most of us have known for most of our lives. It's one reason we're wanting to go to uni, to have enough money to live without debt. [Nods of agreement] [MSFE woman]

However, both the MSFE and MEFE groups were less bothered by the fear of debt than the fear of not being able to meet ends meet:

It's not the debt that bothers us. We can pay that back. It's not having enough money to get by on that bothers us. [MSFE woman]

There's so many people drop out and I think it's because they're so poor. They can't afford to eat, to pay their mortgage, to pay their bills. [MEFE woman]

Fear of debt among mature students and a fear of not being able to make ends meet have been well rehearsed in the literature (See Herbert and Callender 1997; McKee and Merril 1998; McGivney 1996, 1999; Paterson 1997; Callender 2001; Marks 2001; Reay *et al* 2002; Davies *et al* 2002; Marks *et al* 2003).

Internal drivers and barriers

Socio-cultural factors as drivers

As seen under institutional factors, all the young participants, except for the YSD group, identified 'social life' as an incentive category, which going away from home for the YE and YED groups, but not the YS group. Participants hoped to meet interesting people, make new friends, have fun as well as socialise in the sense of developing and improving interpersonal and social skills and for the YE and YED groups learn independence and how to live away from home.

Mature participants did not emphasise social life. Instead they talked about personal validation through doing a degree.

- Interviewer: What makes you want to go to higher education?
- Female 1: *I want to be earning money in my own right.*
[Repeated several times by at least three participants]
- Female 2: *Basically, we're all agreeing that we're in this for ourselves.*
- Female 3: *I am doing it because I want to hear somebody else saying "you can do that" [MSFE]*

In addition to personal validation, mature participants also hope to gain societal validation through doing a degree

I wanted to do a degree because of a need to transcend my traditional role in society and go beyond my expectations and to go beyond expectations that society, family and school had for me. [MSHE woman].

For mature participants, personal and societal validations were closely enmeshed. They underlined the importance of socio-cultural drivers such as *prestige reasons* [MEFE man], *to have a professional career* [MSFE woman] and *to gain a career in something that interests me* [MSHE man]. Mature participants stated that for them an important driver to participation was that doing a degree meant improving their socio-cultural status, which in turn meant gaining self-esteem and upward social mobility.

Knowledge and self-improvement as drivers

Both younger and mature participants identified knowledge as a driver category, although mature participants gave nearly twice as many votes to this category as did young participants. Both young and mature participants wanted to gain more knowledge and to learn about subjects they were interested in. They were driven by

intellectual curiosity, the desire for a challenge, broaden their understanding, stretch their brainpower and, for some, to have the opportunity to discuss and debate freely.

Except for the YSD group, all the other groups group of selected self-improvement related driver categories. The MSFE group for example used 'setting example', 'challenge' and 'confidence' to categorise various self-improvement related incentives. Other categories related to self-improvement were 'challenge' [MSHE], 'new places' and 'independence' [YE] and 'stepping stone' [YS]. Mature participants gave self-improvement related categories more than twice as many votes as did young participants. Young people were driven by the desire to discover their own potential, learn about themselves, learn and grow as a person, learn self-discipline and independence, gain self-respect and for some to avoid the downhill side of leaving school which meant the possibility of getting in trouble and hanging around with the wrong people. Mature participants were especially motivated by the need to fulfil the ambition of a lifetime, make use of their full potential, improve their self-confidence and self-esteem, gain an identity for themselves. Several mature participants went even further and expressed self-improvement drivers in quasi-religious terms:

I want to increase my knowledge of the world and of how humanity functions ... search for answers about what life's really about is what it's all about. [...] Ideally I'd be a student forever [...] I have discovered a new world here. [MSHE man]

I'm on a quest for the meaning of life. [MEHE man]

Higher education is more than bettering myself; it's a form of therapy. [MEHE woman]

Such attitudes provide evidence that the culture of self-improvement has been duly internalised by potential entrants and has even taken the role of a kind of secular religion and that higher education is seen as part of a self-improvement programme. Internal drivers such as socio-cultural factors, knowledge and self-improvement are closely related to each other and they have more to do with the inner self rather than external factors. Self-improvement is closely linked to both knowledge and socio-

cultural factors such as validation by self, family and society, which are also closely linked to self-improvement and to knowledge.

Effort/ability and time as barriers

Young and mature participants conceptualised effort/ability as barriers in very similar ways. They feared higher education would be extremely demanding, too difficult, a lot of hard work.

Everyone I know that's gone to uni has been shocked by the amount and the difficulty of the work. [YS boy]

In addition to the effort needed, both young and mature participants explained that they felt a lot of pressure to do well because of the time it would take to do a degree and because of the amount of money that would be spent and/or not earned.

Both young and mature participants often linked time to effort, but time was conceptualised differently by young and mature participants. The younger participants focussed on long boring lectures and years of boredom. The mature participants felt that the barriers were not so much the length the course, but the lack of time they felt they had, because of juggling the many responsibilities of student, spouse and parent all at the same time in addition to part-time work. The pressure of time on mature students through having to juggle many different roles and responsibilities and its influence on identity of mature students have been well documented by previous research (See Pascall and Cox, Edwards 1993, West 1996; Reay 2001; Bowl 2001; Baxter and Britton 2001; Davies *et al* 2002; Reay *et al* 2002; Marks *et al* 2003).

Confidence as a barrier

Young and mature participants interpreted 'confidence' differently. Young participants were afraid to feel lonely if they did not know anyone, to have to fend for themselves, to take full responsibility for themselves. The younger participants understood lack of confidence as lack of social confidence as well as lack of

confidence in becoming independent and taking care of oneself. The mature participants were afraid of exams, of being stressed, of neglecting their families, of failing, of not being intelligent enough and of not being able to cope with the course. For the mature participants lack of confidence was wider ranging and was mainly about perceived lack of academic confidence rather than social confidence.

I'm worried that I won't be able to cope with higher education [...]

See when we get to next October, I'm having nightmares about that.

[MSFE woman]

The MEFE and MSFE participants had some anxiety about going to higher education. The fear was largely one of not knowing how to cope with the unknown. Their fear was exacerbated by helpful and supportive access tutors who warned them that higher education would be far more difficult than an access course.

The barriers of 'effort', 'ability', 'time' and 'confidence' are not only closely linked together, but have also more to do with perceptions of self lacking in confidence than with factors outside the self, although pressures on time do exist and have to be carefully managed. External and internalised barriers and drivers are not easy to disentangle and their boundaries not easy to delineate. A way to gain a better understanding of how the mutual influence of drivers and barriers operate is to examine the interaction of key drivers and barriers selected by the participants towards the end of the focus groups.

Interaction of key drivers and barriers

In the previous chapter the analysis of the categories showed that the same categories were found to act as both drivers and barriers. It was found that all the categories, whether positive/negative, or external/internal, were closely entangled and that it was difficult to disentangle them. In order to determine precisely the interaction of key drivers and barriers, towards the end of each focus group the participants were asked to write down one key driver and one key barrier that were so powerful that the key driver could override all the barriers and the key barrier would override all the drivers. [See appendix 4 for complete outline]

Employment and financial factors were both the strongest drivers and strongest barriers. Table 7.2 below outlines all the employment and financial factors for the focus groups on their way to higher education. The drivers are highlighted in green and the barriers in red. Opposing discourses are indicated in italics.

Table 7.2 Financial and employment factors as key drivers and barriers

Financial and employment factors as key drivers	Financial and employment factors as key barriers
The chance of a stable well-paid job at the end of it all [YE] Better job prospects, independence x3 [YE]	If an amazing job offer came up which does not require HE [YE] Cost/fees/debt x4
<i>A better job as it is scientifically proven that graduates earn better wages than those who go directly to the workplace by approximately 10k and the ability of possibly getting a better job outweighs the expense because if you get a well paid job you could afford to pay out your debts [YED]</i>	Not having the confidence and knowing that I may fail and <i>have wasted all that time when I could have been in full time employment earning money and getting work experience</i> <i>Getting a full time job and earning money</i> x2 <i>Earning money by working full time sooner rather than spending more years in education</i> Money/fees/debt x5 [YED]
Better money/prospects x6 [YS]	Not sure of getting a job at the end of it all [YS]
Better job prospects x 4 [YSD]	Fees/debt/money x6 [YSD]
To be sure to have a career x7 To be independent x2 [MSFE]	Money x5 [MSFE]
Have a career x2 Better and more satisfying employment [MEFE]	Cost and fees x4 [MEFE]

The above table 7.2 shows that three of the groups, YSD, MSFE and MEFE, did not have employment barriers, only financial barriers, whereas all three had both financial and employment drivers. More importantly, the statements written by the YED group illustrate best the interaction of financial and employment factors because full sentences were used rather than just a couple of words. The interaction of key drivers and barriers for the YED group shows clearly two opposing public discourses in action, one ‘pushing towards’ going to higher education and the other ‘pulling away from’ higher education. The former discourse is that of the economic benefit of higher education. The latter discourse is that of the necessity of entering full time employment as soon as possible. Previous research associated the desire to enter full time employment rather than staying on at school with working-class

assumptions and practices (See Robbins 1963; Heathfield and Wakeford 1991; Edwards 1993; West 1996; Robertson and Hillman 1997 *inter alia*).

Familial key barriers and drivers too were found to act as both a ‘push towards’ and ‘pull away’ forces in relation to higher education as outlined in table 7.3 below:

Table 7.3 Family and friends as key drivers and barriers

Family/friends as key drivers	Family/friends as key barriers
Social life [YE] How to live away from home [YE] Experience which will prepare me for life – socially [YE]	Isolation from family and friends [YE]
Go to new places and start afresh [YED]	Miss family and friends Confidence as I don't mix well and being put in a situation when I don't know anybody is my worst nightmare and I don't examine well and I don't want more of that The confidence – I think it would take me a long time to settle and make friends (it usually does!) [YED]
Have a good social life [YS] Meeting people [YS]	-
-	Family responsibilities x2 [MEFE]
-	Childcare/family x5 [MSFE]
Something worthwhile to make the family proud [MEHE]	If children negatively affected [MEHE]
Role model and independence [MSHE] Responsibility for daughter's future [MSHE]	Lack of assistance with childcare would have made studying impossible [MSHE]

Table 7.3 shows that family and friends only appeared as both key drivers and barriers in the YE, YED, MEHE and MSHE groups. For the MEFE and MSFE groups family and friends only acted as key barriers and not as key drivers. In the YE group familial key drivers predominate while in the YED group familial key barriers predominate. This is the consequence of a lack of social confidence as well as lack of academic confidence. Only a small number of previous studies on mature students has underlined that the same factors, such as financial and employment and family and friends, were acting as both drivers and barriers (See Reay *et al* 2002; Davies *et al* 2002; Marks *et al* 2003).

In addition to key drivers and barriers of the same type, key drivers and barriers of a different type, might interact in such a way that at the same time they ‘push towards’ and ‘pull away’ potential entrants in relation to higher education, as shown in table 7.4 below.

Table 7.4 Push towards and pull away factors

Push towards factors	Pull away factors
Learning about something that really interests me [YE]	If an amazing job offer came up which does not require HE [YE]
The broadening of my knowledge and improved qualifications [YED] Gaining better knowledge and life independence [YED]	Academic and social lack of] confidence [YED]
The chance to follow my dream [YSD] The opportunity to realise my ambition [YSD]	Not getting the Highers [YSD]
Achieve something for self [MEFE]	Fear of failure [MEFE]
To be seen as someone [MSFE]	Childcare/family [MSFE]

Just because the participants were asked to write down one key barrier and one key driver does not mean that at the time they actually consciously weighed the importance and intensity of key drivers against the importance and intensity of the key drivers. Similarly, whether or not they enter higher education may not be the consequence of reflexiveness and hence a decision made within discursive consciousness. It seems more likely that a course of action is chosen within practical consciousness and only then various discourses may be articulated to justify it.

Some key drivers and barriers had not been highlighted during the ranking exercises and discussion. Examples are: *experience which will prepare me for life – socially* [YE] as a key driver and *ending up in the wrong course* [YE] as a key barrier. This demonstrates that some important drivers and barriers are not immediately available to consciousness and that decisions are based on what goes on without saying or on the *habitus* of potential entrants, which does not tend to be clearly articulated.

During the discussion it emerged that external and internal incentives such as knowledge, qualifications, better employment prospects, career and personal growth were so enmeshed that participants had problems separating them:

Drive for knowledge and qualifications are the same thing really, for me anyway. [MEFE woman]

Personal growth is a major incentive as well as entering employment. And then qualifications. So the most important incentive then is personal growth [...] Family approval would have been a bonus, but

not an incentive. So again career and employment would have been the most important. [MEHE woman]

External barriers such as lack of qualifications and internal barriers such as confidence were particularly entangled for each participant and between the participants:

I think if I'd had the qualifications, I'd have had more confidence to want to go there [higher education/university]. But I didn't have the qualifications. [MEFE woman]

I think if I had the qualifications, I'd have had the confidence. [MEFE woman]

I had the qualifications and an offer of a place from Cambridge but I still did not have the confidence. I couldn't cope with the pressure ... I was too young and didn't have the maturity, it wasn't the right time for me [MEFE woman].

What the present research about key drivers and barriers to participation in higher education both fits and does not fit in with previous research. According to most previous research higher education choice remains in all probability semi-conscious and not fully verbalised and hence not reflexive and made within discursive consciousness. Both factual and practical knowledge about higher education and questions of whether or not to enter higher education were not often explicitly discussed, but were based on implicit assumptions and expectations (See Bourdieu 1976, 1997, 2000; Allatt 1996, Pugsley 1998; Reay 1998; Du Bois-Reymond 1998 *inter alia*). Looking at drivers and barriers only scratched the surface of these assumptions, which are now further explored by examining constructions of students and of higher education.

Constructions of students and of higher education

Negative constructions of students

Despite all but seven [two in each of YE, YED, YSD and one in YS] participants agreeing that to do a degree meant less money in the short-term, but far better employment prospects afterwards, all the participants had far more negative images of students than they had of higher education. The YS and YE image of students was of young people who did not have a lot of money and would be left with debts at the end of the course; who had to put in effort and dedication, but could also have a good time. The YED and YSD participants had the most negative images of students. The YSD group explained that students were

Intellectuals who are able to study and willing to study and willing to put a lot of time and effort into the course because you have got to stick at it for a full four years before they have anything to show for it.

[YSD]

The image of students held by the YSD group did not incorporate any description of how they look, any description that students could be having fun and a good social life or that higher education was for a particular social class. Their image was solely based on academic ability and willingness to put in a lot of time and effort. The YED group on the other hand emphasised their lack of willingness to put in a lot of time and effort.

- | | |
|---------|--|
| Girl 1 | <i>It's for them middle class ... not for me</i> |
| Boy 3 | <i>Some are working-class, my brother went to university</i> |
| Girl 3 | <i>My brother and sister went to university</i> |
| Boy 2: | <i>When they're not working, they're out having a good time.</i> |
| Boy 1: | <i>They party all the time with the taxpayers' money ... they don't go to lectures</i> |
| Girl 1: | <i>They've shiny hair</i> |
| Girl 2: | <i>Yes, pink and other colours [Laughter]</i> |

- Boy 1: *Generally odd.*
- Boy 2: *They have delusions. [...]*
- Boy 1: *Most people who go to university end up making enemies...*
- Interviewer: What do you mean?
- Boy 1: *People that go to university go to higher places...[...]
Yeah, you risk falling out with someone who goes on to become a lawyer, to become a judge ... and there you are, in front of the judge [Laughter] [YED]*

The YED group emphasised not only lack of willingness of students to put in a lot of time and effort and the lack of willingness to attend lectures, but also their looking odd and peculiar, their having fun and a good social life at the taxpayer's expenses, the fact that they work part-time. More importantly, the YED group introduced a social class dimension to their constructions of students.

The mature students acknowledged that at the time of their leaving school they had very negative images of students whom they saw as boring middle class who had to study hard. Only recently had they become aware that younger students had a good social life. Typical comments were

At that age of about to leave school I had no idea that at university there was such a good nightlife. I thought students studied and read books all the time. [MSHE man]

If I had known about it, the exciting lifestyle and partying would have been the thing that would have persuaded me. [MEHE man]

As found by Archer *et al* (2001) and Tett (2000) mature male participants had stronger deeply ingrained negative stereotypes of students that they found very difficult to overcome. In both the MEHE and MSHE groups male participants agreed that they used to have negative stereotypical views of students which had acted as barriers to participation and which they had to overcome. The barriers that they felt had been pulling them away from higher education included

Overcoming students' negative stereotypes. [MEHE man]

Immaturity because of stereotyping and mental blindness. [MSHE man]

They explained that in their schooldays to be a university student was considered as a stigma, referred to as *poofiness* by a MEHE male. Such deeply ingrained stereotypes or even stigma had prevented them to even consider the possibility of doing A-levels or Highers, as this would have destroyed their identity as working-class males, especially among both peers and families.

Going to higher education was being labelled a poofster so you did not even think about it. I did not think I could even think about university or about not getting a job after leaving school. So I don't know if I'd have wanted to [MEHE man].

The family and peers of one female participant also used derogatory sexual terms about her because she was doing an access course and wanted to go to university:

One of them called me a lesbian because I want to go to uni. They're all quite chauvinistic [General laughter] [MSFE woman].

This shows that deeply ingrained stereotypes of students as homosexuals were and are still common among some working-class families, but men seemed to have greater difficulty in overcoming them.

To summarise, the mature participants constructed students as bookish boring middle class wearing glasses and having no fun while at university. To the YSD participants, students were intellectuals who have to study hard. The YS and YE groups saw students as both studying and having a good social life with better off students having more money and a better social life. To the YED participants, students were primarily odd and middle class and having a good time, but they could also be working-class and dedicated with less money and part-time employment. Heathfield and Wakeford (1991) and Archer and Hutchings (2000) had previously identified two polarised student stereotypes: bookish boring middle class students wearing glasses and lazy

[upper] middle class debauched partying all the time. Archer and Hutchings (2000) and Hutchings and Archer (2001) had also underlined a construction of students as working-class rather than middle class, but mostly among Asian and Afro-Caribbean rather than White potential entrants and non-participants.

Interestingly, the MEHE and MSHE groups pointed out that they were shocked to find that the young students who studied alongside them acted as if they were not really aware of the benefits of higher education and spent too much time enjoying themselves partying and going to clubs and not taking their studies as seriously as they should. Mature students being shocked that young students did not seem to make the best of their higher education opportunities has been well-rehearsed in the literature (See for example Duke 1987; Edwards 1993; West 1996; Watt and Paterson 2000; Warmington 2002).

Negative constructions of higher education

All participants had far more negative images of students than they had of higher education with the YED and YSD participants having the most negative constructions of students. Similarly, the YED and YSD groups had the least direct knowledge of higher education, but the most negative constructions.

Girl 1: *There's too much effort needed, it's endless and boring*

Boy 1: *University is rubbish.*

Girl 2: *My sister dropped out after one year. She's now earning ... she has a great job ... [When at university] she did not have any place to go out ... it's very social biased.*

Girl 4: *My brother too left after one year ... he makes a lot of money now working with computers. [YED]*

Boy 1: *A lot of my cousins went to uni.*

Girl 1: *Cousins*

Boy 2: *One cousin but I think she's leaving cause she cannae choose her courses.*

- Girl 4: *My cousin's going to uni. [...]*
- Boy 1: *Everyone I know that's gone to uni has been shocked by the amount and the difficulty of the work.*
- Girl 2: *I wannae to go but I just don't know what I want. I'd go to get the qualifications I need to allow me to get a good job but I am scared that there'd be tae much work and I couldnae cope [...]*
- Girl 1: *I cannae imagine myself at university as I wouldnae be able to do that kind of work as I find doing Highers at school too hard and daeing a degree would definitely be too hard. [...]*
- Girl 3: *I don't wannae go to university because it's for really clever people who will study and are quite smart. I'd like to just finish college and get a job.*
- Girl 4: *If I managed to get a degree I'd feel very pleased and very intelligent because I know how hard it is to get a degree. [YSD]*

The two above extracts show that a minority of the young participants (two in each of the YSD, YED and YE groups and one in the YS group) held a negative view of higher education and position themselves as outsiders to higher education. In the YED context the emphasis was both on effort and on relatives who dropped out to find well-paid full-time employment. In YSD context relatives left higher education both because of effort involved and because they could not find suitable courses.

As they were already in higher education or doing an access course none of the mature participants positioned themselves outside higher education. However, they had done so at the time of their leaving school, because their assumptions and expectations were that higher education was not only unthinkable, but also far less attractive than being treated as an adult, not having to study and earn money immediately.

The MEHE and MSHE groups had previously had negative images of tutors and lecturers. They imagined tutors as remote and intellectual, but were surprised to find most of them approachable and understandable. The MSFE and MEFE participants

too had negative and stereotypical images of lecturers. The MSFE participants imagined lecturers to be very knowledgeable, intimidating and difficult to understand and feared they would be not as helpful as access tutors. The MEFE group had more complicated and more detailed images of university lecturers and tutors.

Male 2: *I have this image of some lecturers with jeans and baggy jumpers and others quite ordinary in their suit and tie. [...].*

Female 1: *I imagine lecturers as wearing suits or dressing like the Open University video.*

Male 2: *Growing a big beard. A big beard was obligatory. And corduroys and a jacket.*

Female 3: *Unless they have a very strong personality they've got to wear a suit.*

Female 4: *Like in Oxford and Cambridge.*

Interviewer: How do you know they dress well in Oxford and Cambridge?

Female 4: *It's what you see on TV.*

Male 1: *I think there's the danger that we get stuck with stereotypes. Of course the truth is it all depends on who you got for tutors.*

Female 3: *Yeah but some of them are beyond stereotypes. [...]*

Male 2: *I find that the ones who dress down are actually the least trustworthy. [...]*

Female 3: *If you are well dressed, it pays to be nice as a tutor – people respect that.*

Female 4: *Kids, I mean when they're at school, they expect their teachers to be dressed nice. And when you're students in an Access course, you get really horrified at the fact your tutor walks in jeans and tee shirt.*

Female 1: *People react differently and even if tutors are nice if they don't give the impression that they are professional then they are not taken seriously, it puts you off completely. [MEFE]*

Although higher education appeared to the MEFE participants as more accessible and less formal than it had been in the past, they viewed lecturers with suspicion, unless they were well dressed. They negatively compared their access tutors to what they imagined Oxford and Cambridge university tutors to be like. Their views demonstrate both the importance of popular culture in shaping constructions of higher education and how constructions of lecturers can mask anxiety about entering higher education.

Positive constructions of higher education

All but seven young participants [2/12 for YE, 2/12 for YED, 1/10 for YS and 2/8 for YSD] constructed higher education primarily in terms of extrinsic economic benefit and to a lesser extent in terms of the more intrinsic personal benefit. These positive constructions were however moderated by the financial and emotional cost of being away from family and friends. A lack of confidence about ability to succeed or to gain better employment prospects moderated the positive constructions. Positive constructions were nonetheless stronger than the negative constructions, indicating that the dominant discourse of the economic benefit of higher education had been internalised by the majority of the young people sample. Other discourses had also been internalised. Student life meant going away from home for the young English participants. Social life was more important for the younger participants and self-improvement more important for the mature participants. Higher education was also constructed as an escape from social exclusion, debt, poverty and the nefarious influence of peers. These constructions of higher education were metaphors about freedom, new beginnings and expanding horizons, both geographically and emotionally. These metaphors emphasised the process of higher education as a transition to adulthood and then to full time better employment.

For the YED and YE participants the metaphors were linked to going away from home and having a good social life.

Interviewer: It's quite interesting that many of you want to move away from [here]?

Boy 2: *I'd sure like to leave [this place]. I'd like to experience life.*

- Boy 1: *My brother went to Manchester*
- Girl: *Manchester has quite a good nightlife.... [Laughter] ...*
No, no, it's true.
- Boy 2: *Yeah, good shops there. [Laughter]*
- Boy 1: *Because in Luton you'll die of boredom. [Laughter]*
[YED]

Staying at home was associated with boredom. The minority of YE and YED participants who did not really look forward to going away from home did not even consider the possibility of attending a more local higher education institution.

For the young Scottish participants the metaphors for higher education as a transition to adulthood were linked to not going away from home.

- Boy: *It's the best place for chemical engineering*
[Aberdeen]. My cousin's there at the moment.
- Girl 1: *I wouldn't want to go that far away from my family*
- Boy: *At least I'll be a real student and learn to live without*
my family doing things for me
- Girl 2: *But you'll have to wash your own clothes*
- Girl 1: *And do your own ironing*
- Boy: *At least I'll be able to live like a real student and I'll*
soon learn to do the washing and go to a launderette
and do the ironing or I won't bother with this... who
needs ironing? [YS]

The YS and YSD groups would not consider going to university away from home if they could at all avoid it. Indeed, they would only consider not going to a local institution if particular courses they wanted to study were not on offer locally.

It would help if all the unis had the full variety of courses. Then I
wouldnae have to think about travelling. The only place I can go is
Aberdeen. That's the only place in Scotland that does the course I
want to do. [YS boy]

Interestingly, although not seen as an attractive prospect, going away from home and living away from family was linked to being *a real student*. This shows an awareness of what being a student entails within the English context. This awareness was most likely derived from the media and popular culture. This awareness also entails awareness that the Scottish context is not only different, but also not quite as authentic as the English context. The YSD group went even further in their preference for localism. Their positive constructions of higher education were closely related to the concept of 'distance'. As also found by Raab (1998) and Tett (1999), they identified easily accessible institutions and courses and not having too far to travel as an important driver to participation, not only because of the cost of travelling but also in terms of physical, social, emotional and cultural distance.

While half of the YSD participants rejected higher education in further education and wanted to do a degree at a local university, the other half constructed doing a degree or HND in a local further education college rather than higher education institution as more attractive:

- Boy 1: *If you just go to a uni where you don't know anybody, then you're disadvantaged.*
- Boy 1: *Maybe cause you get to meet mair people and stuff. It's all going to be scary when you first go.*
- Boy 1: *If you stay where you've always stayed then you'll still know people. But if you're going to a different site, or the other side of the country, you'd be just ill. [...]*
- Girl 4: *Universities do not offer any more than colleges so they don't really teach the students anything anyway. Lectures only convey information, the student has to take it further. I would much prefer doing a degree in a college ... they don't leave students entirely on their own.*
- Boy 2: *[...] there is less stress and I do not have to feel inferior to others, which I would if I did a better-graded course.*
- Girl 4: *I would prefer to do a degree in a college as it may be closer for me to travel to*
- Girl 1: *[...] there would be less people than at university.*
- Girl 3: *[...] It's mair laid back and mair relaxed. [YSD]*

Higher education in further education was more attractive to some YSD participants, because it was easier to get to, the classes were smaller, which meant they got more help and support. It was more relaxed and more flexible and they were less likely to be made to feel as an outsider that is inferior to others. For some YSD participants *going to a different site* to study meant not just going to a different city, but also going to a local university. Either option was equated with not just discomfort, but also illness. Higher education courses in further education have widely been identified as a particularly Scottish phenomenon, linked to a higher participation rate, and especially popular with the most disadvantaged socio-economic groups (See Arbuthnott 1997; Smith and Bocock 1999; SHEFC 2004; HEFCE 2005).

Previous research has linked wider horizons to social class background and depicted working-class entrants as reluctant to move away from the familiar and the known (Hodkinson *et al* 1996; Reay and Ball 1997; Stuart Wells 1997; Reay 1998, 2001; Reay and Lucey 2000; Archer and Hutchings 2000; Power *et al* 2000; Farr 2001). Previous research has also linked lesser distance travelled with lower socio-economic groups (Power *et al* 1998, 1999, 2003; Reay and Lucey 2000; Farr 2001). However, all of these studies were set in an English context. The present research found that for some participants in the YSD group, which had the lower socio-economic profile, studying in a different part of the city was considered to be away from home. Yet, most Scottish students who live within travelling distance, go to a local university, regardless of socio-cultural background, unless a particular course is not available locally (Bell and Grant 1974, 1977; Stephens 1998; Bell 2000).

More than the younger Scottish participants, the younger English participants were aware of institutional hierarchies, insofar as some institutions had a better reputation and more prestige than others. Both young English and young Scottish participants expressed a preference for institutions that siblings, cousins and friends had attended. The young Scottish participants aimed for local higher education institutions to match their needs in terms of subject interest and easy access. They did not specifically seek to avoid pre-1992 institutions, although some YSD participants would only consider doing a degree at a further education college. None of the younger English participants wanted to avoid pre-1992 and elite universities as found by Reay (1998), Reay *et al* (2001), Ball *et al* (2002) and Brooks (2003a).

Mature participants constructed higher education in terms of economic benefit and in terms of self-improvement, but gave a greater importance to self-improvement and to being role models for their children. These positive constructions were variously moderated by the financial and especially emotional cost of childcare issues, opposition from family and friends, as well as lack of confidence that they were actually able to succeed in gaining a degree and gaining better employment afterwards. Since half the sample had already entered higher education and since the other half wanted to enter higher education, the positive constructions of higher education were stronger than the negative constructions, indicating that the dominant discourse of the economic benefit of higher education had been well internalised.

Mature participants were aware that opportunities were more widely available now than when they were younger. In particular, they praised the availability of access courses as giving the possibility of a second chance for those who had been excluded from educational opportunities. One MEHE mature participant among many reflected

I am excited because I am able to go beyond the expectations that society, family and school had for me. I am surprised I have done this. I have gone well beyond my own expectations. [MEHE woman]

This extract confirms that even though they may not always articulate them, potential entrants are somehow aware of societal, familial and school expectations.

Both English and Scottish mature participants constructed higher education in terms of local post-1992 universities that were seen as more welcoming and friendlier to mature students (See Reay 1998; Hutchings and Archer 2000; Reay *et al* 2002; Davies *et al* 2002). The differences between mature and younger participants were thus more marked in the English than in the Scottish groups. Whereas for the young English participants going to university meant going away from home, preferably to a pre-1992 institution, for the mature participants it meant going to a local post-1992 higher education institution that could be travelled to daily as pre-1992 institutions were perceived as less friendly and welcoming to mature students. For both the young and mature Scottish participants higher education meant going to a local

institution, although mature participants preferred post-1992 institutions and did not consider higher education in further education.

Only the MSFE group constructed higher education not simply as an individual, but also as a collective enterprise. Because of institutional incentives and arrangements, the participants had a guaranteed place in a specific institution if they passed the access course. Thus, they would all attend the same institution, although they might follow different courses. They felt that the fact that had been through the same access course and knew each other well was a major driver to enter higher education.

Female 2: *It's no that you're going into it completely alone.*

Female 1: *I know I can always turn to people who are going to be doing the same course as me next year.*

Female 3: *We all feel the same way* [nods of agreement] [MSFE]

The MSFE participants felt that they could count on each other and help each other when in higher education as they had done during the access course. Reay *et al* (2002) too found that mature students aimed for higher education institutions that were attended by a high percentage of mature students. This confirms Weber's theory of *social closure* (1946, 1949, 1978, 2001), Foucault's notions of *finely graded hierarchies* (1970, 1972, 1980) and Bourdieu's *classification and judgement* (1976, 1977c, 1982, 1986, 1990b). All these conceptual models presume that particular institutions and particular students end up matching each other.

Public discourses

Like the respondents in Archer and Hutchings (2000) and Hutchings and Archer (2001), the majority of the participants in the present research shared the government's constructions of the individual economic and employment benefits of higher education. Although they agreed with the dominant discourse of its economic benefits, in Archer and Hutchings (2000) and Hutchings and Archer (2001) many respondents would not consider entering higher education. In contrast, in the present research only seven out of 78 participants would not consider entering higher education [two in each of YE, YED, YSD and one in YS].

A question that arises is why most participants in the present research, who were not from social classes 1 and 2, seemed to have internalised the discourse of the economic benefit of higher education to such an extent. Like most participants in Ainley (1994) and unlike most the participants in Heathfield and Wakeford (1991) and Archer and Hutchings (2000), the participants in the present research thought they had more to gain than to lose by going to higher education.

Despite their working-class background and expected lower levels of cultural capital (See Bourdieu and Passeron 1979) the participants in the present research actively sought the economic benefit of higher education, because they were seen as so highly valuable that they couldn't do without them (See Golthorpe 2000). Indeed, the focus group participants seemed to consciously aspire to enter higher education to gain social mobility to a greater degree than the most of the working-class participants in Reay (1998), Archer and Hutchings (2000), Hutchings and Archer (2001), Reay *et al* (2001) and Ball *et al* (2002).

This means either that assumptions that working-class students have lower cultural capital and position themselves outside higher education are misguided or that the focus group sample had higher than expected levels of cultural capital. This could also mean that the assumptions about the fact that potential entrants weigh up the costs and benefits and then rationally decide to enter higher education are less misguided than assumptions about lower levels of cultural capital. More importantly, this could mean that a cultural shift has taken place whereby most young people from all socio-economic backgrounds perceive higher education as being for everyone. As the dominant discourse of economic benefit of higher education is increasingly internalised by more people who perceive higher education as being for everyone rather than for the happy few, more potential entrants are likely to decide to enter higher education or to drift into it.

Life history factors and participation

Initial education

School and teachers as drivers

Teachers were generally not identified as making higher education more likely. However, both the YED and the YSD participants said that because of the small size of the classes, teachers could give them more attention and encourage them more. Only the YSD participants said most of the teachers were really encouraging and raising their expectations to succeed. Only the YSD participants underlined that teachers had talked at length about the benefits of higher education.

For some mature participants the negative influence of their teachers had become an incentive to achieve when they did access courses or Highers in order to go to higher education since they no longer felt lacking confidence and intelligence to the same extent as when they attended school (See McFadden 1995; Marks *et al* 2003).

School and teachers as barriers

In the YS, YE and especially YED group teachers had not really talked about university and were mostly interested with how well pupils would do in their GCSEs/Standard Grades and A-levels/Highers. The YE and YS participants in particular felt that teachers rather than parents were more likely to put too much pressure on them to achieve as many qualifications as possible. However, this was felt to be for the good of the school because of league tables rather than because teachers wanted to improve their higher education chances. Thus, except for the YSD group, teachers were largely not seen by the younger participants as opening the doors of opportunity.

The young participants did not think that teachers should prepare them for higher education. They did not think this could be done at school. They thought that it was up to them to prepare themselves through their own efforts. However, participants did not

depict school and teachers attempting to steer participants away from higher education as found by Green and Percy (1991), Skeggs (1997) and Pugsley (1998) *inter alia*.

In the YE group some participants said that they wanted to leave school to acquire higher education entry qualifications in a further education college where they could do vocational qualifications rather than A-levels. Recent research has pointed out that there is a growing number of young people in England who decide to do their A-levels in further education colleges rather than sixth form colleges or schools. Attwood *et al* (2003, 2004) argue that in England further education can provide a more congenial environment for those who have problems fitting in at school. They can have better relationships with tutors than with their previous teachers. In Scotland where there are no sixth-form colleges, it is less common for young people to do Higher Grades in further education colleges (See Duffield 1998; Mortimore and Whitty 1997). However, it is much more common than in England to do higher education courses in further education (Smith and Bocock 1999; Marks 2000, 2001, 2002; Parnham 2001).

One MEFÉ woman could have gone to university when she left school as she had been offered a place but did not have the confidence and did not feel ready for it. One MEFÉ man had also been qualified to go to higher education when he left school. He even studied for most of one year of university before dropping out. He could not keep up with the work, because he was having too wild a social life. But after seven years of *mindless work* he felt he had to do an access course to help him prepare for going back to higher education and not make a mess of things this time. The rest of the MEFÉ group were not qualified to enter higher education when they left school, although some of the younger mature participants had started A-levels and then dropped out after a few weeks to get into employment or because it was too difficult or too boring. Other participants had come to value doing a degree and getting qualifications as otherwise progression or job satisfaction was not felt to be obtainable. Two of the women mature students with children did a pre-access course and some GCSEs before doing their access course part-time. For them the path to higher education meant six years of study and making sure they had GCSE mathematics and English to at least grade C to be eligible to do a teaching qualification. To within one exception none of the participants in the MSFE group had left school with anything beyond O-Grade or Standard Grade. They felt that the

pressure exerted by teachers had been too much and that this had disinclined them from further study. In contrast, the MEFE participants complained that the teachers had not exerted enough pressure on them to stay on after GCSEs or O-levels.

Schools were criticised by mature participants for making some children feel like failures and outsiders, if they did not do well compared to others. Most of the mature participants underlined the negative effect of school with statements like

Teachers were squashing individuality and not encouraging us to put our ideas forward. We were made to feel that our ideas were not acceptable, that there was something wrong with us [MEHE man].

I hated it at school. Ye'd all these things to learn that meant nothing tae ye. And all they teachers going mad if ye didnae. Put me right aff [MSHE man].

Teachers made me lack of confidence in my own abilities [...] I think you're educated to know your place [MEFE woman]

Most if not all the participants thought that schools and teachers exerted negative influences on them and others, because of boredom, differential gender expectations and deliberate attempts to destroy their confidence and make them conform. The MEHE group were very particularly critical of school and teachers

Female 1: *School, it just dragged on for so long I just wanted to get out. I just wanted to be an adult and do adult things. I had had enough of studying.*

Female 2: *It seemed like they were preparing you for adult life, just to postpone it [if you took it further] Going on would mean not becoming an adult for some time yet.*

Female 3: *[...] It was the boys as well that teachers were focused on to go to university, rather than the girls. They expected less from girls.*

Male 1: *They try to bash it [confidence] out of you to try to make you conform and behave. [...]*

- Female 1 *If you've had a bad experience at school, you're not going to want to do anything academic.*
- Female 3 *If you're told you're stupid often enough you start to believe it [MEHE].*

Most of the mature participants said they knew nothing of university when they were at school, because they did not know anyone who went to university and teachers never discussed university. Hence, they had little knowledge about the benefits of higher education. Mature participants emphasised negative aspects of school, such as social and academic selection, labelling and devaluing, needs of individuals neglected at the expense of the group, socio-cultural exclusiveness, irrelevancy, uninteresting curriculum and gender and socio-cultural stereotyping. Except for Warmington (2002), previous research on mature students and mature potential entrants has tended to highlight the negative aspects of initial education (McFadden 1995; West 1996; Archer and Hutchings 2000; Hutchings and Archer 2001; Reay *et al* 2002 *inter alia*).

Family and peers

Family and peers as drivers

Only a minority of young participants felt that their parents really cared whether or not they entered higher education. Most young participants stated that the wish to enter higher education came from themselves rather than from school or parental expectation and pressure. Some of the YS participants underlined specifically that peers had been a driving force:

I agree with that there's no point in going to uni if there's no job prospects at the end of it, but I think that if it wasn't for your friends then you wouldn't go [YS girl].

Some mature participants underlined the great deal of support given to them by their spouses/partners, which had helped motivate them to enter higher education and to do as best they could.

If your family are not behind you then you cannot do so well in exams, it's going to be more difficult. [MEFE woman]

My husband has always supported me in everything I tried; he does not push me enough [laughter] but he has always totally supported me, even more than my mum or my mother-in-law. [MSFE woman]

Other participants highlighted the importance of siblings who acted as role models and/or the importance of being a role model for their siblings and/or children.

My older sister is my model, she was a mature student. Now I want to be an inspiration for my daughter. [MEFE woman]

My girls are my inspiration, I feel they were born into a society when you have to be educated; if they see their mother do it, they'll be more likely to. [MEFE woman]

I have to set the example for my younger siblings and for my children. [MSFE woman]

I want to be able to provide a secure future for my daughter after separation from my husband. [MSHE woman]

The influence of role model also included that of extended family members. Some YSD participants aimed to follow older siblings, aunts, uncles or cousins and move into a better area, because there was a lot of trouble such as crime and drugs where they lived. They wanted to do a degree to help them achieve not only better employment prospects, but also the possibility of escaping from the area.

Family and peers as barriers

While only a minority of younger participants said that their family expected them or pressured them to go to university, the majority confirmed that their family did not

try to discourage them from going and fully supported them. Family and peers were barriers in the sense of *financial dependence on parents* [YS], *being away from family and friends* [YED and YE] and *losing friends you see at school* [YSD]. Some of the YED participants indicated that peers could have a negative influence, but that entering higher education was actually a way to escape their negative influence.

Except for two mature participants who had qualified (and been offered a place at university, but who in one case did not go and in the other left after one year), at the time of leaving school most of the mature participants had not considered attempting A-levels or Highers, and even less going to university. Peer pressure had been a key disincentive to participation in higher education when they were at school, because in their working-class socio-cultural background *a desire to be part of a group rather than an individual* [MEHE] meant that *peer pressure was enough to make sure you didn't get your qualifications* [MSHE] *because you were going out and having fun with friends* [MEHE and MSHE]. Along with peer expectation, familial expectations had led them to leave school early to enter full-time employment. Now that they had either entered higher education or were doing their access course, many participants still identified opposition to their higher education aspirations in both friends and family.

Some people feel that I have ideas above my station, why do I want to do a degree at my time of life was one comment made to me. I feel that I am unintentionally leaving people behind. They don't seem to understand things I say which I find quite simple [MEFE man]

People often try to put you off it. I think it's a West of Scotland kind of thing. Everybody's really small-minded. They don't like to see other people getting on [MSFE woman]

My family don't think I should be doing this. I should be a wife, a mother. My mother didn't go to uni so they think I shouldn't go as well [MSFE woman]

Opposition and disapproval often came from female family members, typically mothers and mother in laws. Most female participants also felt that they would have

to do the *double-shift* and do all the household tasks. Familial barriers were mostly about pressure of family responsibilities and fear of not maintaining the same level of care for their children. These issues have been well rehearsed in the literature (Duke 1989; Edwards 1990, 1993; West 1996; Baxter and Britton 2001; Warmington 2002; Reay *et al* 2002; Davies *et al* 2002; Marks *et al* 2003).

Conclusion

This chapter has analysed the assumptions that shape higher education decision-making in terms of drivers (or motivations or *push towards* factors) and barriers (or barriers/constraints or *pull away* factors). These were examined by types of factors that are on the one hand more external (employment, national policy and institutional) and on the other hand more internal(ised) (personal and dispositional), including constructions of higher education and of students. Life history factors were also examined (influence of school and teachers, influence of family and peers).

This chapter showed that the decision-making process was highly complex and often sub-conscious. Employment and financial factors were identified as the most important drivers and barriers. External factors and internal factors were closely enmeshed and both extrinsic and intrinsic factors motivated and demotivated most of the participants. Despite many similarities, differences emerged between young and mature and between young English and young Scottish participants. For example 'career' was not identified as a driver by young participants but was often selected by mature participants. Other than the YSD group, the young participants identified 'social life' as a major driver, but most mature participants identified 'socio-cultural reasons' as a major driver. Effort, ability, time and lack of confidence were emphasised as barriers in all the groups. Knowledge and self-improvement were identified as important drivers in most of the groups. Both young and mature participants underlined the importance of intrinsic and non-instrumental motivations, but mature participants had more intrinsic motivations than younger participants.

Drivers and barriers to participation in higher education formed a particularly entangled web of interweaving internal and external factors (See Keen and Higgins 1992; Roberts 1997; Reay 1998; Tett 1999; Connor *et al* 1999a; Ball *et al* 2002 and

Marks *et al* 2003). Financial and employment drivers and barriers were moderated by personal factors such as family, effort, confidence, time, social life, self-improvement and knowledge. Barriers such as lack of qualifications and confidence were particularly entangled. Some mature participants thought they lacked confidence because they did not have the qualifications while others said that they did not have the qualifications, because they lacked confidence. Barriers stood in opposition to the desire to gain qualifications, better employment prospects, greater confidence and self-esteem and personal and societal validation. Drivers such as money, knowledge, self-improvement, qualifications, better employment prospects were just as enmeshed. For example the drive for qualifications and for knowledge was often seen as the same thing. Family, money and employment factors acted both as drivers and barriers.

In contrast to largely negative student stereotypes, constructions of higher education were far more positive such as a chance to escape social exclusion, poverty and dead-end jobs for all participants and for mature participants the chance to overcome the break up of relationships, escape the burden of domesticity, become a role model and even therapy and as a quest for the meaning of life. There was some anxiety in all the groups about dropping-out, failing to obtain a degree and not getting worthwhile employment after gaining a degree. Those participants who had the greatest anxiety felt they had to gamble against greater odds in terms of financial and emotional risks.

Previous research underlined that those who lack cultural capital and have a working-class *habitus* tend to position themselves outside higher education and have a greater levels of anxiety about higher education (West 1996; Tett 1999, 2004; Reay 1998, 2001; Lynch and O'Riordan 1998; Archer and Hutchings 2000; Ball *et al* 2002 *inter alia*). In the present research participants were expected to have a working-class *habitus* and a lack of cultural capital because they were primarily from under-represented socio-economic groups. However, they positioned themselves closer to higher education than expected. Previous research also found that working-class entrants and potential entrants avoided elite institutions (Reay 1998; Archer and Hutchings 2000; Reay *et al* 2002; Ball *et al* 2002). The present research did not find such explicit avoidance of pre-1992 universities among young participants, but mature participants expressed a preference for post-1992 institutions.

Previous research had concluded that in the British context social class was a key variable linked to distance travelled in going to higher education with young people from the highest socio-economic groups travelling the farthest distance (Keen and Higgins 1990, 1992; Roberts and Higgins 1992; Roberts and Allen 1997, Reay 1998; Connor *et al* 1999a; Reay and Lucey 2000; Farr 2001). The present research found this model not to apply in the Scottish context and also confirmed that in Scotland some young people from the lowest socio-economic groups would consider higher education in further education because it meant shortest distance travelled and less cultural distance. Table 7.5 below outlines the relationship between focus groups, institutional hierarchies, distance travelled and cultural distance.

