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'IN UNIVERSITY, YOU PUT YOUR LIFE ON PAUSE FOR THREE YEARS': AN
EXPLORATION INTO THE TRANSITIONAL EXPERIENCE OF THOSE
GRADUATING FROM UNIVERSITY

REBECCA MOYNIHAN

A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Science (MRes)

OCTOBER 2019

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Abstract

The following research was carried out to explore the transitional experiences of those who were graduating from university into their next step. The current research reviews previous transitional literature – from early educational transitions, to the transition to retirement – but focuses the analysis on the transition out of university. The development of the Model of Transition Success in the current study enables the realisation that previous transition successes serve as a useless guide for the transition out of university for most graduates. This is because the progression into the next step is not as simple as succeeding at their current level of education to guarantee progression into a higher level of study. Findings show how graduates making this transition face the challenges of transitioning into adulthood, comparisons between peers, and unmet expectations. The analysis explores why this may be the case. The analysis also explores ways in which graduates facilitated their transition. Facing the transition with a perception of ease (developed through their transitional history) these graduates are often facing the transition unprepared. Implications for future research is discussed, as well as practical implications that can help both the universities and the students themselves, better prepare their students/ themselves to make the transition.

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CHAPTER ONE

Research rationale

Transitions have been well explored within academia over the years, particularly, educational transitions. It is well understood what a transition is, what affects making a successful transition within educational institutes, and also *how* to make a successful transition within educational institutes. What has received less focus within academic research, however, is the transition *out* of education.

A non-academic search on the internet using a general search engine displayed numerous blog posts and newspaper articles written from the perspective of graduates who had transitioned out of university and therefore out of education. These articles highlighted the non-academic interest that covered this particular transition, with graduates posting about their transitional experience, and the challenges which arose with making it. These blog posts and articles showcased that some graduates often experienced issues related to their mental health and a feeling of uncertainty that could be linked back to making the transition out of university.

Recognising the interest that surrounded the transition in the non-academic world, it became apparent that perhaps this transition was unlike any transition that a graduate has faced before, and thus, it should be explored with a different lens in order to understand what makes this transition unique and to offer an insight into how individuals experience the transition out of university. In order to do this, qualitative methods were adopted, understanding that by adopting qualitative methods over quantitative methods, a greater depth of understanding could be taken from the study that delved beyond the level that quantitative methods would allow. Interviews allowed this to take place, putting the interviewee in the centre of the

research, using their individual experiences to broaden the understanding of the transition in focus.

Within the limited academic research that has taken place in response to the transition out of education, studies such as that conducted by Student Minds (2018) argue the need for studies like the current to take place, to ensure that awareness exists of the transition out of education and into the world of work, and to ensure that transitional assistance is in place within universities, and that graduates are made aware of the transition, and what it holds, to ensure they are as prepared as possible.

The current study therefore exists to further illuminate the final educational transition and its components, and to share the transitional experiences of graduates in a way to uncover how the transition takes place, and what can be taken from this to ensure graduates are prepared to make it successfully.

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Introduction to transitions

A transition is a disruption to an individual's current life situation, and it is conceptualised as having a noticeable beginning, adjustment period, and ending point (Brammer, 1992) with these periods varying in length between individuals. These transitions occur across a lifetime, and each life stage offers a new transition, i.e., educational transitions and transitions within careers. Hvidd and Zittoun (2008) explain how a transition occurs when individuals find themselves in unfamiliar contexts in which they require making adjustments to themselves to suit their new environment.

Though there are many different types of transitions an individual can face, their general characteristics remain the same. Firstly, a transition results in both losses and gains (Schlossberg, Waters & Goodman, 1995) - for example one may lose friends when making the transition from primary school to secondary school, but gain new ones in their new environment. Secondly, that the duration period varies depending on an individual's available resources, i.e., social support, coping mechanisms and individual characteristics (Bejerano, 2014).

The stages of a transition

Within academic literature, there are many conceptualisations of transitions (Bridges, 1980; Van Gennep, 1960), but the main assumption is that transitions have certain defining aspects to them. In his work, Bridges (1980) proposed three main stages of a transition: 'Endings', 'The Neutral Zone', and 'The New Beginnings'. Bridges (1980) argues that every transition begins with an ending. This ending involves steps of transition, such as: 'disengagement', 'disidentification', 'disenchantment' and 'disorientation'. Once an individual experiences an ending of something familiar (i.e., a job role) they will find themselves having to disengage (separate) from previous relationships, settings, activities, and roles once they find themselves within a new environment (Bridges, 1980). Once individuals have successfully disengaged from their previous environment, the next step (disidentification) involves the loss of identity, whereby an individual loses a part of their identity – for example, a student leaving university must disengage from their student identity, thus disidentification is understood to be the inner workings of disengagement (Bridges, 1980). A person's identity, as according to Scanlon, Rowling and Weber (2007) involves the important and consistent characteristics of an individual, assigned to the individual by

themselves and others. The third aspect of the ending stage, Bridges' (1980) conceptualises as 'disenchantment', and is a period encompassing feelings of 'being stuck' in a limbo between old identities/situations, and the present. As with any transition, individuals can expect to feel lost, confused, unsure, and uncertain. These feelings can often lead to decreases in motivation as an individual loses interest in plans or goals (Bridges, 1980). It can be useful to recognise that the work of Bridges (1980) focused upon helping individuals navigate the challenges of a transition, and therefore, these feelings may not occur in all individuals. For example, when Bridges (1980) discusses the 'Ending' stage of a transition, he highlights emotions such as fear, denial, anger and sadness. With Bridges(1980) choosing to highlight the negative emotions that come with making a transition, he fails to recognise that some people may embrace a transition, and so will not experience denial or anger, rather they may feel relieved or happy. The work of Bridges (1980) is a general and conceptualised mapping of the basic stages of transitions, however, Brammer (1992) cautions that models of this nature (i.e., breaking a transition into stages), can be at risk of over-generalising the transition experience, as individuals may find themselves 'skipping' certain stages, or repeating them (Brammer, 1992). Bridges (1980) model assumes that every transition will follow this linear pattern, and fails to explain if and how people can skip stages or return to previous stages. However, Bridges (1980) model does leave space to suggest that people can find themselves lingering in certain stages, or moving more slowly through the stages than others.

If models like Bridges' (1980) are used with caution, they serve as useful explanations for the general transitional process. Nonetheless, by achieving the ability to summarise a general transitional process for all of life's transitions, Bridges' (1980) generalisation loses what is unique about each particular transition. Because

of this, those researching within the transitional literature have drawn on Bridges (1980) for inspiration, but have articulated the general stages with reference to the specific transition they are focusing on. Meaning whilst Bridges (1980) work is influential and able to serve as a guide to beginning to understand life transitions, in order to really understand the uniqueness of a transition, other models need to be made with additional distinct stages or categories of transition.

As stated by Bridges (1980) the 'The Neutral Zone' stage of a transition is not an important process, rather a temporary state of loss to endure. Within this stage, Bridges (1980) explains how individuals find themselves disconnected from people and things from their past, yet find themselves emotionally unconnected to the present. Bridges (1980) suggests this stage to be the most daunting stage of a transition wherein reorientation must take place. After the neutral zone comes the 'New Beginning'. Within this stage of a transition, individuals begin to realign after enduring the 'chaos' of the neutral zone with a renewal of energy, an understanding of priorities, and external and internal cues that guide future paths (Bridges, 1980).

Reactions to the changes brought about by a transition vary from increased anxiety/stress to excitement (Brammer, 1992). These reactions alter the way people experience a transition, though the stages remain the same - i.e., a shift in roles, for example that of a work role (Nicholson, 1984).

Transitions through the life-stages

Many of the transitions we make go hand-in-hand with the life stages we progress through. What occurs during these life stages can be explained using the lifespan

approach to human development which recognises that psychological development follows a predictable pattern that is integrated from infancy to death (Peterson, 2003). There are two conceptualisations of the life-course perspective, according to Eliason, Mortimer and Vuolo (2015). The first conceptualisation encompasses the social roles which define each life stage, each of which offers different activities, opportunities and constraints. It is interested in the sequence of roles and the transitions between them, for example the transitions from school to work across the life stages and how a person's role changes (Eliason, Mortimer & Vuolo, 2015).

The second conceptualisation alludes to an individual's recognition, evaluation and interpretation involved with the trajectories of life, which often results in social comparisons being made to those of the same life stage, individuals' recognising the salience of life phases, and identifying personal identities and behaviours which are expected within the life stage (Eliason, Mortimer & Vuolo, 2015).

As we pass through childhood to adolescence, adolescence to adulthood and adulthood to old age, we experience many developmental changes and achieve different milestones related to our life stages (Peterson, 2003). Often times, these milestones involve transitional changes also, such as the transition into a new career during adulthood, which would incorporate a shift in work role identities (Nicholson, 1984). During childhood and adolescence, the main transitions occur within the educational system. Through adulthood, transitions are expected to occur through changes in job roles, marriage, having children etc., and in later adulthood, the main transition to face is the transition from work to retirement.

Transitions across childhood and adolescence

Most children can expect to make a series of educational transitions, from nursery school to primary school, primary to secondary, and secondary to sixth form (Cartmell, 2011). Within the United Kingdom (UK), education is compulsory until the age of 18. Between the ages of five to 12, children are expected to progress within primary school – foundation year (five to seven), and ‘Key Stage 2’ (eight to 11) (HMC, 2018). Reports published by the Department for Education (2018) showed that in January 2018, there were 4.72 million pupils being educated within StateFunded primary schools. Following primary school, children progress into secondary school education at the age of 12, where they complete ‘Key Stage 3’ of their education until the age of 15 when they pass into ‘Key Stage 4’ (HMC, 2018). Reports showed that in January 2018, there were 3.26 million pupils within StateFunded Secondary Schools. Once a child turns 16 and leaves school, they are required by law to remain in some form of compulsory education until the age of 18. This can be either in the form of an apprenticeship, Sixth Form education, or studying part-time alongside a volunteering role (GOV.UK, 2018). In the school year 17/18, the Association of Colleges (2017) reported that there were 712,000 students studying in Sixth Form colleges.

Transitions within educational institutes occur with the same general transition pattern, i.e., a beginning, middle, and end, as Cartmell (2011) explained when she stated that educational transitions occur until the student is fully established in their new environment. The transition is a period in which the student experiences change, passing from the familiar into the unknown, whilst facing both social and cognitive challenges (Perry & Allard, 2003). For example, the transition from primary school to secondary school incorporates the shift from a small school environment to a larger one (Roderick, 1993) and often results in a number of social challenges

such as a difficulty making friends (Wells, 1996), or cognitive challenges such as decreases in self-esteem (Anderson, Jacobs, Schramm & Splittgerber, 2000). Each of these transitions within education are accompanied by distinct policies, curriculums, different teaching methodologies and an involvement of parents (Fabian, 2000). Policies have been created to ensure transitions are as successful as can be, working as a guide for those delivering the education service.

Research conducted into what makes a successful transition came from Ashton (2008). They asked 1763 schoolchildren, what they were most worried about making the transition. The research findings showed that the 22% of children expressed their concerns about making friends. Pratt and George (2005) argue friendship to be a crucial facilitator in a healthy transition. If social support is not available for a child making a transition, it can lead to feelings of irrelevance and anonymity (Mackenzie, McMaugh & O' Sullivan, 2012), with Tonkin and Watt (2003) finding that student's self-concept plummets when there is a lack of a social network.

One of the focuses of educational transition literature is how to prepare students to make these transitions, and how to make them successful. According to the Department for children, schools and families (2008) most schools have begun to implement some method of a formal program developed to support those students making the transition. Rodrigues, Meeuwisse, Notten and Severiens (2018) explained how teachers and parents were in a position to act as valuable resources for students in the preparation period prior to transitioning to secondary school, explaining how they should make themselves aware of the student's perceptions of secondary school, and their feelings of making the transition. Through formal

programmes and support from parents and teachers, the transition between primary school and high school can be managed successfully.

Students transition into secondary school whilst approaching the life stage of adolescence, which the lifespan approaches view to be a complexity of intertwined developmental trajectories (i.e., cognitive and psychological growth), social pathways (the evolving of roles, and gaining independence), and social groups (interpersonal relationships) (Benner, 2011). These trajectories are connected and have an impact on an individual (Elder, 1998), for example, a student transitioning into secondary school may experience feelings of loneliness and therefore may experience a decline in their academic performance (Benner, 2011). The unfolding of these trajectories brings about numerous social pathways for the individual to occupy, for example, the role of a student alongside the role of a daughter/son (Benner, 2011). Thus, alongside the transition into secondary school, these individuals are experiencing many psychological changes related to their current life stage. Using the lifespan approach to human development as a lens for educational transitions offers an opportunity to look beyond what changes occur from one educational setting to another. It also allows insight into how it can affect an individual's ability to transition, but what can be happening for the individual at their current stage of life and how that can affect their ability to transition successfully.