Table 7.5 *Relationship between focus groups, institutional hierarchies, distance travelled and cultural distance*

YE YED	no avoidance of pre-1992 institutions ←siblings/relatives experience	away from home
YS	no avoidance of pre-1992 institutions ←siblings/relatives experience	not away from home → locally
YSD1	some avoidance of pre-1992 institutions but ← subject choice and siblings/relatives experience	not away from home → locally
YSD2	preference for HE in FE	not away from home → very locally
MEFE MEHE MSHE	avoidance of pre-1992 institutions	not away from home → locally
MSFE	partnership FE/HE so go to designated institutions	

Studies into participation by key variables (See Ashcroft *et al* 1996; Metcalf 1997; Dearing 1997; CVCP 1998; SHEFC 2004; HEFCE 2005) and qualitative research into motivations for going to higher education (See Robertson and Hillman 1997; Connor *et al* 1999a, 1999b, 1999c) as well as research into reasons for inequalities in participation (Reay 1998, 2001; Tett 1999, 2004; Ball *et al* 2000, 2002) have underlined that higher education is perceived differently and valued differently according to socio-cultural background.

The present research found some evidence of such mechanisms mainly in the fact that some participants of the most socio-culturally deprived group preferred post-1992 institutions while others preferred higher education in further education. The greater differences were between young English and young Scottish and between young English and mature participants as shown in the above table 7.5.

The focus groups, which counted 89% of their participants from under-represented socio-economic groups, took place in a context of a government policy emphasising the economic benefit of higher education (DfES 1998a, 1998b, 1998c). However, especially for mature participants, the importance of the more intrinsic drivers of self-improvement and gaining more knowledge point to the discourse of liberal education (See Newman 1857; Robbins 1963; Peters 1966; Hamm 1995; Maskell 1999; Winch 2000) or the more recent world-wide discourses of personal growth and development (Rogers and Stevens 1973; Dyer 1976; Robbins 1988; Covey 1989; Zukav 1991; Jeffers 1991; Steinem 1992; Peck 1993; Johnson and Swindley 1995; Gaskell 2001)

This chapter only briefly alluded to the influence of public discourses. These will be further discussed in the next chapter. By examining what participants said during individual interviews the next chapter will attempt to further analyse the main issues touched upon in the present chapter. The next chapter will not discuss external factors such as employment, national policy and institutional practices, but only personal and dispositional factors and the more personalised narratives derived from public discourses concerning the constructions of students and higher education and life history factors.

8

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

The previous chapter analysed discussions that took place in eight focus groups in which 76 participants took part. The motivations (or push towards factors) and barriers/constraints (or pull away factors) were divided into external factors: employment, national policy and institutional and internal(ised) personal and dispositional factors. Also examined were constructions of higher education and of students, influence of public discourses, initial education and familial factors.

This chapter examines what interviewees said during the individual interviews and further analyse some of the issues discussed in the focus groups. This chapter does not focus on external factors such as employment, national policy and institutional practices, but only on internal(ised) personal and dispositional factors, that is, on more personalised narratives derived from public narratives or discourses. The chapter is divided into two main parts:

- constructions of students and of higher education
- life history factors and participation (school, teachers, peers, neighbourhood and family)

This chapter draws on a total of 26 interviews outlined in tables 8.1 and 8.2 below [See chapter 5 for more details on the interviewing process].

Table 8.1 Interviewees who participated in focus groups

YSD Victoria 17 [4] 3 Highers Daniel 17 [3m] 3 Highers	YED Justine 17 [3m] 3 A-levels Steven 17 [3m] 3 A-levels
YS Edna 17 [3nm] 5 Highers Olivia 16 [2] 5 Highers	YE Anthony 17 [3m] 3 A-levels Sophie 17 [2] 3 A-levels Jessica 17 [3nm] 3 A-levels
MSFE Violet 30 [2/3nm] Access/single/0 children	MEFE Jade 36 [3m/3nm] Access/2 children
MSHE Fiona 33 [3m/3nm/3nm] Access/2 children James 35 [4/4] Access/girlfriend /0 children	MEHE Jane 38 [3m/3nm] A-levels/divorced/1 child Felicity 38 [3m/3m] Access/3 children Edward 40 [3m/4] Access/ partner/0 children

In the above table 8.1 socio-economic groups are indicated in brackets. The number of children refers to children living under the same roof and under the age of eighteen. For young interviewees the socio-economic group is that of the father's occupation. For mature interviewees who were not married the socio-economic group is that of the father's occupation. For mature interviewees who were married the first number is that of the socio-economic group of the father's occupation and the second number that of the occupation of the spouse. Table 8.2 below outlines the additional interviews sample.

Table 8.2 Additional interviews of relatives/neighbours/friends of interviewees who participated in focus groups

YSD N/a	YED N/a
YS Olivia's uncle Robert, 47 [4/2] Olivia's grand-father Peter, 75 [3m/4]	YE Sophie's father Gregory, 43 [4/2/2] Sophie's mother Rose, 42 [3nm/3nm/2] Jessica's mother Mary, 45 [3m/3nm/3nm] Jessica's grand-mother Agnes, 75 [4/4/3m] Jessica's grand-father Oscar, 76 [3m/3m/4]
MSFE N/a	MEFE Jade's friend Fatima, 40 [3m/5/3m] BTEC/HND six children
MSHE Fiona's neighbour Andrew, 81 [3m/3nm]	MEHE Jane's neighbour George, 84 [3m/3m]

In the above table 8.2 the first number in brackets is that of the father's occupation, the second is that of the interviewee and the third that of the spouse when applicable. Table 8.3 below shows the socio-economic profile of the interview sample.

Table 8.3 Socio-economic profile of interview sample

Interviews	Overall	Scottish	English	Young	Mature	Older
Total	27 [100%]	13	14	9	13	5
1+2	4 [16%]	3	1	2	2	0
3nm+3m	14 [59%]	7	7	5	5	4
4+5	6 [25%]	5	1	2	3	1

The above table 8.3 shows that the interviewees from under-represented socio-economic groups constituted 84% of the interview sample and that the majority of interviewees were from social classes 3nm and 3m. The socio-economic group is that of the father's occupation or that of the interviewee if they were not a young interviewee and were in paid employment.

Constructions of students and of higher education

Constructions of students

“Middle-class snobs with money”, “lead swingers”, “always drinking” and “always having parties”

English and Scottish older interviewees, who all came from a working-class background and remained working class, used negative stereotypical constructions of students:

Before the war it was mostly those middle-class snobs with money who went to university. [George 84 MEHE neighbour]

Rather snobbish ... most of them are lead swingers ... having a great old time for themselves. [Oscar 76 YE grandfather]

They cannae get a job, or they don't like having tae work, [...], see the way they're all dressed, and the rest of it... They're never out of the pub, they're always drinking, and they're always having parties and things like that. [Agnes 74 YE grandmother]

Students were perceived as coming from a different world and described in disparaging terms. The fact that students were described as unable and unwilling to work suggests that students were seen in relation to working-class values and expectations. Almost identical negative stereotypes of students were articulated by some of the younger English working-class interviewees:

Students are hung over most of the time [...] I see all these students round town with pink hair and that tells me they aren't taking it very seriously. They look like freaks. [...] They're the ones that don't want to conform, so wear outrageous clothes, and it always seems that it's the high society people that are like that, but not me I would work to my full potential. [Justine 17 YSD]

The fact that words like *snobbish* and *high society people* are used, by the older and younger interviewees respectively, indicates that social class is included in their constructions of higher education which arguably applies more to the upper middle-class rather than the middle-class. Older interviewees saw students as not wanting or not able to work and they did not include people like themselves as potential students. While younger interviewees emphasised students as not wanting to conform and not making the best of their full potential, they did include themselves as potential students.

Heathfield and Wakeford (1991) and Archer and Hutchings (2000) who investigated constructions of students among non-participants from under-represented socio-economic groups had previously identified among working-class respondents a similar stereotypical construction of students as middle-class snobs who were doing little studying but always drinking a lot and having fun. The fact that the respondents in Heathfield and Wakeford (1991) were aged around 14-16 in the late 1980s and those in Archer and Hutchings (2000) were aged 17-30 in the late 1990s, while in the present research the older interviewees were aged 14-18 in the 1930s and 1940s and the younger interviewees were 17 and 18 in 2000-2001 indicates that this particular stereotype has remained constant over the past 60 years.

“People who did well at school”, “serious”, “study every night”, “read books all the time”, “no life” and “not much fun”

Some mature interviewees who had not yet entered higher education tended to have problems in defining their concepts of students at the time they left school. For them constructions of students merged into factors that were pushing them towards higher education or pulling them away from higher education.

Being a student is going to be difficult, writing essays especially, but also exciting and enjoyable, and more than worth it in the end. [Jade 36 MEFE]

English and Scottish mature interviewees, who had not entered higher education directly from school, but had recently entered higher education as mature students,

used stereotypical constructions of students that depicted students not as middle-class debauched always having parties and doing no studying, but as studying all the time and having a life without any fun. They did not include people like themselves in their constructions of students.

My image of students is of hard work and of staying in and studying and not having much fun. [Violet 30 MSFE]

As far as my idea of students, university was their life, they didn't actually do anything apart from study every night, you know. What kind of life is that? [Fiona 33 MSHE]

I thought students did more of what we did at school [...] They had no life and read books all the time. [Edward 40 MEHE]

Some Scottish younger working class interviewees used a similar stereotype of students as studying all the time and having no fun, but although they also emphasised poverty and debt, they included people like themselves in their constructions of students:

Being a student means being poor, having no much fun, studying every day and working part-time ... and getting into debt. [Victoria 17 YSD]

Students are people who did well at school, who are quite serious and quite smart and want a better education and more qualifications to lead them into the job they really want [Daniel 17 YSD]

Except for the absence of references to students as middle-class, the constructions of students as academic and clever people who study all the time and who never have any fun held by mature and younger interviewees closely matched that of Heathfield and Wakeford (1991) with respondents aged 14-16 and Archer and Hutchings (2000) and Hutchings and Archer (2001) with respondents aged 17-30. However, the younger interviewees included themselves within their constructions of students as academic and clever people who study all the time. Unlike in Heathfield and Wakeford (1991), none of the interviewees used the term 'boffin'.

Going beyond polarised stereotypes of students

Non inclusive of constructions of students as working-class

Peter, an older interviewee who left school at 14 and had then come into contact with students when he worked as a porter at the University of Glasgow articulated views that went beyond polarised stereotypical constructions:

The students all seemed aloof and would hardly look at a porter, never mind speak to one. They seemed from another planet. [...] Students either work all the time or they are drunk all the time, but I suppose some of them must manage to do the two. [Peter 75 YS grandfather].

A similar way of thinking was shown by Anthony, a young interviewee whose mother and brother were teachers and whose mother had been a mature student:

Some students will do more drinking and more of having a good time, but they'll also have to do their coursework or they're going to fail. [Anthony 17 YE]

Despite going beyond polarised stereotypes and showing some elements of reflectiveness that went beyond taking for granted implicit assumptions, Peter did not include people like himself among potential students while Anthony did [See below].

Inclusive of constructions of students as working-class

Agnes, another older interviewee, who had just retired from working as an airliner cleaner and had encountered students in her workplace, made reference to the construction of student as dedicated working-class who has to have part-time employment:

Well, there are quite a lot of them that swing the lead, I have seen it, but a lot of them are really seriously studying, I have known students because they worked beside me and I admired some of them because they were helping themselves, but other ones were just hanging around and waiting until something falls from the trees. [Agnes 75 YE grandmother]

Agnes thought that students who did not seriously study deserved contempt. Students who were not privileged because they had to work part-time and were *really seriously studying* were to be *admired* because they were *helping themselves*. Her construction of students was framed within a traditional working-class discourse of self-help to betterment and upward social mobility (See Smiles 1882). She assumed that middle-class students did not have to better themselves to achieve social mobility, because they start higher on the socio-economic hierarchy.

Many younger English and Scottish interviewees from both working-class and middle-class background articulated constructions of students that included young people like themselves. However, they were also aware that many students would be different from them and people like them:

To be a student is to work hard, to get what you want from life. [...] University costs a lot of money and some students go without food or don't eat very well. We send my brother a box of food each month to make sure he is eating well. [...] Some students look like freaks, but my brother goes to university and he's not a freak. [Justine 17 YED]

To be a student is to have no money, studying, as well as having a job to support yourself. If students have the means to do it, they've a good social life, because they're well off they don't have to rely on loans, so they've loads of free cash. [Edna 17 YS]

My mother was a mature student and my brother went to university so I think of students as people like them and me, like my friends, some of my friends, not all my friends but most of my friends, my good friends anyway [Anthony 17 YE]

Justine, Anthony and Edna were also aware that being a student for people like them was going to be a different thing than being a student for someone well off and hence not someone like themselves:

Implicit assumptions only challenged by direct experience

Unless they had been directly exposed to, or had interacted with students, interviewees had derived their constructions of students from their familial *habitus* and from representations in the media. This applied more to the older and mature interviewees as younger interviewees tended to have members of their extended family who had entered higher education.

Those mature interviewees who had recently entered higher education became aware how limited, prejudiced and even how illogical their constructions of students were. Fiona, a mature interviewee realised that at the time of her leaving school she had thought students studied *every night* and had *no life* and that this had not seemed a very attractive prospect to her. She had focussed solely on the short-term rather than on the long-term consequences of being a student:

You would never think at the end of their four years their lifestyle would totally change, they would not be like that forever and they would get better employment opportunities for having gone to university and got a degree. [Fiona 33 MSHE]

This remark underlines how potential entrants react in ways dictated by their social and familial background and draw unreflexively on the public and familial discourses that they have internalised. The remark also highlights how little potential entrants tend to really think about what entering higher education might entail and how it might change them.

Mature interviewees who had recently entered higher education and who had thought that students had *no life* and studied *all the time* highlighted that they were shocked to find that younger students who did the same courses as them did not have *no life* and did not study *every night*. Indeed, they were appalled that younger students did not seem aware of the importance of having the opportunity to do a degree or particularly grateful to have what mature interviewees considered the opportunity of a lifetime.

Only Robert, Gregory and Rose who had entered higher education directly from school mentioned images of students as people who *attempted to change society*

[Robert 47 YS uncle], *take part in protests and riots* [Rose 42 YE mother] and *threw paving stones at the police* [Gregory 43 YE father] as they remembered from the newspapers and television when they were young. They recalled not only the protests by American students against racism and against the Vietnam War but also the student riots of May 1968 in France and across Europe. However, when Gregory and Robert became students they found that students were less active about changing society although some students still talked about the possibility of changing society while other students were only concerned with gaining qualifications and then doing as well as possible for themselves.

To summarise, the interviewees broadly referred to the three main constructions of students that were mentioned in previous research. The first two constructions were those of privileged students who were outrageous, drinking and partying all the time and of the middle-class students having no life, reading books and studying all the time found in Heathfield and Wakeford (1991), Archer and Hutchings (2000) and Hutchings and Archer (2001). However, unlike in these three studies, the constructions of students in the present research were not polarised within individuals. English and Scottish older and English younger interviewees articulated the always-drinking-and-partying stereotype while the English and Scottish mature and Scottish younger interviewees described the always-studying-and-having-no-fun stereotype. A third construction was also evoked: that of dedicated working-class students who have to study hard while working part-time. This construction was found especially among the younger interviewees who were aware that students were divided between those who had to work part-time and those who were well off and hence had ready access to money and consequently did not need student loans. This third construction was absent from Heathfield and Wakeford (1991), but was in evidence in Archer and Hutchings (2000) and Hutchings and Archer (2001), although they found it to apply primarily to Asian and Afro-Caribbean potential entrants. The constructions of students held by the younger interviewees in the present research suggest that they have little difficulty in imagining themselves as students despite the fact that being a student is not in itself going to be as enjoyable an experience for them as for students from more privileged backgrounds who can have more fun. This indicates that they are culturally closer to higher education than older and mature interviewees were at the same age.

Constructions of higher education

“I hadn’t the faintest idea of what a university was like, people from our class did not go to higher education”

Except Andrew who left school at 17 after he did his Highers, all the older interviewees left school at 14. However, none of them had any direct knowledge of higher education or any direct knowledge of anyone who had gone to higher education.

I don’t remember anyone from school who went to university. [Andrew 81 MSFE neighbour]

I myself hadn’t the faintest idea of what a university was like. [George, 84 MEHE neighbour]

Robert and Gregory, mature interviewees who had entered higher education after leaving school, had relatives and/or siblings who had gone to university. The mature interviewees who had not entered higher education after leaving school had nobody in their family who had gone to university. However, Mary and Rose knew one or two people from school who had gone to university, but the other mature interviewees who had not entered higher education after leaving school knew nothing about universities and knew nobody who had gone to university:

I had no idea of what went on in universities. [James 35 MSHE]

I can’t honestly recall anybody who was in my class that went to university. [Fiona 33 MSHE]

The only person we knew to go to university, her father was a bank manager so I thought that I’d have to be privileged to be going. [Jane 38 MEHE]

Whereas the mature Scottish interviewees associated higher education with academic study for those able and willing, the older and the mature English

interviewees associated higher education with having money and being middle and hence with not with being working-class:

People from our class, our social class, didn't go into higher education.
[Fatima 40 MEFE friend]

My sister ... had the same feeling as well that I had, that she wasn't privileged enough to be going. [Jane 38 MEHE]

Jane's sister had attended a grammar school and done A-levels but *she felt she was a minority and she didn't fit in*. Consequently, she felt that had she gone to university, she was not likely to have fitted in. Jane, who attended a comprehensive school, felt that at university she would have fitted in even less than her sister.

Working-class pupils going to grammar school and then university and feeling they did not fit in has been widely acknowledged in previous research. Purvis (1991) gave examples of working-class girls in the 1900s and 1920s not fitting in when they went to grammar school and then university. Willis (1977) and Griffin (1985) underlined working-class resistance to the dominant middle-class educational discourse. Power *et al* (1998, 1999; 2003) also provided similar narratives of working-class pupils in grammar schools and in private schools.

“Higher education was for the really brainy folk with the money, for doctors, teachers, lawyers and the clergy”

When asked about images of universities and what they were for the older interviewees articulated more positive constructions than they had done when asked about images of students:

University – that was for the brainy folk, really brainy folk with the money, that's what you always thought, for doctors, teachers, and such like. [Agnes 75 YE grandmother]

I thought that university was for those who wanted to become doctors, lawyers, the clergy and that type of things. [Oscar 76 YE grandfather]

University was for lawyers, doctors and scientists, that's where they came from. [Andrew 81 MSHE neighbour].

While the constructions of students held by older interviewees fitted the privileged dissolute and debauched student stereotype who unable to do any work or who wanted to avoid doing any work, their constructions of higher education were closer to the stereotype of the clever middle-class boffins stereotype (See Heathfield and Wakeford 1991, Archer and Huchings 2000; Huchings and Archer 2001). At the time of the older interviewees leaving school, socio-cultural and educational barriers were such as to make going to higher education unthinkable, even for Andrew who obtained Highers, but these were not good enough to allow him to go to university.

“Too difficult” and “such an uphill struggle and so many headaches”

For two mature interviewees higher education had not been unthinkable to start with, but poor results in A-levels and Highers led to discouragement and to an exaggerated fear of the effort and difficulty involved in doing a degree. Rose from a non-manual working-class background did A-levels in a sixth form college thought that

I didn't dislike the idea of going to university but my qualifications were really minimal so my chances of finding a place would be very reduced [...] It seemed like such an uphill struggle and so many headaches because of having to study all the time and I was very immature and lazy, so I abandoned the idea ... and I didn't like the idea of having to go to university away from home which I would have to do because there were no universities near my home town. [Rose 42 YE mother]

Violet from a middle-class background went to a school with a primarily middle-class intake. However, for her as for Rose barriers to higher education were associated with a feeling of lack of academic achievement and lack of ability:

Both my parents were teachers. All my brothers and sisters went to university.[...] All my family and most of the people I knew went to university. I thought it was more of too difficult for me anyway. Like you need to have a lot of As in your Highers or As and Bs which I didn't really get in my Highers. [...] Maybe I didn't apply myself really when I was 13, 14. I didn't enjoy studying ... I thought university would mean even more hard study. [...] So I presumed that I was not very bright and that I wouldn't go to university unlike all my brothers and sisters who did medicine, law and languages. [Violet 30 MSFE]

Violet who was the youngest in the family felt inferior because of her lack of academic achievement compared to her parents and brothers and sisters. Her parents became secondary school teachers while her brothers and sisters all become doctors, lawyers and teachers. Her construction of students was of *clever people* who became *doctors, lawyers and teachers*, although for her the clever people came from the same socio-cultural background as her and hence need not come from another social class. .

“You just have fixed ideas about these things”

Mature interviewees who entered higher education were surprised to discover that higher education did not fit their stereotypical expectations.

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Higher education is much better than I imagined. It's nothing like school. I really enjoy studying and writing essays. [Edward 40 MEHE]

I had very negative stereotypes of higher education, which I had to overcome in order to come here. Now I would like to be a student forever. [James 35 MSHE]

I thought going to university would be a big jump and it would be really, really hard work, formal lectures, a lot of reading round the subject, but I adapted to that quite quickly. It was actually OK, very enjoyable, and it gives you more confidence, that you can do it. [Violet 30 MSFE]

I think I have always expected the lecturers to be out there with a big black cloak, but it's totally different. They are more normal than you think, I think there is a certain few who are so far removed from everyday life [...] You are encouraged to shout out or answer in the lecture theatre, which I always thought that was not the done thing, you just have fixed ideas about these things. [...] I think I had this idea that they were going to teach you all these things ... a lecturer at the front in a big black cloak ... in a huge lecture theatre and then you just take it all in and go away and think about it. But now it's very much to facilitate your learning and the lecturer is not there to say that is how you do it, they want you to think for yourself. They're wanting you to feedback to them all the time. [Fiona 33 MSHE]

So, yeah, I worried would I be the oldest one there. It was like first day at school really. You know all those nerves and things. You remember what you see films of university cause I'd never been to university before. You do see them in their caps and their gowns, the way they speak, you can't understand the language they use. So it was nice, it was refreshing, to see that they're human at the end of the day. You can relate to them. I didn't expect them to be so friendly or so approachable. I thought they might be patronising. [Fatima 40 MEF friend]

As seen in the above extracts those mature interviewees who had recently entered higher education realised how their fixed ideas about higher education clashed with the reality of higher education. They were pleasantly surprised because higher education was felt to be more accessible and more user- friendly than what they had expected. Only by direct challenge through experience did their largely stereotypical constructions of higher education appear unreal, to the extent that interviewees wondered how these constructions of higher education had implanted themselves in their minds. The process of implantation in the mind has to be linked to cultural expectations derived from school, the family, friends and the influence of the media. Potential entrants often seemed to have a fear of confirming negative stereotypes about themselves as underachievers and outsiders to higher education. Their fears negatively influenced performance, expectations and pathways. A sense of shared identity seemed to be both the cause and the consequence of stereotypical

constructions of higher education. These shared stereotypical constructions of higher education sustain cultural distance and internalised barriers to higher education, because they were shared by groups of people according to the interplay of social class, school experience and familial background.

“You need all the qualifications you can get”

All the interviewees agreed with the current discourse of the economic benefit of higher education and the importance of educational qualifications. The labour market was perceived as more competitive and less secure than in the past. The fact that an increasing number of people gained higher education qualifications made not having qualifications a greater barrier than in the past, because it denied social recognition to those who did not have a degree.

Higher education makes it possible to achieve my dream in terms of employment, which is to become a special needs teacher because my son is dyslexic and I helped him and I have been a voluntary teaching assistant for special needs so I want to have a career and job satisfaction which is only possible if I do a degree first before doing other qualifications [Jade 36 MSFE]

I think that because there is so little in the way of jobs these days you need all the qualifications you can get to be one better than the rest. [Edna 17 YS]

I don't want to end up like my mum, always short of money and always in debt and on benefit. For me, higher education and doing a degree means to have the possibility to have a better job. [Victoria 17 YSD]

I think university is to gain respect, because it shows determination, and you get a status and a better job. [Justine 17 YED]

Not only did the interviewees agree with the economic benefit of higher education, but they wanted to enter or had entered as mature students. However, unlike for

Rose as a mature student who did a further education qualification in social care and financially benefited from it, for Mary who did a degree in heritage studies as a mature student, higher education did not bring the expected employment and financial rewards, so she went back to her administrative post in the local fire brigade. All the mature interviewees who wanted to enter higher education or who were already in higher education aimed to become teachers with the exception of Violet who wanted to become an occupational therapist. James, Edward, Jade, Fatima, Fiona, Jane, Felicity and Violet are unlikely to have the same experience as Mary as they are more or less guaranteed to have more satisfying, more rewarding better employment and more money.

“Universities have become more and more accessible over the past sixty years”

“After the war more people took an interest in trying to get into university”

Long before Robbins (1963), Dearing (1997) and *The Learning Age* (1998) which they had not heard of, the older interviewees perceived that after the Second World War higher education was made more accessible as part of the demobilisation effort.

After the war a lot of servicemen had a chance to go to university and you were encouraged to do all sorts of qualifications including university qualifications. [George 84 MEHE neighbour]

The Further Education and Training Scheme (1943) made discretionary grants available to ex-service personnel for apprenticeships, college courses or higher education degrees (Crace 2004). An access course in all but name was created, whereby those who did not have the higher education entrance qualifications could undertake a preparatory year. However, only Andrew (who had done Highers which had not been good enough to enter higher education) took advantage of this scheme:

I myself went to university but failed to graduate as I couldn't pass the language requirement. I tried and failed French, Spanish, Russian and Latin. [Andrew 81 MSHE neighbour]

The older interviewees were aware that higher education had become increasingly more accessible since they left school, and especially over the last ten years.

Over the years it's become much more open and mature students are encouraged. [...] After the war it became more open, more people took an interest in trying to get into university and I think a good percentage, roundabout 80% of the youngsters today would like to go to university, but I think there's still 20% who do not know what a university is for.
[George 84 MEHE neighbour]

Universities have become more and more accessible over the past sixty years. More and more people young and older go to university now.
[Oscar 76 YE grand-father]

It's good that universities are more accessible. [...] I think everybody is entitled to a good education. [...] I think it's a good thing if the students pay so much towards their costs, to let them realise what the money is, and they should pay and work to help them through their student days.
[Agnes 75 YE grandmother]

It is worth noting that Agnes seems to have internalised the government policies of paying fees and the expectation of working part-time while studying. An alternative explanation is that the government policies happen to match what she thinks is reasonable and fair.

“Now higher education is more open to everyone” and “it's publicised more” and “you know more people going into it”

Although the mature interviewees did not share Agnes's view on national policy, they too thought that that higher education had evolved and become more open and more inclusive and hence less elitist and exclusive:

Now higher education is more open to everyone than when I left school. I never thought I would ever go to university yet I became a mature student. [Mary 45 YE mother]

I see a divide in my younger days. I don't see such a divide now. It's accessible to everybody. [Fatima 40 MEFE friend]

At university now, there's more choice now, wider than ten years ago. You had more traditional subjects then, now you have degrees whereas before you had diplomas [nursing, occupational therapy, podiatry]. [Violet 30 MSFE]

Now I believe that higher education it's open to anybody, anyone who wants to do it, from any background, any financial status even though people pay fees and there's no student grant. I think it's a combination of things and it's publicised more that it's open to anybody and you know more people going into it. [Jane 38 MEHE]

Some of the mature interviewees were not only aware of greater accessibility and of more people entering higher education, but also of a greater range of courses. The fact that interviewees were aware that higher education was more publicised clearly underlines the influence of the media and of institutional marketing techniques in shaping perceptions about higher education.

"You only go to university if you have the grades"

The younger interviewees too shared the view that higher education had become increasingly more accessible and that more and more people of all ages entered higher education. However not all of them thought higher education for open to everyone.

Higher education is for those able and willing to study and who want a better life. [Victoria 17 YSD]

Doing a degree is an opportunity that in theory everyone has but they must be able to achieve their Highers and they must want to go and study for another 4 years. [Daniel 17 YSD]

It is for anyone who wants it, and not just for middle-class or above that people, anyone. [Justine 17 YED]

You only go to university if you have the grades. If I didn't get the grades I would go to college to improve them to go and study what I want in the place I want, it's not worth it otherwise. [Steven 17 YED]

I think higher education is open to everyone who wants to benefit from it. [Anthony 17 YE]

Not everyone is able to go to university. You've got to have like good grades to go. [Sophie 17 YE]

Higher education is for academic people aimed at those who performed well at school. There's a hole in the middle for people in between [Edna 17 YS]

For some of the above interviewees barriers were conceptualised in terms of grades rather than social class whereas most of the mature and all older interviewees saw barriers in terms of social class.

Like the non-traditional respondents in Ozga and Sukhnandan (1997, 1998) the interviewees in the present research expected maximal academic demands. Some interviewees thought that higher education was for everyone and others that it was for those who were academically able and had performed well at school. There was no apparent association with nationality or with the focus group in which the interviewees had previously taken part.

A hierarchy of institutions

Institutional hierarchies based on social class

Whereas the mature interviewees who had not entered higher education after school thought that higher education was now for everybody and that there was no longer a social class divide, Gregory and Robert disagreed with such views:

[Universities] still attract the same people that they always have ... the newer universities, which is the type of university I went to, have a good social mixture but the older universities are still seen as a bastion of things I don't particularly like. [Robert 47 YS uncle]

Before and even now the upper middle class have always wanted to go to the top universities. [Gregory 43 YE father]

Gregory (whose father was a semi-skilled worker in a warehouse) who went to an older university and Robert (whose father was also a semi-skilled worker but in a factory) who went to what was a new university in the mid 1970s agreed that universities were more accessible, but also pointed out that within higher education there nevertheless remained institutional hierarchies based on social class.

“A good university” that is “well recognised” and “the best university possible”

Just as Robert and Gregory with similar socio-economic backgrounds talked in similar terms, Justine and Sophie with different socio-cultural backgrounds also talked in very similar terms but they did not think only the upper social classes aimed for the best universities. Both Justine and Sophie emphasised that they wanted to aim for the best type of higher education, although Sophie thought higher education was for those who had *academic ability* while Justine thought it was *open to everyone*. Sophie, whose parents had university degrees, was from a middle-class background and lived in a middle-class area. She positioned herself firmly as an ‘insider’ to higher education. Justine, whose parents left school at 15 with no qualifications at all, was from a working-class background, went to a smaller school but highly supportive school in a deprived area in order to maximise her chances to achieve good A-levels. However, she also positioned herself not only as an ‘insider’ to higher education, but also has an insider to the best type of higher education.

Ideally I'd like to go the best university possible. I'd like to go to Warwick because it's a good university and not too far. [Justine 17 YED]

I want to go to a good university that's well established and well recognised. I don't know what I am going to study. It depends what influences me in the months before I'm filling out my UCAS form.
[Sophie 17 YE].

Because of her lower social class background Justine started with less cultural capital and greater cultural distance than Sophie. Both had an older sibling who went to university. Both Justine and Sophie achieved As and Bs in their GCSEs. Largely because of the expectations of her mother, Justine had sufficiently lessened cultural distance and internalised barriers to reach optimal cultural distance and hence to position herself not 'outside' higher education, which she saw as being for her as opposed to not for her, as potential entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups are expected to do (See Heathfield and Wakeford 1991; Edwards 1993; West 1996; Reay 1998; Lynch and O'Riordan 1998; Tett 1999; Archer and Hutchings 2000; Hutchings and Archer 2001; Ball *et al* 2002).

Life history factors and participation

Influence of school and teachers, peers and neighbourhood

"I honestly don't think teachers bothered about me or anyone else"

According to Bourdieu (1977c, 1984, 1990c, 1993) what is acceptable for people like oneself is a consequence of the societal or socio-cultural process through which particular constructions of higher education emerge primarily as the consequence of familial *habitus* and interaction with school and teachers. Foucault (1972, 1977, 1980, 1988) suggests that the finely graded hierarchies to which one is exposed throughout school play a key role in such processes.

In the present research the older interviewees who left school at 14 seemed aware of the above-mentioned processes, although the extent of their awareness is a matter of speculation. Whatever the extent to their awareness of the processes highlighted by Bourdieu (1977c, 1990b, 1993b) and Foucault (1972, 1977, 1980, 1988), the older interviewees had nothing positive to say about teachers:

I honestly don't think teachers bothered about me or anyone else.
[Oscar 75 YE grand-father]

There was nae teacher which stood out, had any positive influence or anything like that. [...] Teachers had their favourites and if you weren't a favourite then that was you. [Agnes 75 YE grandmother].

Like the other older interviewees, Andrew, who left school at 17 having done his Highers, did not expect teachers to go out of their way to try and open the doors of academic opportunity for their pupils:

All the teachers were hard-working and did their best to put things across to you. They didn't go into expectations. They just got on with it. They didn't talk about expectations and things like that. You just went into your class, moved onto the next class, that sort of thing. [Andrew 81 MSHE neighbour].

Andrew did not get good enough grades in his Highers to enable him entry to higher education, but he was not particularly bothered:

I got 2 Highers – English and science and 3 Lowers – mathematics, history and biology, but I didn't do very well in them, so that was it.
[Andrew 81 MSHE neighbour].

For Andrew going to university was something his parents wanted him to do. It was not something that he particularly wanted as he thought he was not clever enough and he did not think his teachers thought he was clever enough.

“My preference was to leave school anyway”

Peter, described how when he was 14 the headmaster attempted to stop him from leaving school, albeit unsuccessfully:

When I decided to leave school at 14, the headmaster called in my parents to get them to talk me out of it. It didn't work. I left school to go and work at the University of Glasgow as a porter until I could start an apprenticeship as a marine engineer. [...] So my priority was to earn money as soon as possible. [...] My preference was to leave school anyway even if I hadn't felt obliged to do my bit to support the family.
[Peter 75 YS grandfather]

This account was the closest evidence of an allegedly more meritocratic and more egalitarian Scottish educational tradition or rather Scottish mythology where the teacher has the mission to uncover hidden academic talent and encourage academically talented boys, especially among the lowest socio-economic groups, to stay on at school and then go to university. This Scottish mythology has been described in literary fiction by MacLaren (1894) and in autobiographical accounts by Taylor (1953) and Weir (1998) where it applied to herself as a girl rather than a boy. It has also been widely described in the academic literature (Davie 1961; Beveridge and Turnbull 1989; McCrone 1992; Lockhart-Walker 1994). In reality, despite a greater number of Scottish pupils having access to secondary education, because they passed the 'qualifier' at the age of 12, most pupils from working-class background in both England and Scotland left school at 14 (Osborne 1966).

"Teachers were so boring", "teachers terrified me", "teachers just didn't see me" and "that was a teacher saying *that*"

Mature interviewees seemed to expect more from their teachers than the older interviewees. They also had far stronger feelings and expressed far more negative opinions about them than did the older interviewees.

I just couldn't be bothered when I was at school. [...] The teachers were so boring you'd rather stare at the wall or daydream than look at them and listen to them. [James 35 MSHE]

Some teachers I didn't like at all, others really terrified me [Rose 42 YE mother]

[If] I didn't understand I'd have my hand up and I wasn't seen. In the end I just gave up. If I knew an answer to a question, I'd have my hand up and teachers just didn't see me. [Fatima 40 MEFE friend]

Being bored, pressured, harassed or ignored by their teachers made interviewees feel like giving up and not make any effort to do well at school and even not wanting to be at school and consequently wanting to leave school as soon as possible.

The negative role of school and teachers on the socio-cultural processes that determine where individuals place themselves at a particular point on finely graded socio-cultural hierarchies extended to descriptions of teachers promoting sexist and racist discourses:

My sister took my mum to her parents' evening and the teacher said to my mum "give her a pen in hand, she doesn't know what to do, give her a broom and she's well away". That was a teacher saying that. [Fatima 40 MEFE friend]

The discrimination was mainly through negative and stereotypical expectations about ethnic minorities and through no representation in the curriculum. [Felicity 36 MEHE]

As they recounted these instances of teacher discrimination Fatima and Felicity were still quite emotional despite the fact that many years had elapsed. They were of the opinion that sex and race discrimination was still operating today, but that they were less blatant and less explicit.

Negative role of career advisors

Mature interviewees particularly underlined the negative role of career advisors, who seemed to have been exclusively men, in helping school and teachers to further lower aspirations and to reinforce both the discourses of leaving school early to take on full-time employment and that of domesticity:

It was always jobs they [career advisors] were looking at. They'd never say to you, "there's all these courses at college and university and maybe you have should have a think about that", it was always jobs. With the careers advisors it was not university or college but employers you would write to and with a girl it was office work and things like that. [Fiona 33 MSHE]

I told a career advisor that I wanted to be a teacher or a social worker. He told me to forget that idea. I got six CSEs and four GCEs so I could have got on further, but I didn't look into it because they told me that I should forget the idea. They kind of made you believe we was only worth going into an office or a shop. [Jane 38 MEHE]

I went to the careers people, and discussed all things that I would like to do like teaching or all that sort of thing, but they kind of said you don't have the qualifications and that was it. It was a barrier, I felt, oh well I can't do anything apart from secretarial work. [Violet 30 MSFE]

It is worth noting that the only non-working-class mature interviewee, who also happened to be the only non working-class mature focus group participant, described similar experiences to the working-class interviewees.

"Teachers and especially the headteacher were always comparing me to my brothers and sisters who did so well and I didn't."

Without knowledge of her background, it would be easy to analyse what Violet says in terms of lack of cultural capital derived from a working-class social and familial *habitus*. However, Violet's parents were both teachers. All her brothers and sisters went to university to study medicine or law except one sister who studied languages. She went to a school where most pupils came from social classes 1 and 2 and who were encouraged to go to the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, Edinburgh or St Andrew's. She explained that her secondary school was *a very good school academically and a lot of people went on to university and became lawyers and doctors*. Because in terms of academic attainment she did less well than her siblings,

she clearly felt that she did not fit to the academic strand within the finely graded socio-cultural hierarchy that is produced by the experience of schooling. Her sense of academic inferiority was compounded because

Teachers and especially the headteacher were always comparing me to my brothers and sisters who did so well and I didn't. [...] In the end I got several Highers, but they were not very good. I couldn't even do a nursing diploma course with them, so I did secretarial studies. [Violet 30 MSFE].

Despite her middle class background Violet talked in similar way and had a very similar experience in relation to educational trajectory than Jane, Fiona and the other mature interviewees who were not from a middle class background. The difference was that Violet did not expect to leave school as soon as possible. Her expectation to go to university (as did her parents and brothers and sisters) was limited by her lack of qualifications.

Research about mature students has underlined gender, race and class as well as previous experiences of education (more often than not linked to social class) as the reason why they had left school early and had not followed the prime trajectory to higher education (Weil 1986, 1988; Edwards 1990, 1993; Pascal and Cox 1993; Taylor and Spencer 1994; Wakeford 1994; Ainley 1994; McFadden 1995; West 1996; Green and Webb 1997; Tett 1999; Lynch and O'Riordan 1998; Britton and Baxter 2001; Marks *et al* 2003; Archer *et al* 2003). Violet's experience hence moderates a generalised assumption held by a non negligible number of researchers into both mature potential entrants/students (See for example Reay 1998; Bowl 2001, 2003; Reay *et al* 2002; Davies *et al* 2002) and young people (See for example Reay 1998, Walkerdine *et al* 2001; Ball *et al* 2002) that differential unequal processes take place according to social class and that working-class assumptions, motivations and transition from compulsory education to higher education are different from those of the middle-class. Violet's experience shows that for both middle-class and working-class potential entrants to higher education there can be many very different experiences, aspirations and choices. It also shows that working-class and middle class potential entrants can also have similarities of experiences, aspirations and choices (See for example Savage *et al* 1992; Hatcher 1998; Power *et al* 1999, 2003).

Most research had suggested that social class inequalities were maintained because working-class culture was not valued by schools and teachers and was explicitly excluded from the curriculum. Consequently, working-class families tended to have negative experiences of initial education, because they had to define themselves in relation to academic success or failure within a system that devalued and excluded their culture (West 1996; Bowl 2001; Reay 1998, 2001; Lynch and O'Riordan 1998; Reay *et al* 2001, 2002; Ball *et al* 2002). On the other hand, Power *et al* (1999: 336) and Power *et al* (2003: 102-105) showed that many middle-class pupils had a "troubled, difficult, precarious or broken progression" and that it was not uncommon for young middle-class people to "fail against the odds and not to live up to their educational inheritance". After all, Jackson and Marsden (1966) had drawn attention to the fact that around a third of their working-class sample had experienced downward mobility. Similarly, Fielding (1995) asserted that between 1981 and 1991 no less than 21% of managers and 14% of professionals had also experienced downward mobility.

"There is always more pressure from the school to do [A level/Higher] English and Maths"

Unlike those who had not entered higher education directly from school, the male working-class mature interviewees who had entered higher education from school had always been in A-stream classes throughout secondary school and had more positive views of teachers. Although Robert and Gregory went to local comprehensive schools, teachers' expectations were high:

Teachers expected everyone in the class to get As, which I did in geography, which was my favourite subject, but other subjects I either failed completely or got very low grades so I couldn't go to university after my fifth year. [...] I did more Highers in sixth year and got As and Bs. [Robert 47 YS uncle]

In smaller classes like French and Spanish teachers expected all of us to get As and to go to university. In the larger classes like English and mathematics the expectation was still that we should get As but there

was less of an expectation that all of us should go to university. We all really wanted to do well and get top grades. [Gregory 43 YE father]

Both Robert and Gregory were academically able and had fully internalised the idea of going to university despite their working-class backgrounds so their experience was very different from the experience of other mature students.

On the other hand, both Rose and Violet, who were from non-manual working-class and middle-class respectively and who also did A-levels and Highers respectively, but got very poor grades, did not have such positive views of teachers and of learning which they found was often very boring and very hard going.

In contrast to the older and to most of the mature interviewees, the value of continuing in full-time education was taken for granted by all the young interviewees who wanted to follow the prime trajectory of securing A-level or Higher grade qualifications and then entering higher education. While their grandparents and most of their parents expected to leave school as soon as possible and enter full-time employment, the younger interviewees expected to stay on at school. Their parents and grandparents also expected them to stay on at school.

Although teachers expected young interviewees to stay on at school, the pressure from school and teachers to achieve at GCSE/Standard Grade and at A-level/Highers was intensely felt by many young interviewees:

I don't know if my teachers expect me to go to university. They're just like we want you to really concentrate on A-levels. That's what they're concerned about. [Sophie 17 YE]

There is always more pressure from the school to do English and Maths and it's very difficult not to do these subjects. Luckily, I like English. Maths is a different story though. I don't like it that much and I am not very good at it. I got a B in GCSE without trying, that's why I am doing it. [Justine 17 YED]

I think they think they're gonnae achieve higher scores by pressurising the children and not doing what's best for them. I was told I was doing Higher Mathematics and I wasn't given the help that I needed. And that was wrong. All my teachers wanted me to do Highers in their subjects and I felt pushed into doing 5 Highers ... I think calling it options, it's a joke ... they're kinda lying, because they just tell you what you are doing. [Edna 17 YS]

There was a great deal of pressure to do Higher English and Higher maths. I failed mathematics completely [...] We had a string of supply teachers and this did not help ... I didn't particularly like maths to start with, but I got a 1 at Standard Grade so I was expected to do Higher maths. [Olivia 16 YS]

Here they're particularly desperate to get people to do languages, which I'm doing because I did well in my GCSE French which is alright. I'm so glad I don't have to do Maths because I only got a C in my GCSE. [Steven 17 YED]

The young interviewees depicted school and teachers as not concerned about what they might do after A-levels/Highers or even whether they entered higher education. The young interviewees described the pressure to achieve in negative terms, because it was felt as being not for their sake, but for the sake of the greater good of the school. Yet the schools were local comprehensives, not situated in affluent areas, and were rated well below their national averages for attainment at A-levels and Higher Grades. According to Power *et al* (1999, 2003) such local comprehensives do not provide as much of a push towards academic success as do grammar or independent schools. However, interviewees in the present research felt a great deal of pressure from school and teachers to continue to do well academically in their A-levels/Highers if they had done well in their GCSEs/Standard Grades, but they did not always feel they could freely chose their subjects and did not always feel that the school gave them the academic support they needed.

Researchers have disagreed about the role of initial education in maintaining social class inequalities of participation in higher education. Many studies suggested that

initial education had or no effect in and above that of social class (Floud *et al* 1956; Halsey *et al* 1961; Halsey 1977; Halsey *et al* 1980; Heath and Clifford 1990). Most studies found that schools had a negative effect on access to participation because they maintained or increased social class inequalities (Mortimore 1997; Whitty *et al* 1998). Fewer studies found that initial education could have a positive influence and that cultural capital could be increased and hence initial cultural distance and internalised barriers lessened to the point of optimal cultural distance by the experience of schooling (Halsey *et al* 1980; Lindsay 1982; Roker 1993; Darling-Hammond 1997; Power *et al* 1998, 1999, 2003; Bloomer and Hodgkinson 2000, Hodgkinson 2001). In the present research small schools were found to significantly reduce external and internalised barriers and cultural distance in the case of Victoria and Daniel from the YSD group and Justine and Steven from the YED group for small schools. [This is further discussed later in this chapter under social capital].

Further education as a more user-friendly route to higher education than school

Attwood *et al* (2003, 2004) suggested that further education was increasingly becoming a user-friendlier path to raising achievement and entering higher education, especially for those who felt they did not fit at school or who had been rejected by the school. This was confirmed in the present research, but only in the English context. A minority of young English interviewees expressed a desire to go to a further education college to achieve higher education entry qualifications. The pressure of school was felt to be too intense and further education was seen as the solution that would enable an easier and less painful way to enter higher education:

I don't want to stay on at school to do A-levels. Next year I am going to college to do a two-year BTEC in Art and Design, which is actually equivalent to three A-levels. The pressure from teachers is too much. Writing essays is what bothers me the most, I am worried about that. That's why I want to go to college. [...] There's more creative work and not so many essays to write, but I'll still be able to go to university to study Art and Design. So I think it'll be better for me. [Anthony 17 YE]

Jane, a mature interviewee, who had not entered higher education directly from school, highlighted a similar situation with her daughter, in her case not so much because of a preference for further education as a more user friendly environment than school, but more specifically because her daughter had been deemed not to achieve well enough to enter the sixth form in her single sex school.

I think teachers' attitudes hasn't changed that much, because when I had to go to my daughter's school, she went to a girls' school, to meet with the sixth form tutor, they said: 'with your predicted grades we feel that you shouldn't go on' and I said 'why' and they said 'because she's not achieving'. [...] She's at college now redoing her GCSEs. She's doing exceptionally well in college. She's got very good reports. I don't know if she's going to do A-levels after that or go into a BTEC. [Jane 38 MEHE]

Jane also felt that there had been a generational link in that both her daughter's aspirations and her own aspirations to enter higher education had been discouraged by school and teachers. This had also been the experience of both her parents who left school at fourteen, although they had academic potential and aspirations, because they were never supported and encouraged by their teachers. Jane's and her family's experience moderate the assumptions of many researchers that lesser likelihood of participation is linked to lower aspirations of under-represented socio-economic background (See Mecalf 1997; Robertson and Hillman 1997; DfEE 1998a, 1998b; DfES 2004a, 2004b, 2004c; HEFCE 2005 *inter alia*). The present research suggests that low aspirations per say are not as much a problem as the implicit and explicit limitations and barriers to aspirations that interviewees felt had been imposed on them by school and teachers.

The present research also confirms the importance of further education in the transition from school to higher education. Whereas higher education in further education was considered in the Scottish context by some interviewees (of the focus groups as this did not apply to the interviewees) as a way of making higher education more accessible and more attractive, further education was preferred by some young English interviewees as a more accessible and more attractive route to achieve higher education entry qualifications.

Fittingness to school or fittingness between home and school values

Least fittingness among older interviewees

The older interviewees felt the world of home and school were both similar, because all the pupils came from similar families, and different, because they saw teachers as being from a different background from them. However, since they did not expect to stay on and even less go to university, they did not think they fitted the values of school, largely because these meant learning and the status of being a dependent pupil rather than working and the status of independent adulthood.

Reduced fittingness for mature interviewees who did not enter higher education after school

The mature interviewees who had not entered higher education from school did not feel a great deal of fittingness between their values and aspirations and those of school and teachers. They felt that studying was a lot of effort and that school and teachers were boring, uninterested, unsupportive of their aspirations and that their parents did not expect them to go to university. Even Violet, who was the only mature interviewee from a middle-class background, highlighted that, although the world of home and school were similar insofar as all her siblings and both her parents went to university, she did not feel that fitted the world of school because of her lack of academic achievement compared to her parents, siblings and many of her school friends. She felt that neither her teachers nor her parents really expected her to go to university.

Better fittingness for mature interviewees who entered higher education directly from school

Both Gregory and Robert, mature interviewees from working-class background who had entered higher education after leaving school, felt that the values and aspirations of home matched those of the school and that they too shared the values of the school. Robert liked his teachers whom he saw as having the same background and same values as him:

[We were] distinctly working-class, as were most of the pupils in our school and most of our teachers were fairly young and recently out of teacher training and they came from the same background I had come from. [Robert 47 YS uncle]

Gregory pointed out that it was the values and aspirations of school and teachers were the same as his own and his mother's, but not those of his father who wanted him to leave school at 16 and do manual work. However, Gregory underlined that his mother would never have accepted that he left school at sixteen to do manual work and not go to university, even if he himself had wanted to do so.

Younger interviewees have high degree of educational fittingness

In contrast to the older and to most of the mature interviewees, younger interviewees felt the value of educational achievement was common to home and school. Some younger interviewees nonetheless felt some dissonances between home and school. Edna, Justine, Anthony, Steven and Jessica constructed the pressure to achieve at GCSE or Standard Grade and A-level or Higher level as far more hostile than did Sophie, Olivia, Victoria and Daniel. Sophie and Olivia, who were from a middle-class background, did not feel the same level of dissonance between the worlds of school and home. They did not resent or interpret as hostile the intense pressure from school to perform well in A-levels and Highers. This might indicate that they had a greater amount of cultural capital and were culturally closer to higher education because of their familial *habitus*. However, Victoria and Daniel who came from the lowest socio-economic backgrounds and lived in the most socio-economically deprived area did not perceive school as hostile (because their school was careful not to put too much pressure on pupils in order to avoid discouraging them and putting them off doing Highers and entering higher education). Thus, the school attended by Victoria and Daniel raised their aspirations and also the expectations their family had for them and enabled them to reduce internalised barriers and cultural distance to maximise the likelihood of them doing a degree. They both liked school and felt that their school and their teachers cared for them as individuals.

Apart from the pressure to perform Jessica also felt an additional lack of fittingness between home and school, because school encouraged subjects like Philosophy or Ethics, which she really liked, while her father preferred that she did a vocational course at university such as teacher training, nursing or physiotherapy. Edna and Justine too felt an additional dissonance between home and school because they felt loved at home, but not at school.

I feel safe at home, problems are shared. In school you tend to keep things to yourself. [...] At home if you don't want to do something, they're going to think about it, but out here you have to do it. [Edna 17 YS]

Yes the worlds of school and home are very different, very much so, everyone at home loves me, more than at school. [Justine 17 YED]

Despite feeling emotional dissonances between home and school, both Edna and Justine had high aspirations and were determined to enter higher education. Their academic aspirations therefore fitted school expectations and to lesser extent parental expectations, as their parents would have supported them in whatever they wanted to do. They underlined a lack of emotional fittingness to school rather than lack of fittingness to academic values. Among those who felt intense pressure from school and teachers to perform at A-levels and Highers, Jessica, Justine and Edna had the least amount of cultural capital and were the most culturally distant to higher education. Apart from her mother who had been a mature student Jessica had nobody in her family who had gone to university. Apart from her brother Justine had nobody in her family, not even cousins, who had gone to university while Edna had nobody at all in her family, not even cousins, who had done a degree.

According to Bourdieu (1977c, 1984, 1990c, 1993b) and Stuart Wells (1997) the greater the cultural capital, the more aligned are the values of the self, the family and of the school and the greater the likelihood of entering higher education. However, in the present research it was found that a perfect alignment was not necessarily needed to enable entry to higher education, as long as potential entrants are particularly driven by the economic and/or intrinsic benefits of higher education.

Influence of peers

Previous research identified the influence of peers as being of key importance in the way young people make educational choices (See Robert and Allen 1997; Reay 1998; Pugsley 1998, Connor *et al* 1999a, 1999b, 1999c; Archer and Hutchings 2000, Connor 2001; David *et al* 2001; Ball *et al* 2000, 2001, 2002). However, the influence of peers has remained under-theorised except by Brooks (2003a, 2003b) who found

that the young people she interviewed did not actually discuss their choices and decisions about higher education. Although the present research did not specifically examine the influence of peers, it became clear that interviewees did not discuss with peers either staying on at school or higher education choice. For example, when asked whether she had discussed staying on at school or not with her friends, Fiona said:

No, it wasn't something that I talked about and it wasn't, I have to say, at that particular time, it wasn't something that was discussed a lot. [Fiona 33 MSHE].

Interviewees explained that after compulsory schooling they did as most of their peers did. For the older interviewees leaving school at fourteen was the norm. For Violet, Robert, Gregory and Rose leaving school at fifteen and then sixteen or staying on and going to university were equally possible options. Robert and Gregory were able and willing to enter higher education, but Violet and Rose did not feel they were able or willing to do so. For all the other mature interviewees leaving school at the age of sixteen and gaining full-time employment was the thing to do. Whereas the boys went into factory or warehouse work the girls became office workers and did secretarial work.

It was the thing to do, you were beginning to think well, will I be left here [at school] on my own, all my friends are out working for money and that just seemed to be the thing to do. [...] All the people that I knew were going to get a job. There was one girl who was going to do nursing ... and she had obviously been pushed into it. Her mum had influenced her. [Fiona 33 MSHE].

Fiona seemed to suggest that peer influence was more important than family, unless the family exerted very strong pressures. An example of family overriding peer pressure was Fatima who said that four of her close friends went on to college after school to do secretarial courses. Fatima did not want to do likewise and left school to get married and have children because:

I think my culture actually had something to do with it. When I was with my friends at school, that was okay, I was able to go to school with

them, a lot of my friends were West Indians. And once I had left school, I knew I wouldn't have the freedom I had when I was at school, I knew I wouldn't have so much freedom when I was at college, you know, from my parents' perspective. I think they would have kept tabs on me more. And things like that. [Fatima 40 MEF friend]

Fatima did not want to do what her friends did because her familial background meant more control and less freedom if she stayed on at school while marriage provided more freedom because it was away from parental control.

Unlike the older and most of the mature interviewees for whom the norm was to leave school after it was no longer compulsory, for the young interviewees the norm was to stay on at school and go to higher education, as in Brooks (2003a, 2003b) and unlike in Reay (1998), Archer and Hutchings (2000) and Reay *et al* (2001).

Fittingness to neighbourhood

Older interviewees had good fittingness to their working-class neighbourhood

When they were growing up all the older interviewees lived in council houses or in flats in three storey tenements with one or two rooms and a kitchen with family size ranging from four to six people. They felt they fitted in perfectly well in their working-class neighbourhood. They were aware that they were working-class and that they lived in working-class neighbourhoods. For them working-class meant that. *everybody was Labour around about that time [Agnes 75 YE grand-mother] and as a working-man you voted Labour and that was it [Andrew 81 MSFE].*

Mature interviewees had varying degrees of fittingness to their working-class neighbourhood

Those working class interviewees who did not enter higher education after school felt a good degree of fittingness to their working-class neighbourhood and to their working-class peers. The mature interviewees from working-class background, who entered higher education after leaving school or who went closest to do so, highlighted that they felt different from other people in their neighbourhood:

We were distinctly working-class, although at the time, the whole family had access to books, which was unusual, and this provided an opportunity for learning, but we were working-class always, like the rest of the neighbours, but different, in terms of books and educational expectations, which were very high. [Robert 47 YS uncle]

There were many books in the house and regular trips to the library. My mother, my father and my maternal grandfather were great readers and so were my brother, my sister and me. Most of my school friends didn't like reading and did not do much reading and they didn't have many books at home [Gregory 43 YE father]

Our house was full of books. I loved reading and I was reading books about history from the age of eight. My father too loved reading and so did his mother, but not my mother and her mother. [Rose 42 YE mother]

Apart from Violet all the other mature interviewees lived in council houses when they were growing up. Those who did not go to university after school had a good degree of fittingness to their working-class neighbourhood but those who went to university directly from school felt they were different and that they fitted in less well with their neighbourhood.

Young working-class interviewees have lack of fittingness to both working-class and middle-class neighbourhoods

Unlike the older and mature interviewees, all of the younger interviewees except Daniel and Victoria lived in accommodation owned by their parents. Daniel and Victoria also lived in the most deprived area of all the young interviewees. They felt they did not fit in very well with their neighbourhood and wanted to escape:

I live near an area with a lot of social problems but we're not so bad because we're closer to the shopping centre. There's a kind of social divide I live in the wrong side of [the main] road. [Steven 17 YED]

I live in very bad area, full of problems [...] Some of my cousins have already moved away down the road to the cottage flats [on the other side of the main road]. [Victoria 17 YSD]

Edna too lived in a socio-economically deprived area. She underlined a significant sense of a lack of fittingness with her neighbourhood:

Nice house in a not so good area. I live in the nice bit, but the nice bit and the not-so-good-bit are too close for my liking and I find that half of it should get pulled down completely ... because of drugs and stuff. [Edna 17 YS]

Justine, on the other hand, although she attended a school in a deprived area, lived in a relatively affluent area. However, she too highlighted a lack of fittingness with her neighbourhood:

[I live] in town – a sort of middle-class area, rather classy. [...] The houses are [classy] but we are not! If you listen to my mum we are “common as muck”. [Justine 17 YED]

It seems that for working-class young potential entrants wanting to escape a working-class neighbourhood and wanting to emulate a middle class neighbourhood act as a driver to do well in school and to want to enter in higher education

Young interviewees did very well in primary school

Whether from middle-class or working-class background all the young interviewees had done very well in primary school, loved reading and had a high reading ability from a very young age.

I've always loved reading. I taught myself to read and write, just tracing letters on a sheet. [Olivia 17 YS]

When I was young I used to go [to the library] all the time. I was always a good reader; I read loads all the time. [Edna 17 YS]

I used to go to the library all the time when I was younger. I loved and still love to read. [Justine 17 YED]

It is not unreasonable to assume that having books, a high reading ability and love of reading and hence a more vivid imaginary life may indicate lesser cultural distance than predictable from familial background and parental occupation. Bourdieu (1976, 1977a, 1977c, 1986, 1990b, 1993b) identified books as a visible attribute of cultural capital or as a measure of cultural capital, which may be greater than economic capital. Also a greater imaginary life would make it more likely not to be satisfied with neighbourhood aspirations and wanting something better for oneself.

Having books in the house, a high reading ability and a love of reading from very early on seemed closely related to lack of fittingness to a working-class neighbourhood. It might be suggested that if working-class potential entrants do not feel a sense of fittingness with the neighbourhood and more especially if they desire to escape the neighbourhood, then they are more likely to want to enter higher education. If working-class potential entrants live in a middle-class neighbourhood then the lack of fittingness and feeling of inferiority might also act to increase the likelihood of entering higher education, because of a desire to emulate others who live in the middle-class neighbourhood.

A working-class neighbourhood has been associated with restricted educational horizons in both place and space (Roberts 1993; West 1996; Hodkinson *et al* 1996; Ball *et al* 1995, 1997; Hodkinson and Sparkes 1997; Pugsley 1998; Reay 1998, 2001; Power 2000; Reay and Lucey 2000; Power *et al* 1998, 1999, 2003; Reay *et al* 2001, 2002; Ball *et al* 2000, 2002). A desire not to leave the neighbourhood to attend a better school because the neighbourhood feels more comfortable was negatively correlated by Stuart Wells (1997) to both the internalisation of middle-class values and the ideology of educational achievement. Stuart Wells (1997) used Bourdieu's cultural capital and *habitus* to refer to the familial influences that ensure the internalisation of middle class values and the ideology of educational achievement among working-class families and their children.

Familial influences or *habitus* and cultural capital

Parents seen as an entity with shared values

The older interviewees referred to a strong unquestioned societal expectation that they as working-class young people were expected to leave school as early as possible to enter full time employment.

You went to school, then up to the next class and then you left to do an apprenticeship and that was it. [Oscar 76 YE grandfather]

Notwithstanding this, Andrew's parents wanted him to have a non-manual job. Similarly, both Peter's parents agreed with his headteacher that he should stay on at school and do his Highers, but he really wanted to leave school as soon as possible to work while waiting to reach the age to start an apprenticeship as a marine engineer.

Sophie and Olivia, whose fathers had moved from skilled working class and semi-skilled working class respectively to becoming teachers, depicted their parents not as separate individuals, but as a kind of parental entity who expected them to enter higher education, although this was never explicitly articulated. Violet, whose parents were both teachers, described her parents in similar terms, only she felt they did not expect her to go to university because of her lack of academic achievement. Most of the other interviewees tended to differentiate between mother's influence and father's influence with fathers having a neutral or more often a negative influence and mothers having a neutral or more often a positive influence.

Parents seen as separate entities with opposing values

Negative role of fathers

When mature interviewees referred to working-class fathers, these tended to be described as not taking school seriously, wanting to have a laugh with their mates and getting into trouble at school. A minority of working-class fathers were academically gifted but had not been encouraged to follow an academic learning trajectory. Fathers were either described as indifferent or as having contempt for the

idea of staying on at school and going to university. The fathers of Jane, Fiona, Jade, Fatima, Mary and Felicity expected them to do office work after they left school. Rose's father who was skilled non-manual had similar expectations:

My father did not approve when I did my A-levels. He thought it was a waste of time for girls and that I should gain useful employment instead.

[Rose 42 YE mother]

Rose's father wanted her to enter full-time employment, her mother wanted what her father wanted, but she wanted to avoid entering full-time employment at all costs. It seemed that the discourse of domesticity, which presumed that higher education was not for women, because they would soon get married, did not operate only among manual workers. The fathers of Robert, Gregory, Edward and James expected them to do a skilled manual apprenticeship after they left school because going to higher education was equated with femininity and even homosexuality.

My father only approved of my sister going [to university]. He thought boys should do some kind of manual work if they were real men and not poofers and made comments about this. He had many fights with my mother about this. [Gregory 43 YE father]

If working-class masculinity was defined in terms of manual employment, it was not surprising that fathers were particularly against their sons staying on at school and/or going to higher education. Surprisingly, the fathers of the older interviewees seemed more open-minded and seemed keener to encourage academic talent in their sons.

When younger interviewees referred to working-class fathers, they were mostly described as not taking school seriously and getting into trouble. They were also depicted as wanting to escape school at the first opportunity. Also, fathers often did less well at school and had fewer educational qualifications than mothers:

My dad did not go to school because he lived in the countryside [in Ireland in the late 1940s] he was not even educated at home because this was just after the war ... [my mum] even taught [him] to read and write when she met him. [Justine 17 YED]

Edna's father left school at the age of fifteen with a few O-Grades, but her mother did several Highers and left school at the age of seventeen.

My dad was a trouble maker ... getting into trouble ...having a good time with his mates ... he played for the football team I think, ... he was really intelligent but he let himself down and [he] could have got a lot of qualifications. [Edna 17 YS]

Of the working-class interviewees, only Daniel and Steven had fathers who were better educated than mothers. Working-class fathers were more rarely trying to push in the direction of vocational subjects rather than traditional subjects, which they saw as less useful. Both Victoria and Daniel's fathers approved of their wanting to do a degree in nursing and in computer studies respectively. Jessica's father did not want her to do traditional academic subjects at university.

He says he's not paying for me wasting my time on a useless subject. [...] I really wanted to do philosophy or ethics, because I'm doing them for A-levels, but he says he'll only approve of a more useful practical type of course like teaching, nursing or something paramedical [...] I am not sure myself what's actually better for me. I'd really love to study philosophy but he thinks there's no sense in going to university and not getting a good job at the end of it, especially if I have a lot of debts, and the best way to get a good job is to study something more practical but of course it all depends on how well I do in my A-levels. [Jessica 17 YE]

All the above examples about the negative influence of fathers show the importance of intergenerational dynamics and how parents attempt or not to guide and shape their children's future. Previous research had underlined that in affluent families children are guided towards elite universities and traditional subject whereas in a working-class families they were more likely to be channelled towards vocational subjects and away from traditional subjects (Allat 1993; Walkerdine 1996; Reay 1998; Connor *et al* 1999a, 1999b, 1999c; Connor 2001; Power *et al* 1998, 1999, 2003; Reay *et al* 2002; Ball *et al* 2000, 2002; Brooks 2003b). In the present research

this was found to apply for most mature interviewees, but only to apply to a small minority of younger interviewees, such as Victoria, Daniel and especially Jessica.

Positive role of mothers

Interviewees across the age range gave examples of women in the family both as the most academically gifted and dedicated and as having to leave school early because of familial and societal expectations.

Mother had been quite bright at school and so had my older sister. She had prizes for everything but she didn't get any further. [...] My sister was pretty smart. She left school early, being a girl. She used to say she should have stayed on for her Highers, but she couldn't because she was a girl. [Andrew 81 MSFE neighbour]

My mother did extremely well at school and would have liked to stay on but she had to leave school at 14 to look after the family as she was the elder daughter and her mother had become ill [Gregory 43 YE father]

My mum was always a good girl, she went to [a grant aided girls' school], she was really bright and academic ... and she played netball for Scotland. [...] My mum left with Highers and my dad left after Standard Grade [O Grades][Edna 17 YS]

Among the mature interviewees, mothers and not fathers were depicted by in some cases as playing a supportive and facilitatory role in their children's education by expecting them first to do well at school and then to get the best education possible.

My mother expected my brothers all to be going for a trade, and she tried to get them into a trade and she did manage to get them into a trade. [Agnes 75 YE grandmother]

My mother always expected us to go to university. She's always had high academic expectations for her children, especially for my sister. We always knew she wanted us to go to university. [Gregory 43 YE father]

I got six CSEs and four GCEs so I could have gone on further but I didn't look into it, because they [teachers and career adviser] told me that I should forget that idea. It came as a bad moment. My mother had died the year before. If my mother was still alive then my sister and me would have gone to university because she was the one that was pushing us to do well at school and to get the best education possible. [Jane 38 MEHE]

Robert's mother took an even more active involvement in guiding her children towards educational achievement and the prime trajectory to higher education.

When I failed most of my Highers my mother went on at me to go back to school and redo my Highers. She made me redo my Highers, I went back to school at the end of September so I missed 6 weeks but in the end I got good enough Highers to go to university. I wanted to go to university in England, I went for an interview at Willesden College and got a place. But my mother didn't like the idea and in the end I didn't go. Instead I started a course to train as a psychiatric nurse, but again my mother went on and on at me ... she kept saying "I don't think you're happy. You know very well that you're selling yourself short." So after a year I left psychiatric nursing and went to [a newer university compared to the older universities] to study economics and geography. [Robert 47 YS uncle]

Agnes's mother more than her father made sure her sons went into a trade. Robert's and Gregory's mothers were strongly expecting that they should go to university. Robert's mother went as far as directly intervening to make sure this did happen. If Gregory had shown signs of not wanting to go to university, she would have persuaded that he should go. Jane's mother would have played a similar role, had she been alive at the time Jane left school

Among younger interviewees from working-class background a majority of mothers (Daniel, Victoria, Edna, Justine and Jessica and Anthony) were particularly supportive and encouraging. Jessica and Anthony's mother had been mature students and Justine's mother had done an access course, but not gone any further because she

had to look after one of her children who became seriously ill at the time. Anthony said that his mother was *really determined* that he and his brother would go to university. Anthony admitted that when he was about twelve he was not sure if he wanted to go to university but his mother who had been a mature student and was a teacher had told him

“You’re going to university”. I wasn’t really sure about that when she told me. But at the age of 16 I became sure that I really wanted to go to university [Anthony 17 YE].

The above extracts show that many working-class mothers intervened educationally and that they urged their children towards educational achievement to secure their future. Mothers were described as active agents in the family’s recent history. They made things happen and stressed education and achievement and not the discourses of leaving school early to gain full time employment and domesticity. Mann (1998a, 1998b) had also found such working-class educational dynamics while Dyhouse (1997) found that both middle-class and working-class mothers were often more supportive than fathers and some even paid for their daughters’ education using their share of their own parents’ inheritance.

Bettering oneself

Gorard *et al* (1997, 1998, 1999a, 1999b), Rees *et al* (1997) and Fevre *et al* (1999) have shown the continuity of learning trajectories of parents and children and even of grandparents, parents and children. They underlined an intergenerational influence on learners’ identities that shape constructions of, and patterns of, participation to lifelong learning. The present research found that parents had higher expectations for their children than they had for themselves and that mothers were often key cultural agents in transmitting family scripts of bettering oneself.

Among the older participants parental expectations were linked to gender. Agnes’s mother wanted to make sure that her sons did better than their father and went into a skilled trade. However, Agnes’s future was never discussed because she was expected to get married, have children, do housework and look after her family.

I liked science and was a bright pupil, but they had me stop school at 14. [...] Unlike my brothers, I weren't encouraged for anything. My future was never discussed. [Agnes 75 YE grandmother]

Although Andrew's sister was cleverer than he was, she left school at 14 because *she was a girl*. Andrew as a boy was expected to do much better than his father. He was encouraged to stay on at school to do Highers. His father was particularly keen that Andrew not work in the shipyard. He was expected to move up the social ladder into a clerical job. However, his dad's ultimate dream was that Andrew gained a professional occupation.

I wasn't as bright as my sister but I stayed on and did my Highers. [...] My dad's ambition was that I should try to be some kind of professional. My dad used to say to me "why not be a dentist?" I don't know why he picked dentist. [Andrew 81 MSFE neighbour]

Most mature participants felt that familial expectations were linked to gender with girls expected to do office work and boys a manual trade. However, some mothers were described as expecting much better opportunities for their children than might be anticipated from their socio-cultural background. Felicity's mother valued a good education and had Felicity's undiagnosed dyslexia not impeded her from gaining the qualifications to enter higher education, she would have been expected to have a go at bettering herself:

As my mother used to say "silver and gold will vanish away but a good education will never decay". [Felicity 36 MEHE]

Just as Felicity was the only Afro-Caribbean participant, Fatima was the only Arab Moslem participant, but both their mothers had enlightened views about education. Although Fatima's background suggested that she should leave school and get a job for the money, as that was the common experience in their days. Her mother had other ideas:

She always wanted us to go to college, my mum, she wanted more for us, but I just wasn't interested. [Fatima 40 MEFE friend]

Fatima was not keen to follow that path because she expected to have her freedom severely restricted in comparison to her friends. As did Fatima's mother, Jane's mother was pushing Jane and her sisters to do well at school and to get the best education possible because

[My mother] *worked in shops and factories, shoe factories. And she swore none of us would ever work in a factory.* [Jane 38 MEHE]

Jane's mother died before Jane left school. Without her support and encouragement Jane went into office work instead of taking her studies further despite having six CSEs and four GCEs. Because of their mothers' strong views about bettering oneself, both Gregory and Robert were expected to, and did, go to university after leaving school. Although she liked the idea of going to university, Rose was expected by her parents to enter full-time employment and she did not feel she had the ability and confidence to go to university, despite having the minimum qualification of two A-levels. It is not unreasonable to speculate that a mother like that of Gregory and Robert would have made a difference to her learning trajectory.

All the mature interviewees said that they went on at their children about the importance of doing well at school and educational qualifications. Young interviewees who had mothers who were mature students confirmed this. Most other young interviewees too said that their mothers went on at them more than their fathers about the importance of a good education. Among the working-class young interviewees the discourse of bettering oneself was linked to the economic benefit of higher education and the importance of educational qualifications. Among the young middle-class interviewees entering higher education was more the normal thing to do rather than a way of bettering oneself and parents did not explicitly articulate the importance of a good education as it was something taken for granted.

Archer and Hutchings (2000) and Hutchings and Archer (2001) underlined that working-class participants from Afro-Caribbean and Asian background almost exclusively articulated the discourse of bettering oneself and the importance of role models. Tomlinson (1987, 1992) pointed out that for many generations white colonists indicated implicitly and explicitly to the colonised populations that that the reason they were economically exploited was because they were uneducated,

therefore bettering oneself was particularly important. In the present research, however, the discourse of bettering oneself was present among most of the interviewees and not most among those from Afro-Caribbean and Asian backgrounds.

Frustrated educational ambitions and dreams

Several interviewees drew attention to the importance of frustrated educational ambitions and dreams within intergenerational family scripts for lessening cultural distance and internalised barriers and hence reaching optimal cultural distance. George hoped that his son Albert would go to university because his Highers were sufficiently good. But Ronald was not interested. After his Highers, he worked for Lambeth Borough Council and then abroad for the British Council. George was disappointed because he would have liked Albert to go into accountancy. His other son, however, went to university and did accountancy. George expected all his grandchildren to go to university.

Agnes felt that although she had been a bright pupil who liked science, her parents didn't expect much of her because she was a girl. Unlike her brothers who were encouraged to go for a trade she was not encouraged to go for anything, as she was expected to get married and have children. She consequently had high hopes for her daughter Karen who was in an A stream whereas her three sons were in C, D and E streams. She thought that even if her sons had done well academically, her husband would have still insisted that they did an apprenticeship after leaving school; therefore all her hopes had been invested in her daughter:

I was really disappointed when I heard her Highers results. I took it she was doing so well at school, the reports were good until it came to the latter end, and then she didn't live up to the reports. I think she would have went as soon as she got the chance. [...] When she left school she did a few jobs, it was more or less office work, so she ended it. Then she came in and said I've got a job with an airline company, and that's where she's been ever since, but she did travel the world with it, she did very well, she ended up a manager. [...] We hope that

Jessica is going to be the first in the family to go to university. [Agnes 75 YE grandmother]

Agnes had no educational ambitions for her sons because not only were they expected to become skilled working-class men, but they were also not academically successful at school. So she transferred her hopes and dreams to her daughter and then to her granddaughter who was seventeen and whom she hoped would soon go to university.

Robert and Gregory told of mothers who were academically able, but who like Agnes were expected to leave school early to work and then to get married and have children. These mothers sublimated their frustrated educational ambitions and pushed their children to achieve educationally. Like Agnes, Gregory's mother had differential expectations for her children

She had high expectations for me but she put the highest expectations on my sister who won first prizes right through school and university. I think she desperately wanted her to be what she did not have the opportunity to be. [Gregory 43 YE father]

However, unlike Agnes these mothers were prepared to go against societal and husbands' expectations of their sons entering a skilled trade.

She was unhappy she did not have a chance when she was the brightest in her family. One of her younger sisters went to teacher training college and became a primary school teacher. [...] My mother ended up looking after that sister's children until they were five so her [younger] sister could continue working as a teacher. [...] My mother thought she should have gone to university and she wanted to make sure we would go. [Robert 47 YS uncle].

Robert's mother was especially frustrated, because one of her younger sisters benefited from opportunities she did not have whereas she was forced to leave school at 15, which she really liked, to help look after her many brothers and sisters since her mother was very ill and died when she was 17. Although she was not the elder

daughter it fell to her to take over her mother's role as her elder sister was already in employment and bringing her wage to the family.

Having one or two parents and/or grandparents who were very bright and academically able, but had been frustrated, because they had not been able to seize the opportunity, was a powerful driving force to enter higher education. This happened when children had internalised family scripts of frustrated educational ambitions and dreams and positioned themselves as triumphant culminations of these frustrated educational ambitions and dreams. Robert and Gregory identified themselves with such family scripts largely written by their mothers. Jane who entered higher education as a mature student went through a similar process, but in her case her mother died and she and her sisters had not sufficiently internalised the script, as they needed their mother to act as stage manager and director. Yet, Jane's father had his own frustrated educational ambitions

My father went on to become a mechanical engineer and he was really good at maths and because of his background, he wasn't getting his full chance. He came from quite a poor background and if he was probably in a different family he'd have definitely gone on to further education or university because he was a very clever man. He still is, he's retired now. He was a very clever man and he used to work at British Leyland and he used to specialise in lorries and he actually patented something to overcome a fault on these lorries. [Jane 38 MEHE]

Despite frustrated educational ambitions, Jane's father did not encourage his three daughters to realise their academic ambitions and help them overcome socio-cultural barriers. It seems therefore that primarily mothers through intergenerational family scripts transmit frustrated parental educational dreams and ambitions of university. This can explain why families of similar socio-cultural background have different educational trajectories. Educational frustrations born out of achieving a socio-culturally unexpectedly good degree of fittingness with the school through high academic achievement might create psychological tensions in mothers which can be internalised by children and even grandchildren.

The familial influences analysed in this section can be understood in terms of familial *habitus* and cultural capital. Parents seen as an entity with shared belief in the discourse of educational achievement is likely to indicate a high level of cultural capital and a *habitus* likely to match that of school and higher education. In the case of parents seen as separate entities with different attitudes to the discourse of educational achievement the positive role of mothers, bettering oneself, frustrated educational ambitions and dreams are likely to indicate an increased level of cultural capital from that expected for someone of the same socio-economic group.

Beyond familial *habitus* and cultural capital or the significance of social capital

Bourdieu's *habitus* and cultural capital have often been linked to likelihood of entering higher education (Bourdieu 1971, 1973, 1974, 1976, 1977a, 1979, 1988, 1990b, 1993b, 1997). Made up of goods and resources within the educational field cultural capital is linked to *habitus*, social class, parental occupation and educational achievement (Bourdieu 1977a, Bourdieu and Passeron 1977, 1979; Bourdieu 1990a, 1990b, 1993a). Broadly speaking cultural capital means educational credentials and familiarity with bourgeois culture (Bourdieu 1976, 1977a). Cultural capital is unequally distributed and its transmission is largely hidden (Bourdieu 1976, 1997a, 1979). Cultural capital explains why, despite an alleged meritocratic academic system, a social hierarchy of academic achievement has been maintained.

However, relatively little has been written about the importance of social capital, although Bourdieu (1997), Tomlinson (1987, 1992), Coleman (1988, 1990) and Gillborn (1995) and Putnam (2000) have discussed this ambiguous concept. Social capital is a term that has been imported from the sociological literature into everyday language. However, social capital is an ambiguous concept as there is no single and clear definition of what is meant by it.

For Bourdieu (1997) social capital interacts with other forms of capital such as economic and especially cultural capital. This is because "the volume of social capital possessed by a given agent and thus depends on the size of the network of connections they can effectively mobilise and on the volume of capital possessed by

those to whom they are connected” (Bourdieu 1997: 51) The network of relationships is “the consequence of investment strategies” (conscious or unconscious) “aimed at establishing and reproducing useful relationships” that are “directly usable in the long or short term” i.e “transforming contingent relationships such as neighbourhood, workplace, kinship” into relationships “implying durable obligations subjectively felt (gratitude, respect, friendship) or institutionally guaranteed rights” such as membership of prestigious groups (Bourdieu 1997: 52).

According to Putnam (2000) social capital is a source of familial and more especially extra familial support from which benefit is derived. Social capital is characterised by participation in networks of various kinds (e.g. family, neighbourhood, friends, business), reciprocity, trust and social norms. Most forms of social capital consist of ties across social strata and community members accessing resources and information beyond the community itself.

Coleman (1988: 103-105) describes social capital from a rational action theory perspective but inclusive rather than exclusive of social relationships. Social capital can be inside the family or outside the family. If outside the family social capital is derived from a variety of resources that involve obligations, expectations, trustworthiness, social norms and structures especially if they can produce effective sanctions through social pressure. Social capital can also be derived from informal channels such as social relations and social settings because of the possibility of gathering information as a basis for action. Resources in one relationship can be appropriated for use in other relationships. Social capital is also a form of public good that increases as people within a community make use of it and decreases if they don't.

If inside the family, social capital is produced when parents take an active interest in their education such as reading to their children, helping with homework and discussing educational issues. For Coleman parental occupation, educational qualifications and expectations that their children enter higher education are forms of human rather than social capital. Bourdieu (1997) and the present research consider both implicit parental assumptions and explicit parental help as forms of cultural rather than social capital.

Social capital is characterised by participation in extra familial networks of various kinds (family, neighbourhood, friends) from which benefit is derived and which involves reciprocity, trust and social norms. Acquiring social capital had previously been highlighted as a way to increase the likelihood to stay on at school, gain educational qualifications and enter higher education (See Tomlinson 1987, 1992; Bourdieu 1997; Coleman 1988; Gillborn 1995). In the present research social capital was exemplified by small religious communities, small schools, community education as well as siblings, partners and mothers as mature students and role models which were found to play an important role in lessening internalised barriers and cultural distance to higher education for young and mature participants from under-represented socio-economic groups.

Small religious communities and small schools

Small religious communities and small schools are a form of social capital because of the mechanism of intergenerational closure or social pressure that means more effective pressure through shared norms and expectations about educational achievement, trustworthiness, a sense of reciprocal obligations and the possibility of sanctions in the shape of disapproval. This is the consequence of small religious communities and small schools having more control over individuals because of the above reasons and because they can give more attention to each individual (See for example Lindsay 1982; Coleman 1988; Darling Hammond 1997).

Small religious communities

Felicity, who was a mature interviewee who had recently entered higher education and was the only Afro-Caribbean interviewee, did her best at school, but she did not do very well, because nobody had figured out she was dyslexic. Her parents passionately wanted their children to have the education they never had, but were supportive and matched their expectations to her abilities. After leaving school at 16 Felicity was eager to start working because she wanted to feel more normal than she had felt at school, which she did.

Felicity explained how her small religious community had high educational expectations, exerted beneficial pressures and provided moral support to its members.

When I decided to do the access course and go to higher education to become a teacher the Church helped and encouraged me. [...] At Church a lot of people feel the same way and this puts pressure on the youngsters not to disappoint their family and their teachers and also their community. [Felicity 36 MEHE]

As Archer and Hutchings (2000) have argued, the dream of a good education tends to have a greater significance for non-white people and this, together with the equation made by white colonists between lack of education and being colonised (Tomlinson (1987, 1992), may explain why many Afro-Caribbean and Asian parents so passionately want their children to have the education they never had.

If you want to get anywhere in life you need that bit of paper and it's hard enough being a black or a dyslexic person as it is and with no qualification you aren't going anywhere. [Felicity 36 MEHE]

Felicity was aware that black boys and girls sometimes purposefully and even forcefully rejected what they saw as white middle-class values they felt pressured by the school system into accepting. However, she explained that black pupils whose parents attended church would not be allowed by their parents to reject the discourse of bettering oneself through educational qualifications.

The familial discourse of educational achievement and bettering oneself was thus strongly reinforced through her religious community, where there was an encouragement to emulate those family members or members of the religious community who had achieved the ideal of educational excellence. Felicity indicated that the idea of bettering oneself and educational excellence were driving forces in her religious community, then and now. Members of the religious community, parents and elder siblings who were well educated were role models and so were the few teachers who took the time to help and give encouragement. (Justine, Edna, Gregory's and Robert's mothers as well as Agnes belonged to a religious community.)

Small schools

The present research suggests that the experience of initial education could make a difference and help reach optimal cultural distance and hence lessen cultural distance and internalised barriers and increase the likelihood of entering higher education. Justine, Steven, Victoria and Daniel from the YED and YSD schools respectively drew attention to the fact that many families from their areas avoided the schools because they were deemed to have poor A-level and Highers results. However, the results in terms of league tables did not matter to these young people and their families. Indeed, they rejected the more impersonal and less friendly schools that fared better in the league tables and were situated in the neighbouring non-disadvantaged areas. They preferred small schools in deprived areas because they had smaller classes and offered a more supportive environment:

The school is small and the classes are small and you get plenty of attention and plenty of help. I'm better off in this small school [...] very friendly and relaxed than in a bigger less friendly school, because there wouldn't be so much individual attention. [Daniel 17 YSD]

Teachers give you a lot of support and help, and they definitely want to encourage you to go as far as you can and to go to college and then university. [Victoria 17 YSD]

The classes are small and this helps learning. I can get more personal attention here than in a bigger school. [Steven 17 YED]

I came to this school because some of my family had come to this school. Those that did ended up in good jobs and had a lot of help and support from teachers. The school has a very friendly environment. [Justine 17 YED]

Justine, Steven, Daniel and Victoria were convinced that a small school presented many advantages, not least of which more individual attention. They felt they preferred being star pupils in a small school rather than more ordinary pupils in a bigger school higher on the league tables. They also believed that entry requirements to higher education were lower for pupils from schools in deprived areas.

The benefits of small schools have been underlined by previous research (Lindsay 1982; Darling Hammond 1997; Chubb and Moe 1990). Selecting small school as a strategy shows not only an awareness of the educational market, usually attributed only to the middle-class (See Ball *et al* 1995; Gewirtz *et al* 1995; Bowe *et al* 1995; Reay and Lucey 2000), but also the more 'rational' approach described by rational action theory, whereby individuals weigh the costs and benefits before deciding to follow a particular educational pathway (See Boudon 1974; Golthorpe 2000). Going to small schools in a deprived area can also show that they merely follow a familial tried-and-tested-pathway or that the small school happens to be the nearest to home.

Community education

Community education is a form of social capital because it is both a form of public good that enable to climb the ladder towards educational qualifications and a type of social relations within a quasi-social setting that enables gathering educational information and interacting with others who are gaining qualifications and want to gain more qualifications as a basis for action (See Bourdieu 1997 and Putnam 2000). Community education started Fiona on the path of slowly gaining ever-higher educational qualifications over several years before she decided to do an access course and then a degree. Through community education Fiona had seen other women like her who would recount their success stories of going to university and gaining better employment afterwards. The idea of the success of others prompted her, as did the academic confidence she had slowly gained, to begin to think that she could finish the Highers she had started at school before she left to enter full-time employment. Access courses and institutional schemes could also reduce cultural distance by increasing likelihood of entering higher education because of the support and guidance they provided (See Tett 1999).

Parents, siblings, partners and other family members

Parents and siblings as barriers to educational achievement

In some instances parents and elder siblings were evoked negatively and had an inhibitory effect on educational achievement. Violet felt that the academic success of

her older siblings made her feel inadequate, because she did far less well than all of them in terms of achieving qualifications to enter higher education when she was at school. Her feelings of inferiority were made worse by the attitude of the headteacher

[She was] always comparing me to my brothers and sisters who did so well and I didn't. [Violet 30 MSFE]

Gregory recounted being compared negatively to his far more academically successful sister. In his case he did go to university, but did not study what he wanted because

This would have been seen as an attempt to steal her thunder and I didn't want the grief or the risk of doing less well than her and be constantly told how well she was doing especially if I did less well than her
[Gregory 43 YE father].

The competition with his sister made Gregory all the more determined to enter higher education while Violet saw the opportunity of entering higher education as a way to make up for a sense of academic inferiority from her schooldays.

Siblings, partners and other family members as drivers to educational achievement

In other instances, siblings were paradoxically found to be a form of social capital, because social capital can also be derived from informal channels that provide information and inspiration as a basis for action and also because resources in one relationship can be appropriated for use in other relationships (See Bourdieu 1997; Putnam 2000).

Fatima was inspired to start on the road to higher education through emulate her sister who had started a BTEC the previous year, although she did not acknowledge that her sister had been a role model:

She's doing a degree with me as well. And we're doing it together. She did the BTEC and then I did the BTEC and then we both started a

degree in Early Childhood Studies at the same time. [Fatima 40 MEFE friend]

Fatima admitted that being both the first in the family to do a degree and doing it with her sister had caused a strain on their relationship:

Actually it's terrible. Don't ever do anything with your family. [...] No, I don't know if it was a bit of competitiveness and I wish in my heart of hearts that we had did it at separate times because deep down, it's not ruined the relationship but it's become a bit strained and it's horrible to tell you the truth. I mean a lot of people are saying to us isn't it great, you know, doing it together, being together and that. It isn't really. Not that I don't enjoy doing a degree. I enjoy it immensely. I don't enjoy the way our relationship has turned out. [Fatima 40 MEFE friend]

Studying concurrently with a sibling had also created tensions and competitiveness between Jane and her elder sister. Although Jane's road to higher education was a slow process that stretched over many years, her older sister was first to start a degree with the Open University and graduated one year before Jane before doing a PGCE (Post-Graduate Certificate of Education). Partly because of this, Jane, who had always dreamed of being a teacher, now had second thoughts

I want to do more of an advisory job like working for the LEA [...] and I want to get an MA before she does. I am not telling anyone about this. [Jane 38 MEHE]

Fatima and Jane might have perceived the competitiveness between themselves and their elder sisters negatively because it put a strain on their relationship. However the competitiveness also acted as a driving force not only to follow their elder sisters' steps and gain a degree, but also to do better than they did and gain more qualifications.

In the same way as Fatima and Jane followed on the steps of their sisters, James followed his girlfriend and Edward's partner was talking about following his learning

trajectory and become a mature student, but only after he had finished his degree and gained better employment.

Jessica's mother Mary, Sophie's mother Rose, Anthony's mother and Violet's mother who had all been mature students had acted as driver to educational achievement and participation in higher education. Victoria emphasised the importance not of her mother but of her aunt as a mature student and a role model:

My aunt is my role model. [...] She was the first person in my family to have gone to university. [Victoria YSD aged 17].

Although previous research had highlighted that mature students wanted to be role models for their children (Reay *et al* 2002; Davies *et al* 2002), the present research confirmed that mature students had indeed acted as role models and drivers to educational achievement and participation in higher education.

Previous research had underlined the negative effect that being a mature student can have on familial relationships particularly between partners whether married or not and between former friends because they were left behind (See Edwards 1993; Pascall and Cox 1993; West 1996; Baxter and Britton 1999; Britton and Baxter 2001; Davies *et al* 2002; Marks *et al* 2003). In the present research many siblings, partners and children of mature mothers followed their trajectory into higher education. In the case of Fatima and Jane, whatever tensions were created, they acted not only as a driver to participation in higher education, but also as a driver to do better in higher education.

Conclusion

This chapter examined what participants said during individual interviews and further analysed some of the issues discussed in the focus groups, especially personal and dispositional factors and personalised narratives derived from public discourses concerning constructions of students and of higher education and life history factors. The sample contained older (aged 75-84), mature (aged 30-47) and young interviewees (aged 17-18). The sampling strategy allowed for a comparison of life

history factors and constructions of students and higher education of mature interviewees from under-represented socio-economic groups who had entered higher education after leaving school to those of approximately of the same age who had entered employment after leaving school.

Most interviewees had very stereotypical constructions of students that were broadly correlated with age groups. The older interviewees thought students were middle-class snobs with money who dressed in strange clothes, wanted to avoid employment or could not find employment and were always drinking and always having parties. The mature interviewees who had entered or almost entered higher education after school thought students wanted to improve the world and might take to the streets to protest about war, sexism or racism. Mature interviewees who had not entered higher education from school constructed students as reading books all the time, studying every night, having no life and not much fun. The younger English interviewees shared the constructions articulated by the older interviewees while the younger Scottish interviewees shared the constructions described by mature interviewees. Unlike the older and mature interviewees who had not entered higher education from school, the younger interviewees assumed that students could be people like themselves. Therefore despite their stereotypical constructions of students, they also constructed students as working-class with part-time employment making the best of the opportunity to go on to higher education.

Previous research on constructions of students had mostly identified the polarised constructions of students as upper middle-class having parties and drinking all the time on the one hand, and bespectacled students as boffins bent over book (See Heathfield and Wakeford 1991; Archer and Hutchings 2000; Hutchings and Archer 2001). Potential entrants in Archer and Hutchings (2000) and Hutchings and Archer (2001) described a construction of students as working class with part-time employment. However, his construction was found to apply primarily to working-class respondents from Afro-Caribbean and Asian backgrounds.

The older interviewees thought higher education was for really clever people with money who wanted to become doctors, teachers, lawyers and or clergy. Apart from those who had entered higher education after leaving school, the mature interviewees thought higher education would be very academically challenging and no fun, thus

something they could do without. Those mature interviewees who had recently entered higher education as mature students realised how fixed and untrue their constructions of higher education had been. The younger participants who were mostly from under-represented socio-economic groups saw higher education as a necessity, because without a degree there were not prospects and only dead-end and boring employment.

All the interviewees agreed that higher education has become far more accessible in the past 60 years and is no longer a luxury but a necessity. Unlike most of the other interviewees, the young interviewees took for granted the value of continuing in full-time education in order to follow the prime trajectory of securing A-level or Higher grades qualifications and then enter higher education. Although some research had indicated that young people from under-represented socio-economic groups may drift into higher education (Hodgson and Spours 1999), most other research found that young people from under-represented socio-economic groups did not take the prime educational trajectory for granted (See Robbins 1963; Bourdieu 1976, 1977a, 1979; 1984, 1988, 1990b; Heathfield and Wakeford 1991; Robertson and Hillman 1997; Lynch and O'Riordan 1998, Tett 1999; Reay 1998; Du Bois-Reymond 1998; Archer and Hutchings 2000; Reay *et al* 2001; Ball *et al* 2002).