There has been little research conducted into exploring the transition from secondary school to sixth form education, perhaps because there is an academic assumption that this transition will follow the similar patterns of the previous transitions. However, it may be beneficial to point out that whilst these transitions between compulsory levels of education may seem to incorporate progression into a larger educational

setting and a harder level of study, they are made with underlying stability. For example, for most part, these transitions are being made by children who are living with parents/or guardians that are (it can be hoped) supportive to their child. Therefore, does this stability remain when an individual progresses into higher education?

Transitions through young adulthood: from college to university, university to the working world

Many individuals passing through HE are within the life stage that might be termed as, 'young adulthood'. Yet Arnett (2004) rephrased this to 'emerging adulthood', reflective of the finding that young adults (between 18 and 25) often do not feel as though they are adults. The Universities and College Admissions Services (UCAS, 2017) published report highlighted that in the academic year of 16/17, of those 18 year olds leaving compulsory education, 33.3% of them progressed straight into HE. They also reported that there were 2.32 million students enrolled at a higher education institute, with 1.76 million of them studying for an undergraduate degree, and 551,585 studying for a postgraduate degree (Universities UK, 2017). According to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), (2018), 757,300 HE qualifications were achieved in the academic year 16/17. Of this, 414,340 came from those graduating with their first undergraduate degrees and 266,725 came from those graduating with postgraduate qualifications (including taught and research postgraduates) (HESA, 2018).

Once an individual chooses to progress with HE, they are often doing so because of the perceived benefits of earning a degree level education, often times, in relation to

their career outcomes. One theory to support this expectation is the human capital theory (Becker, 1993; Schultz, 1961) which argues that participation in education is an investment, yielding benefits not only socially, but privately (Ashton & Green, 1996). These 'private' benefits are said to be evident in the earnings of an individual with a higher education, the progression within careers, and a wider range of career opportunities available to those with a degree (Tomlinson, 2008). By obtaining a higher education, students have entered the university with expectations that upon graduating, they will be able to access plenty of opportunities within the job market (Department for Education and Skills, 2003). The cost of partaking in higher education has long since been justified by the promise of such opportunities and significant financial and personal benefits (Tomlinson, 2008).

Models of transition into university

Following Bridge's (1980) work on transitions, Schlossberg (1981) developed the initial transition model, encompassing different influencers on an individual's ability to adjust to a transition: *perception of a transition, defining characteristics of both the pre and post transition environments and the characteristics of the individual experiencing the transitional period*. Schlossberg (1981) called attention to the role of self in a transition, namely, how much control over their lives an individual perceives they have, yet also acknowledged the external factor of support from others. Thus, Bridges (1980) work is a conceptualised mapping of the basic transitional stages. However, individuals can negotiate their transition more or less successfully; therefore, the work of Schlossberg (1981) is a deeper level of analysis of factors affecting a transition.

Another model of student transition used within the literature is the U-Curve Theory of Adjustment (Risque, Moore & Morely, 2008). This theory of student transition has three phases: the 'honeymoon' phase, 'culture shock' and the 'adjustment' phase. The move from college to university occurs at a time in an individuals' life when they are approaching adulthood, gaining independence, experiencing social changes, and sometimes, leaving the parental home (Kurland & Siegal, 2013). Whilst many individuals look upon this new experience with excitement, the break from old routines and familiar environments for some, will uncover feelings of anxiety and stress, putting to the test individuals' coping mechanisms (Chow & Healy, 2008). According to Risque et al., (2008), the honeymoon phase is a short period of time in which the student approaching university visualises a life of opportunities for personal, social, and intellectual growth (Pancer, Hunsberger, Pratt & Alistat, 2000). The culture shock to follow is characterised by feelings of disorientation and during this phase, students may feel heightened anxiety due to academic demands, a sense of loss, and stress (Risque et al., 2008). For some students transitioning into HE, their pre-transitions expectations fail to meet the reality of their first year as an undergraduate, translating into possible difficulties adapting to HE (Bates & Kaye, 2014). Factors that can influence this difficulty adapting include: receiving little prior information regarding university (Yorke, 2000) and feeling unprepared – often leading to withdrawal – (Forrester et al., 2005). These feelings often occur because of changes within their environment, their social life, and their academic/learning environment (Denovan & Macaskill, 2013). Once students reach the adjustment phase, they have often found ways to function effectively in their new environment, whether that is through increased motivation, or a developed sense of community (The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2015). Again, what is

important to recognise is that there are often students who transition into HE with little difficulty, and may not experience the challenges explained above, and so it is important to consider why some people are able to successfully transition. Turner and Tobbell (2018) therefore argued that there is a need to understand the psychological underpinnings that separate a so-called successful transition into university from an unsuccessful transition.

One model to offer clarification comes from Briggs, Clark and Hall (2012) who presented the Model for Mapping the Formation of Student Identity. This model identifies and maps key organisational influences (often within schools and universities) which enable the growth of a learner identity – essential to student achievement (Briggs et al., 2012). When an individual transitions into university, the learner identity – a temporary, socially constructed identity (MacFarlane, 2018) - becomes an unsure aspect because students are undecided of how to navigate their new educational landscape (Paechter, 2003). Important factors in facilitating a positive student identity were highlighted by MacFarlane's (2018) study, and involved, but were not limited to: developed academic skills, autonomous learning, social relations, personal and social skills, active learning and the feeling of a sense of belonging. Turner and Tobbell (2018) argue that educational institutes must focus on the adaptive construction of a students' identity by promoting agency, confidence and inquisition, whilst Briggs et al., (2012) emphasise the importance of support being given from both sides of the transitional bridge (college to university).

Another model of interest is the Student Experience Model proposed by Burnett (2007) which provides a holistic view on the transition process as a continual experience, rather than focusing upon what happens only the first few weeks of the transition into university. The model identifies six phases; the two to be discussed

within this literature review are 'pre-transition' and 'transition or preparing for university'. Within the pre-transition stage, students are considering their options with regards to university, and deciding on a number of aspects such as relevance for career-plans, financial factors etc., The following stage, the transition/preparing for university, is often accompanied by feelings of both excitement and fear of the unknown. According to Jindal-Snape and Miller (2010) the transition into HE consists of multiple transitions, both in context/environment (moving to a different town, progressing into another level of education), and inter-personal relationships (forming friendships, and negotiating changes in relationships with family and school friends). Jindal-Snape and Miller (2010) argue that because of the complexity of this transition, ongoing support should be adjusted accordingly.

Gale and Parker (2014) propose that transitions into university are best managed by universities themselves, through the offering of induction periods that allow students the opportunity to understand what is expected of them as undergraduates.

Nonetheless, Burnett (2007) expresses that students play an important role in predicting their own transitions, through their levels of motivation, commitment and engagement. How well an individual negotiates the transition into university, Kurland and Siegal (2013) explain, can often affect their academic success and their ability to transition into their next step after university.

University to the workplace

Anderson, Goodman and Schlossberg (2012) argue there are numerous factors that affect a students' ability to transition into the workplace, yet they state that a transition occurs over time, and cannot be deemed as successful at any one point.

The first being, the meaning of the transition for the individual and whether or not this

is an anticipated change; the context of the transition and what the individual must (and is willing to) invest, and the level of impact for the student. Considering career planning, Griffiths, Inman, Rojas and Williams (2018) argue that the transition out of university is expected, and therefore, the investment into ensuring you make a successful transition should involve high degrees of energy and emotion. The impact of the transition comes as either employment, unemployment, or underemployment. Nonetheless, this research fails to recognise the complexity of the transition as a whole, ignoring the possible challenges that a graduate can face which may prevent them from successfully transitioning. Many students enter university with the perceived idea that their degree will lead to a wealth of opportunities in the job market (Tomlinson, 2008). As was seen in the work of Riskey et al., (2008) previously, these expectations are formed in the 'honeymoon' phase of the pre-university transition. However, recent figures suggest that in 2017 from July to September, there were 14 million graduates in the UK (Office for National Statistics, 2017), and nearly half of those employed were working in a non-graduate role. This figure has increased from 41% in 2002 to 49% in 2017, reflective of the economic state of the country at that time (Office for National Statistics, 2017). The Office for National Statistics (2017) explain this could be either be down to a lowered demand for typical graduate skills in the labour market, or an increased supply of people graduating with degrees. Thus, you could argue in relation to Anderson, Goodman and Schlossberg (2012) proposal, graduates can be highly motivated to succeed and willing to invest into their futures, but may be hindered due to external factors such as the state of the economy. As Bates and Kaye (2014) found with those students transitioning into university, those who had their pre-transition expectations unmet with reality were more likely to face feelings of disappointment and a difficulty

adapting. Therefore, it is crucial that these students' expectations are reflective of and grounded in the reality of the job climate, and that universities are working with students to promote these realistic expectations.

The recent growth of the gig-economy (which Sage Business Research (2017) report argued could have been influenced by the 2007-2009 recession) – by which companies are able to hire workers to work on a self-employed or freelance basis (Todolí-Signes,2017) - has lead to an increased uncertainty surrounding legalities and worker contracts (Todolí-Signes,2017). This flexible way of working has become preferable to different groups of people (Parker, 2017), one group in particular being the millennials (those born between 1980 and 2000). Millennial work values favour the flexibility offered by the gig-economy, and sees them placing greater value on this than previous generations (Smola & Sutton, 2002). Millennials also place high value on higher salaries, but contradictorily, they also value job security, which is something the gig-economy often fails to promise (Smola & Sutton, 2002).

Nonetheless, research has suggested millennials like to change their job role more frequently than other generations, and so the flexibility of the gig-economy allows them to do this (Kauffman, 2015). However, some claim that millennials have been pushed into embracing the gig-economy due to being 'unfit' for a traditional workplace, lacking inter-personal communication skills, and the ability to communicate successfully face-to-face (Ochen, 2017). On a similar note, Odgers (2017) argues that for some millennials, gig work is much more preferable than being unemployed – with millennials struggling to find work more so than previous generations (Brown, 2017). Kowske et al., (2010) propose that previous expectations of job security and staying in one job role for life no longer apply for the millennial generation, and so they have adapted a different mindset and are often satisfied with

a lower level of job security, making the gig-economy more appealing (Adkins, 2016).

One of the main disadvantages of more millennials – in particular those with degrees - finding themselves in the gig-economy is that they are often finding themselves being overqualified for the role, and underemployed – working less hours than desired (Thorley & Cook, 2017). Thorley and Cook (2017) worry that this can have negative impacts on an individual's mental health – i.e., due to the low-paid work and lack of job security – however, a 2017 study by Balaram et al., (2017) found that the gig-economy is made up predominately of those aged between 31 and 52 (52%).

According to Holton (2001), the transition from university to work is a significant, and often difficult, transition for the conventional undergraduate student. There have been numerous phenomenological studies aimed at capturing the recent graduates' experience of a successful transition (Briggs et al., 2012; The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2015; MacFarlane, 2018). These studies have highlighted three key themes which can be taken from these graduates. Firstly, that the transition into the work place incorporates a change in culture from one environment to another, secondly, that these graduates have a lack of skills and experience required by employers, and lastly, that graduates hold inaccurate expectations about the working world (Gardner & Lambert, 1993; Graham & McKenzie, 1995; Perrone & Vickers, 2003). Whilst this research may be useful in highlighting what challenges a graduate can face in relation to transitioning into the working world, i.e., holding inaccurate expectations about the working world (Gardner & Lambert, 1993), it does not explain *where* these expectations come from, or *why* graduates are holding them.

Noble et al., (2014) focused their research on the transition of a student pharmacist into the working world. This type of transition is particular to those who are graduating with a vocational degree, as their focus upon graduating is pursuing a role in the same vocation. With this in mind, it can be argued that these individuals may not experience the similar struggles presented above, i.e., holding inaccurate expectations (Gardner & Lambert, 1993), or being tarnished as unskilful in the workplace, as their degree has been preparation for entering into their chosen vocation. Therefore, research into those graduating into a vocational degree may not be useful when trying to explore what challenges a graduate face, and *why* they face them. Nonetheless, both transitions (from a vocational degree/non-vocational degree) involve a change in identities. Noble et al., (2014) argued that identity formation (from student to professional) is crucial within this transition, as these identities help the novice to cope with uncertainty, build confidence, whilst also providing a framework for professional work. These professional identities, Noble et al., (2014) explain, are constructed through an evolutionary and iterative process which results in the individual developing a sense of self (Scanlon, 2011). It is not surprising then to see the importance of identity formation in the success of the transition into the workplace, as the formation of a learner identity was seen as crucial in the transition into university (Briggs, Clark & Hall, 2012). Noble et al., (2014) found that when pharmacy students transitioned into the workplace, and thus took on the role of a pharmacist, they struggled with forming an identity that did not incorporate being a student. Moreover, they also lacked the confidence and strategies to overcome difficulties faced, for example, dealing with criticisms from a manager, or working as part of a team. These findings offer support to Bridge's (1980) early work which explained that for a transition to take place, the individual

must successfully disidentify from their previous roles. Nonetheless, arguably, it may not be as simple with the transition from university. When a graduate is facing their next step after university, they are also facing the end of education, thus, the change in role goes from the familiarity of the 'student' role which they have carried through their education, to the frequently unfamiliar 'worker' role. This can explain why graduates are entering the workplace with few skills to navigate (Perrone & Vickers, 2003), because unless they have previously been in employment, they are faced with the challenges of new sets of expectations from adopting into a role they are unfamiliar with.

In 2017, mental health charity, Student Minds (2017) commissioned a paper which explored the transition from university to the working world, and how a graduates' well-being was affected. Student Minds (2017) argued within their report on graduate wellbeing in the workplace, that students are often left feeling 'unprepared' by their universities to make the transition from university. Student Minds (2017) uncovered that graduates often struggled with making the transition into the workplace, particularly when they faced rejections from employers; felt they had little free time to socialise, or felt their peers were succeeding more than themselves.

Their findings also suggested that a healthy transition into the workplace improves mental wellbeing, whilst reducing stress and that work culture relates to how confident a graduate is in disclosing information regarding their mental health.

Factors which promoted graduates feeling they had successfully transitioned into the workplace, were feeling they had a manager who was interested in their personal development, feeling that they were able to successfully navigating their financial pressures, they found their work interesting, or they felt confident to speak to work peers when they were struggling (Student Minds, 2017)

As we understand from the work of Bridges (1980), each transition begins with an ending, and with this particular transition, it means the ending of education. The transition is not as simple from university to a career, because taking into account the lifespan approaches (Peterson, 2003) each transition is accompanied by the trials and tribulations of a life stage. For example, the transition into emerging adulthood involves major changes and different groupings of social roles (Bell & Lee, 2008). Pressures for emerging adults involve 'normative transitions' (Bell & Lee, 2008), such as becoming employed, and 'non-normative' transitions such as moving back into the parental home after independence (Bell & Lee, 2008).

Many young adults are turning to the internet to seek help with making the transition out of university, and there are many blog posts online about the difficulties of graduating. Three blog posts were reviewed, with titles of: 'You're a College Graduate, Now what? Part 2: The Upside of Uncertainty' (Abcug, 2017) 'The university to grad job limbo that nobody is talking about' (Gumushan, 2017), and , 'Why is no one talking about post-university depression?' (Baxter-Wright & Davies, 2018). The general patterns across each blog post suggest that the transition out of university brings challenges that are not readily spoken about prior to making the transition, for example, the 'grad job limbo', uncertainty, and impacts on mental health. The title of Gumushan's (2017) piece suggests that this limbo between leaving university and finding a degree related role is something which graduates may not be prepared for, as highlighted by 'nobody is talking about' (Gumushan, 2017), thus this limbo may be unexpected when making the transition out of university. Similarly, Baxter-Wright and Davies (2018) suggest that another challenge which has gone unspoken is the 'post-university depression', and again,

the pattern arises that this issue was not spoken about prior to making the transition, 'why is no one talking about...' (Baxter-Wright & Davies, 2018).

This idea of a lack of preparation for the transition is also explored in the piece of Abcug (2017) who indicates that uncertainty is often faced post-transition, and leaves the question of, 'now what?'.

From these web articles, it is apparent that there is more to the transition out of university than how a graduate manages to transition into the workplace, it seems the transition is accompanied by uncertainty, unmet expectations, and mental health struggles. So far, the research into the transition from university has focused on the 'success' of the transition based upon how well individuals are able to adjust into the workplace, yet they fail to acknowledge the transition as whole. This reveals a large gap in the literature because the questions asked previously have been too broad. Therefore, meaning a narrower approach will be taken with the current study, focusing more on the smaller, often overlooked details of the transition, such as moving out of independent living back into the parental home and the effect it has.

Later adulthood transitions: from work to retirement

One later in life transition which can be argued to share some similarities to the transition out of education, is the transition from the workplace into retirement.

It is important to recognise, however, that the circumstances surrounding the transitions are different. For example, the transition into retirement can be either voluntary or involuntary (Hershey & Henkens, 2014), whereas the transition into the

workplace is an expected and definite transition. Similarly, the transition into retirement can vary in time and duration (Moffat & Heaven, 2017) and has become a more individualised experience in terms of the age in which a person retires, and which form it takes – gradual or abrupt, early or late, and voluntary or involuntary (Marshall, Clarke & Ballantyne, 2001). The transition out of education, whilst it can also differ in durations for some individuals, can be viewed as more streamline, where a transition into the workplace is expected to occur not long after the individual has left education, and therefore can be viewed as less unpredictable to the retirement out of the workplace, where retirement can bring about many different opportunities for individuals. For example, the transition into retirement sees the individual moving from a structured day-to-day working routine into a less structured, sometimes completely unstructured day-to-day. In contrast to the graduate, who loses a routine structured around university, but gains a work life structured routine. The similarities of these transitions however, is that both incorporate a transition into the unknown, facing new challenges and uncertainties. Individuals from both of these life transitions enter into an unfamiliar territory which they must learn to navigate. Alongside this shift into the unknown, both transitions see a fundamental re-organisation of an individual's self concept. Both of these transitions signify the ending of a long held identity for these individuals – and as we understand from the work of Bridges (1980) disidentification is a necessary part of making a transition. The transition out of the workplace and into retirement signals the end of life as a 'worker' (Lourerio, Mendes, Camarneiro, Silva & Pedreiro, 2016), and the transition out of education and into the workplace signifies the end of life as a 'student'. Changes in self-concept can also occur when the graduate sees a 'step-up', gaining

employment and a salary, and the retired individual sees a step-down, often having to downsize their homes, and losing a salaried income.

Therefore, whilst both transitions do incorporate their own unique challenges, they do share similarities in that both of these transitions are a first of their kind for those facing them.

Research questions

The main questions that arose after conducting the literature review were, what is it about this transition in particular which causes so much uncertainty? Why is it that the transition fails to meet people's expectations, and why are these graduates being encouraged to hold unrealistic expectations to begin with? The issue with the existing research into the transition from university-work is that there is very little, and that which exists (i.e., Noble et al., 2014) focuses on one particular transition, from a degree to a job which is guaranteed in some form (e.g., a vocational degree to the relevant vocation). It is clear to see there are numerous transitional experiences that occur from university to the workplace, and the vocational degree transition is the least problematic. With figures suggesting that nearly half of those (49%) 14 million graduates in 2017 found themselves working in a non-graduate role (Office for National Statistics, 2017), it is evident that this situation, i.e., finding a mismatch between degree and job role, is the most common. Similarly, the work of Student Minds (2017) suggests that more challenges occur for graduates than simply struggling to place their identity in the workplace (Noble et al., 2014).

Reiterating on the earlier rationale, the current research derived from realising that the transition from university is not something that graduates can be expected to face with only their knowledge of previous transitions. The transitions that graduates experience beforehand are, despite being challenging in their own rights, fairly simple transitions to make, because the student knows what to expect from each transition – i.e., how to behave as a student, and that the transition will bring about a bigger learning environment. Despite the differences which occur with each transition, for example, between institutions, friendship groups, and type of learning (i.e., the leap from GCSE study to A-Level), there are many underlying commonalities in that the institute is a place of support, and that students have knowledge of what counts as a success, i.e., doing well at GCSE's enables a transition to college. In addition, although the challenges faced may differ in some respects, the patterns of transition and the way to achieve progression remains the same.

Yet the transition *out* of university has no specific end point, and multiple next steps, and is often only supported by one side of the transitional process, the university.

The current research seeks to explore the transition from university, considering all aspects of the transition, such as how individuals face not only the challenges of finding employment, but also the challenges of becoming an adult. Thus, the research has a number of specific aims. Firstly, to explore how individuals were preparing pre-transition. Secondly, to understand the experiences these graduates have when making the transition into the working world. Thirdly, to make sense of what changes occur in the lives of these graduates once they have transitioned into

the working world. Finally, to uncover how participants experience and deal with any challenges post-transition.

CHAPTER TWO METHODOLOGY

Choosing qualitative methods

The current study was carried out using a qualitative research approach. Qualitative methods were preferred over quantitative methods as it guaranteed flexibility and openness to the research (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Alongside, as there was little previous research conducted into the area of interest, it meant the current study was explorative in nature, and thus, because of its flexibility and openness to research (Corbin & Strauss, 2015), qualitative methods were the most appropriate. As the research was interested in the lived experiences of those who have graduated, qualitative methods enabled this to be explored more so than quantitative methods would have. Qualitative research allows a researcher to identify patterns across a dataset, and generate themes and meanings from the individual and group perspectives of a dataset. As qualitative research methods mean that the researcher is more involved with the data (Donalek & Soldwisch, 2004), adopting these methods required myself as a researcher to consider my position and how it could influence the validity of the findings.

Reflexivity/position within the research

Reflexivity refers to the researcher's role in qualitative research, and entails self-awareness (Lambert, Jomeen & McSherry, 2010), meaning to be actively involved within the research process, and also is about understanding that as researchers, we exist within the social world we study (Frank, 1997). According to Bradbury-Jones (2007) it is the process of an internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation of the researchers' position within the research, and how this can affect the validity and accuracy (Bradbury-Jones, 2007).

When I began to conduct this piece of research, I had just graduated from my undergraduate study and moved back into my parental home, not having the funds to continue living in my university town, or to move into my own place back home. To me, this felt like I had failed. Despite graduating and moving home, I was still due to start my MSc in September, and thus I felt in a strange limbo, being out in the world, and back to living at home, but also still being a postgraduate student. Prior to graduating, I had lined up a number of internship opportunities, and also a waitressing role. I found it difficult to work in a waitressing role, despite still being enrolled as a student, I felt as though I was not living up to my potential as a graduate.

It was crucial that as I was approaching this research myself as a recent graduate, that I took away any assumptions I may have had about the data from my own experience. This meant I was constantly reviewing my position within the research, from writing up the interview schedule to analysing the data. Reflexivity further ensured I was continually bracketing out my own experiences from the methodology and analysis. This extended from the carrying out the interviews, to carrying out the analysis. Within the interviews, efforts were taken to ensure I stuck to the interview schedule, steering away from any leading questions, and avoiding allowing my own

experience to affect the questions I asked. I maintained a professional yet friendly manner with participants, taking care not to inject my experience into the interview in a way that would invalidate their replies. When carrying out the analysis, I took care when choosing which parts of the data I considered important to the research. To do this, I ensured each code I developed, and each subsequent theme, was clearly grounded in the data and not something I had interpreted using my own expectations of the data, or by viewing the data through my own lens of experience. It was important to remain reflexive throughout the research as it meant each code and each theme I uncovered was as close to the participant's spoken experience as possible, leaving a pure and valid analysis. I took particular care when the experiences I uncovered felt close to mine, and ensured that I had those codes and themes checked with my thesis supervisors.

Collecting the data

To facilitate data collection, it was important to consider which method of interviewing would be better suited to meet the aims of the research.

Upon reflection of the different techniques of interviewing, such as structured interviews and unstructured interviews, it was decided that a 1:1 semi-structured interview would fit best. With semi-structured interviews, there is the freedom to present an interview schedule that would aid the delivery of the participant interviews, made up of open-ended questions (Jamshed, 2014). Having an interview schedule is a clear advantage of semi-structured interviews as it allows for optimum use of the interview time, and ensures the freedom to explore respondent's answers more systematically and comprehensively, whilst staying focused on the research

aims and questions (Jamshed, 2014). Similarly, Gorden (1975) argued that when devising an interview schedule, the wording and order of questions asked during the interview should be considered to ensure that any differences in respondent's answers are down to their differences in experience rather than the questions asked. This was particularly important to consider in the current research as it was crucial to gain an understanding of the group experience, highlighting any similarities and differences, thus it was important to ensure those similarities were not forced by the interview, or through the analysis. Semi-structured interviews enable participants the freedom to talk openly about their experiences, as there is the flexibility to adapt the interview schedule to accommodate. This meant that participants were able to take the interview wherever they wished, exploring a variety of topics, but also meant that myself as an interviewer was able to redirect the interview when it seemed the data was becoming irrelevant to the research aims.

Prior to carrying out the interviews with participants, a pilot study was carried out in order to check the face validity of the questions, and to see how well a participant would be able to understand and answer them. Carrying out a pilot interview allowed further improvements to be made to the interview questions, highlighting which interview questions were ill-suited to meet the research aims, therefore, leaving an interview schedule comprised of core questions (see Appendix A).

To recruit participants, a number of methods were used: social media posts, utilising social networks, and relying on snowballing methods; hoping participants would share the study with friends. It was important to ensure that whilst the main recruitment methods were mainly volunteer, the sample consisted of a range of people from different degrees, and different transitional experiences (i.e., pleased with their transition, versus displeased). Ensuring this brought different experiences

and backgrounds to the study, enabling the research to view the transitions through a wider lens of participant perspectives.