Previous research had found that higher education remained irrelevant or a luxury, rather than a necessity, for those in under-represented socio-economic groups (See Robbins 1963; Bourdieu 1984, 1998, 1990b; Heathfield and Wakeford 1991; West 1996; Lynch and O'Riordan 1998, Tett 1999; Reay 1998; Du Bois-Reymond 1998; Ball *et al* 2000, 2002; Archer and Hutchings 2000; Reay *et al* 2001; Power *et al* 1999; 2003). Previous research had also underlined familial background as the most important factor linked to likelihood of participation in higher education. Their conceptual analysis used *habitus* and cultural capital, finely graded hierarchies, hidden curriculum, horizons for action, learning trajectories and intergenerational family scripts (Bourdieu 1977a, 1977c, 1984, 1988, 1990, 1993; Foucault 1972; Jackson 1968, 1971; Banks *et al* 1992; Hodkinson *et al* 1996; Hodkinson and Sparkes 1997; Du Bois-Reymond 1998; Gorard *et al* 1997, 1998; 1999a, 1999b; Fevre *et al* 1999; Reay 1998; Reay *et al* 2001; Ball *et al* 2002). In the present research familial expectations were found to be the key to greater or lesser likelihood of entering higher education.

Whereas middle-class interviewees saw parents as an entity with shared values that were aligned to those of the school, working-class interviewees saw parents as separate entities with different values. Some working-class mothers acted as cultural agents transmitting the discourses of bettering oneself and aiming for entry to higher education. They had been expected to leave school early to help look after the family and/or to get married and have children. Academically able, their own frustrated educational dreams and desires and broken educational trajectories motivated them to ensure their children ended in higher education or with good educational qualifications. Differential parental values and frustrated educational ambitions therefore seemed to make entry to higher education more likely than shared parental values that were not aligned with that of the school and not aligned with a desire that their children follow the prime educational trajectory to higher education, whereby both parents expected children to leave school early to enter employment.

Previous research had also identified social capital as an important factor linked to educational attainment and higher education participation (See Tomlinson 1987, 1992; Bourdieu 1997; Coleman 1988, 1990; Gillborn 1995; Putnam 2000). Social capital (in the form of small schools, community education, small religious communities as well as siblings, partners and mothers as role models) was found to play an important role in increasing bringing potential entrants closer to higher education and increasing the likelihood of entering higher education for young and mature participants from under-represented socio-economic groups.

The next chapter will bring the key findings of the empirical data (focus groups and interviews) together in relation to the main objectives that were chosen to achieve the aim of the present research. The main aim of the research was to investigate explanatory mechanisms of greater and lesser likelihood of participation in higher education in order to formulate a conceptual model of greater and lesser likelihood of participation by potential entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups. The objectives focussed on the interaction of assumptions (drivers and barriers, constructions of higher education and of students and influence of public discourses) and life history factors (initial education and familial influences).

9

DISCUSSION OF KEY FINDINGS

The previous chapter analysed the interviews while chapters 6 and 7 examined the focus groups. This chapter brings the key findings of the focus groups and the interviews together in relation to the main aim of the research, which was to investigate explanatory mechanisms of greater and lesser likelihood of participation in higher education in order to formulate a conceptual model of greater and lesser likelihood of participation for potential entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups. The objectives focussed on the interaction of assumptions (drivers and barriers, constructions of higher education and of students and influence of public discourses) and life history factors (initial education and familial influences) according to the following outline:

- point of optimal cultural distance when higher education becomes for oneself rather than not for oneself
- key factors (assumptions and life history factors) that lessen cultural distance (and internalised barriers) and increase the likelihood of reaching the point of optimal cultural distance and hence of entering higher education
- extent to which entering higher education is a decision or a non-decision
- extent to which decisions and non-decisions are made within practical or discursive consciousness

The key findings are derived from what was said during the eight focus groups (which counted 78 participants) and during 26 individual interviews, which included 16 interviewees who had taken part in the focus groups and 10 additional interviewees.

Point of optimal cultural distance when higher education becomes for oneself

Sudden life changing events or slow processes for older and mature interviewees

Gregory and Robert came from a working-class background, but went to university after leaving school. This was largely because their mothers lessened cultural distance through familial scripts of frustrated educational ambitions that ensured that they would achieve educationally and go to university, because their mothers would have liked to have done so themselves, but felt they were denied the opportunity.

All other mature or older interviewees positioned themselves outside higher education at the time of leaving school and did not think they would ever enter higher education (See Edwards 1993; McFadden 1995; West 1996; Baxter and Britton 1999; Bowl 2001; Reay *et al* 2001; Davies *et al* 2002; Marks *et al* 2003 *inter alia*). However, at some point in time the mature focus group participants and interviewees reached optimal cultural distance and were on their way to higher education. Reaching cultural distance happened either very suddenly or far more slowly in a process that took years.

Andrew unexpectedly discovered an aptitude for teaching while he was in the army during the Second World War:

This put into my head a bit I would like to be a teacher, that's why I went to try university when I came out. [Andrew 81 MSHE neighbour]

Thus, Andrew reached optimal cultural distance more by coincidence than by intention and then largely because alternative entry routes to higher education for mature students were created and promoted through the Further Education and Training Scheme (1943) without which he probably would never have even thought of entering higher education.

Like Andrew, both Edward and James became mature students because of life changing events and because of the availability of higher education opportunities:

At the back of my mind [...] I've always liked the idea of becoming a maths teacher. [Edward 40 MEHE].

When my girlfriend was talking about doing a degree [...] I thought that I would like to do a degree as well [James 35 MSHE].

Like Jade and Felicity, Edward thought that he had always wanted to be a teacher: However, Edward would not have put theory into practice if he had not been made redundant and if his partner had not earned good money. But for the money he had saved over the years, James would probably not have become a mature student.

Having left school at 15 to become a typist Mary decided to do an access course because mature students she knew seemed to have a lot of fun. She decided to do a degree in Heritage Studies:

Because it wasn't like a traditional school subject and seemed like a very interesting subject. [Mary 45 YE mother]

Like Mary, Fatima decided rather suddenly to become a mature student. She was prompted by her sister who was younger and did not have any children had started a BTEC in Early Childhood, Fatima did likewise a year later:

It was that my youngest had just gone into Reception, and I didn't want to have another child. [Fatima 40 MEFÉ friend]

When she started her course Fatima did not have a particular thirst for knowledge she just wanted to do something to better herself. However, no sooner had she started her BTEC she decided she would do a degree because

It's like I've been awakened, I don't know how to describe it. I want to have knowledge to make a difference, to try and make a difference. [Fatima 40 MEFÉ friend]

Once awakened, Fatima's thirst for knowledge literally propelled her towards higher education as she felt powerfully driven to seek ever more knowledge.

Jade and Felicity lessened their cultural distance more progressively, in a process stretched out over many years. They had always dreamed of becoming teachers, but did not act on this for many years, because they did not do well enough at school, did not think they could ever enter higher education and then they had children to bring up. For some years they worked part-time as voluntary teaching assistants. Then they decided to do an access course in order to be able to enter higher education to fulfil their lifelong ambition to become primary school teachers.

Jane too was driven by the fact that she always wanted to be a teacher. Unlike Felicity and Jade, she did various short courses over the years to increase her confidence. Then she did three A-levels and two GCSEs (Mathematics and English) in one year. She was set on starting a degree with the Open University. However she, her husband and daughter moved away to Australia, came back and then she broke up with her husband.

And that's the point that I kind of decided "you have got to do it now or never", because I'd discovered that mature students could do degrees at university just like younger students. I thought, "I haven't got six years to hang around to get a degree". [Jane 38 MEHE]

A year before Jane made the decision to start a degree at a local higher education institution rather than at the Open University, her elder sister had started a degree with the Open University. Like Fatima, Jane followed closely on the footsteps of a sister.

Although Fiona and Violet did not want to become teachers, they too slowly lessened cultural distance to reach the point of optimal cultural distance. Violet had worked full-time in an office for several years. She said that she kept thinking

Do I want to be in this little office for the rest of my years? Then somebody told me about the access course, so that's when I found out I could go on a course and then go to university to study occupational therapy. [Violet 30 MSFE]

For Fiona the key to lessening cultural distance was community education, which she first attended with a neighbour in order to socialise with more people and learn at the same time:

Then I heard there was an access course that you could do which would guarantee you a place at university, so that was when I decided to go for the access course. [Fiona 33 MSHE]

Through community education Fiona gained enough confidence to do her Highers at a further education college and then go on to do an access course and finally enter higher education.

Previous research about mature students had identified loss of employment, failed relationships, feelings of emptiness at home or at work, personal inadequacy and dissatisfaction with life as motivations for entering higher education. Previous research had identified both sudden life-changing events or slow processes as the reason why mature students wanted to do a degree, but unlike the present research previous research had not compared mature students with people of the same age and same background who had entered higher education after leaving school (See Edwards 1993, McFadden 1995; West 1996; Baxter and Britton 1999; Bowl 2001, 2003; Reay *et al* 2002; Davies *et al* 2002).

Examining cultural distance showed that for each mature interviewee who did not enter higher education after leaving school there was a specific point of optimal cultural distance at which factors interact in such a way that for mature interviewees higher education became for oneself rather than not for oneself. In some instances there were years to reach the point of optimal cultural distance, between the original idea that took hold of their mind and going to higher education. In other instances there were merely a few months, if not a few weeks. It is difficult to say whether the idea of entering higher education and doing a degree that took hold of the minds of interviewees was the cause or the consequence of a change in *habitus*. In particular, were the key life-changing events that led interviewees to enter higher education the cause of the change in *habitus* or the consequence whereby they already had a change in *habitus* before their life changing events?

Whatever the answer to this question, mature focus group participants and interviewees reached the point of optimal cultural distance for both similar and different reasons, because they wanted: not to miss out on something (a specific opportunity or something more vague); to make their lives more meaningful by having better paid and more fulfilling employment; to realise long-held dream or ambition (experience of higher education, becoming a teacher, achieving upwards social mobility, breaking cultural boundaries); to be a role model for children; to escape from dead-end employment, boredom, domesticity, depression and key life changing events such as redundancy or the break down in relationships. Some of the mature focus group participants and interviewees identified their children as an incentive or reason for going to higher education, but on closer examination their motivations related more to their own needs to find themselves, fill a void or to do better than a sibling and to finish familial educational stories of frustrated dreams and ambitions and missed opportunities.

Overcoming internalised barriers and breaking cultural boundaries

The extent to which cultural distance and internalised were lessened in order for mature focus group participants and interviewees to reach optimal cultural distance and hence be able to think about entering higher education is shown by the fact that many participants and interviewees wanted to explicitly transgress cultural boundaries and move upwards academically and socially. However, most interviewees only realised after entering higher education the extent to which they had actually overcome internalised barriers and broken cultural boundaries.

I did see it as a breakthrough passing the BTEC and going on to do a degree. I'd never have believed I could actually be doing a degree. Not in my wildest dreams, I wasn't academically minded. Totally satisfied, contented. I mean I've worked. I've worked in shops, I've worked in factories. You know, things like that. But it's like I've seen a new something I have inside. Like I've crossed over a divide. [...] People from our class, our social class, didn't go into higher education. I see a divide in my younger days. I don't see such a divide now. It's

accessible to everybody. [...] You know, like I felt that I'd broke through from one social class to another. Yet I haven't changed, it hasn't changed me, but academically I have changed. I just see it as a triumph, a personal triumph, to myself and to others that have come from working class families that they can get through this divide that existed when I was young and my mother did not have the chance. [...] Getting on to do a degree means more for older mature students than for young people because there isn't such a divide now so it is less meaningful in a way. [...] I didn't have a thirst for knowledge before but now I feel am not satisfied with knowledge, I still want to do more, to know more, to learn more. [Fatima 40 MEFÉ friend]

Fiona also reflected on the fact that entering higher education made her realise the extent of the cultural distance that existed between her and higher education. She realised the extent to which she had broken cultural boundaries when entering higher education, because she became aware of the extent of cultural distance that now existed between her and her parents.

Mark's mum, she's always on the phone saying "how are you getting on" and things. There's two totally different attitudes with two sets of parents really, and I think sometimes, it all boils down to the fact that it is a status thing, to have a degree. They know what it's about whereas my mum and dad just say "well if you think that's right, then you should do it", you know. Yet I have noticed that my mum will say, "you got this at uni and you can't even run the house, it's an awful lot doing all these things and looking after the house and the family". I am sure that if I'll just pack it in, she'll say "that's fine". But Mark's mum would be the complete opposite. It's quite funny with the different families, what their ideas are and stuff. I mean, my mum and dad will say "how are you getting on, are you enjoying the course", that's fine, but Mark's mum will phone up and say, "what did you get for your work" and "well done". [...] My mum doesn't remember what I'm studying, what course I am doing. But Mark's mum, she will quite happily go out to neighbours and relatives and say to them, "my daughter-in-law, she's just got a degree." [Fiona 33 MSHE]

Fiona contrasted the attitude of her parents with that of her in-laws who had been to university. This made her even more aware of the cultural distance that existed now between her and her parents.

Just as Fiona did with regard to her parents Jane also recounted that although there was little explicit disapproval of their doing a degree, her father did not fully approve and perhaps did not understand what higher education was about and what it meant to her.

I remember when I told my dad that I was going to go to university with a view of doing the teacher training, he said to me "oh, that'll be a good thing, if you can do it." [...] Yet a few months after my graduation I was talking to my auntie, his sister, and she lives in America and I was talking to her just a few weeks ago and she said "how's your degree coming along?" and I said "I've finished it. I graduated last year. Didn't my dad tell you?" she said "No, he didn't." [Jane 38 MEHE]

Both Jane's father and Fiona's parents were somewhat uncomfortable about their daughters doing a degree and especially about telling other people that they were and this further indicates that Jane and Fiona had indeed broken cultural boundaries. For such to happen they must have first reached the point of optimal cultural distance when higher education became for them rather than not for them. Although some participants and interviewees entered higher education partly because this would be an indication that they had transgressed cultural boundaries and moved upwards socially, most of the interviewees only realised after entering higher education the extent to which they had actually transgressed cultural boundaries. The pointed out that there was a social class divide in higher education when they were younger, but that this was no longer the case. Nevertheless mature participants saw getting a degree as proof that they had moved across the social class divide.

Previous research into access and widening participation found that for many potential entrants, participants and non-participants higher education remains constructed as culturally distant because it epitomised middle class values (Bourdieu 1966, 1971, 1973, 1974, 1976, 1977a, 1977b, 1977c, 1979, 1982, 1985, 1986, 1987, 1988, 1989, 1990a, 1990b, 1990c, 1993a, 1993b, 1997; 1998a, 1998b, 2000;

Bourdieu and Passeron 1968, 1970, 1977, 1979; Reay 1998, 2001; Tett 1999; Archer and Hutchings 2000; Hutchings and Archer 2001; Bowl 2001, 2003; Ball *et al* 2002). According to Reay (2001) working-class participants' experience higher education as a process of both "finding and losing yourself" (Reay 2001: 333) because of the lack of fit between the self and higher education. West (1995: 133) underlined that mature students underwent "more fragmentary and fragmenting processes" in which the self was divided to greater or lesser degree between the public and private sphere. According to Walkerdine *et al* (1991), Skeggs (1997) and Reay (1996, 1998, 2001) working-class students both young and mature have to reconcile contradictions before they can develop their academic identity. Although mature male participants found it more difficult to overcome negative stereotypes and to adapt to the academic demands, the mature interviewees did not see much in the way of internal contradictions. The contradictions were external and located within parental families. Consequently, unlike in West (1996) and Reay (1998) participants and interviewees did not express divided selves or say that they were both finding and losing themselves. They were mostly finding themselves and finding out about their subjects. Indeed, Violet who was doing an access course came from the most privileged socio-cultural and socio-economic background had the greatest difficulty in getting used to the idea of becoming a mature student:

I was quite apprehensive about it. Before I went I thought, gosh, I will never do this, and I kept thinking, I'll leave the course [access course] after 2 months, I can't do this, it's too much. [Violet 30 MSFE]

For Violet the boundaries to be transgressed were not understood in social class terms but in terms of barriers created by a perceived lack of academic ability.. Jackson and Marsden (1966) and Power *et al* (1999, 2003) showed that many middle-class pupils had similar learning trajectories than Violet and did not always do well at school and live up to the amount of cultural capital that had seemingly been inherited.

Societal shift of the point of optimal cultural distance

Previous research had indicated that for young middle class potential entrants going to university was the natural thing to do or the family plan, and this differentiated the middle class and the working-class (See Bhoys and Kogan 1984; Keen and Higgins 1992; Roberts 1997; Reay 1998; Du Bois-Reymond 1998; Lynch and O'Riordan 1998; Power *et al* 1999, 2003; Reay *et al* 2001, Ball *et al* 2000, 2002).

In the present research most mature and older interviewees believed that there was no longer a social class divide in relation to entry to higher education. Despite complaints about the pressure exerted by teachers towards achievement at GCSE/Standard Grade and at A-levels/Highers, most of the young focus group participants and all the interviewees wanted to do well and then enter higher education. Thus, 35 out of 42 young focus group participants and nine out of nine young interviewees, seven of whom were from under-represented, and two from over-represented, socio-economic groups, considered going to university as the natural thing to do or the next step to ensure better employment, a nice car and a nice house, but also for fear of missing out on something if they did not go

I want to go primarily for the experience of going and if I didn't go I would be afraid of missing out. [Anthony 17 YE]

I don't want to get stuck like a rock in a river and life is rushing past me. [Justine 17 YED].

Compared to young people from under-represented socio-economic groups of previous generations, young people of today are closer to optimal cultural distance than people from similar backgrounds from previous generations and are hence more likely to enter higher education. [The possible reasons for this societal shift of the point of optimal cultural distance are examined in the next section and in the last section of this chapter]

Factors that increase the likelihood of reaching the point of optimal cultural distance

Research into widening participation (See Ashcroft *et al* 1996; Robertson and Hillman 1997; Metcalf 1997; Dearing 1997; CVCP 1998; Reay 1998, 2001; Archer and Hutchings 2000; Tett 1999, 2004; Reay *et al* 2001; Ball *et al* 2002; SHEFC 2004; HEFCE 2005) has underlined that under-represented socio-economic groups are less likely to enter higher education, because they are deemed to position themselves outside of higher education while over-represented socio-economic groups are insiders who are culturally closer to higher education. This section examines factors that increase the likelihood of reaching optimal cultural distance and entering higher education by potential entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups.

A preponderance of financial and employment drivers over financial and employment barriers

Previous research underlined financial and employment factors as key barriers to higher education, especially for potential entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups (See McGivney 1990; Egerton and Halsey 1993; Blackburn and Jarman 1993; McCarthy and Humphrey 1995; Payne and Callender 1995; Callender and Kempson 1996; McGivney 1996; Connor *et al* 1996; Hogarth *et al* 1997; Paterson 1997; Humphrey and McCarthy 1997; Lynch and O'Riordan 1998; McKee and Merrill 1998; Hesketh 1999; Callender and Kemp 2000; Ahier 2000; Bowl 2001, 2003; Callender 2001; Marks 2001; Marks *et al* 2001, 2002; Davies *et al* 2002; Marks *et al* 2003). However, this fails to take into account that financial and employment barriers might be powerful, but that financial and employment drivers can be even more powerful and that focussing only on financial and employment barriers only gives half the picture.

In the present research financial and employment factors acted both as drivers (to get a better job and more rewarding job) and as barriers (fees, loans, fear of debt, the need to work part-time or the desire to work full-time to earn more money immediately). In a sample that contained 89% of participants from under-represented socio-economic

groups¹ the brainstorming and ranking exercises undertaken during the focus groups indicated that financial and employment barriers categories were ranked first with 38% of votes and constituted 52% of key barriers powerful enough to override all the drivers. Financial and employment drivers were also ranked first with 60% of votes and 61% of key drivers powerful enough to override all the barriers. The interaction of drivers and barriers indicated a clear preponderance of financial and employment drivers over financial and employment barriers. Such preponderance was further confirmed by the fact that only 7 out of the 78 participants said they had definitely rejected the idea of entering higher education [2 in YE, YED, YSD and 1 in YS].

Although identified as the most important barriers by the focus groups, financial and employment barriers did not seem to be a sufficient enough reason not to enter higher education for 91% of the focus group sample, in which 89% of participants belonged to under-represented socio-economic groups.² This was because there was a clear preponderance of financial and employment drivers over financial and employment barriers. As it was often pointed out in the focus groups and interviews going to university guarantees a better job and a better-paid job you enables you to pay out your debts. Potential entrants were not looking forward to putting themselves into debt. However, this would not put them off from entering higher education. Thus, it can be asserted that a higher percentage of employment and financial factors as drivers rather than as barriers indicates that internalised barriers and cultural distance have been sufficiently reduced, to at least the point of optimal cultural distance, which makes for a greater likelihood of entering higher education.

A preponderance of intrinsic drivers over external barriers

While a minority of researchers asserted that motivations for going to higher education were overwhelmingly instrumental and unambiguously pragmatic (See Macrae *et al* 1997; Archer and Hutchings 2000; Bowl 2001; Hutchings and Archer 2001), a majority of researchers pointed out that participants tended to consciously

¹ 21% from 1 and 2, 39% from 3nm and 2m and 40% from 4 and 5 for the young participants
2% from 1 and 2, 48% from 3nm and 3m and 50% from 4 and 5 for the mature participants
8 out of 42 younger participants or 19% were from social classes 1 and 2 and 1 out of 36 participants or 3% was from social classes 1 and 2

² 21% from 1 and 2, 39% from 3nm and 2m and 40% from 4 and 5 for the young participants)
2% from 1 and 2, 48% from 3nm and 3m and 50% from 4 and 5 for the mature participants

articulate the more socially acceptable instrumental external and extrinsic incentives and disincentives while being sub-consciously pushed towards and pulled away from higher education by more internal and socially complex, but largely unacknowledged drivers and barriers (See Merriam and Caffarella 1991; McGivney 1990, 1996; West 1996; Roberts and Allen 1997; Herbert and Callender 1997; Britton and Baxter 1999; Tett 1999; Reay *et al* 2001, 2002; Davies *et al* 2002; Ball *et al* 2000, 2002; Warmington 2002; Marks *et al* 2003).

In this research the interaction of drivers and barriers indicated a clear preponderance of financial and employment drivers over financial and employment barriers. In the focus group sample, external barriers only formed 45% of barriers (average between voted for barrier categories 38% votes and selected key barriers 52%) whereas external drivers formed 60.5% of barriers (average between voted for driver categories 60% and selected key drivers 61%). From this it follows that barriers were primarily internal rather than external and that drivers were primarily external rather than internal.

Comparing the participants' ranking of their own categories and the researcher's ranking of these categories by number of words used in selecting key drivers showed that 'better employment' as top driver category and 'financial cost' as top barrier category were almost overtaken and overtaken respectively by 'self-improvement' and 'lack of confidence'. More importantly, financial barriers were moderated by more internal and socially complex largely unacknowledged reasons such as 'lack of confidence'. Consequently, financial and employment barriers were moderated by internal barriers (such as effort, time and lack of confidence, fear of leaving friends and family, fear of neglecting childcare, domestic responsibilities and friends) to a greater extent than financial and employment drivers were moderated by internal drivers (such as social life, self-improvement, wanting to be a role model, career and knowledge). This clearly underlines the importance of internal drivers and barriers because they operate at a more sub-conscious level that cannot so easily be measured as factors that the participants consciously select (See Bourdieu 1971, 1976, 1977a, 1990b, 1993a, 1997, 2000; Bourdieu and Passeron 1979; West 1996; Herbert and Callender 1997; Callender 2001).

An emphasis on the process and on intrinsic factors was a clear distinction between the young and mature participants. Notwithstanding this, a point beyond optimal cultural distance was indicated among younger participants and interviewees by the importance given to intrinsic as opposed to purely instrumental motivations:

[Higher education] is to gain respect, because it shows determination, and you get a status and a better job. [Justine 17 YED]

For mature participants, respect, status and better job were similarly important. However, mature participants put a greater emphasis on the process rather than on the outcome, that is, on self-improvement, desire for knowledge, wanting to be a role model, wanting to break socio-cultural boundaries and wanting to contribute to society. Another factor that further lessened cultural distance and internalised barriers of mature participants on their way to higher education was to perceive entry to higher education as a collective experience, because they felt more confident about entering higher education.

Negative stereotypical constructions of students moderated by increasingly positive constructions of higher education

Negative stereotypes of students that exclude people like oneself

Older interviewees referred to students as coming from another planet and as snobs who wanted to avoid work or unable to work, were always drinking and always having parties. The mature interviewees who had entered higher education or had almost entered higher education after school articulated images of students as not socially conforming to established norms and to government policy, but also as wanting to improve the world, bring about justice and fairness by may taking to the streets to protest about war, sexism or racism. Mature focus group participants and interviewees who had not entered higher education directly from school thought students were from the privileged middle class and studied all the time Latin and stuff, had no life and had no fun. Many male participants said that in their socio-cultural background students were often described as *poofsters* but that paradoxically girls were also deemed not to need educational or higher education qualifications

When they entered higher education both the MEHE and MSHE groups were surprised to find out that the younger students were actually having fun, drinking and partying all the time rather than making the best of the opportunity they had to gain a degree. Some participants in both the MEHE and MSHE groups acknowledged that they used to have strong negative stereotypical views of students. These negative stereotypes were most strongly felt and expressed by male mature students in these groups who indicated overcoming student negative stereotypes and immaturity because of stereotyping and mental blindness had been barriers to participation they had to make an effort to overcome. Although some mature participants underlined the great deal of support given to them by their husbands, many participants identified opposition and disapproval to their higher education aspirations in partners, friends and family. Criticism ranged from accusations of neglecting family, friends, children and housework to disparaging comments about students as *poofsters* and *lesbians*.

Negative stereotypes of students that include people like oneself

The most extreme constructions of students were found in the YED and YSD groups which had no participants from social classes 1 and 2 and the greatest proportion of participants from social classes 4 and 5: The YED group had the most negative descriptions of students as non-conformist, privileged, high society people who were not serious and do not apply themselves and are freaks or weirdoes who wear outrageous clothes, are generally odd and look quite bizarre and even who are having delusions and who are partying all the time with the taxpayers' money and don't go to lectures. The YSD group had less negative views than the YED group insofar as students were described as intellectuals who had to put a lot of time and effort into it and had no fun or time for family and friends. Both the YED and YSD groups mentioned friends, siblings and/or cousins who dropped out of higher education. The YED group told of friends or relatives who had dropped out to enter to full-time employment and who were now doing very well without a degree while in the YSD group relatives dropped out because they did not like or could not cope with any of the courses on offer and could no longer stay on.

While there was an emphasis on negative images of students drinking too much, exhibiting social deviancy and weirdness, having a social life directly linked to the

amount of free cash they had, younger interviewees pointed out that students also had to put in some effort otherwise they would fail. More importantly, in their constructions of students young participants incorporated young people like themselves as working-class with little money and part-time employment who were determined to make the best of the opportunity to go on to higher education. Even young participants from middle class background described students as poor and in debt because the media talked a lot about student loans and student debt.

In Archer and Hutchings (2000) and Hutchings and Archer (2001) the working-class student stereotype was associated with Afro-Caribbean and Asian respondents and post-1992 institutions, this was found not to be the case for most focus group participants and interviewees. In the present research the working-class student stereotype was evoked by young participants and interviewees as well as by an older interviewee who had encountered working-class students in her workplace. It was not particularly associated with post-1992 institutions and was referred to by participants and interviewees regardless of ethnic background.

Stereotypes of students linked to deviancy and slow to change

The present research suggest that the stereotypical constructions of students described by participants and interviewees were all linked to some form of deviancy. Both English and Scottish older interviewees described students as unable and/or unwilling to work. Both English and Scottish older interviewees as well as young English participants and interviewees saw students as upper middle class drinking too much and always having parties. Mature interviewees who went to university after school had images of students as young people who protested against injustice. Mature participants who had not entered higher education after school constructed students as always studying, having no life and no fun. They also talked about families and friends constructing students as homosexuals. Young Scottish participants and interviewees saw students as smart, dedicated who studied a lot. Young English participants and interviewees saw students as freaks and weirdoes who had delusions and who wanted to be seen to defy social norms for the sake of it and did not exert themselves academically.

Why should participants in focus groups and interviewees have such stereotypical constructions of students? It is not unreasonable to assume that negative stereotypes of students create internalised barriers that serve to maintain social class identity among under-represented socio-economic groups by maintaining an explicit societal association between social class and educational achievement. Whether negative stereotypes create internalised barriers or internalised barriers create negative stereotypes, the fear of making true the negative stereotypical threat of seeing oneself not belonging in higher education or failing in higher education might explain why under-represented socio-economic groups positioned themselves outside of higher education.

Since mature interviewees with the least amount of negative stereotypes tended to have fewer internalised barriers because they were culturally closer to higher education as they actually entered higher education after leaving school, the extent of negative student stereotypes might be a good indicator of initial cultural distance of potential entrants in relation to the prime trajectory to higher education and hence a good indicator of the likelihood of entering higher education. Thus, the stereotype of students as dedicated and working-class with part-time employment held by one older interviewee and young participants and interviewees is indicative of a democratisation of higher education, because it shows a shift in how potential entrants from under-represented groups construct higher education. They still have anxiety and ambivalence towards students, but they include themselves and people like themselves in their constructions of students.

Higher education increasingly more accessible over time

Higher education is no longer only for privileged elite

At the time of leaving school and until recently the older interviewees had no idea about what went on inside universities, but thought they were for really clever people with money who wanted to become doctors, teachers, lawyers and / or clergy. Such responses showed their ambivalence towards students and higher education. Their more positive constructions of higher education undermined their negative stereotypes of students. On the one hand, they described students as always drinking and having parties and wanting to avoid employment or as incapable of finding employment. On

the other hand, these same students also become doctors, teachers and lawyers, which are professional occupations conferring status and respectability. However, older interviewees indicated that they now no longer thought that higher education was for a privileged elite.

Higher education is no longer only for the middle class

The mature interviewees who had entered higher education after leaving school or almost did so thought higher education was the next step after school, or a necessary stepping-stone to adulthood, as well as an opportunity to gain more knowledge about subjects in which they were interested. They did not think higher education was only for the middle class.

The mature interviewees who had not entered higher education after leaving school described how higher education seemed too difficult and too much of an uphill struggle, especially for Scottish interviewees, or that they were not bright enough to go to university as going to university was primarily for those who were from privileged middle class, especially for English interviewees. As many of them had entered higher education or were about to enter higher education they no longer thought it was only for the middle class.

Higher education is for everyone who wants it

Previous research suggests that higher education was still perceived as being for white middle class with money and imbued with mystique because cultural possession of traditionally advantaged socio-economic groups and that it remained irrelevant except for really clever people whose families were willing to make enormous sacrifices and a luxury that can only be purchased at expense of other family members (See Weil 1986; Heathfield and Wakeford 1991; West 1996; Lynch and O'Riordan 1998, Tett 1999; Reay 1998; Marks 2000, 2002; Archer and Hutchings 2000; Reay *et al* 2001).

All the focus group participants and interviewees in the present research agreed that higher education has become far more accessible in the past 60 years, that there was a greater choice of subjects, that there was no longer a social class barrier to participation, that going to university was no longer a luxury but a necessity. All the focus group participants and interviewees agreed that there had been a definite societal shift over time in terms of the expectation of going to higher education.

Going to university was largely unthinkable for the older participants in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. The older participants said that higher education was strictly exclusive when they left school in the 1930s and 1940s but became more accessible after the Second World War for those who had been in the armed forces who by way of bursaries and lowered entry requirements were encouraged to acquire qualifications and go to university and that it had increasingly become more accessible over the decades and especially in the last decade.

Going to university was not really thinkable for most of the mature focus group participants and interviewees at the time of their leaving school in the 1970s and 1980s. In the late 1990s and early 2000s young participants and interviewees were significantly more likely to think that higher education was not an “unthinkable” expectation. Only a very small minority of young focus group participants thought higher education to be boring, demanding too much time and effort and not being for them. Some feared becoming homesick or ill or doing something different from their friends and family. They told of siblings or cousins who had entered higher education but dropped out because it was too difficult and/or to enter gainful employment and were subsequently doing well. However, for the majority of the young focus groups participants and all young interviewees higher education was largely perceived as being for everyone and all social classes but some focus group participants and interviewees underlined that it was only for those of all social classes who were academically able. More importantly, higher education was no longer a luxury, because today one needed all the qualifications one could get and that without a degree there was only debt, and dead-end and/or boring employment. A degree also meant having the opportunity of a better life than their parents. Higher education was also seen as stepping-stone, a way to experience life before a life of gainful employment as well as a way to help build character because it helped becoming independent and learning to live away from home.

Mature focus group participants and interviewees who had recently entered higher education, or were about to enter higher education after their access course, constructed higher education in very similar terms. They saw higher education as a way of earning money in their own right, a pathway to better employment and a career, as well as the opportunity to do something for themselves, be a role model, study an interesting subject, ask questions and search for answers about how the world

functions and the meaning of life, undertake a journey of self-discovery and even a form of therapy. Higher education was also an escape from social exclusion, poverty, dead-end jobs, broken relationships, boredom, depression, dissatisfaction from life and the burden of domesticity.

Mature focus group participants and interviewees who had recently entered higher education realised how fixed their constructions of higher education had been. They had imagined lecturers as males dressed in big black cloaks standing at the front of the lecture theatre and talking without interruption for an hour or more. They had also imagined tutors as looking and acting like they did in old television programmes for the Open University and that communications were atrocious between staff and students. However, they soon realised how fixed ideas had been and were surprised or sometimes even shocked to discover how approachable and supportive were lecturers and tutors

Most of the focus group participants and all interviewees agreed with the economic benefit of higher education. However, for young and more especially mature participants positive constructions of higher education were not only directly linked to external instrumental financial and employment drivers, but also and more specifically to intrinsic motivations such as self-improvement. Higher education was ultimately seen as a way to escape social exclusion and poverty, improve status, earn respect, and receive validation from society.

The influence of negative student stereotypes was therefore moderated by more positive constructions of higher education, largely because of the influence of the media and consumer culture that transmits positive discourses about the benefit of higher education rather than positive images of students who are usually depicted as poor with a lot of debt to repay. Since positive constructions of higher education appear thus to neutralise negative student stereotype, they also lessen cultural distance and internalised barriers to reach optimal cultural distance and hence increases the likelihood of potential entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups of entering higher education. It goes without saying that having a positive construction of students is a factor that would make it even more likely to reach optimal cultural distance. The inclusion of construction of working-class students further indicates that

a societal shift may have occurred whereby higher education is increasingly perceived by a greater number of potential entrants as for oneself rather than not for oneself.

DfES (2004a: para 6.6) found that in a sample of 16–30 year olds from social classes 3nm, 3m, 4 and 5, nearly 60% did not plan ever to go to university, and almost 50% of the sample had never thought about doing a degree while 45% of the sample agreed that the student image was not for them. In this research, among 78 focus group participants aged 17 to 50 of whom 89% were from social classes 3nm, 3m, 4 and 5, only seven participants, or 9%, said that they did not want to do a degree. Among the focus group sample as constructions of higher education were more positive than constructions of students. Among the interviewees constructions of higher education were also more positive than constructions of students.

Institutional preferences and distance travelled linked to age, social class profile and nationality

Previous research found that there remained a hierarchy of pre-1992 higher education institutions that tended to exclude under-represented socio-economic groups or under-represented socio-economic groups largely excluded themselves from pre-1992 institutions (See Robbins 1963; Dearing 1997, CVCP 1998; Reay 1998, 2001; Marks 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002; Hutchings and Archer 2001; Reay *et al* 2001; Ball *et al* 2002). A smaller number of studies, such as that of Brooks (2003a, 2003b) found that lower middle class applicants did not avoid pre-1992 institutions, but avoided Oxbridge. Farr (2001) demonstrated a relation between social class and geographical distance with young people from over-represented socio-economic groups travelling the furthest away from home and young people from under-represented socio-economic groups and mature students travelling the shortest distance from home.

In the present research a minority of YSD participants would only do a degree in a further education college and a minority of YSD and YED participants preferred post-1992 institutions, largely because siblings or cousins had attended them. Other young focus group participants and interviewees were planning to go to pre-1992 institutions. Going to a top class university was far more important for young English participants and interviewees than for their Scottish counterparts who aimed to attend

local universities both pre-1992 and post-1992, largely depending on the subject they wanted to study. All young English participants and interviewees expected to go to university away from home.

Only mature participants and interviewees who had not entered higher education directly from school wanted to avoid pre-1992 institutions, because they were perceived to have more mature students and be more welcoming for mature students. Some of the mature English participants already in higher education travelled between 10 and 35 miles while the mature Scottish participants travelled between 5 and 10 miles.

For the YSD group travelling the shortest possible distance and hence higher education in further education was especially important. This can be explained by the influence of a Scottish discourse of education for all those who have the academic ability rather than only for a socio-cultural elite. The discourse was shaped by tradition of a greater number of universities in large industrial cities, and hence a tradition of a less exclusive higher education system and not having to go to university away from home and study either part-time or full-time, as well as universities that could be accessed directly from elementary school (See Bell and Grant 1974; Stephens 1998; Bell 2000).

Greater internalisation of public discourses of economic benefit of higher education and self-improvement

Government policy discourse not only internalised and but acted upon

Archer and Hutchings (2000) found that their respondents, who were non-participants in higher education, from working-class backgrounds and aged 17-30, largely agreed with the belief in the potential individual economic benefits of higher education, but did not think it was for them because they perceived it as too financially and emotionally risky, demanding a lot of time and effort, and not worth the time and effort.

In the present research the overwhelming majority of the focus group participants, who were aged 17-50 and interviewees who were aged 17-84 not only agreed with the discourse of economic benefit of higher education and that of self-improvement, but had also internalised these discourses to such an extent that they had gone beyond optimal cultural distance since they now believed that higher education was for people like them rather than not for people like them. The older interviewees expected their grand-children to enter higher education.

As did the non-traditional mature and younger participants in Ozga and Sukhnandan (1997) the young and mature focus group participants in the present research, who were primarily from under-represented socio-economic groups, emphasised the time and effort needed to do a degree. However, they did not think that on balance it was either financially and emotionally too risky or not worth the effort. While they thought going to higher education meant short-term sacrifices in terms of money, time and effort and constituted a bit of a gamble, they nevertheless believed that the odds were good enough for them to take the gamble.

The younger interviewees mirrored the public discourse of government policy with an emphasis on the economic benefit of higher education, credentialism, self-improvement or bettering oneself, social inclusion and societal validation.

I don't want to end up like my mum, always short of money and always in debt and on benefit. For me higher education and doing a degree means to have the possibility to have a better life. [Victoria 17 YSD]

For me going to university is for increasing your qualifications to get a good job leading to a career in computing. [Daniel 17 YSD]

I think university is to gain respect, because it shows determination, and you get a status and a better job. [...] I just know that I want a good job, a nice house and a good car. [...] I also want to get better at English because I enjoy that. I just want to continue learning. I don't want to get stuck like a rock in a river and life is rushing past me. [...] I want to get really good A-levels, then go to a really good, top class university, then get an excellent job that makes me happy. [Justine 17 YED].

[University] *means a better job than what I would do if I didn't go. It's not the money. Others want money, a car, a house. I want to do something I like and I want to study something I like before I do something I like. But you need qualifications to do what you like and I want money, a car and a house too.* [Olivia 16 YS].

You need all the qualifications you can get to be one better than the rest.
[Edna 17 YS]

All the above extracts read like promotional campaigns and advertisements for higher education that closely mirror the discourse of higher education policy with its emphasis on the economic benefit of higher education, credentialism, bettering oneself and self-improvement to ensure social inclusion and societal validation. This mirroring of the discourse of higher education policy takes for granted that entering higher education is far better than leaving school early to enter full-time employment or to do an apprenticeship.

Mature participants also mirrored the government policy in what they said. Felicity and Fatima were typical of many other mature interviewees:

[Doing a degree was] *to help decide in which direction my life should move and to widen employment opportunities because the access course made me realise that I can achieve educationally and decided I wanted to make something of myself.* [Felicity 36 MEHE]

[Doing a degree] *it's like I've seen a new something I have inside. Like I've crossed over a divide [...] I just see it as a triumph [...] to myself and to others that have come from working class families that they can get through this divide that existed when I was young* [Fatima 40 MEFE friend]

At that point Fatima's husband, who was present during the interview, remarked somewhat ironically *she's an advert for the government.*

As did the young interviewees, young focus group participants too emphasised the discourse of economic benefit of higher education. The discourse was most closely mirrored in the YED group.

A better job as it is scientifically proven that graduates earn better wages than those who go directly to the workplace by approximately 10k. [YED]

The ability of possibly getting a better job outweighs the expense because if you get a well-paid job you could afford to pay off your debts. [YED]

Paradoxically, in the YED group the discourse of economic benefit of higher education was not only most clearly reflected, but was also sharply contrasted with the discourse of leaving school early to enter full-time employment:

Not having the confidence and knowing that I may fail and have wasted all that time when I could have been in full time employment earning money and getting work experience [YED]

The influence of these two discourses acted as opposite forces. The discourse of leaving school early to enter higher education acted as barrier while the economic benefit of higher education acted as a powerful driver.

Notwithstanding the above, the younger focus group participants and interviewees seemed overall more afraid of missing out on a better life with a nice car and a nice house if they did not gain a degree than they were of failing in the attempt. The discourses of credentialism and the economic benefit of higher education were internalised to a greater extent by young participants who constructed higher education as an investment for the future, rather than something to be enjoyed for its own sake or as a reward, because they were afraid to miss out on better employment opportunities and hence financial and societal validation.

Mature focus group participants and interviewees too constructed higher education as an investment for the future. However, since the discourses of self-improvement and

therapy were more internalised by mature participants and interviewees, for them higher education was above all a public service/private commodity to be consumed in order to fill a void, improve, discover or reward themselves. Mature participants had an awareness of taking advantage of a once in a lifetime opportunity to benefit from higher education not only as a way of gaining qualifications, escape from social exclusion, broken relationships, boredom, depression and the burden of domesticity, but also, and more especially, as a rewarding experience for themselves which would contribute to their personal growth. Hence, they wanted not to miss out on something that they thought would make their life more meaningful.

Turner *et al* (2000) underlined two contrasting models of higher education, one of market investment in the United States of America and one of public consumption in Japan. These contrasting models seem to fit the young and mature differential model of motivations to enter higher education.

In terms of differences between the Scottish and English context rather than the young and mature context, the meritocratic Robbins discourse of higher education as for all those able and willing was internalised to a greater extent by Scottish participants while the credentialist Dearing discourse of higher education for all those who have the potential to benefit was internalised to a greater extent by English participants. Thus, there was more of a lack of social confidence in the four English sub-groups and more of a lack of academic confidence in the four Scottish sub-groups.

More difficult to ignore what higher education has to offer because of the media and consumer culture

This research found that participants and interviewees had more positive constructions of higher education than would be expected from their familial *habitus* and from their largely negative stereotypical constructions of students. The inclusion of a working-class stereotype within constructions of students indicates a tendency for potential entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups to be closer to optimal cultural distance and greater likelihood of entering higher education than would be expected from their familial *habitus* and cultural capital.

How to explain this phenomenon? One explanation is the greater internalisation of the discourses of economic benefit of higher education, credentialism, self-improvement and meritocracy rather than the discourses of domesticity and that of leaving school early to enter full time employment. Many mature participants and interviewees depicted teachers as crushing their aspirations and propagating discourses of domesticity and racism through stereotypical expectations. Most young participants and interviewees described teachers as pressurising them more than supporting them to achieve at GCSE/Standard Grade and A-level/Higher Grade. From these findings the role of school and teachers seems to reinforce negative stereotypes and maintain cultural distance (See Jackson 1968; Foucault 1972, 1980, 1988; Althusser 1972; Bowles and Gintis 1976; Bourdieu 1976, 1977c, 1979, 1990c; Bourdieu and Passeron 1977, 1979; Reay 1998, 2001). The negatively felt pressures exerted on young participants and interviewees may have positively affected their academic achievement, which in turn increased their likelihood of entering higher education, how then to make sense of the societal cultural shift linked to greater internalisation of the discourses of the economic benefit of higher education and self-improvement?

If choices are informed or influenced by “what is reasonable to expect” (See Bourdieu and Passeron 1977c: 226), then younger participants from under-represented socio-economic groups are now not only more likely to be confused, but also, and more importantly, to think that higher education is no longer an “unthinkable” expectation (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977: 226). Unlike the older interviewees and mature focus group participants and interviewees, the younger focus group participants and interviewees included people like themselves in their constructions of students, as dedicated working-class student who study hard and have part-time employment.

It is undeniable that the expectation of going to higher education has increasingly risen despite a lack of positive influence of school and teachers and largely negative constructions of students, although this is appears to be slowly changing. However, it is difficult to establish with certainty the extent to which the societal shift and greater internalisation of the discourses of the economic benefit of higher education and self-improvement is the consequence of the changes in the nature and scope of higher education or in government policy discourse with the emphasis on the economic benefit of higher education and on self-improvement and social justice (See Archer

and Hutchings 2000; Thomas 2001). Societal structures too have also evolved with there now being fewer people who belong to the working-class and more people who belong to the middle-class (See Power *et al* 1999, 2003; Reay *et al* 2001).

Negative stereotypes of students (and of higher education) are derived from intergenerational interaction between the familial *habitus* and the institutional *habitus* of schools that create internalised barriers and hence maintain social class identity and hence social class hierarchies. In other words, they are derived from the hidden curriculum (Jackson 1968), disciplinary power and finely graded hierarchies (Foucault 1972, 1980, 1988) interacting with familial *habitus* and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1971, 1975, 1976, 1977c, 1990c, 1997). The fear of making true the negative stereotype of working-class people as outsiders and thus failing in higher education, because dominant images of higher education tend to exclude the working-class, served to maintain an association between social class and educational achievement and could act to maintain cultural distance and internalised barriers and lessen the likelihood of entering higher education by under-represented socio-economic groups.