The initial aim was to carry out face-to-face interviews (f-t-f) with participants, but it became clear that for some interested participants, f-t-f interviews were not accessible due to geography. After considerations of practicality, ethics and the reliability/validity of using an alternative method of interviewing, it was decided that alongside f-t-f interviews, email interviews would take place. Participants recruited for f-t-f interviews were contacted to arrange a time for the interview to take place. All f-t-f interviews were carried out during the day time, in a public space i.e., a coffee shop, or a study room at the university library. Participants who took part in the f-t-f interviews were presented with an information sheet (see Appendix B) upon their arrival to the interview, which they were asked to read through fully. After reading the information sheet, participants were given a consent form (see Appendix C). After the consent sheet had been signed, rapport was built with participants, making them feel more comfortable, which would help the interview run smoothly. To ensure rigour within the methodology, data was recorded) on a mobile device, and the interview schedule was utilised to ensure all topics of interested were covered.

The interview incorporated open ended questions aimed to explore a number of topics such as what preparation the individual went through prior to graduating, what sort of challenges the participants have faced since graduating, and how they have been able to cope with such difficulties. Interviews lasted between 18 minutes to 1 hour and 11 minutes, and after each interview came to an end, the participants were given a debrief sheet (see Appendix D) and thanked for their time.

For email participants, they were initially contacted via email, thanking them for expressing an interest in the study, with an attachment of an information sheet tailored for email interviewees (see Appendix E) and a consent form tailored for email interviewees (see Appendix F). Once a signed consent form was returned from the participant, a word document was attached to a further email with the first block of questions in the same order as from the f-t-f interviews, in reflection of Gorden's (1975) findings that the order of questions asked may affect responses. Questions were separated into blocks to lessen the time commitment for the participant. Once all information had been collected from the email interviewees, the answers were transcribed into a word document, not only to aid analysis, but to ensure reliability in the form of raw data which can be compared against the recordings (Mays & Pope, 1995), and the original email was deleted to ensure confidentiality. Debrief sheets were then sent to the participants.

One benefit of the email interviews was that it presented an opportunity for participants to formulate clearer answers, nonetheless, this could also give rise for individuals to withdraw certain information thus presenting socially desirable answers. Participants may not have felt comfortable discussing sensitive topics as the rapport built with f-t-f participants was not present with email participants. A benefit from a research perspective was the time it offered to deliver follow-up questions which could get the most out of the interview. Participant data was stored within a password protected file on the University's K: drive. This included consent forms, recordings, and interview transcripts.

Participants

20 participants were recruited, eight took part in email interviews, and the remaining 12 took part in f-t-f interviews. The participants varied in the degree course completed. These participants were recruited using volunteer sampling methods and snowballing techniques. The sample of participants included those from universities across the country and each graduated with an undergraduate degree, with some participants currently enrolled on a postgraduate degree course.

(Figure 1 – Table showing participant data)

Participant (Male (M) or Female (F))	Time since graduation	Course studied	Graduate level career?
Participant 1 (F)	6 months	Fine art	No – waitress
Participant 2 (F)	60 months	Visual Arts	No – working in a coffee shop
Participant 3 (F)	24 months	History	No – manager at a coffee shop
Participant 4 (F)	9 months	Graphic Design	Unemployed
Participant 5 (M)	16 months	English Literature and Creative writing	No – temporary position at Waitrose

Participant 6 (F)	24 months (undergraduate) 4 months (postgraduate)	English Language and Literature (undergraduate) Publishing studies (postgraduate)	Yes – marketing/remote publishing job
Participant 7 (F)	Almost 24 months	English Language with creative writing (undergraduate)	No – working in a guitar store

		English Language with creative writing (postgraduate)	
Participant 8 (F)	36 months	Acting	No – working as a civil servant
Participant 9 (F)	6 months	Psychology	Unemployed/ Not seeking work
Participant 10 (F)	6 months	Psychology	No – elderly care
Participant 11 (F)	8/9 months	Psychology	Unemployed
Participant 12 (F)	12 months	Psychology (undergraduate)	No - but relevant to her change in career path

Participant 13 (F)	12 months	Psychology (undergraduate) Psychology (postgraduate)	No – working in clothes store
Participant 14 (F)	12 months	Psychology	No – working in an accounting firm
Participant 15 (F)	24 months	Journalism	No
Participant 16 (F)	12 months	Journalism	No – marketing
Participant 17 (F)	12 months	Business Management	No – marketing
Participant 18 (F)	24 months	International politics	No – working in a bank
Participant 19 (F)	12 months	Primary education with BA hons	Yes – teaching a primary school class
Participant 20 (F)	10 months	Law (undergraduate) Law (postgraduate)	Yes – commercial law firm

Ethical considerations

The current study was designed in line with the British Psychological Society (BPS) Code of Human Research Ethics (2014), and was independently reviewed and

passed through the Human and Health Sciences' research panel. Adhering to the BPS' Code of Human Research Ethics (2014) meant a number of ethical considerations took place. In order for the research to align with the BPS (2014), it had to meet a number of principles: respect for the autonomy, privacy and dignity of the participants, scientific integrity, social responsibility, and maximising benefit and minimising harm (BPS, 2014). In order to respect the privacy, autonomy and dignity of the individuals, 'participant 1, 'participant 2' etc., was used in place of participant's names or initials. . With those participants who took part in the email interviews, once the interviews had terminated, original email threads were deleted, and email addresses were stored away from the transcript data. To ensure the research followed the principle of scientific integrity, the research aims were made as transparent as possible within the information sheet to participants to make certain they were clear of what the research intended to achieve. As a researcher, I had the social responsibility of aiming to generate psychological knowledge of the transition from university , and in term, aiming to support beneficial outcomes that could help those making the transition, and those indirectly involved. To ensure my study was maximising benefits and minimising harm, I had to ensure any potential risks were considered. Considering the email interviews, it was important to remain vigilant so that no psychological harm could come to the participants, as due to a lack of f-t-f contact, it was increasingly more difficult to witness if a participant was becoming distressed. It was important therefore with those taking part in email interviews to continually remind them of their right to withdraw, or their right to withhold information. All participants were made aware of their ethical rights in the consent form. All anonymous participant data was stored securely within the University's K: drive, with access being granted only to myself and my thesis supervisors.

Method of analysis

The chosen method of analysis for this research was a thematic analysis (TA), more specifically, Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis. The qualitative analysis took an exploratory and "content-driven approach" (Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2011). This exploratory approach meant that codes were derived from the data as opposed to codes being created from hypotheses, and codes are not pre-determined, rather are arrived at during the analysis (Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2011).

Thematic analysis involves involvement and interpretation from the researcher, and focuses on developing codes which represent identified themes within the dataset (Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2011). Because of the interpretation aspect of thematic analysis, it is important that to ensure and maintain rigor and validity, codes are shared with other researchers to check the reliability of the code and how and where it was generated from in the data (Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2011).

Therefore, to ensure inter-rater reliability, my codes were sent to the thesis supervisors at different points in the analysis for them to appraise them and their reliability, and offered the chance for discussions to be had, This also occurred when themes were being generated from the coding process.

Braun and Clarke's (2006) TA is a flexible method of analysis, producing rich and detailed data through the construction of themes. TA was the chosen method of analysis, being the most flexible approach to analysing data, not bound to a particular epistemology (Nowell, Norris, White & Moules, 2017). TA allowed the

theoretical freedom to explore participants' similarities and differences in the experience of transitioning out of university, and such is a huge advantage of the method (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Prior to carrying out the thematic analysis, f-t-f interviews were transcribed onto a word document, as were the email interviews. Any information deemed irrelevant to the study aims was omitted. Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) guidelines for a TA, firstly, each transcript was read, and re-read with notes being made alongside, recording initial thoughts about the data itself. Using these notes, initial codes were generated for each transcript using inductive coding. These codes encompassed part of the individuals experience, for example 'did not prepare too much' came directly from a participant disclosing that they carried out very little preparation for making the transition. These codes captured important pieces of data which could be analysed further to aid the understanding of the experience of transitioning out of university. . Once a list of codes had been generated, they were then grouped together to form initial themes – the second step of TA (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To ensure these codes were reliable, the quotes provided were clear and concise and presented to the reader as evidence for the codes development.

Using the codes referred to earlier, these were then grouped together to form the over-arching theme 'Unpreparedness'. Within this step, relationships between codes, themes, and levels of themes (i.e., overarching themes and sub-themes) were considered. This gave way to the sub-themes, 'Uncertainty' and 'Perception of ease' being generated within the overarching theme of 'Unpreparedness'. These themes encapsulated the codes that were present across the individual accounts, offering an understanding of the group experience (formed by the coalition of individual accounts of the experience).

Once there was an initial list of themes, a review was carried out (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This offered the opportunity to disregard themes with too little data support, or overlapped with another theme. The next step of the TA was carried out and involved defining themes, ensuring the themes chosen reflective of the essence of data it contained (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

During the analysis, it was important to ensure that 'fair dealing' (Mays & Pope, 2000) took place to make certain that the analysis was of high quality and validity. Fair dealing meant that the analysis was carried out to ensure findings encompassed a range of different perspectives within the group under focus, ensuring that the analysis did not insinuate that there was one sole truth about the experience.

Alongside, ensuring I remained reflexive in my research increased the rigour of the analysis carried out. Understanding how my experiences as a recent graduate myself could influence the way I analysed the data in front of me, it was crucial that I bracketed out my own understandings to approach the data with a fresh perspective, to avoid any subjective interpretations/preconceptions of the data (Gray, 2014).

CHAPTER THREE

ANALYSIS

After each transcript had been analysed, numerous themes were established, considering how these themes connected (or separated) each individual experience. For presentation purposes, the analysis has been split into three parts. First, pre-transition period, second, post-transition period, and, third, facilitating the transition. The pre-transition period includes data on how the individuals prepared for making their transition. The post-transition experience part considers how their pre-transition

expectations were met/unmet post-transition, looking at which coping mechanisms were used. The facilitating transition part presents what participants did to facilitate their transition out of university.

The analysis was carried out to reflect the aims of this research. The first research aim, 'to explore how individuals were preparing pre-transition' is explored in the pre-transition part of the analytical section. The second research aim of 'to uncover what changes occur in an individual's life once they leave the educational institute' is explored in the post-transition period of the analysis. The third and fourth aims, 'to understand what challenges a graduate can expect to face, and 'to explore what coping mechanisms people adopt and how effective they are' are examined in the post-transition period.

Perhaps the most salient finding was that of the Model of Transition Success. The analysis of the interview data below allowed for the development of this model, aiding an understanding as to what influences these graduates, their expectations, and their transitional outcomes and experiences. The Model of Transition Success evolved when at first glance, participant data seemed to reveal that participants were doing very little in preparation pre-transition into the working world, and as a result, were graduating unprepared to face unexpected challenges. The model attempts to explain how the transitional history of these individuals may have affected and ultimately 'caused' their perceived passivity in preparation. The first assumption this model is based upon through findings of the current study, is that individuals have come to learn that during their educational journey (often structured and systematic in the transition processes between institutes) the only pre-transition preparation they need to do is to work hard to achieve the grades to ensure a transition to the next stage, i.e., achieving good A-Levels to secure a place at university. The second

assumption the model is based upon is that a transition brings progression into bigger or better things. Hence, individuals model this transition out of university on their previous experiences, and make assumptions such as, 'if I work hard and get a good degree, I will get a good job'. The developed and proposed model highlights how graduates may often be perceived to be unprepared to make the transition into the working world, and may not seek career guidance or make a transition plan (Kwok, 2018; Tarigan & Wimbari, 2011), not because they are unmotivated to succeed, but because they feel they have already achieved the steps needed to progress into the working world by obtaining a degree.

PRE-TRANSITION

UNPREPAREDNESS

This section of the analysis features accounts from participants in which they reflect upon their pre-transition preparation. Using hindsight, participants often disclosed doing little preparation in the approach to their graduation from university. As mentioned in the literature review, the transition from working life to retirement is one which arguably shares many psychological similarities to the transition out of university. Whilst the transition out of working life incorporates the ending of the longstanding identity, 'worker', the transition out of university incorporates the ending of the long-standing identity, 'student'. Similarly, both transitions result in individuals facing an unclear next step, with many choices of paths to follow. Therefore, it is expected that individuals would use their pre-transition period to prepare for their next step to diminish some of that uncertainty. Yeung (2013) explored the transition into retirement and found there were two ways to measure the retirement planning/preparation. Firstly, retirement planning could be measured using self-perceived

preparedness (Spiegel & Schultz, 2003), and secondly, retirement planning was measured in that individuals thought about planning, but did not follow through (Wang, 2007).

Using the findings of Spiegel and Schultz (2003), Wang (2007) and Yeung (2013) in relation to the current study, when participants were asked about their pre-transition preparation, FPD's disclosure was that of a self-perceived measure of preparedness (Spiegel & Schultz, 2003) in which she expressed she did very little:

Looking for jobs a lot online and that... uhm, not much to be fair... I wish I'd had a job when I left uni [...] (FPD, Psychology graduate)

The approach of considering preparation yet being passive (Wang, 2007) can be seen in participant 9's account:

I mean there was the careers office which was quite good. I never actually went but I got told that they were very good in helping and then that was about it **I: Was there any reason you did not go in particular?**

P: Not really I just didn't feel like I needed it. (Participant 9, Postgraduate – Psychology)

One surface explanation for this perceived lack of preparation comes from Tarigan and Wimbari (2011) who argue that graduates often have limited information about their careers of interest, a lack of motivation to seek this information, no clear goal or career plan, little self-exploration, and a difficulty in determining a career choice. Research also suggests that those students – like participant 9 – who do not actively seek career guidance/are unaware, or have limited institute help, can undoubtedly find themselves stuck in their career planning (Kwok, 2018). Career uncertainty is something many participants reported feeling, 'I went into uni not knowing what I wanted to do, came out of university, not knowing what I wanted to do.' (Participant 17, Business Management graduate). From an outsider perspective, it may be easy to argue that these graduates are simply setting themselves up to fail

by being passive in their pre-transition planning, both considering the research findings of Kwok (2018) and the findings of the current study. Nonetheless, it may be useful to explore *why* these individuals are taking an arguably passive approach to their transition preparation, especially those who reported being uncertain about their careers whilst in university. Is there something more complex happening for these individuals as opposed to blaming it on a personal deficit (Tarigan & Wimbari, 2011) or a lack of something? The sub-themes generated to explore this further were 'Uncertainty' and 'Perception of ease'.

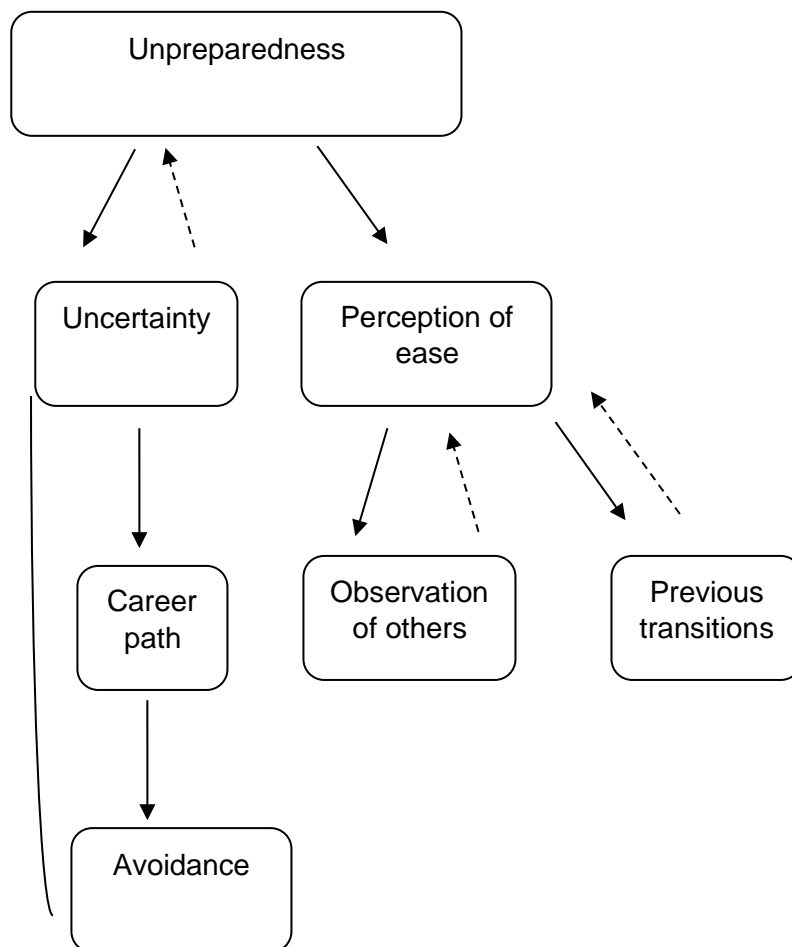


Figure 2 – Spider diagram of the pre-transition thematic map

UNCERTAINTY

Uncertainty accompanies most transitions, because as can be understood from the work of Hvidd and Zittoun (2008), transitions occur when individuals shift from a familiar context/environment, to one of unfamiliarity, requiring psychological adjustments to allow for alignment to the new environment. Often times, this uncertainty exists because they have no career plan in place. Thus, the sub-theme to be discussed is 'Career path'.

Career path:

As Kwok (2018) highlights, the most ambiguous aspect of being an undergraduate is their own personal career plan, and as seen previously with participant 17, graduates are often leaving university with no career plan in mind. This ambiguity can often make the transition seem overwhelming:

Oh it's very like, your path is over. The main path you've been on your whole life is over. And now there's, what on earth do I do? (Participant 14, Psychology graduate)

Kwok (2018) explains how uncertainty acts as a barrier to successful career planning for undergraduates transitioning into emerging adults, and as can be seen with participant 14, her career uncertainty left her feeling undetermined:

[...] I didn't know what I wanted to do and it's not like I had something to work towards, I've never had a career goal or known what I wanted to do [...] Cos I wasn't determined, cos there wasn't something I wanted to do specifically... uhm... so it was overwhelming. (Participant 14, Psychology graduate)

This uncertainty for some participants did not act as motivation to seek career guidance, rather resulted in them adopting maladaptive coping mechanisms in the form of avoidance, as evident from participant 13 and participant 4:

[...] you know when you get to like third year and people keep asking oh what are you doing afterwards? It's like please don't ask me that. It's so much pressure and now I'm like I've still got more than two years I can worry about this later. So I'm trying to focus on what I'm doing now because if I add another worry on my list I can't do it. (Participant 13 – Postgraduate, Psychology)

In terms of having a career in mind, I – probably unwisely- didn't really think seriously that far ahead as it always made me anxious to think what sort of career I would like to dedicate my life to (Participant 4, Graphic Design graduate)

This avoidance only reinforces the uncertain career path for these graduates, and therefore, their perception of being unprepared to make the transition. To further understand why individuals choose to avoid career guidance or to consider their future, exploration into why these approaches are preferred amongst some graduates should be carried out, and ultimately asking, why does this uncertainty not motivate them? One possible explanation arises from understanding that some of these individuals are approaching the transition with a perception of ease.

PERCEPTION OF EASE

One of the findings from the analysis was that individuals had this perceived idea that transitioning out of university would be easy.

I wasn't feeling too anxious because I think, in my head, I thought it was going to be easier to get a job than it was... It's quite scary not having an income and then living at home when you've been at uni with student loans to live off. But at the time, I didn't really think of that. (Participant 17, Business Management graduate)

Observing this type of thinking from participant 17, the U Curve theory of adjustment (Risquez, Moore & Morely, 2008) can be useful. If adapted to the current research, participant 17 not feeling anxious shows that she was living in the 'honeymoon' phase prior to making the transition out of university, whereby, participant 17

visualised an ease of gaining employment. Nonetheless, facing a 'culture shock' (Risquez, Moore & Morely, 2008) once she graduated and found it was more difficult to find employment than expected.

Similarly, postgraduate student, participant 11, revealed she did not expect to use the university resources available because she was not anticipating to struggle with the transition into her next step:

I have no idea cos I've never asked, not really planning on asking cos I don't think it's gonna be - it'll be a bit weird, but I don't think it'll be, for me anyway, I don't think it will be anything too extreme. (Participant 11, Postgraduate - Psychology)

In order to understand how and why these individuals have perceived views that transitioning out of university would be something of ease, further sub-themes explain where this perception could have developed, and are, 'Observations of others' and 'Previous transitions'.

Observations of others:

One way in which universities offer preparation for those students who are soon to graduate, is by inviting recent graduates as guest speakers to speak to the students about their experiences. Whilst Wendlandt and Rochlen (2008) argue that preparation in this way is beneficial, it could be argued that this perceived support is actually hindering the students, by glossing over the challenges that may present themselves after graduation such was a concern raised by participant 17:

I think they should definitely make graduates more aware of, if you don't find a job, you can feel - I don't wanna use the wrong terms - you can feel quite emotional, you can go into a bit of a depression [...] it's quite daunting and I don't think I had any warning of that. They make it out quite glorifying, like they talk about alumni and how amazing all these people have done, but they don't give

you any stories of people who struggled first [...] (Participant 17, Business Management graduate)

Participant 17 may not have thought to seek further advice surrounding the transition from university because by attending a guest lecture and observing the success of someone in a position similar to the one she would find herself in, the transition process seemed to be smooth and unproblematic.

Similarly, participant 15 expressed:

We had a guest lecturer once who was a freelance journalist, she made it out like becoming freelance was easy and everyone could do it [...] You can't just start being freelance when you have no experience or have made a name for yourself, you won't be taken seriously. At uni they didn't show this side of it [...] obviously they would only ask people who had achieved something within Journalism. It was very much a cherry picked image of what life would be like after graduation. I don't think many people anticipated what it would actually be like. (Participant 15, Journalism graduate)

Wendlandt and Rochlen (2008) explain how if universities are going to use guest speakers in this way, they may benefit from delivering courses that help students better understand the transition process, identifying support and coping mechanisms. Rowland and Algie (2007) found that when guest speakers were implemented into the School of Marketing at a university in Australia, 86% of students claimed the guest speaker inspired them to seek out more information regarding a career in marketing. Although guest speakers can be beneficial in motivating students, it is important that students are provided information which fully reflects the full range of transitional experiences, including those which are less than positive. This will ensure graduates are prepared by understanding and expecting that they may face some barriers in their next step, helping them create realistic goals, and as stated by Wendlandt and

Rochlen (2008), help them to develop coping mechanisms.

Another way people were able to observe the success of others was through peers who had already made the transition and were perceived to be successful:

Cos a lot of my friends have graduated and got jobs and stuff and obviously family, I'd turn to them before the uni, I'd be like guys, how do you live? Like how have you managed? But I don't anticipate it being too much of a problem anyway. (Participant 11 Postgraduate - Psychology)

For participant 11, seeing her friends graduate with a degree and find a job barrier free, her reasoning may be that if it is possible for her peers to achieve employment with a degree, why would this not be something achievable for her? Therefore, participant 11 may feel there is little need to prepare, as there are no anticipated challenges for her to face, and nothing will happen that is 'too much of a problem'.

Another participant who saw peer success as an indication that transitioning into the working world would be easy was participant 5:

I assumed that I'd get a job pretty quickly because that's what happened for a lot of people that graduated. (Participant 5 English Literature and Creative Writing graduate)

Observing the success of others may reinforce this perception of ease surrounding the transition and further lead to individuals facing the transition out of university arguably 'unprepared'. Therefore, in light of this, findings of Tarigan and Wimbari (2011) become questionable, as graduates pre-transition may not feel they need to do extensive career exploration, as they have observed from others that gaining employment is an easy experience.

Previous transitions:

Nonetheless, taking a deeper view into these participants' experiences and delving into the data further, it became apparent that these graduates may actually be doing the right amount of perceived preparation for their next step post-transition. Clarity for this argument came about when considering the participants' transitional history. From this, the Model of Transition Success was developed and proposed, which explains how individuals come to hold beliefs such as,

"I expected to come out of university and everything to just slot into place" (Participant 20 – Postgraduate, Law). When reflecting upon the previous transitions of these individuals, two things became known to offer an explanation as to how this perception of ease is reinforced. Focusing on the second assumption of the model – that a transition brings about bigger and better things, the perception of participant 15 about a smooth sailing transition is to be expected:

I found that before going to uni, I had the image in my head that going to uni would be great, I'd get a degree and get a good job and everything would go just like planned. (Participant 15, Journalism graduate)

Evidence for the Model of Transition Success was uncovered from the participants' accounts:

It was as if my entire life had led up to this point – it had pretty much always been pass your GCSEs to get onto A-Levels, pass your A-Levels to get into university, pass university to get a job. And then that was it – the end! (Participant 12 Psychology graduate)

I got like a 2:1 degree and I did well at A-Levels and I got decent GCSE's and I have work experience that as much as you can get at 21 and you've been at uni the whole time... and I just got no... (Participant 14, Psychology graduate)

With reference to the above quote from participant 14, following the Model of Transition Success in relation to making the transition out of university, it is clear to see expectations of progressing into a career, and the assumptions that gaining a degree alone will guarantee success. It is therefore not illogical for participants to come to the conclusion that the only preparation they need to succeed in their next step is to graduate with a good level degree.

For postgraduate, participant 9, she decided to withhold on pursuing a part-time job whilst studying for her degree, because she felt it would prevent her from achieving a good grade, clearly a target for herself:

I was gonna work alongside [my third year] but then I thought it's my dissertation year and it's gonna take a lot to get a good grade in that and do well in that and I thought having a job might affect that so I thought... I just decided to leave a job. (Participant 9 – Postgraduate, Psychology)

On a similar note, previous transitions have shown individuals that they will be supported throughout their transitional journey through education:

You get so much support it's really fantastic [...] you get tutors, if you need anything you get told who to go to. You have a health and wellbeing centre and then you have people looking out for your attendance if you don't swipe in you get an email... For me, uni here, as in the context of it, I see it as more school-like so that's great (Participant 9 – Postgraduate, Psychology)

[...] even though I didn't enjoy my course just knowing I was still in education provided some kind of safety blanket feeling. (Participant 4, Graphic Design graduate)

When making their transitions so far, these graduates have experienced transitional support from both the institute they were leaving, and the institute they were progressing into. In context then, these individuals have had to do little more than

achieving good grades to progress through the education system, and they have always had the support of the institute to help them with challenges. Individuals therefore, in previous transitions may have developed this perception of ease surrounding their transitions because of the support available to them each time they make a transition.