In all probability the cultural or societal shift, whereby the fear of negative stereotypes of the working-class self in higher education is lessened, is largely the consequence of the influence of the media and the consumer culture more than changes in the nature and scope of higher education, the impact of higher education policy and institutional initiatives, because the latter are only known through the influence of the former and the two necessarily overlap (See Hodgson and Spours 1999, 2000; Reay 2001; Ball *et al* 2002). The influence of the media and consumer culture plays a key role in the perception of the importance of lifestyle (mobile phone, CDs, DVDs, television, cable television, cinema, going out, clubbing and shopping) and also that with less certainty about employment prospects than a few decades ago, it is more difficult to ignore what higher education has to offer (See Furlong and Cartmel 1997; Willis 2000; Morley 1991; Marks 2003; Marks *et al* 2003) [More on the influence of the media and consumer culture on pages 338-341]

Thus, the societal cultural shift as a consequence of the greater internalisation of the discourses of the economic benefit of higher education and self-improvement moved the point of optimal cultural distance closer to potential entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups, because higher education is no longer as

unthinkable as it used to be. Largely because of the influence of the media and the consumer culture and to some extent government policy, the fear of making true negative stereotypes about oneself within the field of higher education has lessened because public discourses have been internalised that have made constructions of higher education more positive and more relevant for everyone, not just over-represented socio-economic groups.

Associated with the discourses of economic benefit of higher education and self-improvement and associated discourses of credentialism, bettering oneself and social inclusion is the discourse of meritocracy. Stuart Wells (1997) and Goldthorpe (1997) have also underlined the importance of the internalisation of the discourse of meritocracy as a key factor in increasing the likelihood of staying on at school and going to higher education.

Academic attainment and love of reading/imagination

A difference between mature interviewees who entered higher education after leaving school and those who did not enter was that the former not only tended to have a love of reading and to achieve better academically, but also that their families had many more books than their neighbours. From this it can be inferred that for many potential entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups high academic ability and a love of reading, and hence a more vivid imaginary life, indicated a greater amount of cultural capital and hence lesser cultural distance than predictable from familial *habitus* and socio-cultural background. Also a greater imaginary life might make it more likely they may not be satisfied with family and neighbourhood aspirations, which would act as a driver to participation in higher education.

Good fittingness to school

Investigating the degree of fittingness between the self, the family and school was found to be useful ways of evaluating the likelihood of entering higher education and hence the extent of cultural distance or proximity to higher education between the self and higher education.

The older participants felt the worlds of home and school to have been both similar, because all the pupils came from similar families, and different, because they saw teachers as being from a different background from them. All but one had expected to leave school at 14 and to do so to enter employment.

The mature interviewees who had entered higher education after leaving school felt that the values and expectations of home matched those of the school or rather than the values of school matched their mothers' values and expectations. The mature interviewees who had not entered higher education from school did not feel a great deal of fittingness with the world of school because either their lack of academic achievement prevented them from going any further or they really wanted to leave school as soon as possible to gain full-time employment.

Despite a shared belief in the value of educational achievement common to home and school, younger participants and interviewees from middle class backgrounds felt a greater level of affinity between the worlds of school and home than young participants and interviewee, because the latter described the pressure from school to achieve as hostile or felt they were not loved at school as much as they were at home. Notwithstanding a lack of emotional fittingness between home and school, regardless of familial background the young interviewees had high aspirations and were determined to enter higher education largely to gain better employment prospects.

According to Bourdieu (1971, 1974, 1976, 1977c 1986, 1990c, 1993), StuartWells (1997) and Power *et al* (1999, 2003) the greater the cultural capital, the more aligned are the values of the self, the family and of the school and the greater the likelihood of entering higher education. The present research found that the greater the degree of fittingness to school, the more the world of home and school were the same in terms of shared values and assumptions, the greater the likelihood of entering higher education and the lesser the cultural distance, regardless of familial background. The alignment of values between school and home of younger participants and interviewees from under-represented socio-economic backgrounds was much more likely than among mature participants and interviewees from similar backgrounds.

Notwithstanding a societal shift of the point of optimal cultural distance and hence greater likelihood of entering higher education for younger participants and

interviewees, academic attainment, fittingness to school, high reading ability and love of reading therefore still indicate a *habitus* more likely to be aligned to the hidden curriculum of school rather than that of the family and hence a greater amount of cultural capital and lesser cultural distance than predictable from familial background. Associated with love of reading, a greater imaginary life made it more likely not to be satisfied with family and neighbourhood aspirations and constituted a push towards not wanting to become like them and hence acted as a driver to participation. A love of reading and greater imagination also helped potential entrants internalise outside discourses that made them feel part of an imaginary community whose values were more in line with the hidden curriculum than that of their families and neighbourhoods.

Lack of fittingness to neighbourhood

Previous research found that among under-represented socio-economic groups fittingness to neighbourhood was inversely linked to fittingness to school. A more working-class background and working-class neighbourhood was found to be associated with restricted educational horizons in both place and space primarily because of a high level of fittingness and attachment to neighbourhood (See Bowe *et al* 1995; Stuart Wells 1997; Reay and Ball 1997; Reay and Lucey 2000).

In the present research mature interviewees who went to higher education after leaving school education felt a lack of fittingness to their neighbourhoods largely because of their mothers' aspirations and because of the number of books at home. Young interviewees from under-represented socio-economic groups who felt a lack of fittingness to a poor or deprived neighbourhood wanted to escape from the neighbourhood and have a better life, which acted as a strong driver to participation in higher education, and hence made entry to higher education more likely. If the neighbourhood was middle class, then a desire to become middle class acted as a driver to participation and made entry to higher education more likely.

Intergenerational family scripts

Positive role of mothers acting as cultural agents despite negative role of fathers

The fathers of mature and younger working-class interviewees were often depicted as not achieving academically because of peer pressure and the importance of having a laugh when at school or were shown turning down the possibility of staying on at school for the sake of getting an apprenticeship. These fathers exerted a neutral or negative influence on the likelihood of participation in higher education. They often thought that higher education was a waste of time for girls and that boys should do manual work. Even when their children wanted to or had entered higher education as mature students they showed little positive reactions. Paradoxically, many female mature interviewees who were planning to or had recently entered higher education found that opposition and disapproval often came from female family members, typically mothers and mothers-in-law who reminded them of family responsibilities.

Mothers were however more often seen to be more supportive than fathers and were actively involved in their working-class children's education to the extent of intervening and pushing their children towards educational achievement. Mothers were often described as active agents in the family's recent history. They made things happen. They prioritised educational achievement over leaving school early to gain full-time employment. Thus, they played an active role in lessening cultural distance through actively and at times desperately trying to increase the likelihood of their children entering higher education and hence changing the direction of the familial learning trajectory.

Bettering oneself and role models

Unsurprisingly, the discourse of bettering oneself was transmitted primarily through mothers or other females who refused to transmit the discourses of domesticity or that of leaving school early to enter full-time employment. Often these working-class mothers were more academically able than their husbands or partners and made sure their children ended up where their own educational trajectories should have taken them, but for various reasons did not. Working-class mothers or aunts were often role models because they achieved academically at a higher level than their husbands or

because they became mature students. Among middle class interviewees, entering higher education was the normal thing to do rather than a way of bettering oneself and do better than their parents and hence parents did not need to explicitly articulate the importance of a good education, as it was something taken for granted.

Frustrated educational dreams and ambitions and missed educational opportunities

Previous research had drawn attention to the continuity of intergenerational learning trajectories and hence intergenerational influences on constructions of learners' identities and educational paths (Jackson 1968, 1971; Foucault 1972, 1977, 1980, 1988; Bourdieu 1971, 1973, 1974, 1975, 1977, 1979, 1984, 1986, 1990, 1993, 1997; Bourdieu and Passeron 1975, 1977, 1979; Coffield *et al* 1989; Allat 1993; Walkerdine 1996; Du Bois Reymond 1998; Gorard *et al* 1997, 1998, 1999; Fevre *et al* 1999; Power *et al* 1999, 2001, 2003). More importantly previous research had underlined how that middle-class parents guided young people implicitly or explicitly to ensure their children's positive acceptance of the prime learning trajectory to higher education (See Bourdieu 1971, 1976, 1977c, 1979, 1984, 1990b; Bourdieu and Passeron 1975, 1977, 1979; Allat 1992, 1996; Power *et al* 1999, 2001, 2003).

In the present research parents were found to have higher expectations for their children than they had for themselves. Mothers were often key cultural agents in transmitting family scripts of self-betterment. Participants across all the age groups gave examples of females in the family as the most academically gifted, but as unable to go as far as their abilities might take them because of working-class expectations of going to work after leaving school and because of the prevalence of the discourse of domesticity. Mothers who were very bright and academically able, but had not been able to seize the opportunity somehow transmitted their frustrated educational ambition to their children who often positioned themselves as a triumphant culmination of the mother's unfinished story, stayed on at school and went to university. Such children, by accepting to play a role in the script written and directed by their mothers, changed the direction of the familial learning trajectory.

The familial scripts of frustrated educational ambitions and dreams which were transmitted by the mothers were found to significantly increase the amount of cultural and symbolic capital that interviewees were presumed to have according to

their familial and socio-cultural *habitus*, thereby reducing internalised barriers and cultural distance in relation to a prime educational trajectory to higher education. Intergenerational and family scripts whether explicit or implicit were thus key factors in increasing the likelihood of entering higher education, because they lessened cultural distance to the point of optimal cultural distance, whereby participants changed the familial learning trajectory, because they were able to finish the script of frustrated educational dreams and missed opportunities of their mothers and be the triumphant culmination of her broken educational trajectory.

Social capital

Bourdieu (1997), Tomlinson (1987, 1992), Coleman (1988, 1990) and Gillborn (1995) and Putnam (2000) have discussed this ambiguous concept. [See chapter 8 for a full discussion and definitions of social capital]. In the present research social capital was exemplified by belonging to small religious communities and small schools because of the mechanism of intergenerational closure or social pressure to gain educational qualifications (See Coleman 1988). Social capital was also exemplified by the influence of siblings, partners and role models since social capital can be derived from informal channels that provide information as a basis for action and also since resources in one relationship can be appropriated for use in other relationships. Community education was also found to function as a form of social capital because it is a type of social relations within a quasi-social setting that enables the gathering of educational information and interacting with others who are gaining qualifications and want to gain more qualifications as a basis for action (Tomlinson 1987, 1992; Bourdieu 1997; Coleman 1988; Gillborn 1995; Putnam 2000). [Small religious communities, small schools, community education, siblings, partners and role models are fully analysed in chapter 8]. The present research found that social capital could significantly reduce cultural distance and internalised barriers and increase the likelihood of entering higher education.

Small religious communities

This research found that the pressures and expectations put on the self by small religious communities that valued the ideology of bettering oneself and educational achievement exert a very strong push factor towards higher education and hence reduce cultural distance and increase the likelihood of entering higher education. (See Tomlinson 1987, 1992; Coleman 1988; Gillborn 1995; Putnam 2000; Archer and Hutchings 2000; Hutchings and Archer 2001)

Small schools in deprived areas

Three young interviewees and many focus group participants and interviewees from the YSD and YED schools were convinced that a small school presented many advantages, not least of which was more individual attention and better guidance. They preferred being star pupils in a small school rather than more ordinary pupils in a bigger school with better overall league table results. Previous research had underlined that small schools were associated with higher achievement, better bonding with adults in the learning community, close interpersonal relationships between pupils and between staff and pupils, more extra-curricular activities and hence the possibility of having leadership roles (See Lindsay 1982; Coleman 1988; Darling-Hammond 1997).

Community education

The present research found that in the Scottish context community education initiatives and outreach programmes were effective in boosting academic confidence and hence reducing cultural distance and internalised barriers to participation in higher education through the acquisition of that particular form of social capital. Previous research such as Thomas (2000, 2001), Bamber *et al* (1997), Bamber and Tett (1999), Bamber and Tett (2000, 2001) had highlighted the value of community education, outreach programmes and special access schemes to render higher education less unthinkable in order to increase the likelihood of participation by potential entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups.

Siblings, partners and mothers as mature students as role models

While the competitiveness between two female mature interviewees (Jane and Fatima) and their sisters negatively affected their personal relationships, it also acted as a driving force that decreased internal barriers and cultural distance and increased the likelihood not only of entering higher education, but also to do better than their sisters in gaining more qualifications. Partners starting a degree had prompted some interviewees to follow in their footsteps while interviewees doing a degree had also prompted partners to want to do likewise. Many young interviewees (Justine, Edna, Anthony, Jessica, Victoria) had mothers or other family members such as aunts who had been mature students and role models. Among mature interviewees who were mothers of interviewees, Rose and Mary had been mature students while the mother of mature interviewee Violet had also been a mature student who became a teacher. Previous research had underlined the potential negative effect that being a mature student can have on familial relationships (See Edwards 1993; Pascall and Cox 1993; West 1996; Baxter and Britton 1999; Britton and Baxter 2001; Davies *et al* 2002) but also that mature students wanted to be role models for their children (Reay *et al* 2002; Davies *et al* 2002)

Higher education in further education

Like community education, higher education in further education is a form of social capital, because it takes place within a quasi-social setting that enables gathering educational information and interacting with others who are gaining qualifications and want to gain more qualifications as a basis for action. As does community education, higher education in further education functions as a public good that enables gaining a degree and hence social status very locally without having to go too far from home. Higher education in further education increases its value as people within a community make use of it and decreases if they don't (See Coleman 1988; Puttnam 2000).

In the present research higher education in further education was found to significantly increase the likelihood of entering higher education for some YSD participants, for whom it was a major institutional driver to participation because it

lessened both physical and cultural distance. Its main advantage was to provide the opportunity to do a degree and gain qualifications and socio-cultural and socio-economic status as near home as possible (See Paterson 1997; Arbuthnot 1997; Smith and Boccock 1999; Schuller and Bamford 1999; Mackie 2001, SHEFC 2004; HEFCE 2005).

Extent to which entering higher education is a decision or a non-decision

In order to gain further insights into the higher education decision-making process, and to better understand the role of the point of optimal cultural distance and whether entering higher education is the cause or the consequence of a change in *habitus* and whether entering higher education is a decision or a non-decision, the extent to which decisions and/or non-decisions are made within practical or discursive consciousness is now examined with reference to the key findings. [See p333-334 below for definitions of discursive and practical consciousness]

According to Du Bois-Reymond (1998) middle-class potential entrants have linear transitions and are literally propelled into higher education. For them going to university is more of a non-decision, because it is the natural thing to do. Working-class potential entrants on the other hand have fragmented and broken transitions. For them going to university is less of a natural transition and hence they make a deliberate decision to enter higher education, because it is not the natural thing to do.

In the present research Robert and Gregory, two mature interviewees who had entered higher education directly from school and were both from a working-class background, always knew they would go to university. Although Robert tried not to go to higher education, his mother put him back on track to follow the prime trajectory to higher education. Thus, for them going to university was a linear transition and a non-decision, but should have been a deliberate decision according to their socio-cultural background.

Violet, a mature interviewee from a middle-class background who had not entered higher education directly from school should have had a linear transition. Yet she

was a mature student on an access course aiming to enter higher education. According to her socio-cultural background, her entering higher education should be a non-decision, but for her it was very much a deliberate decision, because she had many doubts and insecurities.

The other mature participants who were doing access courses or had recently entered higher education had fewer doubts and insecurities than Violet, because they were closer to or past the point of optimal cultural distance. Some reached this point over many years (Fiona, Jane, Mary, Jade) and others in a matter of weeks (Fatima, Daniel, Edward, James). For them entering higher education was more of a non-decision, because at the time they were about to enter higher education, it had become the next step or natural thing to do.

For Olivia and Sophie, who were the only young interviewees from a middle class background, there were more of a fit between the world of home and school, thus entering higher education was for them a non-decision. Anthony, Edna, Justine and Steven felt more dissonances between the world of home and school. However, for them entering higher education was equally the natural thing to do and the next step. However, for Jessica, Victoria and Daniel, although still highly desirable higher education was perceived as more risky and less natural, hence entering higher education was more of a deliberate decision.

A problem with the conceptual model of decisions and non-decisions is that these concepts assume that middle-class potential entrants make non-decisions while working-class potential entrants make decisions, which was found not to be the case in the present research. Another problem is that social class is measured by the father's occupation, yet mothers can often have higher educational qualifications and/or higher occupational status. A further problem is the fact that working-class women who marry into families that are familiar with higher education have already been acculturated into more middle class values before they became mature students.

Notwithstanding these problems, older interviewees and mature interviewees who had not entered higher education directly from school but had entered or were about to enter as mature students indicated that they made educational decisions alone:

I think it's actually the person themselves, when they finally decided what they would like to do, then these things like wanting to go to university happen, and that they start to believe in themselves and want to achieve particular things. [Oscar 75 YE grandfather]

I think they just left me to learn by myself. I mean, if I passed exams and things, they said, well done, pleased for you, so they were supportive in that way, but they would never say I think you should be doing that, or I would like you to do that. [Fiona 33 MSHE]

At the time of leaving school the older and mature interviewees thought higher education was not for people like them. They even seemed aware that a deliberate decision going against the flow of their familial and socio-cultural *habitus* was needed to change educational trajectory.

Research suggested that middle-class children are pressured and guided to ensure their positive acceptance of the best university while working-class children were left to decide alone whether to go or where to go (Du Bois-Reymond 1998; Reay and Lucey 2000; Power *et al* 1998, 1999, 2003). Andrew thought precisely along the same lines, namely, that working-class and middle-class families had different values, expectations and priorities about education than working-class families:

Education was not really talked about. It wasn't one of those houses where I gather a middle-class household rally egging on the youngsters all the time. It wasn't like that at all. There was not a drive for education like you would get in a middle-class home; it wasn't that at all. We were left to get on with it. [Andrew 81 MSHE neighbour]

Unlike Oscar, Fiona and Andrew, the younger participants no longer seemed to feel that whether they should enter higher education was something they had to decide on their own and that it meant going against the flow. For them there was no real decision as it was a necessity and the natural thing to do.

Previous research had underlined that for young people from the middle-class going to university was the natural thing to do or was part of the family plan, which

differentiated them from the working-class (Bourdieu 1971, 1976, 1977c, 1979, 1986, 1990c, 1993b; Keen and Higgins 1992; Robert and Allen 1997; Du Bois-Reymond 1998; Connor *et al* 1999a; Connor 2001; Ball *et al* 2000, 2002). In the present research, however, working-class potential entrants considered that entering higher education was the natural thing to do and the next step.

All the parents of the older interviewees were working-class. With one exception all the parents of the mature interviewees were working-class. Except in the cases of families where mothers were actively pushing their children towards higher education, working-class parents did not think that as far as education was concerned it was their role to interfere in something that was not familiar to them and which they knew little about. To stay on at school and go to higher education was therefore not *the natural thing to do* or something that one ended up doing when *going with the flow*. Rather, it would be a deliberate decision that meant *going against the flow* and against perceived expectations whether or not these were actually articulated.

The mature interviewees who entered higher education after leaving school did so because their mothers had made sure they would do this. Those who did not enter higher education after leaving school did not make the decision to enter higher education. Instead they made the non-decision of *going with the flow* and what for them was the more natural thing to do, that is, enter full-time employment.

For most middle class young potential entrants going to university was more of a non-decision involving practical rather than discursive consciousness because it was part of *going with the flow* and *the natural thing to do*. For many working class young potential entrants it was more of a deliberate decision because it was less the natural thing to do, but it was still mostly a non-decision, especially if there was not a good degree of fittingness to their neighbourhood and a good degree of fittingness between school and home.

Extent to which decisions and non-decisions, are made within practical or discursive consciousness

Practical and discursive consciousness and tacit, semi-tacit and non-tacit knowledge

Practical consciousness consists of all things that are known tacitly about social behaviour without being able to give them discursive expression although people have the ability to reflect to some extent on the effect of their actions on others and themselves (Giddens 1984).

Discursive consciousness means more than being able to articulate explanations. It is about consciously learned rules and principles and reflexivity, that is, the ability to stand back from structures and develop discursive knowledge regarding previously tacit rules and assumptions. It means the ability to reflect about social attitudes and behaviour of self and others in terms of understanding and articulating the underlying rules and assumptions (and then to implement such reflections into their actions) (Giddens 1984).

The boundary between discursive and practical consciousness is blurred and permeable and contingent on exposure to new things and new contexts, but both practical and discursive consciousness are both bounded by the unconscious and by the unacknowledged conditions and unintended consequences of deliberate actions.

Broadly speaking Giddens' practical consciousness corresponds to the Bourdieuan concepts of practice and *habitus* (Bourdieu 1977a, 1990b) The latter is the deeply ingrained structured and structuring attitudinal dispositions subconsciously acquired from early socio-cultural experiences structure practices from within while the former constitutes day-to-day actions, the things we do automatically without even thinking about them, based on taken for granted assumptions that go beyond reflection.

While Goffman (1983), Garfinkel (1967), Bhaksar (1978) and Giddens (1984) all explain and acknowledge the central role of practical consciousness in everyday

interactions and hence its role in social reproduction, they do not adequately explain social transformation. Change such as breaking with old routine and starting new routines, the capacity to reflect upon conditions and to bring this knowledge to bear on further actions does not fit their models of social reproduction. Hence, these theorists imply that ordinary people do not seem to use their discursive consciousness and develop discursive knowledge about underlying rules and assumptions let alone implement such reflections into their actions. Only theorists and researchers are attributed this capacity for reflection and implementing reflections in their actions.

While Bourdieu (1976, 1977c, 1990b) argues that higher education decision-making is largely the consequence of practical consciousness rather than discursive consciousness), Giddens (1984, 1991), Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) and Brooks (2003a) assert, rather than demonstrate, that the mostly tacit or semi-tacit knowledge of practical consciousness and taken-for-granted assumptions *can be turned into* discursive knowledge when through reflexivity or capacity to reflect about underlying rules and assumptions tacit practical knowledge is transformed into discursive non-tacit knowledge. Giddens (1984, 1991), Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) and Brooks (2003a) state that decisions to enter or not higher education can be the consequence of rationality and reflexivity as well as non-rationality and non-reflexivity. This is what separates them from Bourdieu and bring them closer to Goldthorpe (1995, 1996, 1997, 2000), Becker (1976, 1993), Boudon (1974, 1982) who believe that decisions are made with calculative intentionality and rationality, because people who are deemed to be self-interested and are stripped of their social ties evaluate costs and benefits and then make a rational decision about what to do.

Tacit knowledge is a form of knowledge that is implied or inferred without direct expression; having effect by operation of law rather than by being directly expressed (Collins Dictionary). Semi-tacit knowledge is a form of knowledge that stands in between non tacit and tacit knowledge. Non tacit knowledge is accessible to accurate introspection and by talking to someone. Tacit knowledge is not directly accessible. Semi-tacit knowledge is accessible but only through appropriate methods (Blandford and Rugg 1999). An example of semi-tacit knowledge is when an individual or a group “need not engage in rational computation in order to reach the goals that best

suit their interests” because they can function in a particular field with ease and lack of self-consciousness “like a fish out of water” (Bourdieu 1990b: 108).

While it is not easy to establish clear boundaries between decisions and non-decisions, it is even more difficult to differentiate clearly between practical and discursive consciousness and it is possibly even more difficult to establish clear boundaries between tacit and semi-tacit knowledge. However, reflection and discussion that enable us to become aware of our assumptions can transform tacit knowledge into semi-tacit knowledge and semi-tacit knowledge into non-tacit knowledge (Schon 1983, Brookfield 1988; Bourdieu 1990c). Specific methods for accessing semi-tacit knowledge are brainstorming exercises, ranking exercises as well as sorting and laddering predefined concepts (Blandford and Rugg 1983).

Higher education decision-making

Rational action theorists such as Boudon (1974) and Goldthorpe (1995, 1997, 2000) understand higher education decision-making as made within discursive consciousness because potential entrants evaluate the projected future costs and benefits of higher education and make a rational self-interested decision to either go or not go because they determine that it would mean too high a cost relative to available resources.

Bourdieu (1975, 1977a, 1977c, 1984, 1990b, 1990c, 1993) and Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) claim that potential entrants make primarily non-decisions within practical consciousness rather than discursive consciousness because they do not tend to deliberate and reflect, but tend to do the natural thing according to their *habitus* and the amount of various forms of capital that they have.

According to Giddens (1991: 125) in today’s reflexive settings, “living on ‘automatic pilot’ becomes more and more difficult to do”. Entering higher education is therefore a deliberate decision made within discursive consciousness. Du Bois-Reymond (1998) suggests that decisions might imply deliberation and reflection and hence reflexive consciousness for potential entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups, but not in the case of potential entrants from over-represented socio-economic groups and non-decisions are made within practical consciousness

because entering higher education is the natural thing to do and the next step. Hodgson and Spours (1999) believe that many young people drift into higher education, because they see it as something they might try and if they don't like it, they can always dropout. Drifting in does not indicate reflexivity and making informed decisions. In all likelihood it is largely the consequence of implicit and explicit pressures exerted by the media and consumer culture.

Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997: 39) who attempted to merge Bourdieu and rational action theory argue that young people are constantly "revising the meaning of values, actions and experiences that shapes and reshapes *horizons for action*."³ Decisions are partly influenced by reason, but not in the sense of evaluating risks, costs and benefits according to rational action theory. Rather, decisions are partly influenced by feelings and emotions, so they are not purely rational or purely irrational, but an entanglement of strategic rational action or choice with non-rational and non-utilitarian goals or choices.

Explaining greater and lesser likelihood of participation by potential entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups

The present research showed that when rankings by number of votes and number of words were compared 'better employment' as driver and 'money' as barrier were moderated and overtaken respectively by 'self-improvement' and 'lack of confidence'. This suggests participants had a tendency to consciously choose the more socially accepted instrumental external and extrinsic drivers such as better employment whereas being sub-consciously driven by the more internalised driver of 'self-improvement'. Similarly, participants had a tendency to consciously choose as key barriers external factors such as 'financial cost' and 'lack of money' whereas being sub-consciously pulled away from higher education by the more internalised barrier of 'lack of confidence'. The discrepancy between ranking by votes and by number of words confirmed the importance of practical rather than discursive consciousness.

³ Derived from *habitus* and opportunity structures, themselves an amalgam of social class and labour market opportunities – See Roberts 1968

Negative stereotypes of students create internalised barriers that serve largely to maintain social class identity because of a human desire to belong to homogenous groups. The stereotypes and barriers thus sustain a working-class identity in opposition to a middle class identity and consequently create internalised barriers and cultural distance towards higher education seen as belonging to the middle class. Internalised barriers and cultural distance arise out of a fear of making true the negative stereotype threat against the self as a non-middle-class outsider who enters higher education but does not succeed, because dominant constructions of higher education exclude the self.

However, a cultural shift seems to have taken place whereby the influence of negative stereotypes is less powerful. Internalised barriers and cultural distance are thus lessened to the extent that potential entrants are less afraid of what might happen if they fail in higher education than afraid of what might happen if they don't try. In other words, the cultural shift had led to potential entrants from under-represented groups of not being afraid of making true negative stereotypes about themselves as failing in higher education, but afraid of being socially excluded if they don't enter higher education and gain a degree.

Explanation of societal shift of the point of cultural distance

All the participants agreed that higher education has become far more accessible in the past seventy years and that it is no longer a luxury, but a necessity as one needs all the qualifications one can get and that without a degree there is only dead-end employment. Over the past seventy years the expectation of entering higher education of potential entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups went from unthinkable to increasingly more likely with ever more positive constructions of higher education despite largely negative but slowly changing stereotypes of students. Most participants and interviewees thought the odds were good or even if they were not completely good, they would be worse off emotionally and financially if they did not enter higher education. Hence, most of the participants positioned themselves closer to higher education than expected. The value of continuing in full-time education and then entering higher education was taken for granted by most of the

young participants and all the young interviewees. This societal shift is arguably the consequence of

- changes in societal structures, labour market, nature and scope of higher education and higher education policy
 - to the extent that young people are perhaps less respectful and less deferential about social class divisions and there is less of a certainty about employment than there was a few decades ago so it is more difficult to ignore what higher education has to offer
- the influence of the consumer culture and the media which in turn is moderated by initial education, peers and family
 - to the extent that a life without material possessions advertised by the consumer culture seems worthless and higher education is seen as the necessary investment to get access to these desired material possessions
- the influence of public discourses on private narrative and the lesser internalisation of the discourses of domesticity and leaving school early as possible to enter full-time employment and a greater internalisation of the discourses of economic benefit of higher education, credentialism, bettering oneself, self-improvement and meritocracy

Bourdieu and Passeron (1977c: 226) and Bourdieu (1997: 51-52) asserted that potential entrants from over-represented socio-economic groups have the “greatest amount of cultural capital and are more likely to enter higher education” and that potential entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups have “greater internalised barriers”, and hence are situated at a greater cultural distance from higher education. However, Bourdieu and Passeron (1977c: 226) and Bourdieu (1986, 1997: 51-52) could not take into account the fact that optimal cultural distance is now easier to reach, because through the influence of the media and of the consumer culture public discourses of economic benefit of higher education, credentialism, bettering oneself, self-improvement and meritocracy are internalised to a greater extent.

According to Robbins (1988) the consumer culture operates by ensuring that various messages and discourses are internalised through indirect and direct manipulation of consumers through the media and hence consumer behaviour is modified and

products bought. Barthes (1957), Foucault (1980, 1982) and Wetherell and Potter (1992) have argued that public discourses permeate our daily existence not only through the influence of school, family, peers but also and more especially through the influence of the media (literature, arts, press, radio, television and cinema). These discourses influence beliefs, attitudes and behaviour.

Relatively few researchers have underlined the influence of the media and consumer culture in shaping the perceptions of higher education that people in general have and working-class people in particular (See for example Heathfield and Wakeford 1991, Morley 1991; Blackman 1995; Furlong and Cartmel 1997; Willis 2000; Reay 2001; Hodgson and Spours 1999, 2000; Ball *et al* 2000, 2002; Marks 2003; Marks *et al* 2003). Those researchers who have examined and reflected upon the influence of the media and consumer culture in shaping the perception of higher education have drawn attention to the fact that the media and consumer culture play an important role in

- shaping the perceptions of higher education and higher education policy, especially among under-represented groups (Hodgson and Spours 1999; Archer and Hutchings 2000; Reay 2001; Ball *et al* 2000, 2002)
- propagating stereotypical and polarized images of students (Heathfield and Wakeford 1991; Archer and Hutchings 2000)
- perpetuating negative and lack of a positive images of the working class within the dominant media representations and hence contributing to lesser likelihood of entering higher education for under-represented socio-economic groups (Willis 2000; Reay 2001; Marks 2003)
- making higher education choice and decision-making more complex than previously thought (because there is not only a greater variety of institutions, qualifications and entry routes, but also increasingly conflicting messages from peers, parents, schools, and employers about life priorities (Morley 1991; Hodgson and Spours 1999, 2000; Willis 2000; Reay 2001; Ball *et al* 2000, 2002)
- making it increasingly more difficult to ignore what higher education has to offer because of less certainty about employment prospects than a few decades ago (See Furlong and Cartmel 1997; Willis 2000; Morley 1991; Marks 2003; Marks *et al* 2003)

- the fact that many young people drift into higher education for something to try as if it was the latest gadget or thing to do to just as they keep the same part-time employment and have the same lifestyle (mobile phone, CDs, DVDs, television, cable television, cinema, going out, clubbing and shopping) (See Hodgson and Spours 1999, 2000)

The present research found that participants and interviewees mirrored what they had read in the newspapers and watched on television. The media had given some of them the idea that students in general are poor and in debt and hence higher education was not only for well off people and almost for poor people because students are poor people.

The influence of the media and consumer culture also led to participants and interviewees to having not only internalised government policy, but having acted upon it. Constructions of higher education among most if not all participants and interviewees closely mirrored the discourse of the economic benefit of higher education as promoted by government policy as well as consumerist concerns [See chapter 8 page 245-246, chapter 9 pages 315-317 and appendix 3 and 4 pages 460-475].

A dominant cultural narrative of our times is that of self-improvement through higher education and various forms of counselling and therapy to become a more educated better person (as well as a better looking, better dressed in better health who exercises regularly and eats well). Perhaps this contemporary culture of self-improvement has become some kind of secular religion with degrees as symbolic markers of social and moral significance. Mature participants underlined that in addition to better employment prospects and escaping social exclusion they had become mature students because they wanted to achieve dreams, break socio-cultural boundaries, undergo a form of therapy and or were on the quest for the meaning of life. [See chapter 7 on page 201 and chapter 8 on pages 245-246]

Because of the influence of the media and consumer culture in helping the dissemination of the public discourses of the economic benefit of higher education and self improvement is that higher education has moved closer to potential entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups. If according to Bourdieu (1976)

cognitive structures of choice are merely internalised social structures, then social structures have indeed undergone some significant changes. Although it is difficult to evaluate precisely the extent to which external factors and public discourses had become personalised and internalised, it is undeniable that a cultural shift has taken place whereby optimal cultural distance is easier to reach and higher education is less unthinkable that it used to be for potential entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups.

A consequence of the media and consumer culture helping to bring about a cultural shift in that the public discourses of the economic benefit of higher education, credentialism, bettering oneself and self-improvement are internalised to a greater extent and that less effort is needed to overcome internalised barriers and reach the point of optimal cultural distance. Hence entering higher education has increasingly become a non-decision made within practical consciousness, because the non-decision is largely the consequence of the media and consumer whereby higher education is increasingly conceptualised as the natural thing to do or the necessary next step.

The precise extent of the cultural shift and in particular the influence of public discourses would be difficult to evaluate precisely because once internalised, they become an integral part of someone's identity. However, if all actions are guided by internalised representations or personal constructs or *habitus*, which is largely sub-consciously acquired, then factors that reduce cultural distance can do so without the individual being aware of this or using reflexivity. Since choices are limited by *habitus*, a change in *habitus* is necessary to reduce cultural distance in order for higher education to become for oneself instead of not for oneself.

If cultural distance needs to have been sufficiently lessened, choices and decisions are consequently made within practical consciousness and thus are really more non-decisions, because higher education is now more the natural thing to do than not the natural thing to do. If cultural distance was greater, then higher education would not be the natural thing to do and a more deliberate decision would have to be made. However, a decision is truly reflexive and made within discursive consciousness, or truly rational and self-interested, only if the individual has acquired extensive information and knowledge of higher education and adopts a precise strategy with

clear goals to evaluate the projected future costs and benefits of higher education in relation to available resources.

Yet, too much knowledge of costs and benefits would be counterproductive because a certain level of false belief or delusion that effort and ability are always being rewarded is also needed for potential entrants to take the emotional and financial risks of entering higher education. Hence, higher education choice is rarely made within discursive consciousness. However, it might be argued that some individuals consciously aspire to upward social mobility. Although deliberate reflexive decisions using discursive consciousness are possible, they are highly improbable, because in order to think that higher education is not unthinkable and upward social mobility is possible, cultural distance needs first to have been lessened to [almost] the point of optimal cultural distance.

Bourdieu (1974, 1976, 1977c, 1979, 1990b, 1993b), Foucault (1972, 1980, 1988) and Hodgson and Spours (1999) reject reflexivity and discursive consciousness as playing an important role in entering higher education. Bourdieu asserts that choices are largely non-decisions derived from *habitus* made within practical consciousness. Only Giddens (1991) and Goldthorpe (1995, 1996, 1997, 2000) and to some extent Du Bois-Reymond (1998) believe that higher education choice is a deliberate decision made within discursive consciousness. However, a more deliberate decision need not necessarily involve reflexivity. Interviewees in the present research did not systematically weigh their options after having sought a lot of information to inform their decision. Rather they used the fragments of the public discourses of economic benefit, credentialism, bettering oneself and self-improvement that a degree really meant better employment and a happier life.

Mature interviewees who did not enter higher education when they left school had to make a deliberate decision to enter higher education in relation to their past lack of expectations of entering higher education. However, their decision was more of a non-decision especially when the process of becoming a mature student stretched over years, when a small religious community was involved, when other family members were seen as role models to emulate or outdo, and when going was the consequence of a family or personal crisis.

Whenever there is an aspect of being ‘propelled’ into higher education a potential entrant makes more of a non-decision than of a decision and practical consciousness is involved rather than discursive consciousness, because it higher education becomes the natural thing to do or the next step. Power *et al* (1998, 1999, 2003) have pointed out the metaphor of navigating higher education may be more realistic, because of substantial differentiation within social classes and because of the expansion of and structural changes in higher education over the past 30 years.

Those potential entrants situated too far from the point of optimal cultural distance tend not to enter higher education because they leave school early. Those potential entrants who are not close to optimal cultural distance, but closer than too far, tend to struggle into higher education, or perhaps drift into higher education if nothing better is available. They make more of a deliberate decision if they struggle and more of a non-decision if they drift into higher education. They make a non-decision within practical consciousness if they have limited knowledge of higher education, no strategy and unclear goals. They make a deliberate rational decision within discursive consciousness if they have acquired knowledge of higher education and had a precise strategy and clear goals. Yet, as seen before, too much knowledge and reflection is likely to make them more anxious and hence be more detrimental than beneficial.

Conclusion

The key findings were derived from what was said during the eight focus groups, which counted 78 participants that were aged 17-50 and during 26 individual interviews. These included 16 interviewees who had taken part in the focus groups and were aged 17-42, and 10 additional interviewees aged 40-84 who were relatives, friends and neighbours of some of the focus group interviewees to provide a generational link where possible.

This chapter brought the key findings of the focus groups and the interviews together in relation to the main objective of the research, which was to investigate the interaction of assumptions (drivers and barriers, constructions of higher education and of students and the influence of public discourses on private narratives) and life

history factors (initial education and familial influences) on greater and lesser likelihood of participation to determine: whether there was a point of optimal cultural distance; the key factors that lessened cultural distance and internalised barriers, increased the likelihood of reaching optimal cultural distance and hence increased the likelihood of participation by under-represented socio-economic groups; the extent to which entering higher education was a decision or a non-decision; and the extent to which decisions and non-decisions were made within practical or discursive consciousness.

This chapter first examined the point of optimal cultural distance when higher education becomes for oneself rather than not for oneself and found that for mature potential entrants the point could be attained through sudden life-changing events or through slow processes. However, only once they were in higher education did participants and interviewees become aware of the extent to which they had overcome internalised barriers and broken cultural boundaries. Because of a societal shift in expectations and constructions of higher education younger potential entrants who were mainly from under-represented socio-economic groups were found to be closer to the point of optimal cultural distance.

This chapter then investigated factors (assumptions and life history factors) that increased the likelihood of reaching the point of optimal cultural distance. Factors found to be significant were: a preponderance of financial and employment drivers over financial and employment barriers; a preponderance of intrinsic drivers over external barriers; academic achievement, love of reading and imagination; fittingness to school; lack of fittingness to neighbourhood; intergenerational family scripts of frustrated educational dreams with mothers as cultural agents; and social capital through further education in higher education, community education, small schools in deprived areas, small religious communities and influence of siblings and partners. Perhaps the most significant factor was the fact that largely negative stereotypical constructions of students were moderated by positive constructions of higher education seen as conferring societal validation through qualifications status, respect and access to better employment as well as providing escape from social exclusion, poverty and dead end jobs, a chance to overcome the break up of relationships, to escape the burden of domesticity, to become a role model, to go on a quest for the meaning of life and even a form of therapy. Positive constructions of higher education

despite largely negative constructions of students indicated that the greater internalisation of the public discourses of economic benefit of higher education and self-improvement, largely because of the impact of the media and consumer culture, was arguably the most probable cause of the societal shift of the point of optimal cultural distance.

Finally, the extent to which entering higher education is a decision or a non-decision and the extent to which decisions and non-decisions are made within practical or discursive consciousness were discussed.

The next chapter will revisit the preliminary conceptual model and adjust it to the key findings discussed in this chapter to formulate the finalised conceptual model of greater and lesser likelihood of participation by potential entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups.

10

FINALISED CONCEPTUAL MODEL

The previous chapter discussed the key findings of the focus groups and the interviews in relation to the interaction of assumptions (drivers and barriers, constructions of higher education and of students and the influence of public discourses on private narratives) and life history factors (initial education and familial influences) in order to investigate: the point of optimal cultural distance when higher education becomes for oneself rather than not for oneself; key factors (assumptions and life history factors) that lessen cultural distance (and internalised barriers) and make it more likely to reach optimal cultural distance; the extent to which entering higher education is a decision or a non-decision; and the extent to which decisions and non-decisions are made within practical or discursive consciousness.

This chapter adjusts the preliminary conceptual model to the key findings discussed in the previous chapter and formulates the finalised conceptual model of greater and lesser likelihood of participation by potential entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups. This chapter is divided into two sections:

- preliminary conceptual model
- adjusted finalised conceptual model

The key findings were derived from what was said during the eight focus groups, which counted 78 participants, and during 26 interviews, which included 16 interviewees who had taken part in the focus groups, and 10 additional interviews.

Preliminary conceptual model

In chapter 4 a preliminary conceptual model derived from previous research was outlined. Various key aspects of the preliminary conceptual model are summarised before adjusting the conceptual model to the key findings.

Key variables and other factors linked to the prime educational trajectory to higher education

Table 10.1 below shows D1, D2 and D3 which represent various key measurable variables and other factors that have been found by previous research to be linked to likelihood of entering higher education. The most important factors in each category are highlighted in grey.

Table 10.1 *Key variables and other factors from the literature that position individual in relation to the prime educational trajectory from school to higher education*

Key measurable variables D1	Social class
	Educational qualifications
	Sex
	Parental occupation
	Post code
	Ethnicity
	Disability
	Age
	Region/country
Additional measurable key variables D2	Mother's educational qualifications
	Type of school attended
	Father's educational qualifications
	Parliamentary constituency
	Electoral wards
Other significant factors D3	Parental expectations/pressure
	Parental encouragement and involvement in homework
	Influence of peers
	Labour market opportunities
	Factual knowledge of higher education
	Religion

Source: see tables 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3

D1 is derived from key measurable variables collected by HESA and UCAS used in analysing trends as well as by other correlational and statistical research on trends in access and widening participation (See See Banks *et al* 1992; Parry 1997; Paterson 1997; HEFCE 1997; SHEFC 1998; Tonks 1998; CVCP 1998; Power *et al* 1999; Tonks and Farr 1999; Hodgson and Spours 1999; Ball *et al* 2000, 2002, Reay *et al* 2001, 2002; SHEFC 2004; HEFCE 2005).¹ D2 is derived from additional key measurable variables (See Keen and Higgins 1990, 1992; Tonks 1998; Power *et al* 1999, 2003; Johnston *et al* 1999; Tinklin 2000; Gorard and Selwyn 2005; HEFCE 2005). D3 is derived from less easily measurable other significant factors outlined as important by both correlational and qualitative research (See Taylor 1992; Roberts 1997; Skeggs 1997; Hodgkinson and Sparkes 1997; Lynch and O’Riordan 1998; Pugsely 1998; Reay 1998; IES 1999; Hodgson and Spours 1999; Reay *et al* 2001; Ball *et al* 2000, 2002; Brooks 2003a, 2003b). D3 can moderate D1 and D2 and position an individual in relation the likelihood of following the prime educational trajectory to higher education.

Constructions of students and of higher education

Table 10.2 below indicates constructions of students or C1. These constructions were highlighted by Heathfield and Wakeford (1991), Archer and Hutchings (2000) and Hutchings and Archer (2001) who specifically examined constructions of students among potential entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups. The colour red indicates a negative construction and the colour green a more positive construction of students.

Table 10.2 Constructions of students from the literature

Middle class boffin who goes to pre-1992 university	C1
[Upper] middle class drinking and partying who goes to pre-1992 university	
Working class with part-time employment who goes to post 1992 institution	

Source: see table 4.4

¹ For example a potential entrant from social class 1 is four and five times more likely to enter higher education than a potential entrant from social class 3m and 5 respectively (Robertson and Hillman 1997; Ball *et al* 2002).

The constructions of students as working-class with part-time employment as seen in the above table 10.2 were found to apply mostly to young people from Asian and Afro-Caribbean background who were non-participants and potential entrants aged 17-30 (See Archer and Hutchings 2000 and Hutchings and Archer 2001).

Table 10.3 below shows constructions of higher education or C2 derived from research on drivers and barriers and on higher education decision-making (Heathfield and Wakeford 1991; Edwards 1993; Blackman 1995; West 1996; Lynch and O’Riordan; Tett 1999, Reay 1998, 2001; Archer and Hutchings 2000; Reay *et al* 2001, Hutchings and Archer 2001; 2002; Ball *et al* 2002; Davies *et al* 2002, Marks *et al* 2003; Brooks 2003a, 2003b).

Table 10.3 *Constructions of higher education derived from the literature*

Differential institutional hierarchies [Oxbridge, pre1992, post 1992)	<div>C2</div>
Differential socio-cultural types of students for different institutions	
Imbued with mystique because cultural possession of traditionally advantaged groups	
For white middle class with money	
For really clever people whose families were willing to make enormous sacrifices	
Luxury that can only be purchased at expense of other family members	
For those who want better employment and more money [but not for oneself]	

Source: see table 4.5

In the above table 10.3 the colour red indicates a negative construction or at least a not so positive construction of higher education as seen from the perspective of potential entrants and participants and non-participants from under-represented socio-economic groups.

Public discourses

Table 10.4 below shows a summary of public discourses alluded to by previous research on the nature and scope of higher education, widening access and participation and educational decision-making (See Davie 1961; Bell and Grant 1974; Willis 1977; Coffield *et al* 1980; Griffin 1985; White 1986; Tomlinson 1987; Lareau 1987; Brown 1990, 1995; Bowe *et al* 1995; McCrone 1992; Weiner 1994;

Lockhardt-Walker 1994; David *et al* 1994, 2001; Robertson and Hillman 1997; Stuart Wells 1997; Reay and Ball 1997; Golthorpe 1997; Weiner *et al* 1997; Ball and Vincent 1997; Mann 1998a; Power *et al* 1998, 1999, 2003; Connor *et al* 1999a, 1999b; Thompson 2000; Reay and Lucey 2000; McDiarmid 2000; Hutchings and Archer 2001; Marks 2002; SHEFC 2004; HEFCE 2005). The colour red indicates a discourse with a negative construction and the colour green a more positive construction of higher education.

Table 10.4 *Public discourses and participation and non-participation in higher education derived from the literature*

Domesticity
Leave school as early as possible to enter full-time employment
English exclusive/public school ethos/Oxford mystique/higher education as badge of middle class superiority
Economic benefit of higher education
Credentialism
Self-improvement
Bettering oneself through educational achievement
Meritocracy
Scottish inclusive/egalitarianism/democratic intellectualism/higher education as escape from poverty for those academically able and badge of nationality

Source: see table 4.6

Some of the public discourses in the above table 9.3 overlap with each other. They might use similar concepts, but different words, because the words used publicly and privately have evolved over the years. Other discourses have been evoked more often than others overall and/or have been written about more recently than others.

Distance and proximity to prime trajectory to higher education

Table 10.5 below shows T1 and T2, the learning trajectories typically associated with middle class and working class participation in higher education according to previous research. Table 10.5 underlines how distance and proximity to the prime trajectory to higher education has been explained by previous research that contrasted educational trajectories according to polarised social class based assumptions and life history factors.

Table 10.5 Middle and working-class educational trajectories derived from the literature

MIDDLE-CLASS T1	WORKING-CLASS T2
Prime trajectory to elite HE	Non-participation in HE
More economic capital	Less economic capital
No pressing needs to make ends meet	More pressing needs to make ends meet
Long term thinking	Short-term thinking
Future is imagined and precise	Future is unimagined and vague
Unlimited geographical horizons	Limited geographical horizons
More cultural capital	Less cultural capital
Culturally close to HE	Culturally distant to HE
Insider	Outsider
No anxiety about HE	Anxiety about HE
Expect to succeed	Fear of failure
Few internalised barriers	Many internalised barriers
Less cultural distance	More cultural distance
Better A-levels/Highers	Lower A-levels/Highers
Expected to enter HE	Not expected to enter HE but if enter HE then ...
Traditional subjects	New and vocational subjects
More Intrinsic motivations	Instrumental motivations
More subject interest per se	Less subject interest per se
More personal development	Qualifications
Pre-1992 universities	Post-1992 higher education institutions
Normal biography	Choice biography
Linear unreflexive transition	Fragmented reflexive transition
Easy transitions and linear narratives	Difficult transitions and broken narratives
Confidence in ability to enter and succeed in HE	Lack of confidence in ability to enter and succeed in HE
HE as natural thing to do	HE as something that involves risks
No ambivalence	Ambivalence
Non decision	Deliberate decision
Decision really made by family	Decision made alone
Guided by parents to go to good university	Goes to local HE
Become same as parents	Become different from parents
Fear of downward mobility or fear of becoming different	Fear of risks and cost (failure/money) and fear and attraction of becoming different
Factual and procedural knowledge of higher education and student life	Lack of factual and procedural knowledge of higher education and student life
Key factors internal to HE	Key factors external to HE

Source: see table 4.7

In the above table 10.5 the colour green shows the prime middle-class trajectory, or T1, from school to higher education while the colour red indicates the working class trajectory that does not expect entry to higher education, or T2 (See Jackson and Marsden 1966; Coffield *et al* 1980; Keen and Higgins 1992; Taylor 1992; Ball *et al* 1995; Bowe *et al* 1995; Roberts and Allen 1997; Skeggs 1997; Tonks 1998; Gorard

et al 1997, 1998, 1999a 1999b; Reay 1998, 2001; Du Bois-Reymond 1998; Lynch and O’Riordan 1998; Connor *et al* 1999a, 1999b; Hodgson and Spours 1999, 2000; Johnston *et al* 1999; Tett 1999; Power *et al* 1998, 1999, 2003; Reay and Lucey 2000; Power 2000; Ball and Vincent 2001; Reay *et al* 2001, 2002; Ball *et al* 2002; Brooks 2003a, 2003b; Lucey *et al* 2003; Gorard and Selwyn 2005; HEFCE 2005).

T1 and T2 represent two polarised educational life trajectories associated with middle class and working-class. The literature described T1 as culturally close to higher education while T2 is depicted as culturally distant from higher education. T2 is depicted as not expecting entry to higher education, but if higher education is entered, then the transition is difficult and fragmented. The assumption is that T1 means easy and linear transition to higher education.

Explanatory mechanisms of greater and lesser likelihood of participation and higher education decision-making

Table 10.6 and 10.7 below show previous explanatory mechanisms of lesser likelihood of participation in higher education and educational decision-making

Table 10.6 *Explanatory mechanisms of greater and lesser likelihood of participation derived from the literature*

Robbins (1963) and Dearing (1997) low aspirations and lack of ambition [family and school]
Weber (1932, 1946, 1978) <i>social closure</i> [assumptions]
Bourdieu (1976, 1977c) cultural capital and <i>habitus</i> [family and school]
Jackson (1968, 1971) <i>hidden curriculum</i> [school]
Foucault (1972, 1980, 1988) <i>disciplinary power</i> and <i>finely graded hierarchy</i> [school]
Gorard <i>et al</i> (1997, 1998, 1990a, 1999b) <i>familial educational trajectories</i> [family]
Du Bois-Reymond (1998) <i>intergenerational family scripts</i> [family]

Table 10.7 *Explanatory mechanisms of educational decision-making processes derived from the literature*

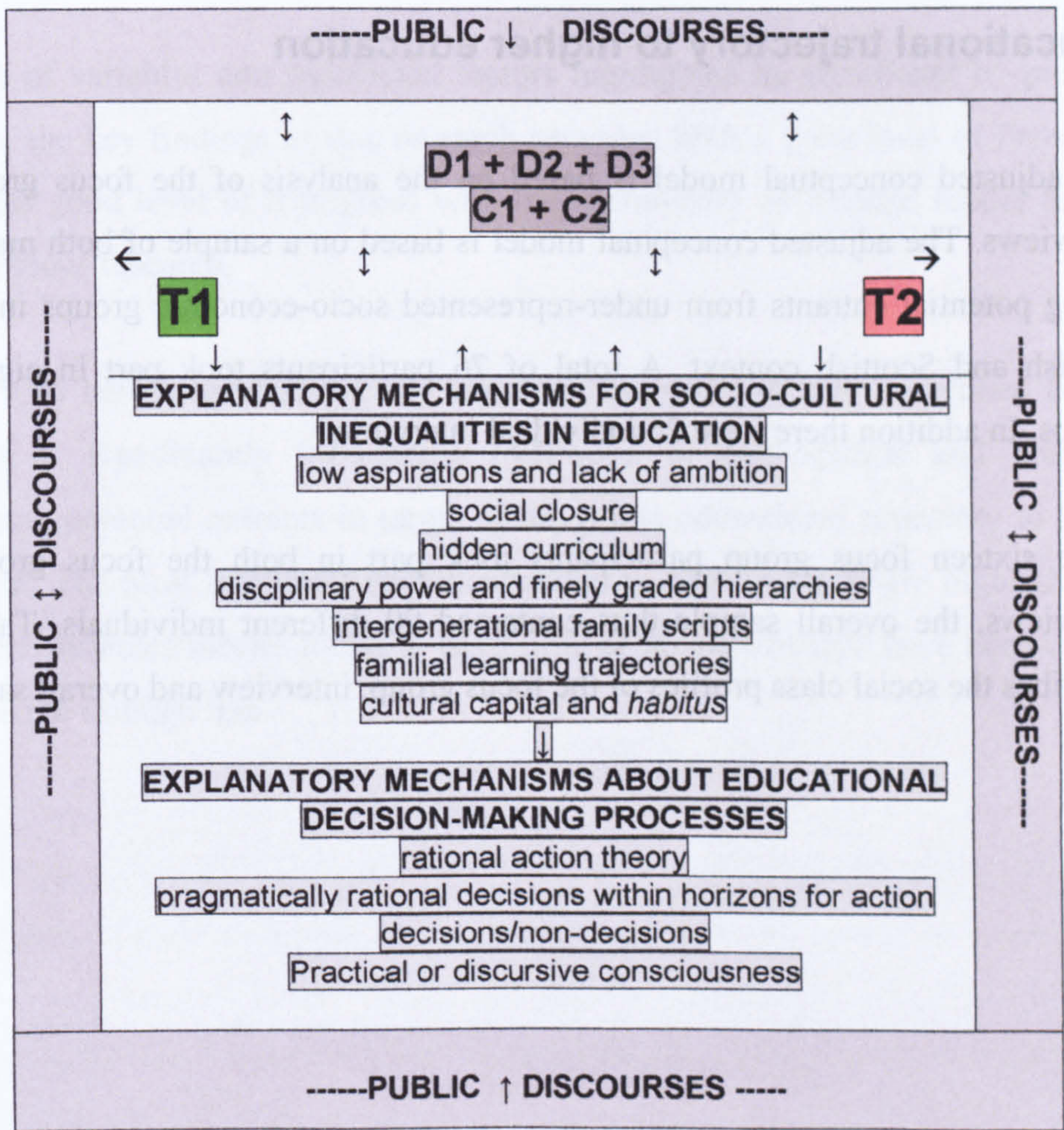
Godthorpe (1995, 1996, 1997, 2000) <i>rational action theory</i> [assumptions]
Du Bois-Reymond (1998) <i>decisions and non-decisions</i> [assumptions]
Bourdieu (1976, 1990b) practical consciousness [assumptions and life history factors]
Giddens (1991) <i>reflexivity</i> and <i>discursive consciousness</i> [assumptions]
Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) <i>pragmatically rational decision-making within horizons for actions</i> [assumptions and life history factors]

The above tables 10.6 and 10.7 show the main explanatory mechanisms underlined and referred to by previous research that have been used extensively by those who invented them and by many other researchers besides. Just as some of the public discourses overlap with each other, so do the explanatory mechanisms. Except for Bourdieu, those who have examined explanatory mechanism have tended to focus either on life history factors as in table 10.6 or on educational decision-making processes as in 10.7 rather than both.

Preliminary conceptual model derived from the literature

Table 10.8 below summarises the conceptual model and refers to D1, D2 and D, to T1 and T2, C1 and C2 and to public discourses, which are put on the outside of the model because they are both external and internalised by individuals and groups.

Table 10.8 Preliminary conceptual model of greater and lesser likelihood of participation in higher education for under-represented socio-economic groups



In table 10.8 above the colour green shows the prime middle class trajectory T1 and the colour red indicates the working class trajectory T2.

According to previous research potential entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups never get to a position where they can contemplate higher education (Bourdieu 1976, 1977c; Gambetta 1987; Lynch and O’Riordan 1998; Reay 1998; Tett 1999, 2000, 2004; Archer and Hutchings 2000; Hutchings and Archer 2001; Ball *et al* 2000, 2002; Reay *et al* 2001, 2002; Davies *et al* 2002; Marks *et al* 2003). Cultural distance seems therefore an appropriate conceptual framework to better understand and better explain mechanisms of greater and lesser likelihood of participation.

Adjusted conceptual model

Key variables and other factors linked to the prime educational trajectory to higher education

The adjusted conceptual model is based on the analysis of the focus groups and interviews. The adjusted conceptual model is based on a sample of both mature and young potential entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups in both an English and Scottish context. A total of 76 participants took part in eight focus groups. In addition there were 26 individual interviews

Since sixteen focus group participants took part in both the focus groups and interviews, the overall sample thus contained 90 different individuals. Table 10.9 describes the social class profiles of the focus group, interview and overall sample.

Table 10.9 Social class profiles of the interview, focus group and overall samples

Social class	Interview sample		Focus group sample		Overall sample	
	Numbers	%	Numbers	%	Numbers	%
1+2	4	16	9	11	10	11
3nm+3m	17	65	34	43	40	46
4+5	5	19	35	45	38	43
TOTAL	26	100	78	100	90	100

Source: see tables 6.7 and 8.3

The focus group sample was also divided into 36 mature and 42 younger and 34 Scottish and 44 English participants. Out of the younger sample of 42 there were eight participants or 19% who were from social classes 1 and 2. Out of the mature sample of 36 participants only one participant or 3% of the mature sample was from social classes 1 and 2.

In terms of variables and significant factors highlighted as significant by previous research, the key findings of this research provided both a good level of fittingness and a less good level of fittingness with the preliminary conceptual model derived from previous research.

Table 10.10 below outlines the key variables and other factors underlined by this research as significantly influencing likelihood of participation and hence as positioning potential entrants in terms of the prime educational trajectory to higher education. The most important variables/factors in each category are highlighted in grey. The variables/factors found to have little or no significance have been deleted with a strike-through line.

Table 10.10 *Key variables and other factors that position the individual in relation to the prime educational trajectory to higher education adjusted to the key findings*

Measurable key variables D1	Social class (father's occupation)
	Educational qualifications
	Sex
	Parental occupation
	Post code
	Ethnicity
	Disability
	Age
	Region/country
Less measurable key variables D2	Mother's educational qualifications
	Type of school attended
	Father's educational qualifications
	Parliamentary constituency
	Electoral wards
Other significant factors D3	Parental expectations/pressure
	Parental encouragement and involvement in homework
	Influence of peers
	Labour market opportunities
	Factual knowledge of higher education
	Religion

Source: tables 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3 and 10.1 and key findings

Table 10.10 shows that as far as D1 is concerned, social class has been repeatedly identified as the most important variable to predict likelihood of having a prime trajectory of entering higher education after leaving school or after one year gap (See Robbins 1963; Dearing 1997; Metcalf 1987; SHEFC 2004; HEFCE 2005). However, in the present research some mature focus participants and interviewees from social class 2 did not enter higher education while some others from social class 4 did. The younger focus group participants and interviewees from social classes 3nm, 3m and 4 were as keen to enter higher education as those from social class 2. The young focus group participants and interviewees had all achieved at least 5 GCSE at grades A-C or 5 Standard Grades at grades 1-2 regardless of social class.

Focus group participants from the Scottish schools [which had 48% and 80% of pupils with free school meals] had a similar proportion of pupils who did not want to enter higher education than focus group participants from the English schools [which had only 19% and 27% of pupils with free school meals] [see table 6.3], making young Scottish focus group participants more likely to enter higher education if the social class profile is taken into account. Thus, in terms of measurable key variables,

or D1, only ‘educational qualifications’, ‘sex’, ‘age’ and ‘region/country’ might be significant to this research. This does not negate the correlation between social class and likelihood of participation in higher education found by numerous previous large-scale statistical research over the past few decades.

The above table 10.10 also shows that in terms of less measurable key variables, or D2, only ‘mother’s educational qualifications’ and ‘type of school attended’ were significant. Finally, in terms of D3 or other significant factors, primarily derived from qualitative research rather than quantitative research as were D1 and D2, all the factors were significant although some were more significant in particular contexts.

Construction of students

Table 10.11 shows how the key findings modified the constructions of students or C1, which had been derived from the literature. The positive constructions are highlighted in green and the negative constructions are highlighted in red. The constructions found in previous research that have also been replicated in this research are in bold. The constructions that were not found to apply in the present research have been deleted with a strike-through line

Table 10.11 *Constructions of students*

Middle class boffins wearing spectacles (-go to pre-1992 university) [m 1 +YED]	C1
Read books and study all the time things like Latin and have no fun and no life [m 1 when leaving school and YSD]	
[Upper] middle class drinking and partying (-1992 university) [younger+ older]	
Never out of the pub, always drinking and having parties at the taxpayers' expense, not going to lectures, hung over, not applying themselves [young and older]	
Rather snobbish, from another planet, refuse to work, unable to work [older]	
Freaks, weirdoes, dressing funny, high society people, having delusions [younger]	
Working class with part-time employment who goes to post-1992 institution who goes to both post and pre-1992 institutions [local for Scotland and away from home for England] [young and mature]	
Both middle class and working-class having a good time and also need to do some effort otherwise fail [younger]	
Want to change world and make it more fair+ protest against war and other injustices + demonstrates in streets or riot in streets [mature 2 when leaving school]	

Sources: table 4.4 and 10.2 and key findings

In table 10.11 ‘mature 1’ means mature participants and interviewees who had not entered higher education from school while ‘mature 2’ refers to mature interviewees

who had entered higher education after leaving school. For constructions of students only found in specific groups and sub-groups the name of the group is indicated in bracket. This research uncovered a wider range of constructions of students. This is not surprising since the overall sample was aged between 17 and 84. However, even among the young mature students the range of constructions is wider than in previous research.

Constructions of higher education

Table 10.12 below shows how the key findings modified the constructions of higher education or C2 derived from the literature.

Table 10.12 Constructions of higher education

Differential institutional hierarchies [Oxbridge, pre-1992, post-1992]	C2
Differential socio-cultural types of students for different institutions	
Imbued with mystique because cultural possession of traditionally advantaged groups [mature and older when young]	
For white middle class with money [older and mature when young]	
For really clever people whose families were willing to make enormous sacrifices [young and mature Scottish]	
Financially and emotionally too risky and luxury that can only be purchased at expense of other family members	
For better employment and more money but not for oneself [7 participants]	
Only for those who are academically able [all]; boring, too difficult, too much effort [mature 1 and young deprived] + siblings/cousins had dropped out [YED and YSD]	
Not for our social class, only for the financially privileged [mature 1 when young]	
Next step or stepping stone; a way to experience life and have a good social life [young but not YSD]; help build character because away from home [young English]	
HE in FE [YSD only], going away from home [young English] or going to a local higher education institution [young Scottish and mature]	
For those who want better employment [all] and a career [mature]; status, respect, societal validation, bettering themselves, upwards social mobility, a nice car and a nice house [all] to break socio-cultural boundaries [mature 1]	
To ask questions and search for answers meaning of life, journey of self-discovery; therapy; long-held dream; to be a role model or to do better than a sibling [mature 1]	
Escape from social exclusion, debt, poverty, dead end jobs [all]; from loss of employment, failed relationships, boredom, depression, emptiness at home or at work, personal inadequacy, dissatisfaction with life and domesticity [mature 1]	
For everyone because increasingly far more accessible in the past 60 years, greater choice of subjects, no longer a social class barrier, no longer a luxury for a few but a necessity because today one need all the qualifications one can get although some short-term sacrifices in money, time and effort needed but the odds are good [all]	

Sources: table 4.5 and 10.3 and key findings

In the above table 10.12 positive constructions are highlighted in green and negative constructions are highlighted in red. The constructions that were not found in this research have been deleted with a strike-through line. ‘Mature 1’ means mature participants and interviewees who had not entered higher education after leaving school while ‘mature 2’ refers to mature interviewees who had entered higher education after leaving school.

It is worth noting that the constructions of higher education mirrored public discourse of government policy with an emphasis on the economic benefit of higher education, credentialism, bettering oneself, self-improvement, meritocracy, societal validation and escape from social exclusion.

Public discourses

Table 10.13 below shows how the key findings modified public discourses derived from the literature. The positive discourses that increase the likelihood of participation for potential entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups by pushing them towards higher education are highlighted in green. The negative discourses that pull potential entrants away from higher education are highlighted in red. The discourses that were not highlighted in this research have been deleted with a strike-through line.

Table 10.13 Public discourses internalised by participants and interviewees

Domesticity
Leave school as early as possible to enter full-time employment or working-class ethos
English exclusive myth/ideology/public school ethos/higher education as a badge of middle-class superiority with
higher education as social skills and character building experience and also higher education for all
Economic benefit of higher education
Credentialism
Self-improvement
Bettering oneself through educational achievement
Meritocracy
Scottish inclusive myth/ideology/democratic intellect/higher education as escape from poverty and badge of nationality/higher education for all academically able

Source: tables 4.6 and 10.4 and key findings

This research suggests that the discourse of domesticity was less internalised than in previous research (See Byrne 1978; Griffin 1985). There was little direct and indirect evidence of the English and Scottish discourses about national educational mythologies. Although the young English participants and interviewees used the public school discourse of education as character building, more of the English participants and interviewees thought that higher education was for all than did the Scottish participants and interviewees who believed that higher education was for those who were academically able.

More Scottish participants thought higher education was an escape from poverty and social exclusion. For all participants and interviewees the most internalised discourses were those of economic benefit of higher education, credentialism, self-improvement, bettering oneself. All participants and interviewees implicitly assumed the possibility of meritocracy, because the strength of the discourse of the economic benefit of higher education overrode any uncertainty they might have had about whether the educational system was meritocratic.

Distance and proximity to prime trajectory to higher education

Table 10.14 below explains how the key findings modified the learning trajectories underlined by previous research which tended to describe polarised learning trajectories associated with middle class and working class participation in higher education.

The colours red and green highlight points before and after the point of optimal cultural distance while the colour yellow indicates the point of optimal cultural distance at which higher education becomes for oneself rather than not for oneself. The arrows indicate what factors might apply to T3 whether these are factors belonging to T1 or T2 or both or another factor entirely.

Table 10.14 Modified distance and proximity to prime trajectory to higher education

T1 Beyond optimal cultural distance	T3 Optimal cultural distance	T2 Before optimal cultural distance
Middle class	Under-represented groups 3nm, 3m, 4 and 5	Working class
Applied to 9% of total sample 10% of focus group sample 19% of young focus group sample Applied to mature interviewees who had entered higher education after leaving school	Applied to 82% of total focus group sample 64% of young focus group sample who fitted neither T1 nor T2 or more T1 than T2 Applied to mature focus group sample and mature interviewees who had not entered HE after leaving school	Applied to 8% of total sample 9% of focus group sample 17% of young focus group sample Did not apply to interviewees because they fitted T3 better Applied to mature interviewees who had not entered HE after leaving school Fitted most older interviewees
Selective or private school to elite university	Comprehensive school to HE	Comprehensive school to leaving school at 16/17
Unlimited geographical horizons [does not apply to Scotland]	← →	Limited geographical horizons [applies to Scotland]
No anxiety about HE	← →	Anxiety about HE
Insider	← →	Outsider
Expectation of success	←	Fear of failure
Long-term thinking	←	Short-term thinking
EXPECTED TO ENTER HE	←	NOT EXPECTED TO ENTER HE
Linear unreflexive transition	← →	Fragmented reflexive transition
HE as natural thing to do	←	HE as not natural thing to do
No ambivalence	← →	Ambivalence
Non-decision	← →	Deliberate decision
Decision made by family	possible drift into HE ←→	Decision made alone
Remain same as parents	→	Become different from parents
Fear of downward mobility	Fear of not moving upward socially	Fear of upward mobility
Fear of emotional and financial risks and costs of not going to HE	← →	Fear of emotional and financial risks and costs of going to HE
Traditional subjects	← →	New and vocational subjects
Pre-1992 institution	← →	Post 1992 institution
Intrinsic motivation	← →	Instrumental motivation
Personal development	← →	Instrumental motivations

Source: tables 4.7 and 10.5 and key findings

Table 10.14 shows how distance and proximity to the prime trajectory to higher education was explained by this research which went beyond contrasting educational trajectories according to polarised social class based assumptions and life history factors.

The above table shows that 9% of the whole sample of this research fitted T1 or the middle class trajectory to higher education from school. Thus, 91% should have therefore fitted T2 or the working-class trajectory and who should have wanted to either leave school at 16 or struggle as an outsider within higher education. However, T1 only applied to 81% of those from socio-economic groups 1 and 2 who participated in this research. More importantly, T2 only applied to 8% of the total sample, 9% of the focus group sample and 17% of the young focus group sample. The trajectory T3 applied to 82% of total sample who fitted neither T1 nor T2, but were really in-between them or even in some instances actually fitted more T1 than T2.

Consequently, previous research described learning trajectories that were too polarised and too simplistic, because they presumed that all the middle class or over-represented groups and all the working-class or under-represented groups are perfectly homogeneous. The polarised model of learning trajectories contradicts the extent of social mobility that exists between socio-economic groups. One third of Jackson and Marsden's (1966) working-class sample had previously belonged to the middle class. Fielding (1995) identified for the decade 1980-1999 a 30% risk for social classes 1 and 2 together to go down one or two socio-economic groups. Goldthorpe *et al* (1987) showed that in the decade 1970-1980 there were 30% of men in class 1 and 42% in class 2 who had fathers in 3m but 75% of 3m or 4 men had fathers from 3m, 4 or 5. The polarised model of learning trajectories is largely assumes too much homogeneity within socio-economic groups. Thus, in all probability T1 would seem to have the greatest fit with the learning trajectories of social class 1 who constituted 11 % population in 2000 and had an API of 72%. Similarly, T2 would seem to have the greatest fit with the learning trajectory of social class 5 which made 11 % of the population in 2000 and had an API of 14%. Consequently, T1 and T2 would apply at best to 12% of the population (ONS 2000: 56; Hansard 2002). [See Appendix 8 on page 504 for more detailed figures of API and socio-economic profiles]

In the present research T1 only fitted the experience of 81% of social class 2 participants and interviewees, who made up 13% of the overall sample. Consequently, in this research T1 cannot fit middle-class if middle-class includes social class 1 and 2. T2 only fitted 6% of socio-economic group 3nm and 3m and only 4% of socio-economic group 4 and 5. Consequently, T2 did not fit with the experience of working-class potential entrants who fitted neither T1 nor T2 but fitted T3 that had mix and

match elements of T2, but more especially of T1. The trajectory T3 was the best fit because participants had reduced cultural distance because they had through consumer culture, media, family, peers and initial education, internalised important public discourses.

Explanatory mechanisms of greater and lesser likelihood of participation and higher education decision-making

Table 10.15 and 10.16 below show previous explanatory mechanisms of greater and lesser likelihood of participation in higher education and educational decision-making. The explanatory mechanisms that were not found to be relevant in this research have been deleted with a strike-through line.

Table 10.15 Explanatory mechanisms of greater and lesser likelihood of participation that applied to participants and interviewees

Robbins and Dearing low aspirations and lack of ambition [family and school]
Weber's social closure
Bourdieu cultural capital and <i>habitus</i> [family and school]
Jackson's <i>hidden curriculum</i> [school]
Foucault's <i>disciplinary power</i> and <i>finely graded hierarchy</i> [school]
Gorard <i>et al</i> <i>familial educational trajectories</i> [family]
Du Bois-Reymond's <i>intergenerational family scripts</i> [family]

Source: tables 4.8 and 10.6

Table 10.16 Explanatory mechanisms of educational decision-making processes that applied to participants and interviewees

Gedthorpe's rational action theory [assumptions]
Du Bois-Reymond's <i>decisions and non-decisions</i> [assumptions]
Bourdieu practical consciousness [assumptions and life history factors]
Giddens's reflexivity and discursive consciousness [assumptions]
Hodkinson and Sparkes' <i>pragmatically rational decision-making within horizons for actions</i> [assumptions and life history factors]

Source: tables 4.9 and 10.7

Just as some of the public discourses overlapped with each other, so did the explanatory mechanisms. Those who have examined explanatory mechanisms have tended to focus either on socio-cultural inequalities in education and hence more on

life history factors or on educational decision-making processes or on assumptions derived from life history factors.

The above explanatory conceptual models underlined by previous studies, research into participation by key variables (See Ashcroft *et al* 1996; Metcalf 1997; Dearing 1997; CVCP 1998; SHEFC 2004; HEFCE 2005) and qualitative research into motivations for entering to higher education (See Robertson and Hillman 1997; Connor *et al* 1999a, 1999b, 1999c) as well as research into inequalities in participation (Reay 1998, 2001; Tett 1999, 2004; Ball *et al* 2000, 2002) have underlined a link between under-represented socio-economic groups and lesser likelihood to enter higher education.

Many researchers have argued that life chances remain highly structured according to social class, sex, ethnicity, and geography and hence according to *habitus* and cultural capital or to their cultural distance or proximity to higher education. Social and cultural processes and contexts help shape outcomes and pathways or educational trajectories in such a way that potential entrants are largely unaware of these structures and of the constraints and pressures they might exert on them. Thus, higher education is perceived differently according to socio-cultural background and the decision-making process is differentiated according to socio-cultural background (Bourdieu 1976, 1977c, 1990c; Beck 1992; Skeggs 1997; Reay 1998; Lynch and O'Riordan 1998; Du Bois-Reymond 1998; Tett 1999; Archer and Hutchings 2000; Reay *et al* 2001; Ball *et al* 2000, 2002).

Robbins (1963) and Dearing (1997) crudely identify low aspirations and lack of ambition as the reason for lesser likelihood of participation by under-represented socio-economic groups and suggest raising aspirations as what they defined as a problem. Weber's theory of social closure was not found to be particularly useful to explain greater or lesser likelihood of under-represented groups participating in higher education.

The Weberian model (Weber 1932, 1946, 1978) of *social closure*, like that of Foucault's (1972, 1980, 1988) *disciplinary power* and *finely graded hierarchies*, emphasises the importance of structure, power relations and dominant discourse which are both enabling for some and constraining for others and hence underline the

importance of unintended effects of purposive action such as buying into unwritten rules, which ultimately enable dominant groups to rely on particular structures and values to defend their interests and exclude alternative claims. Oxbridge has only 20% of its entrants that come from socio-economic groups under-represented in higher education (3nm, 3m, 4 and 5), while it has 80% of its entrants that come from socio-economic groups that are already over-represented in higher education (1 and 2) (Lampl 2000).

For the above reason Jackson's (1968, 1971) *hidden curriculum* (1968) and Foucault's (1972) *disciplinary power* and *finely graded hierarchies* (1972) explain better the role of initial education in adjusting the aspirations of potential entrants to higher education according to social class. Bourdieu's (1971, 1974, 1976, 1977c, 1986, 1988, 1990c, 1993b, 1997) conceptual model of *habitus* and *cultural capital* underlines the importance of the familial repertoire of educational schemata and the transmission of cultural capital in influencing educational perceptions and actions.

According to Bourdieu (1977c, 1990b, 1993b) individuals are complex amalgams of past and present, individual and collective, internalised and externalised who make choices within practical consciousness and without reflexivity by putting a discourse into action without fully thinking about the consequences. Bourdieu (1976: 110) underlines that "families transmit to their children deeply interiorised values that shape their educational trajectories". According to Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) and Bourdieu (1990b, 1993b) any external or internal factor is interpreted internally through an interconnected structure of meaning made up of ideas, pictures or images and memories (derived largely from *habitus*) and inform the process of deciding what to do, usually without the individual becoming fully conscious, just by putting the interpretation into action while the interpretation chosen is aimed at least in part at holding together our structure of meaning. Bourdieu's *habitus* and cultural capital (1976, 1977a, 1977c, 1986, 1990c, 1993b, 1997) inspired Gorard *et al* (1997, 1998, 1999a, 1999b) and Fevre *et al* (1999) and their model of *familial learning trajectories* and Du Bois-Reymond's (1998) *intergenerational family scripts*.

All these explanatory models investigate what are essentially the same phenomena and have many similarities, but with some differences in emphasis. Until the present conceptual model, Bourdieu had generated the most compelling explanatory model

of lesser likelihood of participation by under-represented socio-economic groups, but he had taken over-represented socio-economic groups as his starting-point and deducted that under-represented groups did not have what over-represented groups had, that is a *habitus* in line with the that of school and higher education and a greater amount of cultural capital.

A summary of the conceptual model of greater and lesser likelihood of participation in higher education by under-represented socio-economic groups using optimal cultural distance as an explanatory conceptual framework is outlined in table 10.17 below:

Table 10.17 *Conceptual model of greater and lesser likelihood of participation in higher education*

Previous research		Previous research	
Over-represented socio-economic groups		Under-represented socio-economic groups	
Positive constructions of students		Negative stereotypes of students	
Positive constructions of HE		Negative constructions of HE	
Fear of downward mobility		Fear of upward mobility	
Sample of this research*			
OPTIMAL CULTURAL DISTANCE Not for me becomes for me			
Negative stereotypes of students			
Positive constructions of HE			
Public discourses Fear of not moving upward socially Fear of missing out and of social exclusion because of greater internalisation of public discourses of economic benefit of higher education, credentialism, bettering oneself, self-improvement and meritocracy (so because of influence of consumerism and media, HE is increasingly seen as private commodity and investment)			
Private narratives Mothers as cultural agents for upwards social mobility because of intergenerational frustrated educational ambitions or self having frustrated educational ambitions Academic ability, fittingness to school, lack of fittingness to neighbourhood			
Social capital Small schools, small religious communities, community education, HE in FE in Scotland; siblings and partners			

It is argued that the present explanatory conceptual model is not only more user-friendly, but also takes as its starting point potential entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups rather than potential entrants of students from over-represented socio-economic groups. Optimal cultural distance explains both lesser and greater likelihood of participation by potential entrants from under-represented

socio-economic groups rather than using the greater likelihood of entering higher education of over-represented socio-economic groups as a model and then defining under-represented socio-economic groups in terms of what they do not have.

While some researchers have focussed on explanatory models of greater likelihood of participation in higher education by over-represented socio-economic groups, others have emphasised the mechanisms of the educational decision-making process. Rational action theorists such as Boudon (1974, 1982), Becker (1976, 1992, 1993) and Goldthorpe (1995, 1996, 1997, 2000) suggest that choice is patterned as the result of an evaluation of the projected future costs and benefits and the consequence of a rational self-interested decision. Non-participation is explained in terms of too high a cost relative to available resources. While assumptions of rationality may not be culture-free and may be based upon false beliefs, rational action theorists do not explain how and why people have false beliefs (See Baert 1998). According to Giddens (1991: 125) in today's reflexive settings, "living on 'automatic pilot' becomes more and more difficult to do". However, apart from Giddens, only rational action theorists such as Goldthorpe believe that higher education choice is made within discursive consciousness. Du Bois-Reymond (1998) differentiates between decisions and non-decisions derived from familial intergenerational scripts linked to socio-cultural background. Bourdieu (1976, 1990b, 1993b) argues that higher education choice is linked to familial and socio-cultural *habitus* and made within practical consciousness. Bourdieu and Passeron (1970, 1977) and Bourdieu (1990c, 1993b) assert that *habitus* can be transformative when people have turning points or crises that make them change, but they do not explain how this happens except to say that *habitus* is fluid and is sometimes disjointed when people are going through the process of upward or downward social mobility. Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) argue that career choices are made within horizons of actions and are both rational and non-rational, and hence can be made partially within practical consciousness and/or partially within discursive consciousness. If a decision is made within a turning point in which the individual becomes aware of not being the same as before and having undergone a significant transformation of identity, then the *habitus* of the person is changed, which means that not only practical consciousness, but also discursive consciousness contributes to the repertoire of schemata of the *habitus*. Yet they also assert that the decisions themselves are opportunistic and not the consequence of deliberation and reflection because they are based on partial

information and therefore related within the familiar and the known and directly linked to labour market, family background, socio-cultural group and life history.

This research suggests that individuals and groups make decisions that are more often made within practical consciousness rather than within discursive consciousness. Most young participants and interviewees considered higher education as the next step. Mature interviewees who had entered higher education directly from school largely did so because their mothers had changed the familial learning trajectory and decided that they would go to university. Mature interviewees who had not entered higher education after leaving school rarely reached optimal cultural distance as a direct consequence of having taken steps towards the specific goal of entering higher education. They considered higher education only when they had already reached the point of optimal cultural distance. [See end of chapter 9 pages 294-298 and 340-343] Often a momentum towards higher education starts to build up and propels potential entrants into higher education. Table 10.18 below shows the conceptual model of decision-making processes to enter higher education.

Table 10.18 *Conceptual model of decision-making process to enter higher education*

POINT BEYOND OPTIMAL CULTURAL DISTANCE	POINT VERY CLOSE TO OPTIMAL CULTURAL DISTANCE		POINT BEFORE OPTIMAL CULTURAL DISTANCE
	Sample of this research		
Internalised drivers	Internalised drivers	Internalised barriers	Internalised barriers
Financial and employment drivers greater than barriers	Financial and employment drivers greater than barriers		Financial and employment barriers greater than drivers
Propelled into HE so more a non-decision Practical consciousness because natural thing to do due to being propelled into HE	Navigate into HE so both a non-decision and a decision Practical consciousness if more natural thing to do than not and if limited knowledge and unclear goals Discursive consciousness only if precise strategy and clear goals		Struggle into HE so more a decision Practical consciousness if limited knowledge and unclear goals. Discursive consciousness if precise strategy and clear goals

The conceptual model asserts that higher education choice is directly linked to optimal cultural distance. As potential entrants come closer to optimal cultural distance, higher education choice goes from being a struggle against the current into navigation

between drivers and barriers. Decisions are made within practical consciousness if higher education is more of a natural thing to do than not and if potential entrants have limited knowledge and unclear goals. Decisions are made within discursive consciousness only if potential entrants have acquired a significant amount of knowledge about higher education and have a precise strategy and clear goals.

The conceptual model takes into account changes in the nature of society and labour market (with fewer skilled and semi-skilled manual occupations, more professional, managerial and skilled non-manual occupations, but more casual/part-time work in the service industry, and a greater level of consumerism) the changes in nature and scope of higher education (such as removal of binary line between polytechnics and universities, funding along national lines, new subjects, new and more flexible modes of study, removal of grants, and the introduction of loans and tuition fees). The changing context is associated with changes in the prevalence of public discourses have largely not been taken into account by previous research.

In the same way as the labour market and higher education have changed so have dominant higher education metaphors. In the 1940s Ralph Glasser who came from a poor semi-skilled working-class background in the Glasgow Gorbals went to Oxford as a mature student. He pointed out that

One was surrounded by people with strange tastes and preferences to adapt to or to steer clear of and always the nagging awareness that others seemed to navigate [without] any special care while my vigilance must never relax (Glasser 1990: 13).

Referring to the 1980s, Anderson (1992) pointed out that the image of the sieve sifting out potential entrants had replaced that of the ladder to be climbed by academically talented individuals. Power *et al* (1999, 2003) have made similar observations, but used a different metaphor. They underlined that even the academically successful are likely to have to “navigate higher education”, because changes in the labour market and in the nature and scope of higher education have made higher education “a more complex educational space” (Power *et al* 1999: 337). The metaphor of navigation best fitted the overall sample of the present research.

This chapter revisited the preliminary conceptual model of greater and lesser likelihood of participation by under-represented socio-economic groups proposed in the fourth chapter before formulating a finalised conceptual model derived from adjusting the preliminary conceptual model to fit the key findings. The starting point of the conceptual model was the idea of a specific point when various factors interact to create a point at which optimal cultural distance is reached in such a way as higher education becomes for oneself as opposed to not for oneself. The conceptual model took into account the key factors that make potential entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups more likely to reach this point of optimal cultural distance and hence increase their likelihood of entering higher education.

The conceptual model explains cultural distance as the consequence of negative stereotypes of students that were found to create internalised barriers and a *habitus* culturally distant from higher education. However these negative stereotypes were moderated by positive constructions of higher education that reduced cultural distance and internalised barriers. The positive constructions of higher education were found to be the consequence of the public discourses of the educational benefit of higher education, credentialism, self-improvement, bettering oneself, social inclusion and meritocracy propagated through consumer culture and the influence of the media.

The conceptual model goes beyond previous polarised explanations of distance and proximity to the prime educational trajectory from school to higher education based on contrasting middle and working class assumptions and life history factors. The conceptual model focussed both on explanatory mechanisms of likelihood of participation and on explanatory mechanisms of higher education decision-making.

The next chapter will justify the conclusions reached and how this research has contributed to new knowledge and new ways of understanding greater or lesser likelihood of participation in higher education by potential entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups before suggesting ways of taking the research forward.

The previous chapter formulated a finalised conceptual model of greater and lesser likelihood of participation by young and mature potential entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups that took into account both an English and a Scottish dimension.

This final chapter concludes the research process and underlines how this research contributes to new knowledge. It is divided into four sections:

- summary of finalised conceptual model
- contextualisation of conclusions within policy and research context since 2001
- reflection on research process (including contribution to new knowledge ways forwards)
- concluding remarks

Summary of finalised conceptual model

The conceptual model of greater and lesser likelihood of participation by young and mature potential entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups was derived from adjusting the preliminary model derived from the literature to the key findings.

The sample group upon which the key findings were derived was made up of the focus group sample divided into 36 mature and 42 younger, and 34 Scottish and 44 English participants; out of whom 8 out of 42 younger participants or 19% were from social classes 1 and 2 and 1 out of 36 participants or 3% were from social classes 1 and 2. A total of 16 interviewees had taken part in the focus groups, including one mature interviewee from over-represented socio-economic groups. The additional ten

interviewees all had fathers who were from under-represented socio-economic groups except for one mature interviewee who came from the over-represented socio-economic groups. [See table10.9 for more details on the sample.]

A summary of the conceptual model of explanatory mechanisms of greater and lesser likelihood of participation in higher education by potential entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups using optimal cultural distance as a theoretical framework is outlined in table 11.1 below

Table 11.1 Conceptual model of greater and lesser likelihood of participation in higher education

Previous research		Previous research	
Over-represented socio-economic groups		Under-represented socio-economic groups	
Positive constructions of students		Negative stereotypes of students	
Positive constructions of HE		Negative constructions of HE	
Fear of downward mobility		Fear of upward mobility	
Sample of this research*			
OPTIMAL CULTURAL DISTANCE Not for me becomes for me			
Negative stereotypes of students			
Positive constructions of HE			
Public discourses Fear of not moving upward socially Fear of missing out and of social exclusion because of greater internalisation of public discourses of economic benefit of higher education, credentialism, bettering oneself, self-improvement and meritocracy (so because of influence of consumerism and media, HE is increasingly seen as private commodity and investment)			
Private narratives Mothers as cultural agents for upwards social mobility because of intergenerational frustrated educational ambitions or self having frustrated educational ambitions Academic ability, fittingness to school, lack of fittingness to neighbourhood			
Social capital Small schools, small religious communities, community education, HE in FE in Scotland; siblings and partners			

Previous explanatory models of lesser likelihood of participation in higher education took as a starting point greater likelihood of participation by over-represented socio-economic groups. These explanatory models are *low aspirations and lack of ambition* (Robbins 1963; Dearing 1997), *social closure* (Weber 1932, 1946, 1978), *the hidden curriculum* (Jackson 1968; 1971), *habitus and cultural capital* (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Bourdieu 1976, 1977c, 1990b, 1993b), *disciplinary power and*

finely graded hierarchies (Foucault 1972, 1980, 1988), *familial learning trajectories* (Gorard *et al* 1997, 1998, 1999a, 1999b), intergenerational education family scripts (Du Bois-Reymond 1998). All these explanatory models investigate what is essentially the same phenomena and have many similarities but with differences in emphasis. So far Bourdieu has generated the most compelling explanatory model of lesser likelihood of participation by under-represented in relation to over-represented socio-economic groups. The present model of optimal cultural distance takes under-represented groups as a starting point and explains both their lesser *and* greater likelihood of participation.

A summary of the conceptual model of decision-making processes by potential entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups using optimal cultural distance as a conceptual framework is outlined in table 11.2 below

Table 11.2 Conceptual model of decision-making process to enter higher education

POINT BEYOND OPTIMAL CULTURAL DISTANCE	POINT VERY CLOSE TO OPTIMAL CULTURAL DISTANCE		POINT BEFORE OPTIMAL CULTURAL DISTANCE
	Sample of the this research		
Internalised drivers	Internalised drivers	Internalised barriers	Internalised barriers
Financial and employment drivers greater than barriers	Financial and employment drivers greater than barriers		Financial and employment barriers greater than drivers
Propelled into HE so more a non-decision Practical consciousness because natural thing to do due to being propelled into HE	Navigate into HE so both a non-decision and a decision Practical consciousness if more natural thing to do than not and if limited knowledge and unclear goals Discursive consciousness only if precise strategy and clear goals		Struggle into HE so more a decision Practical consciousness if limited knowledge and unclear goals. Discursive consciousness if precise strategy and clear goals

Previous explanatory models of higher education decision-making such as Goldthorpe (1995, 1996, 1997, 2000) *rational action theory*, Du Bois-Reymond's (1998) *decisions and non-decisions*, Bourdieu's *practical consciousness* (1976, 1990, 1993), Giddens's *reflexivity* and *discursive consciousness* (1991) and Hodgkinson and Sparkes (1997) *pragmatically rational decision-making within horizons for actions* attempted to investigate what is essentially the same phenomena. Only Goldthorpe and Giddens believe that higher education choice is made within discursive consciousness.

Du Bois-Reymond (1998) differentiates between decisions and non-decisions depending on familial intergenerational scripts linked to socio-cultural background. Hodgkinson and Sparkes (1997) claim that educational choices are made within horizons of actions and are both rational and non-rational, hence can be made partially within practical consciousness and/or partially within discursive consciousness. Bourdieu (1976, 1977c, 1990b, 1993b) argues that higher education choice is linked to *habitus* and made within practical consciousness.

The present theoretical model asserts that higher education choice is directly linked to optimal cultural distance. As potential entrants come closer to optimal cultural distance, higher education choice goes from being a struggle against the current into navigation between drivers and barriers. Decisions are made within practical consciousness if it is more of a natural thing to do than not and if the potential entrant has limited knowledge and unclear goals.

Policy and research context since 2001

New government policies for higher education

Since 2000 significant statutory developments have required higher education institutions to adopt more pro-active methods to work towards equality. These were the Human Rights Act 1998 which came into force in October 2000, the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 [SENDA] which came into force in May and September 2002 respectively.

The White Paper *The Future of Higher Education* published in January 2003 set out the Government's plans for radical reform in higher education (DfES 2004d). The key proposals were: raising the aspirations of young people through the *Aim Higher* programme; good-quality accessible 'second-chance' routes into higher education; fairer admissions procedures; better benchmarks for institutions to monitor widening participation; reintroducing grants for those from the poorest families, abolishing up-front tuition fees; and allowing universities to set their own fees which could range from £0 pa to £3,000pa if they fulfilled the requirements on access (DfES 2004a).

No acknowledgement was given to the fact that debts running to thousands of pounds may act as a disincentive. However, the introduction of bursaries and the removal of upfront tuition fees will go some way towards reducing barriers to participation. In this research the focus groups underlined financial and employment issues as key barriers and drivers. Although financial and employment issues were identified as key barriers, when asked what government and institutions of higher education could do to make it more likely for them to enter higher education only 13 out of 78 participants [5 mature and 8 younger] suggested better financial incentives such as removal of upfront tuition fees, reintroduction of grants and bursaries and bigger student loans. In the English context the younger participants from lowest socio-economic groups indicated a buoyant labour market as the greatest barrier to participation rather than financial constraints *per se*. In the Scottish context the greatest barrier was having to travel and the concern of finding suitable courses rather than financial issues.