POST-TRANSITION

EXPECTATIONS

With reference to the previous pre-transition section of the paper, many of the individuals who either perceived the transition to be easy and thus were passive in their preparation, or were facing the transition with an uncertain career plan, ultimately found their expectations of life post-transition were not met. Using hindsight, participant 20 expressed how coming out of university, she realised the perception of ease she held may not have been productive, and was shattered in reality when there was little institutional support and more personal responsibility:

I think my biggest difficulty was managing my own expectations, I expected to come out of university and everything to just slot into place but unfortunately it doesn't work like that and I have had to really think about what I myself have to do in order to further my career. (Participant 20 – Postgraduate, Law)

Many individuals face the transition out of university with expectations regarding what life will be like. These expectations are either a result of entering into a new life stage (i.e., the transition out of university often occurring alongside the transition into adulthood) with different expectations (Eliason, Mortimer & Vuolo, 2015), or from the perceived benefits they expected university to deliver in their next step. Ultimately, these expectations were grounded in comparisons being made between where

participants found themselves post-transition and where they expected themselves to be or felt they ought to be:

I thought I'd be, in my university town still, I thought I'd have a graduate job. I thought maybe I'd be living with people that were also up there, in fact I even secured a house, but had to back out because I didn't get a job. It is very different to what I thought it would be. (Participant 17, Business Management graduate)

The shared expectations of participants can be grouped together to form the main theme, 'Adulthood'.

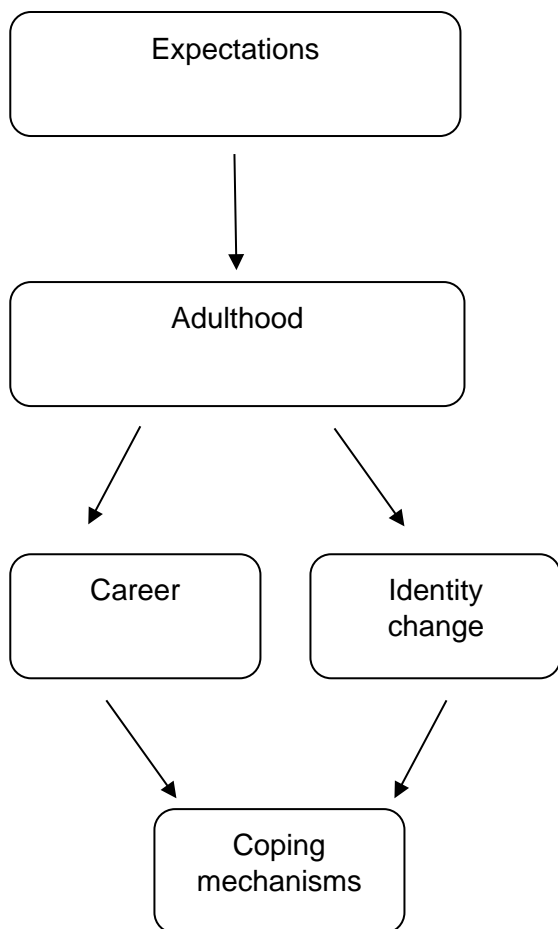


Figure 3– Spider diagram of the post-transition thematic map

ADULTHOOD

With the majority of students pursuing HE at the end of compulsory education, often aged between 18 and 25, therefore classified as emergent adults (Arnett, 2004), and with many students reporting not feeling as though they were adults at university - “acting like I was an adult even though I wasn’t an adult... thinking that I was an adult even though I was going out drinking like five times a week” (Participant 1, Fine Arts graduate). It therefore ultimately came as no surprise to see these graduates approached the transition out of university with the expectation that they were to transition into adulthood:

I did end up being like oh my god I’ve got to - I mean at 22, I’m technically an adult but cos you’re still in the uni bubble, I’ll finish and be like uh no I actually have to be the grown up that you think everyone else is. (Participant 11 – Postgraduate, Psychology)

How did these graduates expect to become well established in adulthood? What did adulthood mean, and were there expectations met post-transition? To explore this further, the sub-themes, ‘Career’ and ‘Identity change’ are discussed below.

According to Johnson, Berg and Sirotzki (2007) there are five transition markers (i.e., no longer in education, and pursuing full time work), and three personal characteristics (i.e., being self-sufficient and independent) which predict feeling like an adult. Thus, with recognition to the transitional markers of both leaving education and pursuing full time work, for these graduates, the markers are not only a sign of a successful transition out of university, but of a successful transition into adulthood.

Career:

As explained by Johnson, Berg and Sirotzki (2007), pursuing full time work and leaving education are transition markers that predict feeling like an adult. Graduates approaching adulthood will not only expect to pursue full-time work as an expectation of the life stage, but as an expectation of progression from university, with many pursuing HE for the perceived job benefits:

I knew that having a university degree there is a better chance to get a better job.
(Participant 18, International Politics graduate)

Throughout their educational journey, and more specifically, their time at university, the institute further reinforces this perception of having an easier time entering the job market:

It's actually quite funny because in the library and everywhere there's these signs like however many percentage of our students, within six months after graduating have a job [...] (Participant 13 – Postgraduate, Psychology)

[...] you're told, ah yeah go to uni cos your chances of getting a better job, a better income are so much higher by going to uni. (Participant 17, Business Management graduate)

These expectations infiltrate out of the institute and into the social surroundings of an individual, with those around them placing expectations upon them of how they should progress within the working world as a graduate:

It's very like, expected, you're an adult – you need to come out of uni and be an adult and get a proper job straight away, which is impossible. (Participant 14, Psychology graduate)

[...] There's this stigma that like, you've paid all this money and you have your qualification and our taxes are paying it because of the government loan or

whatever so what are you gonna do with it? You can't just go to uni and then go into a normal job. (Participant 7 - Postgraduate, English Language with Creative writing)

These expectations can lead to individuals feeling a pressure to use their degrees, often accompanied by feelings of anxiety:

It's always the worrying and the anxiety I'll never be anything I'll never do anything with my degree [...] it's not even making money it's just I'll never prove myself to my family and friends it's again uni does play a big part in this. It's like oh my god I need to do something with my degree I need to make something of it I've spent all this money and time investing in this degree. (Participant 1, Fine Arts graduate)

You're damned if you don't have a job and damned if you don't have the right kind of job. It creates an unbearable pressure, has adverse effects on mental health and then keeps this cycle going. (Participant 6 - Postgraduate , Publishing studies)

Nonetheless, post-transition, these individuals found it was more difficult than expected to meet these presumptions, from themselves and others, of progression into a certain type of job role. Participants either reported struggling to find employment:

I think had I spent all day, every day looking and applying for jobs I would've gone mad. When I had to sign on to Universal Credit, I don't think the people who work at the job centre have any clue on how stressful it is and how unrealistic it is to spend 8 hours a day searching. (Participant 15, Journalism graduate)

Reported finding themselves in jobs they are unhappy with:

I wouldn't say I'm particularly happy in my current job – but there's so much stigma around unemployed graduates, and of course it's incredibly hard to get a job as a graduate – that I feel like I'm stuck. (Participant 6 – Postgraduate, Publishing Studies)

Or reported finding themselves in roles they did not expect, or were unrelated to their degree, as was the case with participant 2, a Visual Arts graduate:

[...] it's hard because you're thinking aw this isn't what I want to do, this isn't the role I had set for my life... (Participant 2, Visual Arts Graduate)

Again, with reference to the previous pre-transition section of the analysis, it can be concluded that not only did the expectations of career progression manifest from the institute or others, but from the perception of ease that is arrived at from the Model of Transition Success.

Each transition - with regards to the Model of Transition Success - these individuals have negotiated so far has been “upwards” in some respects, in that the transition is an opportunity to move up a level in education, to increase in the complexity of study, and to increase in life independence. In support of this, van Rens, Haelermans, Groot, and Maassen van den Brink (2018) found that when children are making the transition from primary school to secondary school, they are often anticipating having more freedom, more challenges, and making new friends. This anticipation of gaining ‘more’ follows individuals throughout their transitional experiences, and the ‘more’ to follow on with the transition from university is in the acquisition of a career better than one they would have gained without a degree. This can be seen in the reasoning of participant 17, who compares her position post-transition with that of her peer with a midwifery degree:

When I graduated and couldn't find a job, I did find that really hard, it's quite challenging cos I think you put a lot of pressure on yourself to find a job and when it doesn't happen, you compare yourself to others and you feel like you're not achieving what you should be so I think comparing myself to others was the biggest challenge. When I saw my friend for example, did midwifery, went straight into a midwifery role. (Participant 17, Business Management graduate)

Not only does the above quote from participant 17 further support the idea that individuals are aware of the behaviours and expectations of adulthood (Eliason, Mortimer & Vuolo, 2015), with participant 17 claiming comparisons to peers lead her to feel she was 'not achieving what [she] should be', but also supports the Model of Transition Success. On the surface, the comparison participant 17 makes above may seem strange in that she is not comparing herself to someone with a similar degree, rather is comparing a broadly focused business management course with midwifery - arguably much more vocational. It could be argued therefore that the simple assumption that these graduates hold with regards to university is that a degree equals a job, regardless of your degree choice. Following the Model of Transition Success, participant 17 would expect to naturally progress into a graduate career post-university because her expectations of the perceived benefits of going to university and her own transitional history has shown her that if you work hard, you will succeed in the next step.

According to Furstenberg, Rumbaut and Settersten (2005), the road to adulthood is no longer marked by the early achievement of a stable, full-time career; rather young adults find themselves facing greater instability and movement within the work place. Kwok (2018) argues that due to the current state of the job market – with employers perceiving a lack of employability skills within graduates (Tymon, 2013), and intense competition for job roles, the lack of job security and therefore guaranteed uncertainty, must be explored within career planning within emergent adults as they ready themselves for graduating. This can help individuals to re-align their expectations to diminish the blow of reality once they graduate, as research from

Denovan and Macaskill (2013) suggested that often times when making the transition into university, students have anticipatory beliefs and expectations about the experience. They explain how when these expectations are not met in reality, these students experience disappointment and great levels of stress. Denovan and Macaskill (2013) compared this to those students with perhaps more realistic expectations of university, and found they adjusted easier into the transition than those with unrealistic expectations. To tackle these unrealistic expectations, attention must return to the pre-transition preparation for graduates, arguably, if the perception of ease was addressed with graduates, it may decrease the number of unrealistic expectations held by graduates and others.

Identity change:

Whilst in the context of education, individuals base their identity in a learner role, referring to themselves, and seeing themselves as a student. Osborne (2012) found that when people faced retirement, it often lead to questions similar to those of the participants in the current study of ‘what/who am I now that I am retired?’ (Osborne, 2012).

Graduation was like the end of the ‘uni bubble’ and a step in to reality so I feared that I wasn’t ready for life outside of being a student. (Participant 20 – Postgraduate, Law)

Seeing the end of education as the subsequent end of a long-term identity (student) allows an understanding of why this unfamiliarity can lead to feelings of uncertainty, because alongside the loss of their familiar structure, students are experiencing the loss of the identity they have based inside this structure. For the transition into their next step, individuals must be able to successfully disidentify (Bridges, 1980) from

their role as a student, and successfully take on the role of 'worker' if they are to cope with uncertainty, build confidence and develop a framework for professional work (Noble et al., 2014). Nonetheless, whilst taking on the worker identity, individuals must simultaneously successfully identify as an adult, and as mentioned previously, transitional markers such as a career, and personal characteristics like being self-sufficient (Johson, Berg & Sirotzki, 2007) are all predictors of individuals feeling well established in adulthood.

One interesting finding is that, although technically considered adults at university, many participants expressed not feeling as though they were adults, a finding similar to that of Arnett (1994) who found that only 25% of those young adults in universities considered themselves adults. Thus, pre-transition, it is witnessed that individuals expect the transition out of university to bring a change in identity, which they expect will allow them to become established in adulthood.

For these participants, being an adult meant many things, including financial independence and self-determination. Participants often perceived that rather than progressing into an adult like expected, they regressed back to a child after moving back home with parents. Copp, Giordano, Longmore and Manning (2017) found that there was an increasing number of individuals living with parents. This living with parents can lead to regression in a number of ways, firstly that individuals are moving back home after experiencing independence, or that individuals have never moved out in the first place, and not progressing how they expected (Copp, Giordano, Longmore & Manning, 2017). Again, drawing attention to the Model of Transition Success, progression is something expected, and thus, to experience a regression in the sense of finding themselves either not progressing into the next

developmental stage, or regressing back to an earlier developmental stage, can be a harsh reality to face. Similarly, Bell and Lee (2008) argue that non-normative transitions like moving back into the parental home may be more stressful than those transitions to more adult statuses, because they may be perceived as inappropriate, and a permanent failure in the progression towards adulthood.

According to Kwok (2018), emerging adulthood is a time of feeling in-between adolescence and adulthood, belonging to neither, rather being stuck in a developmental transition. This 'being stuck' was something participants highlighted, and supported the work of Bridges (1980) and the proposal of the 'ending stage' encompassing a period of 'disenchantment', feeling in a limbo between old identities and new:

[...] but then when you come back, it's very much like you're back to being a child and you're back to having a routine and getting told what you need to do. (Participant 19, Primary Education graduate)

You've got someone to report to, like if you do move home, and it's just like you've been living what you think is this adult life, living on your own for three years and then suddenly you're back and it's like you're back to being a child and it's out of your control. (Participant 14, Psychology graduate)

With reference to the above quotes from both participant 19 and participant 14, it can be understood that if an individual finds themselves regressing back to childhood, it can be accompanied by not only a loss of control, but a loss of self-determination. Self-determination is defined by Wehmeyer (2005) to be actions taken through free will which enable individuals to act as autonomous agents in their lives, and to improve quality of life. Students with self-determination skills have been seen to have a stronger chance of being successful in not only making the transition to

adulthood, but in employment and independence (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997). Nonetheless, Wehmeyer and Schwartz (1997) argue that often times, people/institutes act as barriers to those with self-determination skills, making it harder to exert their self-determination. As can be seen with individuals such as participant 19 and participant 14, moving back into their parental home has taken away the self-determination they gained at university, thus, preventing them from feeling as though they are adults. With this in mind, it is no surprise to see some individuals reported their lives at university to feel more representative of adulthood:

I do feel like I am not quite in 'the real world' though yet as I still live with and am supported by my parents and I'm not in a 'proper adult job' yet [...] I could say that I had more responsibility whilst at university in terms of paying my rent, buying my own food [...] suggesting my time at university was actually more reflective of the real world than my circumstances currently. (Participant 4, Graphic Design graduate)

The above quote from participant 4 indicates that financial independence, alongside having a

'proper' job, and a sense of self-determination are all markers of adulthood for these graduates. Participant 9 demonstrated this clearly when she explained:

I don't like relying on my parents like when they have to pay for things or provide for me with certain things cos they've been doing that so long I feel like I'm at that age where I can do that for myself now. (Participant 9 – Postgraduate, Psychology)

Participant 9 acknowledges that as an adult, she expects she should be financial independent, but instead she has found herself dependent on her family. With more people staying in education for longer periods of time (Fitzpatrick & Turner, 2007), it is taking longer for young adults to achieve financial independence (Danzinger & Ratner, 2010). As a result, young adults find themselves in a semi-dependent stage for a number of years (Johnson, 2013) leading to financial assistance from parents,

particularly for those who have pursued higher education (Johnson, 2013).

Ultimately, independence – whether in broad terms, or financial specifically – is considered to be necessary for attaining adult status (Arnett, 1997), and a sense of independence enables individuals to view themselves as adults (Johnson, Berg & Sirotzki, 2007).

Therefore, as can be seen with participant 9 continued financial support into adulthood may violate the individual's sense that they should be able to financially support themselves as they transition into adulthood.

COPING MECHANISMS

Individuals adopted a number of coping and defence mechanisms when dealing with life post-transition, particularly when life did not meet their expectations. Both coping and defence mechanisms are conceptualised as behavioural dispositions that enable an individual to cope with stress and adversity, and are essential to social-emotional functioning in adults (Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010). Coping mechanisms are viewed to be conscious and intentional, whereas defence mechanisms are unintentional and non-conscious (Cramer, 2008).

One positive coping mechanism which participants' disclosed using was 'brightsiding', whereby they sought the positives in a predominately negative present. Looking on the bright side is a way of positive thinking - particularly a method of positive reframing - which has been found to be related to positive emotions and other constructs like optimism and hope (Naseem & Khalid, 2010). When individuals engage in positive reframing, like looking on the bright side, it allows them to cope

with highly stressful events (Carver, Pozo, Harris, Noriega, Scheier, Robinson, Ketcham, Moffat & Clark, 1993). Particularly the feelings which arose when individuals made comparisons between where they expected to be, and where they found themselves. One of the main expectations for these participants was securing a graduate role.

... I don't cope well [with uncertainty]. I maybe justify it with other things I have done so like, I'm not doing a graduate job but I am still working and studying so it's kind of, reassuring yourself. (Participant 7 – Postgraduate, English Language with Creative Writing)

The lack of a graduate job post-transition was something which many participants disclosed struggling with. Whilst participant 7 focused on the positives of her present situation to deal with the disappointment of not securing a graduate job, other participants focused on re-aligning their beliefs about what a degree means. Graduates facing the transition from university hold the belief that in gaining a degree, they will have easier access into a job market (Tomlinson, 2008). Nonetheless, this belief has to be altered when they face the reality of the current economic state, and to do this, individuals alter their expectations of what a degree means. For example, individuals use 'transferable skills' as a way of buffering against the realisation that their degree does not guarantee immediate success. They focus on the positives of what they have achieved in gaining a degree, in the form of transferable skills.

It's kinda frustrating, it seems a bit of a waste of 3 years, and a lot of money! But I have to try and think of the transferable skills I gained and the experiences I had whilst at uni. I know I learnt a lot of things at uni, both relevant to journalism and life in general so I have to try and see that aspect, and use the skills I have gained in whatever job I do (Participant 15, Journalism graduate)

Enabling graduates to gain transferable skills during their time at university is a way in which institutes can positively prepare their graduates for transitioning out of university. Wendlandt and Rochlen (2008) explain how HE institutes can help graduates to feel prepared for the working world by offering courses which enable them to integrate everything they have learned whilst at university (both in the lecture hall and out of it). Courses can also promote the use of transferable skills, enabling students to effectively utilise the skills they have gained at university (Wendlandt & Rochlen, 2008). Focusing on transferable skills as a brightsiding coping mechanism can help individuals to deal with their unmet expectations.

Another way of coping for these individuals was by adjusting their timeframe in which they make comparisons. As found by the report published by Student Minds (2017), graduates often struggle with feeling as though their peers were succeeding more than themselves. Whilst this is a finding related to the graduate experience, making comparisons is also seen within research into the life-stage theory. Eliason, Mortimer and Vuolo (2015) explain how during each life-stage, individuals make social comparisons to those in the same life-stage, as a way of evaluating their transition. Social comparisons have the ability to either comfort the individual or negatively affect their self-esteem if comparing to those deemed more successful (Pyszczynski, Greenberg & La Preme, 1985). As mentioned previously, participants in the current study have many expectations of the transition into adulthood, with acquiring full-time employment being one such factor/ transitional marker which enables individuals to feel like adults (Johnson, Berg & Sirotzki, 2007). When making comparisons between peers, individuals often found themselves critical of their own achievements:

I feel like they're further ahead because they're in a full time job and they're getting money and they kind of know where they want to be but then at the same time I'm thinking I wanted to do my masters I need to do it to get to where I want to be so in the long run it is worth it. (Participant 9– Postgraduate, Psychology)

For participant 9, adjusting her timeframe in which she makes comparisons meant focusing on the future, taking her focus from the negative present, in which she is not employed in full-time work. Looking into the future meant that any comparisons made now for participant 9 were irrelevant, because in the future, she will be just as successful as those peers.

Where alternatively, participant 4 adjusts her timeframe to a short-term focus, on getting through each single day, refraining from long-term, unfavourable comparisons about where she 'should be':

Another coping mechanism that helps with all the difficulties mentioned is just taking the approach of taking one day at a time, trying not to worry about where I 'should' be at this point in my life. (Participant 4, Graphic Design graduate)

Friends and family support also acted as a coping mechanism for graduates. Social support in this way refers to the practical content of relationships, like the perceived or actual support given (Wilcox, Winn & Fyvie-Gauld, 2005). Wilcox, Winn and FyvieGauld (2005) found that emotional support from family and friends for those individuals transitioning into university acted as a buffer against the stressful experience of not being alone in an unfamiliar situation. This buffering effect was witnessed in the current study, when individuals often referred to their peers in similar positions as being in the 'same boat', helping them to cope by realising they were not alone in their post-transition struggles:

I have few friends who are struggling just like me so when I am spiralling I try to remember that I am not the only one who is still struggling. Having people who are experiencing similar issues calms me down. (Participant 18 International Politics graduate)

I'm not alone, I know a lot of people are in this position, especially people with creative degrees. A lot of the time, it's not people's full time job and they're wanting to do it full time but having to support themselves with other means [...] (Participant 2, Visual Arts graduate)

According to Pyszczynski, Greenberg and La Prelle (1985) after failure, comparisons to those who have performed similarly (i.e., others who have struggled or failed) as opposed to those who have succeeded allows individuals to imply that their failure was situationally determined, and was not a product of themselves, but of external factors. Comparisons in this way enable individuals to rationalise their failure (Pyszczynski, Greenberg & La Prelle, 1985). Thus, individuals are able to comfort themselves with the realisation that others around them are experiencing the same struggles. Wendlandt and Rochlen (2008) found that group counselling, or focus groups can be therapeutic for graduates. Group work can help individuals to impart and receive information surrounding the transition. This information can help individuals to gain a sense of control, and universality – where they are not feeling alone in their experiences of transitioning. Groups can also enable individuals to develop positive coping mechanisms (Wendlandt & Rochlen, 2008).

Alongside family and friends as support networks, participants also acknowledged the role of their employers, in support of the findings published in the Student Minds (2017) report, which suggested that having a supportive manager meant individuals were more likely to describe their transition into the workplace as a positive experience:

I also have a good line manager at my current job, and I know I can talk to [...] them about anything problem/worries I have. (Participant 12, Psychology graduate)

According to Aneshensel and Stone's (1982) stress-buffering model, social support has a protective role in relation to psychological problems, by reducing the perception of situations as threatening, and through increasing an individual's belief that resources are available for them (Dzulkifli & Md Yasin, 2009).

FACILITATING THE TRANSITION

For some participants, their post-transition experience was far smoother than it was for others. One potential explanation was that for a handful of these individuals, the Model of Transition Success worked in their favour. For example, those who were pursuing a vocational degree, where their level of preparation for life post-transition was simply to work hard at gaining a good degree, ensuring they were able to secure a relevant graduate job in their vocation:

[...] so I had an interview in April before I even left university, and I got the job on the day and so then I had a job for when I graduated in the summer. (Participant 19, Primary Education graduate)

I have recently (within the last month) had three job interviews for paralegal positions, and surprisingly I had offers from all three. I decided to accept the job at a commercial law firm. (Participant 20 - Postgraduate, Law)

What about those individuals who were not graduating with a vocational degree? As Burnett (2007) proposed, students play an important role in predicting how well they will navigate a transition, through their levels of motivation, engagement and commitment. Engagement can be seen as the difference between those who are able to make a smooth transition, and those who are not. Strauss, Griffin and Parker

(2012) define proactive career behaviours in four ways: career planning, seeking career guidance, developing relevant skills to specific career, and building a career network. For clarity, this section of the analysis will focus on the transitional journey of participant 16, a journalism graduate who, although not pursuing a career related to journalism, approached the transition out of university as pro-active as possible.

The preparation I did, I was – oh, I made my own website which had all the stuff I'd done to use as sort of a portfolio and I designed my own CV and made it a bit jazzy and a bit different. I applied for so many jobs. I remember sitting in the living room of the flat just constantly applying for jobs. (Participant 16, Journalism graduate)

Going beyond this and asking why participant 16 was carrying out more preparation than the Model of Transition Success suggested, it can be argued that participant 16 knew that the field she was wanting to enter into was more favourable of experience over a degree, and thus she gained relevant work experience:

I think in journalism, you don't necessarily need a degree, it's all about your experience. But I was always on the understanding that I would need experience and a degree. So whilst I was at uni I tried to get a lot of work experience and stuff. (Participant 16, Journalism graduate)

When investigating the impact of work experience on employability, Brennan, Blasko, Little and Woodley (2002), reported that work experience is an opportunity for undergraduates to gain useful contacts within the area of interest, and can often lead to them 'getting a foot on the ladder'. It can similarly help those who are uncertain of their career paths.

Wanting to find out why participant 16 had the knowledge that she would need experience alongside a degree, it became clear with further analysis that participant 16 had been wanting to pursue journalism since sixth form:

[...] whilst I was at college, I did bits and bobs that would help me, so I did the student radio and I've always written a blog and stuff so I always knew I was interested in it but in college, I don't think they did really help me out. Because I wanted to go into doing radio production for a while, I looked into doing that for a bit but like even in college there wasn't really a radio show. Like me and [my friend] set up our college radio station up. [My college] was very academic so there wasn't a huge amount of help for it. (Participant 16, Journalism graduate)

Alongside, participant 16 had realised earlier that in order to succeed in her field of interest, doing well in her academics was not going to be enough. Not receiving the creative help from her academic sixth form, participant 16 realised that she had to gain the relevant experience on her own accord. Having this early realisation meant that for participant 16, the Model of Transition Success was deemed useless prior to her making the transition out of university, because succeeding in her degree alone, she knew, would not enable her to pursue her intended career, and thus she recognised she needed to do more than the model suggests.