As is the way of many White Papers, much was left unsaid. Hence in April 2004, DfES published *Widening Participation in Higher Education* (DfES 2004b). This set out the government's proposals for the creation and remit of the Office for Fair Access and its vision for widening participation (DfES 2004c). Attainment is to be raised primarily through the various initiatives aimed at secondary school and at further education:

There are still significant barriers of aspiration facing young people from non-traditional backgrounds, as well as disabled students and those from some ethnic minority groups. 59 per cent of a sample of 16–30 year olds from social classes C1, C2, D and E¹ did not plan ever to go to university, and almost half of the sample had never thought about doing a degree. 45 per cent of the sample agreed that 'the student image is not for me'. And aspirations are often set at an early age – one study found that the decision to participate in higher education was made by the age of 14 by the majority of pupils, and some made the decision even earlier (DfES 2004a: para6.6).

¹ It is noteworthy that even the Government sticks to the old style of classification of occupations [albeit with letters instead of numbers] and eschews completely the Socio-economic Classification which was meant to be used from 2001 onwards.

DfES (2004b) using a social class sample similar to that of this research confirmed a lack of positive identification with the student image. However, 14% more of the sample had even less positive views of higher education than of images of students. This research found that many participants had a negative construction of students and that among younger students the YED group had the most negative images of students. Interestingly, the constructions of higher education itself were far less negative as most participants overall agreed with the dominant policy discourse of the economic benefit of higher education.

Unlike in this research, the lower socio-economic groups were presented as if they were in effect a near-homogeneous mass and no account is taken of the notion that there could exist a range of what might loosely be termed working class intellectualism whereby some persons emerging from materially poor circumstances are in fact wealthy in terms of cultural capital or that some persons from materially poor circumstances have parents (and/or social circumstances) that actively pushed them towards academic success.

Initiatives aimed at secondary school are certainly welcome since this research highlighted that aspirations were often adjusted downwards by schools, teachers and career advisers. The YSD school was an exception and managed through planning and working with various agencies to raise expectations of entering higher education in a school with 80% of pupils eligible for free school meals. This research found a lack of positive encouragement by school and teachers now and in the past seven decades in terms of raising aspirations to enter higher education. Now the overwhelming concern of schools and teachers seemed to get pupils to undertake as many qualifications as possible and to pressure them to achieve the highest possible qualifications but not provide them with the proper support to maximise their achievement at GCSE/Standard Grade and A-level/Higher level. Also, in the English context some pupils with high aspirations were directed towards vocational qualifications despite the pupils and the parents' wishes. In other instances pupils decided to go to further education colleges to do traditional academic qualifications and BTECs as they perceived that school and teachers were more likely to prevent them from entering higher education.

As this research has shown, with most potential entrants sharing the view of the economic benefits of higher education, doing a degree will become less important than doing a degree at a “good” university. Since universities like Bristol and Cambridge are not going to be launching two-year vocational degree programmes, the significant increase in numbers attending university may not, in itself, do much to widen the overall socio-cultural profile. Meanwhile, the Government makes clear that “the bulk of the increase” in student numbers will come through the provision of extra places on two year foundation degree courses. There is a good economic argument for this: Britain needs more skilled technicians (Hindmore 2004). The net result of the expansion of higher education towards the 50% participation rate therefore risks to further reinforce social class disparities in participation.

The White Paper stated that as the top-up fees were introduced the government was determined to ensure that access to higher education was broadened, not narrowed. (DfES 2004b: 2). However, widening access and tuition fees are more likely to be mutually exclusive rather than compatible. Keep and Mayhew (2004: 298) suggest that, “given the current social class composition of higher education entry, there are significant risks that yet greater expansion, unless it is attended by fundamental redistribution of access opportunities, will lead to further declines in social mobility”. Parsons and Bynner (2005) have suggested that social mobility was greater in 1958 than forty years later. To safeguard against potential further decline in social mobility, the Government has placed on any university in England that wishes to apply fees higher than the basic level [£1100 in 2004/2005] the obligation to enter into an Access Agreement with the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) whereby the university will undertake to produce a plan for access, admissions and student support by means of bursaries.

In July 2004, the Higher Education Bill received Royal Assent and entered the statute books. The new grants were offered for the first time in October 2004 and the ‘top-up’ fees introduced in 2006. Meanwhile in Scotland, there has been no recent debate over fees since these were abolished in 2001 following the Cubie Report (1999) and replaced by the Graduate Endowment Scheme, which is confined to students who are ordinarily resident in Scotland, and under which most younger students will pay for their fees after graduation. A number of courses are exempt

from the Graduate Endowment and upfront fees have to be paid.² There are also a number of exempt categories of students for whom higher education has actually become free at the point of delivery.³

No major new insight within access and participation research since 2001

Since 2001 research has continued to use Bourdieu's cultural capital and *habitus* to underline the socially embedded nature of educational choices or decision-making which explains the differential patterns of awareness of higher education and preferences, intentions, motivations and barriers. The focus has been less on barriers than on the socially embedded nature of educational choices and decision-making (Warmington 2002; Ball *et al* 2002; Reay *et al* 2002; Davies *et al* 2002; Brooks 2003, 2003a; and Marks *et al* 2003; Bowl 2003; Lucey *et al* 2003). A lesser focus has been attempt to prevent non-traditional students from dropping out (Laing and Robinson 2003) and examining non-traditional and traditional students' expectations of higher education (Bennett and Kottasz 2006).

However, much research has tended to assume that middle class and working-class were homogeneous groups polarised in relation to each other. Yet within the present sample of a minority of middle class and a majority of working-class participants and interviewees there was both less polarity and less homogeneity as there were considerable differences in the way in which young and mature people from similar background made educational choices and there were often more similarities than differences despite different backgrounds.

As in this research Reay *et al* (2002), Davies *et al* (2002), Marks *et al* (2003); Brooks (2003) found that some key incentives such as money and employment, personal factors and family were also key disincentives. They also found that intrinsic and extrinsic motivations were very difficult to disentangle. As in this research Reay *et al*

² Courses preparing for a higher diploma or certificate; post-graduate courses; courses which prepare for a qualification from a professional body [para5.1]; first degrees in nursing or midwifery.

³ See the *Graduate Endowment (Scotland) Regulations 2001* and the regulations set out the application of the *Education (Graduate Endowment and Student Support) Act 2001* which list these as being: over 25 at the start of their course; married prior to the start of the course; have supported themselves out of their own earnings for a total of at least three years prior to the start of the course [para4.1]; qualify for an allowance under the Students' Allowances (Scotland) Regulations 1999 by dint of being a lone parent or of being disabled [para4.2]

(2002) found that mature students tended to prioritise the process of doing a degree rather than the outcome. Murphy and Roopchand (2003) found that women of all ages were more likely to give intrinsic reasons and that men of all ages were more likely to give instrumental incentives.

Unlike in this research, majority of mature students in Warmington (2002) saw the influence of school and teachers as largely positive. Some participants were pushed to stay on by teachers but decided that they were not going to do so because the pressure limited their autonomy and put them in a subordinate position while the expected benefit was not enough to justify staying on. The minority of respondents who did not see the influence of school and teachers as positive felt themselves marginalised by schools and by teachers.

No major new insight has emerged from research since 2001 except perhaps that of Osborne and Shuttleworth (2002, 2004) who suggest that many applicants coming from deprived areas do not appear to be themselves socially disadvantaged. This research casts doubt on the validity of poor neighbourhoods as a performance indicator to measure access and widening participation. This research has shown that in both the English and the Scottish contexts going to a school in deprived areas can be a strategy to increase university chances.

Reflection on the research process

Many things did not go as expected

Upon reflection it is clear that many things did not go as expected. Because of the small-scale nature of this research it was difficult exert control on aspects of the research that depended on the co-operation of gatekeepers. The focus groups were not of equal size and were not gender balanced. The time allocated was variable and in some instances things had to be done very fast in order to have time to finish. Doing pilot interviews was helpful but the first two people interviewed had a lot to say so they gave an impression that all participants would be similar. In order to ensure maximum responsiveness it was found that for some participants probing, prompting and asking participants to reflect was a doomed enterprise, as they tended

to dry up or feel self-conscious or become restless, cutting short the interview. Other participants responded well to a greater level of self-disclosure from me. Thus, such interviews resembled more a social interaction than an interview. A frustrating problem with the interviews is that it was sometimes difficult to challenge interviewees who appeared to contradict themselves. Contradictions did not always become obvious until the interview was transcribed and then it was too late to ask certain pertinent questions. Thankfully, these contradictions rarely occurred.

Interviews provide ethnographic and biographical information, but they can also be therapeutic as participants gain new insights by expressing problems, frustrations and reflecting on some issues for the first time ever. Often I had the impression of seeking out reality together with the participants. I felt that interviews were often a learning experience for both the participants and me. Bourdieu (1993b: 29-30) believes that sociologists need to take a step back; it is not that the sociologist is too far removed from lived social life to study it, but that in a certain sense is not removed far enough in order to uncover all the presuppositions inherent in the theoretical posture as an external remote, distant or quite simply, non-practical, non-committed, non-involved vision. An unexpected aspect of the research was how the participants had an effect on me, although some of them affected more than others. I was concerned to give voice to what the participants said and at times found it difficult to step back during the analysis of the data.

Good fittingness and non-fittingness with previous research

The major criticism of qualitative methods is that they are impressionistic, non-replicable, non-verifiable and lack reliability, validity, objectivity and generalisability. Theories are constructed to predict and explain phenomena, which is particular to the context and which constitutes the evidence of the phenomena and its reliability for justifying claims about phenomena. The design and methodology of this research aimed to enable new insights to be gained and theory to be advanced by formulating a conceptual model. Although this research was embedded in particular contexts, it is certainly replicable in purpose and in procedures and can be transferred to similar contexts

This research was based on a design that sought to reliably establish phenomena in multiple ways before generating theory through the use of focus groups with ranking exercises, discussions and in-depth individual interviews. A multiplicity of methods was chosen because it adds rigour, breadth and depth to any investigation. Since interviews, focus groups discussing and ranking exercises are different methods and each group and each interviewee is different, I took care to ensure that different methods of gathering independent data sources actually addressed the same issue.

I was also aware that my personality, age and sex and assumptions may have some influence on my interactions with participants. Thus I was careful not to make assumptions about the participants and interviewees. I made it clear to them that I did not want to influence their opinions and that they were free to say what they wanted whether positive or negative about higher education or about school and teachers. I took care to appear approachable and not threatening. To reinforce the approachable and non threatening aspect I dressed casually rather than formally and told the participant that I was a student doing my own research. Thus, rather than an insider representing authority, I aimed to appear before them not as an insider in a position of authority, but as a student engaged in a formal learning process, just as they were.

When compared to similar contexts the main findings and theoretical model showed both a level of fittingness with other research and a certain amount of non-fittingness that is essential to generate further insights. Not only did this research have a sound design which sought to reliably establish phenomena in multiple ways before generating theory, it also had logical and persuasive link between the evidence produced and the conclusions drawn and plausible rival alternative explanations for the evidence eliminated. I took care not to appeal to emotion, popular sentiment or authority. I was also careful not to have implicit assumptions and not to use irrelevant premises. Alternative explanations for the conclusions were ruled out using logical argument in order to persuade rather than playing to existing converts. As few explicit assumptions as possible were used for which no direct evidence was available.

Following Jipson and Paley (1997:4) this research aimed to contribute to the way theory is advanced so that it is more insightful and more compelling, but I found it difficult to do this, as there was a continual struggle against the mainstream

discourses of policy makers and researchers (for example Metcalf 1997; Dearing 1997; DfES 1998a, DfEE 2004b) who consider non-participation or lesser likelihood of participation of potential and qualified potential entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups as a problem-to-be-solved in general and more especially as a problem of low aspirations from potential entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups. It is hoped that this research nonetheless pushed the boundaries of knowledge and gave useful insights into greater and lesser likelihood of participation by under-represented socio-economic groups.

As Standish (2001) points out, what is taken as given determines the data collected and how it is interpreted. The problem is that whatever counts as research remains within what is already known and this tendency towards a normalisation of research will necessarily blunt the edge of enquiry. Pring (2001) also draws attention to the fact that pushing the boundaries of knowledge has to be at the expense of bodies of knowledge being seen as unquestionable. Since the boundaries of knowledge can only be pushed, and errors can only be discovered, by constantly questioning accepted truths, originality of thinking, persistence and seeking truth despite possible criticism and derision are virtues needed by researchers.

Explicitly framing non-participation and lesser likelihood of participation of potential entrants from under-represented groups as a problem of low aspirations, bad application of policy and elitism, and self-contradictory policies enables researchers and policy makers to blame in turn: potential and qualified potential entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups for low aspirations; institutions for not being inclusive enough and government policy for its inherent self-contradictions. This research suggests that the problem-to-be-solved approach might actually contribute to the perceived on-going problem as many potential entrants might still be afraid of making true negative stereotypes of themselves as under-represented socio-economic groups failing in higher education. Hence they might want to exclude themselves from participating in higher education in order to avoid the risk of failing (See Lynch and O'Riordan 1998; Archer and Hutchings 2000, Reay 2001). The present research suggests that the influence of the consumer culture and the media in promoting higher education as the thing-to-do because of its economic benefit and/or as part of programme of self-improvements seemed to have had a non negligible effect as the main fear was not the fear of failing in higher education but

failing in life by not entering higher education. It would be regrettable if researchers and policy makers were to lessen the positive influence of the media and consumer culture by continuing to claim that under-represented socio-economic groups should have higher aspirations and institutions should be more inclusive and government policy less self-contradictory.

Contribution to new research

The present research adds to the criticisms of the unidimensionality and rational action approach in government policy and associated research. The historical, cultural and sociological importance of decision-making processes rather than the technical rational approach assumed and advocated by economists was highlighted (See Boudon 1974, 1982; Becker 1976, 1993; Goldthorpe 1995, 1996, 1997, 2000). However, the research also underlined that potential entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups had internalised an individualistic and consumer based discourse in the way they constructed higher education. Unlike in Reay *et al* (2001) Ball *et al* 2002 and Archer *et al* (2003) the present research showed very little evidence of a sense of a much greater risk in opting for higher education for young and mature potential entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups or of younger potential entrants from under-represented groups who aimed to go to lower status higher education institutions, although mature potential entrants preferred new universities because they would encounter other mature students.

Also, emphasised was the importance of negative stereotypes of students while positive constructions of higher education emerged as a key factor from the complexities and contradictions of how people construct, deconstruct and reconstruct their previous and future educational experiences.

This research suggests that all actions are guided by internalised representations or personal constructs largely derived from the degree of internalisation of transgenerational familial scripts and societal forces such as public discourses that operate at multiple levels and are moderated by schools and teachers through disciplinary power and finely graded hierarchies and self-matching to belong to homogenous groups. The precise influence of discourses is difficult to evaluate precisely because, once internalised, they become an integral part of someone's identity.

The methodological approach was both inductive, because theory was derived from empirical phenomena, and deductive, because it was also based on previous theories while logical argumentation was used to make constant comparisons at all levels. This research offered a conceptual model of optimal cultural distance whereby extant findings and theories were extended in conjunction with qualitative case analysis to specify more carefully the circumstances in which it might offer potential for explanation. The conceptual model has a degree of fittingness with other research while still expanding further the boundaries of knowledge. It emphasises that the interaction of socio-cultural factors, societal forces and ideologies on decision-making is not to be understood as external influences on the self but as having become an integral part of the self by having been internalised.

Possible ways forwards

Possible ways forward might be to replicate this research to see the extent of its fittingness and transferability to similar or slightly different contexts and/or to follow up some of the participants to see what happened to them and compare what they said for this research in terms of drivers, barriers, constructions of students, constructions of higher education, influence of initial education and family with their views of several years later.

Other ways forward are: to repeat this research in different contexts in terms of socio-economic groups, institutions and subjects and in particular Foundation Degrees; to repeat this research with younger participants who have just entered secondary school and also to investigate their siblings, parents and grand-parents in order to focus in more depth on aspirations, constructions of students and higher education and the effect of familial learning trajectories and intergenerational scripts; young non-participants or young people who have decided not to enter higher education could also be followed over a period of several years to investigate not only aspirations and familial influences, but also the influence of public discourses.

This research generated a conceptual model that other researchers can use to explain, describe and predict non-participation of potential entrants from under-represented

socio-economic groups. With claims that poor neighbourhoods might be flawed as performance indicators for widening participation (Osborne and Shuttleworth 2002, 2004) and that social mobility has decreased over the past few decades (Blanden *et al* 2005), a theory of the influence of ideologies and discourses on mechanisms of upwards and downwards social mobility could be the most appropriate way forward. To investigate mechanisms of social mobility would make it possible to test and better adjust the present theoretical model. It would also further reduce the gap between microanalysis of qualitative biographical and ethnographic research and macro-analysis of quantitative research of trends in participation.

Concluding remarks

Many researchers have argued that the current funding arrangements ensure entrenched socio-economic disparities and actually inhibit wider participation (See Hodgson and Spours 1999, 2000; Woodrow 1999a, 1999b 2000, 2001; Callender 2001; Watt 2001; Mackie 2001; Osborne 2001; Reynolds 2001; Davies *et al* 2002). The assumption underpinning the position of Metcalf (1997) and DfES (1998a, 1998b, 2004a, 2004b) that young people from under-represented groups do not participate in higher education fails to acknowledge the fact that the participation rate of mature students has recently dropped and that the education system, the labour market and other socio-cultural factors might also create barriers.

This research has shown that the education system, labour market opportunities and socio-cultural factors or societal forces, more than funding structures or low aspirations, do create invisible barriers and that these structural invisible barriers operate to a great extent through the disciplinary power of the school and its finely graded hierarchies that help generate or strengthen negative stereotypes of students that serve to create internalised barriers that maintain a sense of socio-cultural identity between insiders and outsiders to higher education. These negative stereotypes and invisible barriers or cultural distance can be moderated by familial history, academic ability and personal circumstances. The interaction of all these factors will perhaps always draw a line of demarcation and hence always maintain a social rather than academic inequality of access and participation. To reduce cultural distance, internalised barriers and negative stereotypes, Thomas (2001b) suggests

strategic institutional initiatives that both raise their awareness and aspirations and make higher education institutions more inclusive and more accessible while Blanden *et al* (2005) suggest an academically selective school system. This research suggests that these can be the best way to reduce cultural distance along with belonging to small religious groups who value educational achievement.

Finally, this research has made clear that mechanisms of greater and lesser likelihood of participation are complex and that low aspirations and funding structures are less important than the education system, socio-cultural factors or societal forces. Furthermore, under-represented groups do not necessarily have low aspirations. The focus group participants and interviewees, most of whom were from under-represented groups, showed that they had to a greater rather than lesser extent internalised the discourses of the economic benefit of higher education, self-improvement and meritocracy. Indeed, they demonstrated far higher academic and life aspirations than some potential entrants from the privileged classes:

I don't want to end up like my mum, always short of money and always in debt and on benefit. For me higher education and doing a degree means to have the possibility to have a better life [Angela 17 YSD social class 4]

I think university is to gain respect, because it shows determination, and you get a status and a better job. [...] I just know that I want a good job, a nice house and a good car. [...] I also want to get better at English because I enjoy that. I just want to continue learning. I don't want to get stuck like a rock in a river and life is rushing past me. [...] I am not confident, but this will not stop me. [...] I want to get really good A levels, then go to a really good, top class university, then get an excellent job that makes me happy [Tess 17 YED social class 3m].

*I want to be A1 at cricket and football, and all the other games, and to make my hands keep my head against any fellow, lout or gentleman. [...] I want to carry away just as much Latin and Greek as will take me through Oxford respectably [Tom social class 1 in *Tom Brown's Schooldays* - Hughes (1857/1963: 262)]*

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Acronyms

ACORN	Geodemographic [postcodes] classifier
APL	Accreditation of Prior Learning
APEL	Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning
API	Age Participation Index -
AGNVQ	Advanced General National Vocational Qualifications introduced in 1996 [from NVQs level 3 and above]
AVCE	Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education
BTEC	British Technical Education Council
CNAA	Council for National Academic Awards
COSHEP	Council of Scottish Higher Education Principals
CSE	Certificate of Secondary Education [England] established in 1951
CVCP	Commission of Vice Chancellors and Principals – Universities UK since 2000
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DES	Department of Education and Science
FEFC	Further Education Funding Council – created in 1992
GNVQ	General Vocational Qualifications introduced in 1996 [NVQs level 1 and level 2]
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education established in 1988 to replace O levels which had been introduced in 1951
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England – created in 1992
HEIPR	Higher Education Index Participation rate
HESA	Higher Education Statistical Agency
HMSO	Her Majesty's Stationary Office
HNC	Higher National Certificate – largely replaced by Foundation Degrees in 2001
HND	Higher National Diploma – largely replaced by Foundation Degrees in 2001
ILEA	Inner London Education Authority
LA	Local Authority
LEA	Local Education Authority
MEFE	Mature English in Further Education – name of focus group in present research
MSFE	Mature Scottish in Further Education – name of focus group in present research
MEHE	Mature English in Higher Education – name of focus group in present research

MSHE	Mature Scottish in Higher Education – name of focus group in present research
MOSAIC	Name of a geodemographic [postcodes] classifier
NAB	National Advisory Body for Public Sector Higher Education – operated until 1988
NIACE	National Institute for Adult and Continuing Education
NQF	National Qualifications Framework (NQF) – established to more easily compare academic and vocational qualifications in England
NVQ	National Vocational Qualifications [England] – introduced in 1986
ONC	Ordinary National Certificate [equivalent to 2 A-levels] from BTEC
OND	Ordinary National Diploma [equivalent to 3 A-levels] from BTEC
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OPCS	Office for Population and Census Survey
PCFC	Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council [1988 to 1992]
RAE	Research Assessment Exercise – see under glossary for more detail
SCE	Scottish Certificate of Education
SEB	Scottish Examination Board – established in 188 until 1997
SED	Scottish Education Department – until 1988 when replaced by SOED
SEED	Scottish Executive Education Department – created in 1999
SHEFC	Scottish Higher Education Funding Council – created in 1992
SCQF	Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework
SCOTVEC	Scottish Vocational Education Council
SENDA	Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (2001) – an amendment to the Disability Discrimination Act (1995)
SOED	Scottish Office Education Department – from 1988 to 1992
SOEID	Scottish Office Education and Industry Department – from 1992 to 1999
SQA	Scottish Qualifications Authority – created in 1997 upon the merger of SCOTVEC and SEB
SRHE	Society for Research into Higher Education
TQA	Teaching Quality Assessment – see under glossary for more detail
UCAS	Universities central admissions system – was University and Colleges Central Admissions or UCCA until 1992
UFC	Universities Funding Council – replaced UGC from 1988 to 1992
UGC	Universities Grants Committee established in 1916 to centrally fund universities – replaced by UFC in 1988
YE	Young English – name of focus group in present research
YS	Young Scottish – name of focus group in present research
YED	Young English Deprived – name of focus group in present research
YSD	Young Scottish Deprived – name of focus group in present research
YPR	Young Participation Rate which is a participation rate calculated from the experiences of real cohorts defined relative to the school year used by HEFCE 2005 and SHEFC 2004

Glossary

Access Performance Indicators	The percentage of students who attended a school or college in the state sector; the percentage whose parents' occupation is classed as skilled manual, semi-skilled, or unskilled; and the percentage whose home area, as denoted by its postcode, is known to have a low proportion of 18 and 19 year olds in higher education
ACORN	Geodemographic [postcodes] classifier owned by CACI Limited used by HEFCE and SHEFC (54 group version based on 1991 Census and current 56 group version based on 2001 Census)
A Levels	One of several academic qualifications that gives entry to higher education [2 A Levels at E grade is the minimum qualification]; A Levels were introduced in 1951 as part of the [English] Certificate of Secondary of Education – after 2000 all A Level programmes became fully modularised, carried increased coursework weighting and were split into Advanced Subsidiary (AS) and A Level (A2) [academic and vocational subjects could be combined]; O levels also introduced in 1951 were replaced by GCSEs in 1988
AGNVQs	Introduced in 1996 also known as NVQs level 3 which are equivalent to A levels; after 2000 became known as vocational A levels and more recently became known as Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education or AVCE
API	Age Participation Index – the number of home domiciled young initial entrants under 21 to full-time and sandwich undergraduate courses expressed as a proportion of the average number of 18 to 19 year old in the United Kingdom for that given year
Binary system of higher education	The 1966 White Paper A Plan for Polytechnics and Other Colleges (DES 1966) made the public sector institutions of higher education into one of the main pillars supporting higher education in parallel with the universities. The universities were funded by the UGC until 1988 and then by the UFC until 1992. The public sector institutions (teacher training colleges, colleges of higher education, technical colleges, and polytechnics) were under the control of the LEAs, or Local Authorities in Scotland, and funded by the National Advisory Body for public sector higher education (NAB). In 1992 the Further and Higher Education Act removed the binary divide and all higher education institutions became funded along national lines.

BTEC	British Technical Education Council – also name by which vocationally based courses equivalent to 2 or 3 A levels accredited by the same council tended to be known
CNAA	Council for National Academic Awards – established in 1964 to validate courses and make awards comparable to those in universities to replace the External London system that was rigidly centralized
CVCP	Commission of Vice Chancellors and Principals – Universities UK since 2000 (128 members and three national councils: England and Northern Ireland, Universities Scotland and Higher Education Wales)
Elite system of higher education	One with less than 15% participation
GCSEs	Qualification established in 1988 to replace O levels which had been introduced in 1951; vocational GCSEs equivalent to two non-vocational GCSEs carry a double grade and became available in 2002 in a range of subjects, including Business, Engineering, health & Social care and Travel and Tourism.
Higher Grades	Introduced in Scotland in 1888 as part of the Leaving Certificate in order to have a specific university entry qualification [Higher Grade] along with Lower Grades; the Leaving Certificate until its replacement in 1962 by the Scottish Certificate of Education with O Grades and Highers. Standard Grades gradually replaced O Grades from 1986; in 1999 the Higher Still programme which brought together academic and more vocational and work-related subjects was introduced
HEIPR	Higher Education Index Participation rate which is an extension of the API that takes into account both full-time and part-time students aged 17-30 to measure progress towards the 50% target of participation set by the Labour Government
Mass system of higher education	One with more than 15% but less than 40% participation
Mature student/ participant/ interviewee	One over the age of 21

Middle class	Professional and managerial or professional and intermediate classes or social classes 1 and 2
MOSAIC	Name of a geodemographic [postcodes] classifier owned by Experian Limited and used by HEFCE AND SHEFC (52 groups version based on 1991 Census and current 61 groups version based on 2001 Census)
NAB	National Advisory Body for Public Sector Higher Education - the public sector institutions were under the control of the LEAs, or Local Authorities in Scotland and funded by the National Advisory Body for public sector higher education until 1988
Participation in higher education	The extent to which sub-groups are represented across higher education institutions and subjects. Widening participation therefore means seeking a more representative cross-section of potential entrants across universities and subjects
Pre-1992 universities	HEIs that had acquired university status before 1992 also known as old universities
Post-1992 universities	Public sector institutions that became universities after 1992 when the binary system was removed also known as new universities
Public sector higher education	The public sector contained polytechnics, teacher training colleges, colleges of higher education and technical colleges
QCA	The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) [England] was established in 1997 to set national tests at 7, 11 and 14 and to validate exam boards eg GCSEs, A levels and later AS levels that are validated by various approved exam boards
RAE	Research Assessment Exercise – can bring substantial financial rewards and favourable publicity in national press
SCOTVEC	Scottish Vocational Education Council - merged with the Scottish Examinations Board in 1997 to form SQA
SCQF	The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (is a partnership between the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) for Higher Education and Universities UK which is supported through the Scottish Department for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning. What distinguishes the Scottish SCQF from the English NQF is that it includes all levels of education and training(from Access 1 at SCQG level 1 to Highers at SCQF level 6 to Honours degree at SCQF level 10 and PhD at SCQF level 12). In contrast, the English National Qualifications Framework is separate from the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications.

SQA	Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) replaced both the Scottish Examination Board (SEB) and the Scottish Vocational Education Council (SCOTVEC) in 1997; SQA and is now the single body responsible for all Scottish qualifications (i.e. schools, further education colleges, workplaces and education centres) other than those offered by universities and professional bodies. Unlike England, Scotland has a single awarding body for both vocational and academic education 14-19.
TQA	Teaching Quality Assessment – brings far less financial reward and little media publicity than RAE
UCAS	In terms of equivalency with England, the Universities and Colleges Admission Service (UCAS) considers Highers to be worth slightly more than AS-level and Advanced Highers to be equivalent to A-levels
Universal system of higher education	One with more than 40% participation
Widening access	Increasing the representation of particular subgroups that are under-represented in higher education.
Working-class	Skilled non-manual, skilled manual classes, semi-skilled and unskilled classes or social classes 3nm, 3m 4 and 5 or all classes that are not social classes 1 and 2
Young student/ participant/ interviewee	One under the age of 21
YPR	Young Participation Rate which is a participation rate calculated from the experiences of real cohorts defined relative to the school year used by HEFCE 2005 and SHEFC 2004

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1.1

FOCUS GROUPS SCHEDULE

- 1 Drivers and barriers
 - a. 4 drivers and 4 barriers written on post-its then put into category
 - b. 3 stickers/votes per participant to be allocated to driver and barrier categories
 - c. Discussion about drivers and barriers
 - d. Key drivers that could override all the barriers
 - e. Key barriers that could override all the barriers
 - f. Discussion about key drivers and barriers
- 2 Constructions of higher education and of students
 - a. When you left school/were younger, what did you think university students were like?
 - b. Have you changed your mind since then? In what ways?
 - c. What did you think higher education is/was for and who is/was it for?
 - d. What kind of people do a degree?
 - e. What do you think students actually do?
- 3 What could government and institutions do to make it more likely for you or people like you to enter higher education

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

- 1 How would you describe your area and the kind of house you are living in at the moment?
- 2 How would you describe the area and the kind of house you were living when you were at school? [Mature only]
- 3 What is/was the occupation of your parents?
- 4 What were their educational qualifications when they left school?
- 5 What kind of memory did your parents have from their school days?
- 6 What kind of memory do you have of your school days?
- 7 What qualifications did you have/will you have when you leave school?
- 8 What do/did you think your teachers expected you to do after leaving school?
- 9 If you had the qualifications for higher education – did you apply to go on to higher education, if not why not?
- 10 What course are you doing at the moment [Mature]?
- 11 What A levels/Highers are you doing at the moment [Young people]
- 12 How do you feel about this course/A levels/Highers?
- 13 Is it linked to any specific employment opportunities?
- 14 Have you done any other courses in the past? [Mature only]
- 15 What is your current situation in relation to higher education [If not already in higher education]?
- 16 What higher education course do you think of applying for/are you doing?
- 17 What are your motivations for wanting to apply to do a degree/for your choice of degree?
- 18 Did/do you have any dreams or ambitions in relation to higher education?
- 19 How many people do you know that were at school with you that want to enter/went to higher education?
- 20 Do/did you know anyone in your family and in your neighbourhood will go/went to higher education
- 21 What did/will your friends do after leaving school?
- 22 What do/did you think your parents expected you to do after leaving school and when do/did they expect you to leave school?
- 23 At that time, what did you think university students were like?
- 24 Have you changed your mind since then? In what ways?
- 25 What did you think higher education was for and who was it for?
- 26 What kind of people do a degree?
- 27 What do you think students actually do?
- 28 What is the one thing about all other things that makes you want to enter higher education?
- 29 Is there a key barrier that would prevent you from wanting to enter higher education/applying to higher education/from having started a degree/finishing your degree?

FOCUS GROUPS/INTERVIEWS: BACKGROUND INFORMATION FORM

What qualifications did you have when you left school? [Mature]

How many GCSEs A-C: [England]?

How many Standard Grades 1-2: [Scotland]?

Mother's occupation

Father's occupation

Name and address and phone number or email if you are willing to be interviewed:

APPENDIX 3

[The drivers are highlighted in green and the barriers in red]

FOCUS GROUPS: BRAINSTORMING AND RANKING EXERCISES

YE [12] Driver categories	No. of Votes	Rank	Drivers
Social life	10	1	Make new friends Become more socially aware and get to know people better Socialisation Social life Party Develop social skills Socialise and improve social skills Enjoyable times Meet new friends Socialising
Employment	6	2	Better job Better job prospects – better pay Better job prospects Wider range of job prospects
Qualifications	5	3	Beneficial qualifications Qualifications Better qualifications
Money	2	4	More money Earn more money long term because better qualified
Knowledge	2	4	Learn about subjects that I am interested in Get more knowledge x2 Learn subjects that I have not done before
Self-improvement	1	5	More education Improve education Know own potential Discover own potential Learn about myself
Independence	1	6	Independent experience Find out how to live away from home and be independent To become independent x2 Being independent Get away from home Get away from family life Freedom

YE [12] Barrier Categories	No. of Votes	Rank	Barriers
Money	12	1	Cash flow problems Financial situation Costs a fortune Still dependent on parents (fees) Fees Expensive (fees and accommodation) Money Expense Cost Costly Want money now Too much money (debts) Money (expensive) Maybe not wanting to go if one has job Want to earn money Could be earning hard cash Could be earning money if went straight into a job Not making lots of money straight after A levels
Isolation	8	2	Isolation from family Isolating Away from family and friends Missing friends and family Making a new start –friends etc New area (away from home) Area/location Lonely Leave security Having to leave your family and friends Boyfriend Scared Relatives Living away from home Having to look after myself Independence Doing everything yourself Too many people at university Not independent enough
Effort	5	3	Too lazy Might not enjoy it Too demanding which may lead to health problems Extremely demanding Struggle Had enough of studying Hard work + exams x2 Essays for another 3 years Another 3 years of essays More essays for the next 3 or 4 years Having to carry on studying for another 3 years
Time	3	4	Too long 3-5 years of boredom Time consuming if you can already find a job Time consuming Could be a waste of time if no job after degree

YED [12] Driver Categories	No. of Votes	Rank	Drivers
Qualifications	12	1	Better qualifications for better job x4 Easier to get higher paid jobs with the extra qualifications Chance to gain more qualifications Qualifications that earn respect Good qualifications for a good job People respect university grades To get a decent education and a number of qualifications to help in the future
Better job prospects	9	2	Better prospects for when I'm older Good connections with employers A well-paid job when I leave High paid job A well paid job Higher paid job Better paid job
Social life	9	3	Chance to meet more people You can meet a wider range of people New variety of friends Meet new people Said to be a brilliant laugh (clubbing, getting drunk) Have fun as well as learning (ie pubs and clubs) and you can have a laugh Night life It's a great social experience University is fun – 'the best years of your life'
Knowledge	2	2	Higher understanding of different subjects The knowledge I will have You can study a subject you enjoy more in depth A degree in a specialised subject
New places	2	2	Get away from Northampton/boring places A chance to move away from your home – see the world a bit more See new places Chance to start afresh in a different town or city You can travel to other places instead of just staying at home New surroundings To get a wider/better look at the 'real' world and be ready for it when the time comes
Self-improvement	2	2	More chance of self-discipline (have to study in own time) The respect for myself I will have To make my family proud of me To learn and grow as a person To avoid the downhill side of leaving school etc....- getting in trouble and hanging around with the wrong people Avoid the responsibility of f/t employment

YED [12] Barrier categories	No. of Votes	Rank	Barriers
Money	12	1	<div>Expenses x2</div> <div>Tuition fees x2</div> <div>Cost x2</div> <div>Money as in living and as in fees</div> <div>Being permanently skint [with no money]</div> <div>It costs too much and you often get into debt</div>
Family and friends	7	2	<div>I don't want to live home, what happens if I don't like being alone</div> <div>Having to be independent (living home)</div> <div>You might not want to leave home or move out of your house yet</div> <div>Moving away from home</div> <div>I like where I live now</div> <div>Being away from family and friends x3</div> <div>I'd miss my family and boyfriend</div> <div>Being away from boyfriend</div> <div>Might miss seeing my football team play</div>
Confidence	5	3	<div>It's very social (and I would not fit in)</div> <div>Surrounded by people you might not like so your social life might be poor</div> <div>Upset people who may go on to higher places</div> <div>Be surrounded by snobs</div> <div>Pressure to do well because of the time and money spent</div> <div>At university you are in control of when you study and I am very undisciplined and I am never motivated to do my work</div> <div>Being afraid of failing and wasting time</div> <div>Could be a burden to the taxpayers if I have nothing to show at the end of 3 years</div> <div>Inexperience in the workplace</div> <div>Feeling lonely if I did not know anyone – having to start a fresh live</div> <div>Having to fend for myself</div> <div>Taking full responsibility for yourself and work</div> <div>What if good universities reject me?</div> <div>Not getting high enough grades to go to the best universities</div> <div>I don't know what I want to do/what courses I would take</div>
Effort [+time]	3	4	<div>More flaming homework</div> <div>The courses are quite long</div> <div>Long lectures</div> <div>A lot of hard work</div> <div>Lot of own time taken up by studying (long boring lectures)</div>
Work	3	5	<div>Wanting to go to employment to earn money <u>now</u></div> <div>I'd rather have a f/t time job so I can have more money</div> <div>Wanting a full time job and not wanting to be in education</div> <div>I don't want to spend any more time in education</div>

YS [10] Driver categories	No. of Votes	Rank	Drivers
Job prospects	9	1	
			Good job
			Job
			Opportunities
			Opportunity for those with qualifications
Money	7	2	
			More money
			More money in long term
Self-improvement	6	3	
			Self-expectations
			Chance to learn new things
			Goal for future
			Self-development
Social life	5	4	
			Meet new people
			Making new friends
			Meet men
			Student union
Stepping stone	2	5	
			Too young to work
			Easier than working

YS [10] Barrier Categories	No. of Votes	Rank	Barriers
Effort	11	1	
			Studying
			Too much studying
			Too much pressure
			A lot of hard work
			Hard work
			Effort
			More pressure to achieve
			Harder than school work
Money	9	2	
			Student accommodation
			Lack of money and having to pay tuition fees
			Tuition fees
			Lack of money
			Dependence on parents
Time	7	3	
			Time
			Chance of immediate job if not go
			Takes too long
			Early mornings
			Not much chance of job immediately afterwards
Confidence		4	
			Feel too young to go
			Lack of intelligence

YSD [8] Driver Categories	No. of Votes	Rank	Drivers
Better opportunities	4	1	
			More jobs
			More opportunities
			Better job
			More chance of promotion
			Good job
			Better prospects
			Skills for a better career
Qualifications	3	2	
			The idea of gaining more qualifications
			Better qualifications
			More qualifications
Money	3	3	
			No fees to pay
			More money
Courses	2	4	
			Enjoyable courses
			Larger variety of courses at all places
			Interesting course
			Study that interests you
Distance	1	5	
			Easily accessible institution

YSD [8] Barrier Categories	No. of Votes	Rank	Barriers
Money	8	1	
			Less money for going
			Fees need to be paid
			Fees to pay
Distance	4	2	
			Problems trying to get there
			Too far to travel
			Hard to travel
Level of difficulty	2	3	
			Too hard
			Too difficult to get the required Highers
Friendship and family	2	4	
			Loosing friends you see at school
			Having to leave home
Courses	1	5	
			No jobs at end of course
			Bored of the type of study
			Boring courses
			No course that interest me

MEFE [12] Driver Categories	No. of Votes	Rank	Drivers
Better job opportunity	11	1	Greater chance of getting a well-paid job x2 Prospects, job security Better prospects for self and family Better prospects for the future Do not enjoy current job Want more interesting job Want job satisfaction x3
Qualifications	8	2	To get qualification x3 To gain a proper qualification x2 Qualifications = better opportunity
Knowledge	5	3	To widen/broaden my knowledge x2 To have more/further knowledge x2 Want to learn x2 Learning opportunity Intellectual curiosity/challenge Enjoy learning
Money	6	4	Money Would like to earn more money than now To obtain security
Self- improvement	3	5	Self-improvement x3 Self-development To improve self-confidence Sense of achievement Broader experiences Recapture lost education Ambition of a lifetime
Career	2	6	To gain a career To increase the chance of a better career Career prospects Change career
Socio-cultural reasons	1	7	To meet interesting people x2 New social life x2 Change of lifestyle Start a fresh life Prestige reasons To gain social mobility

MEFE [12] Barrier Categories	No. of Votes	Rank	Barriers
Money	12	1	
			Lack of money x3
			Cost
			Funding x3
			Having to pay for everything
			Travelling expenses
			No help from local authority
			Having to take out loans
			Loan repayment x2
			Debt after completion of studies
			Other work commitments
			Money worries during study
			Loss of income/earning power x2
Confidence	11	2	
			No confidence
			Stress
			Being able to cope with the course x2
			Start something new – able to cope
			Fear of change
			Am I intelligent enough?
			Fear of lack of own abilities
			Ability to mix with large number of new people
			Fear of exams
			Fear of failure
			Not sure about career prospects
			Too old to get work
Family	8	3	
			Pressure of family responsibilities
			My kids
			Family
Time	6	4	
			Timescale
			Lack of sufficient hours/days/life

MSFE [12] Driver Categories	No. of Votes	Rank	Drivers
Career	12	1	
			To get a good career at the end x 2
			To give me a career
			Want a career working with people
			To have a career not just a job
			A career with a future
			To become a professional
			Always wanted to be a professional
			Have a future
			Getting out of a dead end job
			Get a job I enjoy
			To get a good job at the end
Confidence	8	2	
			Confidence
			To feel confident in yourself
			It would give me confidence
			To help build up my self-esteem and confidence
			To gain self-respect
			Meeting new people
			To be more independent
Money	7	3	
			More money x 3
			To earn better money
			Good money if good degree
			To earn money in your own right
			Security for future
Challenge	4	4	
			Challenge x 2
			Challenge to further educate myself
			Seeing if I can cope
			Doing something I would enjoy
			A goal
Knowledge	2	5	
			Knowledge x 2
			To broaden my knowledge
			To stretch my brainpower
Validation	1	6	
			Help from others
			Someone to believe in you
			Student lifestyle
Setting an example	1	7	
			Setting a good example to children

MSFE [12] Barrier Categories	No. of Votes	Rank	Barriers
Children	8	1	
			Family responsibilities
			Married with child
			Childcare issues
			Fear of not maintaining the same level of care
			Health of parents
Ability, effort and time	7	2	
			Will I be able to cope academically?
			Lack of knowledge
			Do I have stamina to keep going till the end?
			Volume of work
			Finding it too difficult
			The pressure to study
			Finding time to study
			Time management
			Length of course
			Student/wife/mother all at the same time is too much
Confidence	6	3	
			No confidence
			Lack of confidence
			Fear of the unknown
			Not knowing how to cope with the unknown
			Not knowing if I will like it or not
			Level of commitment needed
			Everybody is younger
			Negative attitude from others
			Fear of failure
			Fear of the future
			Fear of not enjoying the job at the end
Money	6	4	
			Money x 2
			No money for 4 years x 2
			No money for 3 years
			Funding
			No cash
			How will I manage financially?
			Being poor for 3 years
			Giving up a good job

MEHE [6] Driver Categories	No. of Votes	Rank	Drivers
Money and career	10	1	
			Increase capacity to earn money
			Money
			Good job prospects
			Improve prospects – career
			To get a good job
			Get a good job
			Better job in the long run
Personal growth	4	2	
			To better myself
			Therapy
			Opportunity to debate freely
			Broaden understanding
			The feeling of achieving something
			Desire to learn and understand more
			To gain confidence
			To get out of the rat race rut
To gain qualifications	3	3	
			To be better educated
			Better educated
Socio-cultural reasons	1	4	
			To move upwards socially
			Family approval
			Employment avoidance

MEHE [6] Barrier categories	No. of Votes	Rank	Barriers
Time	7	1	Time and age x2 Length of course Lack of time/balancing/juggling time Extension of school Too long at school first
Money	5	2	Lack of funding at the time Financial considerations Economic expectations to earn money Not paid employment Domestic considerations Cost of education Concern about childcare facilities Too long before you earn
Lack of confidence	3	3	Instilled belief of lack of ability Lack of confidence Not encouraged Not having ability to study at higher level
Socio-cultural reasons	2	4	Stigma (poofiness) Peer pressure Overcoming students negative stereotypes To be seen as different class
Lack of qualifications	1	5	Entrance qualifications Having the right ones/not enough qualifications

MSHE [6] Driver Categories	No. of Votes	Rank	Drivers
Self-development	14	1	
			Self-development
			To achieve my full potential
			To acquire confidence and autonomy
			To progress in my own development and knowledge of humanity
			To gain an identity for myself
Money	8	2	
			More money
			A personal need not to be a state dependent single parent
Better job	5	3	
			Better paid job
			Chance of better job
			Career development
			To gain a career in something that interests me
			To attempt to gain qualifications that would make me more employable
			To avoid working in a dead end job or claiming benefits
			Wanting an improved chance of providing a secure future for my daughter after separation from my husband
Socio-cultural barriers	5	3	Meet new people
			Looking for answers
			The need to transcend my traditional role in society
			Go beyond expectations
Challenge	4	4	Challenge
			That I have the ability to get a degree even though I did badly at school
			Stimulation
			Stimulate the brain and learn new things
			Desire to learn more

MSHE [6] Barrier Categories	No. of Votes	Rank	Barriers
Money	9	1	
			Mortgage to pay
			Not possible financially
			Desire for immediate money
			Financial demands
			Lack of financial support
			Drop in income
Educational experience	5	2	
			Had no solid concept of what I really wanted to do
			Did not do well at school because I could not conform
			No real incentive to continue after school
			Disillusioned with previous contact with educational bodies
			No idea about the benefits of HE
Family	4	3	
			Family circumstances x4
Other choice	4	3	
			Chosen something else to do x4
Lack of discipline	4	3	
			Not disciplined enough
Status	3	4	
			Loss of autonomy
			Drop in prestige [in becoming a student]
Peer pressure	2	4	
			Desire to be part of a group rather than an individual
Not ready/lack of confidence	2	5	
			Not mentally ready
			Immaturity because of stereotyping and mental blindness
			Many fail

APPENDIX 4

FOCUS GROUPS: KEY DRIVERS THAT CAN OVERRIDE ALL THE BARRIERS AND KEY BARRIERS THAT CAN OVERRIDE ALL THE DRIVERS

[The drivers are highlighted in green and the barriers in red]

Key drivers than can override all the barriers	Key barriers that can override all the drivers
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YE Social life x5 The chance of having a stable well paid job at the end of it all Qualifications, better job prospects, independence x3 Learning about something that really interests me x2 Experience which will prepare me for life – socially	YE Cost/fees/debt x4 If an amazing job offer came up which does not require HE Isolation from family and friends Ending up on the wrong course If I don't get the grades Not wanting to study for another 3 years The amount of hard work I will have to do or the amount of time I will have to put in x2
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YED Better qualifications and prospects x5 A better job as it is scientifically proven that graduates earn better wages than those who go directly to the workplace by approximately 10k Ability of possibly getting a better job outweighs the expense because if you get a well paid job you could afford to pay out your debts The broadening of my knowledge and improved qualifications Knowing that I will possess the knowledge at the end of the course Gaining better knowledge and life independence Going to a new place and starting afresh Avoiding responsibility of f/t employment	YED Money /fees/debtx4 Getting a full time job and earning moneyx2 Earning money by working full time sooner rather than spending more years in education The fact that I would miss my family and friends and would be away for a long time if I went away x2 Confidence as I don't mix well and being put in a situation when I don't know anybody is my worst nightmare and I don't examine well and I don't want more of that The confidence – I think it would take me a long time to settle and make friends (it usually does!) Not having the confidence and knowing that I may fail and have wasted all that time when I could have been in full time employment earning money and getting work experience
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YS	YS
Better money/ prospects x6 Improving myself To study a subject that really interests me Having a good social life Meeting people	Fees /debt/money x6 Not sure of getting a job at the end of it all Difficulty x2 Not being clever enough

YSD	YSD
Better job prospects x4 To get a qualification in something I enjoy Not to have to travel Chance to follow my dream Opportunity to realise my ambition	Cost and fees x4 Not getting the Highers No course that I want to do Too difficult x2

MEFE	MEFE
Have a career x2 Better/more satisfying employment x5 Gain qualifications Increase knowledge and skills Get better knowledge Achieve something for self	Financial costs x5 Debt/repayment of loans x2 Exams Fear of failure Family responsibilities x2

MSFE	MSFE
Money To be sure to have a career x7 To be independent x2 To be seen as someone	Money x5 Childcare/ family x5

MEHE	MEHE
Better qualifications The career I want x2 Experience of HE even if not very good degree Something worthwhile to make the family proud Move upwards socially and have a more recognised status	Financial cost/ having to pay fees x2 Lack of confidence If children negatively affected Negative stereotypes of students If too much like school

MSHE	MSHE
Self-development x2 The confidence I have gained in my own abilities Stimulation of mind, better job and more money Role model and independence Responsibility for daughter's future	Money pressures/financial constraints (mortgage) x2 The horrific financial constraints placed on mature students Money and time commitment (4 years) Lack of assistance (financial) in relation to childcare would have made studying impossible

APPENDIX 5

FOCUS GROUPS: POLICY AND INSTITUTIONAL INCENTIVES THAT WOULD MAKE ENTRY TO HIGHER EDUCATION MORE LIKELY

[The participants were asked to write down “What can government and higher education institutions do to make it more likely for you to enter higher education?”]

Young English (YE) [12 participants: 8f + 4m]	
Pay you a wage for doing it Subsidise the cost of course tuition Lower the cost of the fees Provide cheaper and better accommodation	Financial Incentives
Make better prospectuses/explain themselves better More specific with course choice	Better general information and better recruitment procedures
Be able to mix subjects Better courses and more specific course eg radio instead of media More connections with industry Lower their grade expectations Make it more exciting to go and more freedom	Improvement in content, structure and timetable of courses as well as in institutional attitude
All that you need e.g. food is close to university	Other

Young English Deprived (YED) [12 participants: 7f+ 5m]	
Make it cheaper x2 Make it more affordable x2 Make better grants available and lower living costs Be less expensive and offer shorter courses Reduce tuition fees They could do here in England what they have done in Scotland and scrap tuition fees and do away with 'elitism'	Financial Incentives
They could have more representatives visiting schools to encourage and to show the advantages of going to universities and colleges and the effects this would have More clear what is required from you for courses	Better general information and better recruitment procedures
Promote a more caring side (ie plan bits n' bits of new activities)	Improvement in content, structure and timetable of courses as well as in institutional attitude

Young Scottish (YS) [10 participants 7f + 3m]	
No tuition fees x4 Re-introduce grants x2 Pay you for going a degree Tax free student loans	Financial incentives
Give better details about what courses are about and answer questions frequently asked More user friendly open days	Better general information and better recruitment procedures

Young Scottish Deprived (YSD) [8 participants 6f +2m]	
Get rid of fees x4 Have grants for poorer students Give scholarships to good poor students	Financial incentives
Have all the courses in all institutions [This relates particularly to art and design, science and technology and engineering courses]	Improvement in content, structure and timetable of courses as well as in institutional attitude
Visit schools so we can ask questions	Better general information and better recruitment procedures

Mature English in Further Education [MEFE] [12 participants: 8f+4m]	
More funding x3 Pay you for doing a degree Have a competition for bursaries/grants for mature students No tuition fees	Financial incentives
Greater choice of courses on offer especially for p/t students	Better general information and better recruitment procedures
More detailed information about timetables Don't give contradictory advice on things e.g. NC subjects for would-be teachers Appear more really interested in potential students Have more tutors and students to answer questions – not just a lengthy presentation without stopping Get university tutors to visit Access students Access students to drop in on HE courses [to see what it is like	Improvement in content, structure and timetable of courses as well as in institutional attitude

Mature Scottish in Further Education [MSFE] [12 participants: 3m + 9f]	
No tuition fees x4 Reintroduce student grants/bursaries x2	Financial incentives
Provide childcare facilities x1 Introduce parent-friendly timetables x4 Let the students know the timetables before the summer so that they can arrange childcare	Improvement in content, structure, timetable of courses as well as institutional attitude

Mature English in Higher Education [MEHE] [6 participants 3m+3f]	
Financial help Offer p/t employment opportunities to mature students when they are studying	Financial incentives
Have open days when you can meet mature students who are actually doing courses Use mature students in prospectuses – have pictures and stories about them Don't give the impression that some courses are less worthwhile than others	Better general information and better recruitment procedures
Have more social events for mature students – have a mature students' room and club	Other

Mature Scottish in Higher Education [MSHE] [6 participants: 3m + 3f]	
Financial support, flexible learning, decreased pigeon-holing of individuals and accommodate work and learning Increase grant levels for mature students Assurances and support concerning finance and emotional support as current funding is way too low Provide realistic and adequate financial support, raise the graduate wages and provide childcare Financial assistance Mature student grants and work experience	Financial incentives

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW [YOUNG ENGLISH DEPRIVED FOCUS GROUP]

[Sheets of brown parcel wrapping paper have been stuck with blu tak to the blackboard and walls prior to the arrival of the pupils. Between ten and fifteen pupils are expected to turn up. The material has been prepared for fifteen pupils. Each place has four green post-its and four pink post-its as well as three green sticker and three yellow stickers. They also have one blank sheets of paper each. Only twelve pupils turn up and are left with me by their teacher who goes away.]

Hello, good afternoon everyone, I am Catherine, and I am here today to get to know what think about higher education, what images of you have of higher education and of students and what you perceive to be the drivers and barriers to higher education. By driver I mean motivation or incentives or what pushes you towards higher education. By barrier I mean what would pull you away from higher education. I want you to write drivers to higher education on each of the four green stickers ... different drivers on each sticker ... and use less than four words on each sticker. Would someone give me an example of a barrier to higher education a reason that might make you want not to go or that might not make you want to on to higher education and do a degree?

Boy 1: It's too expensive

Yes, that's an example.

Boy 2: It's boring

Yes, that's another example. Now would someone give me an example of a driver to higher education, why you may want to go on to higher education and do a degree?

Girl 1 To get a good job

Boy 2: To become a lawyer

Yes very good. Now we can start. Now write on your stickers 4 drivers and try to use less than four words for each driver ... If you can't think of four drivers write as many as you can and remember one driver per post-it and you have four post-its. I give you a few minutes to write the drivers down.

[After a few minutes the researcher starts collecting the green post-its. These are stuck on the brown paper sheets as they come. The pupils are asked to go to the blackboard and walls and arrange the drivers into categories and then label the categories. There is a lot of moving about and several people talking at once. When they have finished they return to their place. This takes around 5 minutes. The pupils are then asked to write four barriers to participation in higher education on pink post its. These are then collected and stuck on the remainder of the brown sheets of paper. This takes another 5 minutes. Pupils are then asked to get up and group barriers into categories and label them. Pupils move around while they categorise and label the drivers and then the barriers. When they have finished they return to their places. This labelling and categorising takes around 10-12 minutes.]

Let's have a quick look at what you wrote about drivers and barriers. It's interesting so many of you have come up with similar drivers and barriers. Some of you have also ... you've also written ... quite a few words. For example I'm reading ... I'm going to read a few drivers yes ... a few drivers. I'm selecting the longer ones. Some of you had a lot to say about what pushes you towards higher education and also what pulls you away from higher education. So for the drivers: 'to get a decent education and a number of qualifications to help in the future'; 'have fun as well as learning, pubs and clubs, and you can have a laugh'; 'to get a wider/better look at the real world and be ready for it when the time comes'; 'a chance to move away from your home and see the world a bit more'; 'to avoid the downhill side of leaving school getting in trouble and hanging around with the wrong people'; 'avoid the responsibility of f/t employment'; and 'get away from [here] and 'boring places'. It's quite interesting that many of you want to move away from [here].

Boy 2: I'd sure like to leave [this place]. I'd like to experience life.

Boy 1: My brother went to Manchester

Girl 1: Manchester has quite a good nightlife.... [Laughter] ... No, no, it's true.

Boy 2: Yeah, good shops there. [Laughter]

Boy 1: Because in Luton you'll die of boredom. [Laughter]

Girl 1: I'm looking forward to go have a good time clubbing and getting drunk

Girl 2: University is meant to be a great laugh and a lot of fun, it's the best years of your life

Boy 3: Yes university is meant to be a great social experience before starting real life, it's a way to avoid full-time employment and a settled life, and to get a higher paid job because you have a degree, but at the same time I really want to gain more knowledge, I'm looking forward to lectures

What do you want to study?

Boy 3: History, classical history

That's interesting. It's a very traditional subject

Girl 3: I want to study international business

Boy 2: Me its' law

Boy 1: I want to study geography and politics

Boy 4: I want to do art and design

Girl 4: Drama or theatre studies

Girl 5: English literature

Boy 5: Sociology and politics

I'm impressed you've already decided what you're going to do at university. So you have already decided what to study. But you haven't applied yet?

Girl 4: No we don't actually apply until next Autumn but we already know what we're going to study

Girl 5: My dream would be to study English Literature at Oxford or Cambridge, if I could ... but I am ... I'm not sure to make the grades though ...three As ... I don't think I could get three As

I didn't get three As and I did Highers. I think it demands a lot of work to get three As. Yet if you believe the government more and more young people achieve three As or even 4As. Yet, I suppose A levels and Highers are now modularised. When I did my Highers it was all exams. My daughter had an interview for Oxford ... we suggested that it was a good thing if she could get into Oxford. She was not too keen on the idea but went for the interview anyway ... but she hated Oxford. She had to stay overnight in a student room in the college she was applying to. She thought it was utterly sinister. She didn't get offered a place. I myself

would have really liked Oxford at her age. Does anyone else want to go to Oxford or Cambridge?

Boy 3: I wouldn't mind ... if I get a place

Boy 2: I'd go if they offered me a place

Boy 4: Definitely not. I would never get the grades and it's full of snobs

Girl 1: I don't think it would be fun and it's too near home

Girl 2: Manchester, Leeds or Liverpool are more fun places

Girl 4: They don't do theatre studies at Oxford or at Cambridge and again it's only about one hour away from here

Would you consider going as far as Scotland? Would you want to go to a Scottish university?

Girl 2: No way. Scotland is far too far away. It's another world.

Boy 2: No it's too far north but they don't have to pay tuition fees ...so that's rather good, but no it's too far.

It seems that most of you want definitely to go to university ... and you have high aspirations too. This means that your drivers are stronger than your barriers. So far we've only talked about drivers. But you have written a lot about barriers too. Yet your mind is set on going to university and you already know what subject you want to study. Before you look at the barriers, is there anyone who does not want to go to university?

Girl 6 I'm not sure yet...I just want to gain more work experience

Girl 7 I'd rather not go I'm not sure ... I'm too young to go away from home and there's nothing that interests me ... I want to find a full-time job and earn money

Girl 6: There's too much effort needed, it's endless and boring

Have you definitely decided not to go to university?

Girl 7: I'm very sure. I have had enough of studying.

Boy 1: University is rubbish.

Girl 2: My sister dropped out after one year. She's now earning ... she has a great job ... she didn't like university life ... she was unhappy to be away from home and from her friends and family The problem is she didn't have any place to go out ... it's very social biased.

Girl 4: My brother too left after one year ... he makes a lot of money now working with computers

That's interesting, they all dropped out after one year. They're now earning and have good employment that they like. So despite this you still want to go to university?

Girl 2: Yes, I want to enjoy myself and live away from [here] and away from home. I want to teach primary school so I definitely need to go to university and get a degree first ... I hope I'm going to like university life ... I'm not looking forward to be in debt though ... University is meant to be a good way to improve social skills but it's not for everyone even if you have the qualifications to get in you may not take to it ...

So you think university is not for everyone?

Girl 2: It's open to everyone but if you don't like independence and you're too attached to your family and your friends then you're not going to be happy there. It's up to you ... really ... it's better to go and leave after a year than not to go because it's only when you're there that you know what it's really like and most students don't drop out anyway...

Thank you for this. I would now like to take a look at the barriers you wrote. Some of what you just said covers the statements about barriers. 'prefer to have a full- time job so I can have more money' and 'not getting high enough grades to go to the best universities'. I think we've covered these. I see one driver that I would like us to talk about: 'you might not want to leave home or move out of your house yet' and the 'fear of being lonely'. Wouldn't you agree that if you want to do a degree or you need to do a degree for the kind of employment you want to do but you don't want to move away from home, then why not go to a local university or local institution of higher education? Is this something you've considered?

Girl 5: I want to go to a good university and there are no good local universities, at least not in [this place], but Warwick, Oxford and Cambridge are good universities not too far from [here] but I wouldn't think of commuting every day so I'd move away

from home, I would miss out on social aspects if I didn't live away from home.

Girl 3: There's no point in doing a degree [here] it's rubbish, it's not well known, nobody has heard of it,... it's totally unthinkable ... You'd have to be more than desperate. I'd rather retake A levels rather than do a degree [here]–

Boy 3 If you don't go to university away from home you never learn independence and how to fend for yourself and you never get to learn self-discipline and how to motivate yourself

Boy 4 You're not learning any life experience and you don't live in the real world if you stay at home with your parents ...

Boy 1: And going away from home it's easier to avoid getting in trouble because you avoid hanging around with the wrong people which you perhaps would do if you stay in your neighbourhood and can't avoid to see certain people who get into trouble a lot

Now that we've discussed the drivers and barriers, I would like you to rank the categories that you have created. What I'm asking you is to vote for categories. For example you have three green sticker and three red stickers that I have given you. Use the three green stickers to distribute your votes as you want. You may use all the votes for one category of drivers or vote for three different categories by using one sticker for each category. When you've finished with the drivers do the same for the barriers and use your red stickers for the barriers.

[The pupils get up and distribute their votes. This takes about 5-7 minutes. The votes are then counted and the categories ranked. The researcher reads out the ranking order of all the categories.]

What have we got 'qualifications', 'better employment' and 'social life' came top of the driver categories. 'Money', 'family and friends' and 'confidence' came top of the barrier categories. That's interesting we have not yet talked about financial barriers about the cost, tuition fees, student loans and debt. Now I would like to talk about how you perceive students and higher education. How you construct students and higher education. But before this I would like to know how many of you are doing part-time work. Nearly everyone. Ten out of twelve of you are

*working part-time and doing A-levels. What kind of work are you doing?
And how many hours do you work?*

Boy 2: I work in Morrisons in the coffee shop I work Saturdays and Sundays between eight and ten hours depending on who is off sick or on holiday

Boy 1: I work in Tesco the same kind of hours

Girl 3: I work Friday night in Safeway

Girl 4: I work in a music store

Girl 1: I only work during the Summer and holidays.

Is the job you're doing more interesting than school?

Boy 1: No

Girl 3: No, it's not very interesting. That's why I want to go to university not to have to do that kind of work all my life

Thank you for this. I need to move on because the clock is ticking and we only have one hour. Now for constructions of higher education and constructions of students. Your image of students... of what students are like ... What is the image you have of students? What kind of pictures and images do you have of students?

Girl 1 It's for them middle class ... not for me

Boy 3 Some are working-class, my brother went to university

Girl 3 My brother and sister went to university

Boy 2: When they're not working, they're out having a good time.

Boy 1: They party all the time with the taxpayers' money ... they don't go to lectures

Girl 1: They've shiny hair

Girl 2. Yes, pink and other colours [Laughter]

Boy 1: Generally odd.

Boy 2: They have delusions

Girl 1: They look like freaks, they're ... weird ...they're not quite there ... they sleep all day because they're out drinking and clubbing all night ...but it's not with the taxpayers' money ... they pay tuition fees and they live off their loans which they have to repay and they have to work as well

Girl 5: To be a student costs more than the tuition fees so they don't pay the full cost of doing a degree so I suppose it's the

taxpayers' money ... the government has to invest in higher education through the tax people pay ... when they had grants and no tuition fees then it was really the taxpayers' money

Boy 1: Most people who go to university end up making enemies...

What do you mean?

Boy 1: People that go to university go to higher places...

What do you mean higher places?

Boy 1: They have more powerful jobs, more money, more power and they may not like you because you're not from the same background and this can have consequences

For example? What kind of bad consequences? Then they'd be a powerful enemy?

Boy 1: Yeah, you risk falling out with someone who goes on to become a lawyer, to become a judge ... and there you are, in front of the judge [Laughter]

But you still want to go to university despite these possible bad consequences?

Boy 1: I want to go and I don't want to go, I want to go more than I don't want to go but I don't have much confidence ... I'd like to be more confident about interacting with others ... I just have to be careful not to make enemies ...that's the problem with universities ...someone earlier said it's very social class biased so you may not have any friends or even make enemies with the more middle or upper class students ... but now universities are for everyone ... without a degree you don't have much chance of a satisfying and worthwhile job

Boy 3: I agree with this I want to go to university and I'm definitely going to be a working class student and my brother was a working-class student ... he says the social life ... he's got all sorts of friends ... the social life's good but he's also working hard to get a good degree

Girl 3 My brother and sister went to university and we're working-class ... Many students were working class now

Girl 4: My brother went too, but he didn't want to go on ... he left university ... he didn't like studying and he didn't like to be

away from home ... now he makes a good living ... working with computers ... but I think I'm going to enjoy university life I would not drop out ... I need a degree to have better prospects... As I'd like to work in theatre management I need the qualifications ...to be taken seriously ... I also really enjoy studying drama ... you develop yourself constantly ... so I'm looking forward to this and to independence and to be away from home ...I want to start afresh ... to have a new start and a more exciting life

Now that we've discussed drivers and barriers and constructions of students and of higher education, what I'm asking you to write down... out of all the positive factors or drivers, what is the key driver which would overcome all the negatives, the key positive factor that may overcome all the negative factors? Among the positives, is there something that might overcome all the negatives. So what is that key factor? The key driver that can overcome all the barriers. Then look at the key negative factor, the thing that would make you change your mind and decide not to continue going in the direction of higher education. So what is the key barrier that can be so powerful it can override all the drivers?

[The pupils write the key drivers and key barriers on a piece of paper, which was given to them at the start. The sheets are then collected by the researcher. This takes about 5 minutes]

Let me quickly have a look at what you wrote. I see that seven of you ... seven out of twelve have put as key drivers financial and employment factors. That's your main driving force towards higher education the main thing that pushes you towards higher education. Before today were you aware that financial and employment factors were the main drivers to wanting to enter higher education?

Boy 3: It's well known and you just know that a degree means a lot more money than not having a degree so there's not really any other option ... unless you have a particular talent like singing, and music and can earn hundreds of thousands. I don't have these kinds of talents so my best strategy is to go to

university. Even if you have these kind of talent you're probably better getting a university qualification –

Girl 5: If you get full-time employment directly after leaving school you will get a good enough job with reasonably good pay the kind of employment where they also take on graduates that have just finished their degrees but the people with degrees will go further and get promoted and get more money

Girl 4: I don't know how you can have such a long-term approach ... to have money and promotion in a good few years isn't a main driving force. I want to gain knowledge and go to a new place to start a new life. I'm more motivated by shorter term things like I don't want to get settled and get a proper job too soon I want to experience life, university life and start a new life in a new place

I have just counted the key barriers and there's almost as many key barriers that are money ... financial and employment factors as there was for the key drivers. For which ones of you are employment and financial reasons acting as key barriers?

Girl 6: For me .. For me getting a full-time job and earning hard cash and ready money is the reason I don't want to study anymore after the A-levels ... I don't want to spend anymore time in education

Girl 7: I'm the same for me. We don't want to go on with doing more courses I can't wait to get a full-time job ... There's no way I'd change my mind, I just don't want to

Boy 1: I do want to go to university, my brother went to university, he's got a good job, but I have driving forces that One part of me wants to go and another part is lacking confidence I think what about if I fail I have wasted my time when I could have been earning and getting work experience ... I am not sure which part is stronger

What about the cost of university, the cost of tuition fees and loans? Quite a few among you put this down as key barriers

Girl 5: I mean it would be better not to have to pay tuition fees and not to leave university with debts ... but this would not stop me

from going ... I would probably have to work part-time as a student but that's very common now for students to work during term time

Boy 2: The fact that going to university guarantees a better job outweighs the expense because if you get a well-paid job you can afford to pay out your debts

Boy 1: What about if you don't get a better job then you're just left with debts ... not a good way to start up in life

Girl 5: You don't have to pay back your loans if you don't earn enough to afford to pay them back. You just defer the payment until you earn enough to pay the loans

Yes, that's right. I went to university as a mature student. When I started it was the first year for loans. And I haven't yet paid back my loans. I've always deferred the payment. Now I see that we are running out of time. Well, the last thing I am going to ask you to write down. Is there anything that colleges and universities could do to be more attractive, to make things so that they might want to tempt you? What could they do to make it more attractive? Write your suggestions on the sheet of paper I have given you.

[Pupils write down their suggestions. The researcher collects the sheets of paper. This takes about 5 minutes]

Let me have a quick look at these. I like this one 'They could do here in England what they have done in Scotland and scrap tuition fees and do away with elitism'.

Girl 4: I think it would be good not to have to pay fees. I'm going to university despite the fees, but some people might be put off by the fees and this might prevent them from going so ... so I think it would be good for everyone not to have to pay fees because it's less elitist and more fair

I'm surprised you've heard about the removal of the tuition fees in Scotland, but graduates will have to pay back the fees like they have to pay back the loans. They pay after they have graduated and got a job that pays at least I think it's 12,000 pounds a year net... The Cubie Commission they were commissioned to look into it they set the level at

15,000 pounds a year net and the Scottish Parliament rejected this point.

Girl 2: I think the Scottish system is best, it would especially encourage those who cannot afford to pay the tuition fees

Since most of you want to enter higher education, only two are set against the idea and it's because you don't want to go on studying rather than because of the cost, I wonder if your teachers encouraged you to want to go to university

Girl 5: Teachers haven't really talked about going to university. It's an expectation they have and an expectation we have ourselves. I know they encourage us to go to the best university possible rather than going to the local institution.

Boy 4: Teachers are more concerned that we do well in our A levels. That's their priority. But this school is very good to help you do your best. Because it's a very small school the classes are very small and you can have a lot more of attention from the teachers.

Girl 5: The school isn't well seen by some people because it's small and near the Eastern districts which are trouble but if you last until the Sixth form then it's great especially some subjects like French have only five people in the class so you get plenty of support ... I wouldn't want to go anywhere else.

Thank you. I think it's time we finished. Before I go just one more thing, I should be grateful if you would fill in the background information sheet that I'm giving you now. If you are interested in taking part in an individual interview, if you'd like to be interviewed, please write your name, address, telephone, number or email address on the information form. Thank you. It was great talking to you. Good luck with your A-levels.

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW [MATURE SCOTTISH IN HIGHER EDUCATION]

[Fiona, 33, married with 2 children in primary school, father skilled working-class, husband engineer with HND from technical college]

So, Fiona, you took part in the focus group and agreed to be interviewed. I am here to interview you about your journey to higher education.

I wasn't sure whether you would send me questions in advance. In a way I was happy you didn't because I wouldn't have been able to relax. I would have been thinking about how to answer the questions.

No, no I don't send questions in advance. This isn't an investigation or an examination. [Laughter]. It's more a ... a kind of conversation with a purpose! [More laughter].

I was just saying to Alistair[her husband] this morning it's funny that I'm actually going to university in the same place he did his HND many years ago, only now it's become a university and it was a technical college when he went there.

[Alistair offers tea and biscuits – general chatter about the trip to Scotland, the weather and how nice the house looks etc. Alistair reminisces briefly about his days doing an HND at the technical college and how his father and brother also attended the same technical college.]

What kind of area do you live in?

The house is a semi-detached, I would say it is in a good area, we live in, quite quiet, a lot of people roundabout, not in this particular setting here, but everybody seems to have this idea that if you live in Dane Park then you've got plenty of money, that's the general consensus of opinion, you know what I mean, everybody roundabout, if you say Dane

Park, but I would say it is, there is not a lot of bother in this part, although I think some pockets have some bother, but it is quite quiet.

How did you get to be doing a degree?

When the children were younger I worked for the local play-group, afternoon times, I got quite involved in that. And before I started doing, studying for Highers, and things, which I did at college, before I took the access course, for a period I did personal and social educational courses, they were held in the high school or in a community centre and I was involved in those every week, every Tuesday we would meet up and do courses in that time. I made a lot of friends as well, because this was a new place to me. And it took a while to settle in, I have to say, but we have been here 15 years now, so just now I don't have a lot of time to join clubs or what have you, because of the studying and the family, but that was a good thing. Community education was a great thing for me, but it wasn't intense studying, a lot of the time it was just have fun as well, but there were certificates, there were modules with computers, it was a great way to get involved with other people and that's how I have made quite a lot of friends, they all keep in touch, they are very friendly, so that was a good thing.

Was there a moment in time when you thought higher education is for me rather than not for me?

The reason behind me doing the access course and then going to university was through community education, a couple of times there was a careers advisor appeared and he brought I think it is called Gateway and it's a computer package, and it does careers and things, careers you might like to get into, and he came along a couple of times and I can't remember whether we got 50 questions or 100 questions, but you rated yourself on a scale, every question that came up you said whether I would like it or I would not like that at all, and at the end of it the computer sent out and listed all the jobs which were quite similar to you with the most popular one at the top, and both times I had tried it had teacher, so it was at the back of my mind, but when I did start thinking about, well it's time I was beginning to do something, now,

that's what put the idea in my mind which was a good thing, otherwise I might have been completely in the dark, just wondering what to do, so that is what put the idea in my head as well. I think what it was, in the group we were in, in community education, your children were starting to go to school and things and you would begin to think Oh, I can do something now, and one girl actually went to college. She was the first one to actually go on to higher education and now she has finished her degree, she's working, she actually wants to get into office work. She has never ever done it in her life, before when she was married, when she was young she had a family, but she decided she was going to go into office work, so she is doing personnel management now. She was the first one that started, everybody just started going off in some sort of similar direction, although we had come together, and you could see people were starting to go a wee bit further on. It gave me the idea.

Once you had the idea and you thought higher education is for me, which was something you had not considered before, what did you do, did you do anything?

I did my Highers at evening classes at [a further education] college, because of the children they were still quite young, so I just did one a year. I had always wanted to do my English Higher, and my biology Higher, because those 2 Highers I had actually started doing them during my first year at high school, I had started to do them and then I left to get a job, so they were never finished. I left them halfway, I had done them for 3 or 4 months, and then I had left them, and that had always niggled me and I thought, well maybe someday, so I think going back to community education was the key. [The] university was quite involved with community education as well, they would always bring you information and get you phone numbers so that was always something giving you that wee bit more access. Everyday, you could ask them, you could phone up the community education office and they would give you the information as well. So I think going to that was a start off, if I had not gone to community education I probably wouldn't be doing this course now. community education was really good thing, because there was a crèche for the wee ones, so you are getting that time

to yourself, you are meeting new people, because all the people that were there apart from a friend, it was a friend who introduced me to it, so I had actually gone with one friend, and through it we all made about ten new friends, and that was a few years ago, Ronald was only two, and he is coming up for ten, and we are all still keeping in touch. People are doing different things, but we are still friends.

What did you do after your Highers?

Well what I decided to do after doing the Highers, I phoned up the head of department at [the further education] college, and she said, what qualifications have you got and I told her, the grades I had had, and that I had come back and done my Highers, and she said, there is an access course that you could do which would guarantee you a place at university, so that was when I decided to go for the access course. I went along, sat the interview and passed the interview and then I had to go for the interview up at the university as well and I had to go for two interviews up there before I started the access course. I did the access course, and that was useful, it was backup again, and I thought, well that has been a long time since I have been at the university and I phoned the head of department up there, and said, I would like to study psychology and biology. She said in first year, this is what is all involved, so she went through it again, which was good just before it actually started. I like the idea of doing my dissertation and things, and I have never missed a session at university. I think once I missed it for a hospital appointment and I quite enjoy the lectures, tutorials and things, and I don't mind, I know it sounds funny to say this, I don't mind studying if it's for an exam, a lot of people don't like exams. I don't say I enjoy them but I would much rather study for an exam, and sit the exam, and that is it, over, it's all the course work at home that I find more difficult but you have to do it, just now, it has been quite an intense method and you don't really get a day off, well not for us, it might be for younger students, so it has been quite intense, getting used to things, and you have to pass your assignments to do. We had four to do. I have finished one, which was a case study, but we have another essay as well, and I just hate sitting down, in the house, I think it's quite difficult. Maybe it's

just my expectations and trying to find the time as well, I would much rather study and then go in and do an exam. Well I think obviously the 2 Highers, English Higher and then biology Higher, it was a year's work and then you had to prove yourself on the day, and I know that a lot of people find that really difficult because they think I have got two hours, I have got all this knowledge, and I have studied hard for it, and what if the questions don't come up that I'd like, but maybe it's just an expectation, now having a family maybe that is better for me that way, than trying to get a few hours everyday on an essay and make it as good as you can do it, you know. But I know that a lot of people don't like the exams set-up.

Were you the first in your family to go to university?

Yes.

Why did you not finish your Highers?

I had started to take my Highers, started to study for my Highers, so it would have been back in August, and I got a job and started in my first job in the November of that year. It was the thing to do, you were beginning to think well, will I be left here on my own here, all my friends are out working for money and that just seemed to be the thing to do.

Did you talk about this with your friends?

No, it wasn't something that I talked about and it wasn't, I have to say at that particular time it wasn't something that was discussed a lot. If the careers advisor came as he did in secondary school, it was always jobs they were looking at, they would never say to you, there's all these courses at college and university and maybe you have should have a think about that, it was always jobs. With the careers advisor it was not university or college but employers you would write to and with a girl it was office work and things like that, as well.

At that time what did you think universities were for?

I don't know, although I had studied hard and got my 7 O Grades that I wanted, I always thought that you had to come from a certain kind of

background, or family, or to be really clever, because it was just you had no conception of what university was all about. You just thought it was so far away from you, and it was so removed and you must have brains falling out your ears so clever it was, I think as well you saw things on TV ... if maybe you had seen something to do with university on TV, you would think what on earth is all that about, you just had an idea, it was a silly idea, of what University was about.

What about students, did you have an idea of what students were like and what they did?

As far as my idea of students, university was their life, they didn't actually do anything apart from study every night, you know. What kind of life is that? You would never think at the end of their four years, their lifestyle would totally change, they would not be like that forever and they would get better employment opportunities for having gone to university and got a degree. At the time I thought I will get a job, and once I am in a job, I can move on to a better job, and the money will be start to gradually increase. Once you start work you are treated as an adult. I think it has a lot to do with it, the way you are brought up.

Did you know of anyone from your neighbourhood who went to university?

No, because they hadn't the qualifications, I can't honestly recall anybody who was in my class that went to university to do this course or that course. I can't honestly remember. All the people that I knew were going to get a job. There was one girl that she was going to do nursing, that is what it was, her family, two of her family had been in the nursing career, and she had obviously been pushed into it. Her mum had influenced her. But at that time, people were moving away, we moved a few miles away, you wouldn't get to see people anymore anyway. But just through speaking to other people I know, she actually did go on to do the nursing training and I don't know if she still is a nurse.

What did your father do after leaving school?

Well I know my dad worked for the mining industry but when that all fell through he had certain qualifications that he had taken over the years that could take him elsewhere, whereas a lot of the men in the mining industry, they maybe didn't have these sort of skills, so that when that fell apart they were unemployed and had to re-train, but he went to work for British Aerospace, it's all engineering work and things. So he's always had that to fall back on.

What about your mother?

My mother she's always worked at the dole, hospitals, nursing homes and things. She loved that, that was the only thing she could do, that was the way

Do you know anything about your parents' schooldays?

Not really. My mum would always - she is a laugh - she would say, I liked this, I liked that, I wasn't very good at Maths, she liked English, that was her favourite thing, I haven't heard my Dad saying anything about his schooldays.

Did your parents ever say about what they expected you to do in life?

Well they were really pleased that I got the job and things. I don't actually know or remember, I can't remember how they felt when I said I am not going to do my Highers and things, but they have always believed that, if you were going to do any exam or anything, it was always, do the best you can, and that is all they can ask of you. If you got a good mark, obviously they were delighted and things, and they are supportive. I am saying that I don't really think they know what I am doing at the moment, to be honest with you, but they are always really supportive. Whatever you are doing, they don't put pressure on you and maybe I think a wee bit of pressure is not a bad thing at times, to have that, to say, well come on, but never, the job came and they said, that's great, you've got a job, and then once or twice obviously I think when I was young I would go in for a job that was not really suitable for me and they never say, I think you have done the wrong thing there, or, I think

they just left me to learn by myself. I mean, if I passed exams and things, they said, well done, pleased for you, so they were supportive in that way, but they would never say I think you should be doing that, or I would like you to do that.

What do your parents think about you doing the Access course and then going to university?

They are happy for me, I don't think they know just what is involved, I don't think they know the structure of it, of what it is that you get at the end of it, or how it can help in your career. I don't think they have any notion of that. Maybe that's wrong. I have never actually sat down and asked them how they felt, they've never said, things have never come out and they have never given me the impression that they were not happy that I was doing Psychology and Biology. I remember one time my Mum said she met a relative and her friend, who had been asking after me, and she said, she's doing a course and that's it. I can't actually remember what course. I said, well, Mum, it's psychology and biology, she said, oh right, right. I think there's always this thing as well, you don't want to be the smartypants, if you know what I mean. You don't . . . that's a cultural thing as well, you don't want to say at the end of this I am going to have a degree. We don't want to be showing off. You actually want to play it down, I think. But I am sure they will be proud of me. They sent me a wee card through the post to me and it said well done and everything. And that's a great confidence boost, but that was about the access course and now I think they just accept the fact that I am at university, but I don't think they have any idea of the structure of it. Or how you are accessed or what the lectures are about, things like that.

What image did you have of university and of lecturers?

I think I have always expected the lecturer to be out there with a big black cloak, but it is totally different. They are more normal than you think, I think there is a certain few who are so far removed from everyday life, but there is one, one of my favourite lecturers, and he just wanders about with his hands in his pockets, you are encouraged to

shout out or answer in the lecture theatre, which I always thought that was not the done thing, you just have fixed ideas about these things ... I thought the buildings would be really old but it's all rather new ... a lot of the rooms, the lecture theatre which is very new, very modern, you know. I mean there's also older rooms and building, but nothing, nothing really Victorian. I think I had this idea that they were going to teach you all these things, ... in very old buildings ... a lecturer at the front in a big black cloak in a huge lecture theatre and you just take it all in and go away and think about it. But it is very much to facilitate your learning and the lecturer is not there to say that is how you do it, they want you to think for yourself. They're wanting you to feedback to them all the time.

How well did the Access course prepare you for university?

During the Access course we always had tried to contact, well any of the students, whether they were first year, second year, whatever, if they could come along and let us know how their course is going, what was involved and how was it different from college, because we were aware that it would be different, but it fell through. The thing at college which was different was all this continual assessment and you are getting 3 short assessments, where it is much more at university, you can't go in and do badly in the exams, so that was different. There were just some things I thought they could do at college to prepare you better. Preparing for exams and doing presentations which was a big thing in the first year, if they had bought that in the Access year I think it could have prepared people a wee bit better. I think the way things are even taught in secondary schools now is a lot different, I see that with William in high school and it's even introduced in primary where you asked to go up and give a presentation, you are asked to do a project. At the high school he had to do a presentation on endangered species, he had to have an index page, have a cover page, all these things. I never remember doing a presentation ever, not even in secondary school. But I think that is a great thing because there again that comes in as well at university to stand in front of a class and saying, here's what I found out and having a little overhead projector, that sort of thing, that is a great thing, because

that was never encouraged or - I don't think it was in the curriculum at the time. It is now and I think it's a really good thing.

Do you see any difference between mature and younger students?

I think the younger students, the social side of it is a big thing for them. For mature students, any spare time you've got you have to get back home and, once you get back in the house, and somebody rings the bell and you get in your mother mode, putting your tea on the table, and this that and another, and I didn't realise how much there is to do in the house. You are dusting and you think, I have got all these and other things I don't find that I have quite got to grips with them yet ... You've got all this stuff, whereas when you are a student, so you've got all these different roles and you don't have time to go out and get involved in the social side of things at all. But that is maybe the best part of it for the younger students, quite rightly so, good for them. There is always that - what if I had gone years ago, but then you can't change things so don't regret things that you have done, because I am doing it now, so that is that. If you are a mature student because you have got a lot of life experience, as well, you've got other things that have happened to your life that maybe someone at 18 has not experienced, and does help you, I am not saying it's always the case, but you are maybe more emotional because of different things in your life than somebody at 18, even the fact of having a family and all this, children and that sort of thing, what they have been through at school and you have to deal with and everything as well. So I think it really depends on the course, whether that helps or hinders it. I think a lot of people do benefit. But everything like parents, the professional side, that is not a bad thing. It will stand you in good stead in that way. It might be difficult if you have been out of studying for a long time. I think I was not as nervous as I had been back when did the Highers and things and then took the Access year, which was a good thing to get you back into studying as well, but maybe that, if you haven't done something for a long time, and then you are just going in at 34, 35, and you haven't studied for a long time, that might be a bit of a worry.

How do you find juggling so many things?

Well I have a job and that, but I find that you are sitting in front of the computer screen till twelve, one in the morning and things. You know I can't tell when I am going to study. Other things sometimes dictate when I can do it, and I can be sitting doing an essay, and worrying about the boys and my family and it's very difficult to try and switch off from that. I think sometimes you get so really stressed about it. You think something has got to go, can that wait until tomorrow or next day week. I think you have got to try and organise your time more when you have got family, because you don't want, I am always weary that you do too much and then you look back and you think, Oh, gosh, I put so much into that and at the end of the day, it's - you are still a Mum, you can't switch off from them all the time, but it's trying to get a balance. I mean they don't actually know what course I am on, but they know that you are going to work or whatever, and Ronald, for some reason, he thinks I am doing only psychology because I think the teacher at school had said something, that your mother's at psychology today, and that is really good, he said you are doing your psychology, and I thought he is too young to start going into it all, so but I think it is quite a good thing for them as well to see me wanting to achieve qualifications.

Do you expect him and his brother to go to university?

Yes, I think my ideas have changed as well, and I know that they are bright enough to do it, if I can do it, they certainly can, and they are bright enough, I don't want them to waste their potential away, as I feel that I did, because now is the time, because I can see it, I have done it, I have been there, and I have made mistakes, that I can't change what I did years ago. But I feel that Ronald is young yet, but really have to check him that he and William are doing their best at school and help them decide where I am going to go at the end of the first year, whatever.

Do your parents think that universities have changed?

No, I don't think - I think whatever ideas they have had, they would still have the same ideas, because they have never had a chance to look at it

in any way, they have never had a chance to find out. I would be interested to find out what their ideas are, because we never have discussed it. It's never come up in the conversation. It probably could have come up - the conversation - somewhere along the lines that I said my access course would lead me on to university, and I have been there two and a half years at university, but it is funny how I don't think it's ever come up, you know ... what exactly is it, what are your classes like, what are your teachers like, it's never come up. I think as well though it has never come up because I don't really want to overdo it, but I don't often say, I want to tell you about the life of a university student. I don't think, maybe they would, maybe I am hanging back and they are hanging back, maybe if kind of one of us starts the conversation about it, maybe we can have a good conversation about it. But maybe I am not saying because I don't want to sound that I am a smartypants, and maybe they are not saying because I have never asked them. I don't want to say to them, exactly what do you think I am doing? I mean, just that example of Mum meeting someone and saying she is doing a course so I sometimes find that I think, well is it that important, what I am doing, if they can't remember what course I was doing. Maybe they don't like to say after all this time that they don't actually know what I am studying. Funny how it's never ever talked about though. Alistair's mum and dad are a lot older than my mum and dad, but I think because they have been through all that since Alistair and his brothers and dad went to university, that they have an idea, and they know what is involved in that, even though they are older than my parents. Alistair's dad is 20 years older than my dad, but because he's been through all that he's helping us through it with the family and he knows what it's about, there is nothing new to him. Alistair's mum, she's always on the phone saying "how are you getting on" and things. There's two totally different attitudes with two sets of parents really, and I think sometimes, it all boils down to the fact that it is a status thing, to have a degree. They know what it's about whereas my mum and dad just say "well if you think that is right, then you should do it", you know. Yet I have noticed that my Mum will say, "you got this at uni and you can't even run the house, it's an awful lot doing all these things and looking after the house

and the family". I am sure that if I'll just pack it in, she'll say "that's fine". But Alistair's Mum would be the complete opposite. It's quite funny with the different families, what their ideas are and stuff. I mean, my mum and dad will say "how are you getting on", "are you enjoying the course", that's fine, but Alistair's Mum will phone up and say, "what did you get for your work", "well done". Alistair's mum is a teacher. She's a remedial teacher, you know, with disabilities and things. She's got a very good understanding of the process, assessment and things like that. She wants to keep up with how I am getting on and things. I was quite upset one time as I hadn't ... as I had this essay which I hadn't even started yet, but she said, "but you will get there, just take a few days off", and I thought I can't, I can't, I have got all these things on my mind, but she very much does not want you to panic, you'll get there. My mum doesn't remember what I'm studying, what course I am doing. But Alistair's mum, she will quite happily go out to neighbours and relatives and say to them, "my daughter-in-law, she's just got a degree", that would be it, I don't know if that is a good thing, but for that side of the family, that's an achievement, she would even say the same things to William as well, which I don't agree with, previously she said, and she frightened the life out of William, he was nine at the time, far too young to have any concept of university, she said to him when you are older you will go to university, and you will move away from home and he became quite upset at the thought.

This is my last question. It's strange your in mother in law thinking that William will have to move away from home to go to university since nobody in the family did this and it's not really the done thing in Scotland unless a course is not available locally.

I know, I think she may have an idealised picture of university life, one that belong more to the middle class or even the upper middle class. Maybe she wants to move up the social scale through her grandchildren. Maybe it was her dream for Alistair and his brothers and it didn't happen. It's strange how things have changed over the last fifteen years from having nobody in my class who went to university and me thinking that I wanted to start work to be treated as an adult and earn money, to

me expecting William and Ronald to go to university and not do what I did after leaving school which was to left my Highers unfinished and go to work, for what I thought was a good job me earning good money and then I would earn more and more money without needing any qualifications beyond my O Grades. It's all to do with the way you're brought up and with changing expectations. If I hadn't gone to university I don't know what I would be expecting for William and Ronald.

Thank you for this. I need to end our conversation here, Fiona, as I am nearly at the end of the tape.

APPENDIX 8

Socio-economic profile of working-age population in the UK (percentages)

Occupations		2000	2002	2003
1	Higher managerial and professional	11	10	11
2	Lower managerial and professional	23	22	22
3nm	Intermediate [secretarial/sales	14	10	10
3nm	Self-employed non professionals	10	7	8
3m	Lower supervisory and technical/craft [skilled trade]	10	10	9
4	Semi-routine/semi-skilled [driver, assembly line]	19	13	13
5	Routine/unskilled [cashier]	13	10	10
6	Unemployed	11	17	16

Adapted from Socio-economic classification of working-age population in the UK; ONS (2000, 2002, 2003) in Regional Trends 34, 36, 37, based on data from Labour force Survey, available at <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/STATBASE/Expodata/Spreadsheets/D7665.xls>

Socio-economic profile of the API in the UK (percentages)

Occupation	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
1	Professional	73	78	80	82	79	72	76
2	Intermediate	42	45	46	47	48	45	48
3nm	Skilled non-manual	29	31	31	32	31	29	33
3m	Skilled manual	17	18	18	18	19	18	19
4	Semi-skilled	16	17	17	17	18	17	19
5	Unskilled	11	11	12	13	14	13	14
1, 2, 3nm		43	46	47	48	48	45	48
3m, 4, 5		16	17	17	18	18	17	18
All classes		30	32	32	33	33	31	33

Sources: Adapted from Higher Education Statistics, *House of Commons Hansard Written Answers*, 8 July, 2002; and ONS (2000) *Social Trends*, 30, 56 available at <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200102/cmhansrd/vo020708/text/20708w20.htm> and http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_social/st30v8.pdf