Nonetheless, how does this explain those who were not wanting to pursue careers in creative fields? For example, participant 10, a psychology postgraduate student had gained relevant experience throughout her studies:

[...] I'm wanting to do a doctorate eventually, but I know I need to get some experience and like, by the time I've finished this year, I'll have a masters, I'll have a first class degree, [...] and I've got quite a bit of job experience. (Participant 10 – Postgraduate, Psychology)

This understanding of needing more than a good level degree for participant 10 came from speaking to her mum:

[...] my mum's a teacher and she's also governor at the school [...] she tends to know, anything you wanna know about education [...] I usually speak to her

about stuff like that because she knows quite a few people who have been through ed psych who have gone through all the process of things so it's quite helpful. (Participant 10 – Postgraduate, Psychology)

Thus, for participant 10, she has reached an early understanding that success into the workplace, and her career of interest is not guaranteed by degree alone, and therefore, she needs to gain relevant work experience to stand a chance, after speaking to her mum, who has awareness of the field.

Making comparisons to those participants discussed in the previous sections of the analysis – those who felt uncertain about their career paths or struggled to find employment –by gaining work experience, or speaking to people with experience in the area - like participant 16 and participant 10, they may have been better equipped and prepared to face their transition. Work experience could have helped clear up any uncertainty surrounding their career plan, or as was the case with both participant 16 and participant 10 allowed them to boost their CV for a better chance at entering into their career of interest. For many employers, work experience within graduates is something they seek. The Higher Education Careers Service Unit (HECSU) (2015) produced a report which explored the recruitment and selection processes of employers with regards to graduates. They reported that although most employers will not explicitly ask for applicants to have prior work experience for graduate positions, they believe those graduates with work experience perform better within the recruitment and selection process (HECSU, 2015).

Therefore, although the Model of Transition Success may be present in the minds of these individuals, they are able to bypass the path into inactive preparation, and thus unmet expectations, by being pro-active in their career planning - which can be seen

to both be a cause of increased self-efficacy and a result of increased self-efficacy (Bullock-Yowell et al., 2014). Self-efficacy is defined by Bandura (2011) to be an individual's belief in their capabilities to achieve. Perhaps individuals are more proactive because they are certain of their career paths, but as Bullock-Yowell et al., (2014) argue, careers advisors within universities must work with those students who are undecided about their futures to increase their self-efficacy to enable them to become active in their career seeking behaviours. If individuals are able to become active agents in their post-transition planning, not only will it help them navigate any setbacks, but will help them to realise their Model of Transition Success does not follow them upon the transition out of university, and the transition involves a lot more effort than achieving high grades.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Overview of research findings:

The current research study had a number of research aims in mind regarding the transition from university into an individual's next step. The first research aim was, 'To explore how individuals were preparing pre-transition' and the research uncovered that participants often disclosed they felt they were doing enough preparation, but using hindsight felt they should have done more. Upon exploring this further, it was argued that individuals' hold a Model of Transition Success in their minds, which has lead to the belief that in order to prepare for their next step in education, they must work hard at their current stage. Therefore, pre-transition, these individuals who did not initially seem to have prepared at all, were using their

Model of Transition Success and therefore doing the right amount of preparation by working hard at their studies.

The second research aim was, 'To uncover what changes occur in an individual's life once they leave the educational institute'. The analysis showed how for these graduates, the biggest change they faced was the end of familiarity. The end of education brought many participants a sense of uncertainty in their next step, and they were left feeling overwhelmed by their options, often a cause of 'unpreparedness'. Similarly, individuals experienced the transition into adulthood alongside the transition out of education.

The third research aim was, 'To understand what challenges a graduate can expect to face' and uncovered a number of things. Firstly, that graduates often struggled with their expectations of post-transition life not being met with reality, i.e., struggling to find employment, which often lead to making comparisons to their peers who they deemed more successful. Secondly, that those individuals who moved back home with parents perceived they had regressed into childhood rather than progressed into adulthood - an expectation of both the Model of Transition Success and of the adulthood life stage (Eliason, Mortimer & Vuolo, 2015).

The final research aim was, 'To explore what coping mechanisms people adopt and how effective they are'. It can be argued that some coping mechanisms adopted by participants were more effective than others, for example brightsiding enabled individuals to buffer the negative effects of making comparisons against peers they deemed more successful, and peer support as a coping mechanism enabled

individuals to find comfort in knowing they were in the 'same boat' as other graduates and were not facing the challenges alone.

Current findings in relation to previous research:

In the first stages of the analysis, participants, in line with the findings of Tarigan & Wimbari (2011) disclosed having no clear career plan, disclosed carrying out very little preparation for their next step, and as a result, the findings of Kwok (2018) were supported as this uncertainty lead some participants to feel undetermined and therefore, avoid career planning. The consistency between findings assures that the sample in the current study was reflective of the wider graduate population that has been previously been researched, and thus the participants' disclosures were not unusual to the current sample in particular.

Support for Bridge's (1980) work on transitions

The concept of disidentification (Bridges, 1980) was supported within the research findings of the current study, as participants reported the expectation of the transition out of education meaning a transition into adulthood, whereby their student identity is lost and the adult identity is assumed. Nonetheless, many participants faced barriers when approaching the disidentification stage (Bridges, 1980), as by living with their parents, they felt they had regressed into childhood rather than progressed into adulthood. This idea of regression further supports the work of Bridges (1980) who explained that the third aspect of the ending stage of a transition involves 'disenchantment', a period in which individuals often feel stuck between two identities, the present and the past. Moving back into the parental home left

participants disclosing they have 'gone back to being treated like a child', and have struggled to identify as adults, not having the self-determination or financial independence to aid the feeling of being an adult, thus supporting the findings of Johnson, Berg and Sirotzki (2007).

Support for the lifespan approach

The transition out of university is most often accompanied by the transition into adulthood, and many of the findings in the present study coincide with the research into the life-course perspective. For example, participants had clear expectations of adulthood, whether instilled in them from others, or from themselves; one expectation was taking on the role of an adult and losing their student identity.

Eliason, Mortimer and Vuolo (2015) argued that with each life stage comes the opportunity for individuals to recognise not only the identities expected within the life stage (i.e., adult), but the behaviours also. As witnessed in the research, participants had many ideas about what adulthood was (i.e., the behaviours involved) including, financial independence, self-determination and a career. Often times, when participants found their expectations were not met by reality, they turned to social comparisons to those of the same life stage/situation, which Eliason, Mortimer and Vuolo (2015) argue to be a result of an individual's ability to interpret and evaluate their trajectories of life. These social comparisons often occurred between themselves and those peers around them who they deemed to be more successful, i.e., between those participants who struggled to find employment posttransition, and those who secured a graduate role. But often, comparisons were made to peers who were perceived to have failed or struggled also. This finding offered further support to the research of Pyszczynski, Greenberg and La Prelle

(1985) who explained that when individuals compare themselves to others who they perceive to have struggled or failed, it allows them to imply that their failure was determined and not a result of themselves. Comparisons in this way showed to act as a coping mechanism for participants, who used the analogy of the 'same boat' to reassure themselves that they were not alone in their struggles.

Understanding that it is important for graduates not to feel alone, support is offered to Wendlandt and Rochlen (2008) who found group work to be beneficial in enabling graduates to gain a sense of control and universality, and allowed them to develop positive coping mechanisms. The findings of both the current study and Wendlandt and Rochlen (2008) suggest that individuals are more able to cope with the struggles of life post-transition (i.e., with reality not aligning to expectations) if they do not feel alone.

Presenting a new model of transition

The current research gave way to a new model of transition, the Model of Transition Success, which was used to explain a number of findings in the research. Whilst the existing models of transition such as the U-Curve Theory of Adjustment (Risquez, Moore & Morely, 2008) were supported in the research, particularly finding that students experienced a 'honeymoon' phase pre-transition and a 'culture' shock post-transition when reality shattered their illusion of ease, the question of *why* remained. The Model of Transition Success offered an understanding as to why individuals held a perception of ease about the transition out of university, offering a number of reasons such as observing the success of others, i.e., peers and previous graduates, or by acknowledging their previous transitions in which preparation was as simple as working hard.

Using the Model of Transition Success as a response to the findings of Tarigan and Wimbari (2011), and the initial findings of the current analysis, it is possible to reflect on the research findings that graduates have little motivation to explore career options, no clear career plan, and little self-exploration (Tarigan & Wimbari, 2011) using the graduate's perspective.

Navigating transitions – and following the Model of Transition Success - it is possible to see that graduates perceive themselves to be carrying out substantial preparation when they questioned their employment struggles and used their success through education as an explanation as to why they expected to succeed, i.e., 'I passed my A-Levels and made it to university'. For these graduates then, their transitional history has proved to them that working hard at their current stage of education guarantees progression into their next step. Therefore, they may seem to have little motivation, or little self-exploration (Tarigan & Wimbari, 2011) to outsiders, but from their perspective, they are working hard at university to ensure progression into their next step – the working world. Similarly, the model explains why graduates struggled when their expectations of progression – into a career, and into adulthood – were not met, as one assumption of the model is each transition will lead to bigger and better things.

Initially then, those participants who reported doing little preparation seemed to be 'deviants' in that they went against what was expected of them, but as the analysis progressed, it became those who were active in their preparation and experienced a smooth transition that became the so-called 'deviants', and an interest of the research. It seemed that those who were able to facilitate a smooth transition were doing more than their Model of Transition Success suggested. Wanting to know what we can learn from them, further exploration suggested that this could either be

because the model simply worked in their favour, i.e., they had chosen a vocational course where working hard, their chances of progressing into a degree-related careers was a lot higher than those who chose non-vocational degrees. Another explanation was individuals were going to a career field that favoured experience over a degree (i.e., journalism). Therefore, the Model of Transition Success became redundant for these participants, and a more pro-active approach to preparation was necessary.

The development of the Model of Transition Success highlights how the transition out of university is unlike any of the transitions these graduates have faced before, and therefore, expectations they have of the transition out of university may not be grounded in reality, rather than in the past experiences which are now irrelevant. As seen with those participants who defied the Model of Transition Success, more pro-active preparation may help to facilitate a smoother transition. Alongside, enabling students pre-transition to consider their career paths, and help them develop career plans will promote self-efficacy (Bandura, 2011; Bullock-Yowell, McConnell & Schedin, 2014).

Practical implications

The question to arise from this research is what can we do to make this transition smoother for those making it? First and foremost, students should be making the transition with more awareness of what they are to face. This awareness, I believe, should begin at the sixth form/college side of the transition bridge, where career advisers can explore career options with their students, ensuring that those who are choosing to progress into HE are more aware of their career options, and what goals they need to set to get there.

This career guidance should have its main aim as increasing a student's self-efficacy (Bandura, 2011) as this is seen to promote positive career planning and engagement (Bullock-Yowell, McConnell & Schedin 2014).

Looking at the university's role in this transition, awareness should be shared on the transition, and skills should be encouraged to be developed in order to deal effectively with making the transition. One way universities can share awareness on this transition is by bringing in previous graduates and alumni to discuss what support they feel, in hindsight they would have benefited from. If universities work alongside those who have made the transition, and use graduate speakers in a more practical way, i.e., ensuring that a variety of transitional stories are told, both positive and less than positive, students are more likely to approach the transition with confidence. Utilising the transitional experiences of graduates can help universities prepare their students for navigating the working world. One way of enabling this is by offering a seminar/lecture based preparation course in which findings like that of the current study are discussed with students and opportunities to ask questions are provided. Through personal tutor (PT) sessions, students in their first year may be encouraged to book a careers appointment with a school tailored advisor who has relevant experience to the individual's degree and is better equipped at working with these students to promote realistic expectations and better career planning.

Workbooks may also be developed and worked on in such PT sessions which incorporate the research findings of the current study, asking students to become more pro-active in their approach to preparing for life after education. Workbooks can also provide them advice on how to search for jobs etc., or how to adopt positive coping mechanisms when facing difficulties like moving back home with parents, or making comparisons to peers.

Universities must also ensure their current preparation services such as careers advice are clearly accessible and their existence is made clear to students, as the findings of both the current study and Kwok (2018) suggest that students who are unaware of the universities resources may find themselves stuck in their career planning. Preparation in this way can also enable current students to align their expectations with reality to avoid any disappointments, and encourage students to render their Model of Transition Success as useless for their current transition, and promote a more pro-active approach to preparation.

Why should universities be concerned with this transition, when they have achieved their purpose in teaching students to a degree level? It first should be mentioned that the responsibility does not fall on the university alone. Students who are making the transition must act independently and recognise their own role in preparing for making the transition. This means engaging in processes like the Personal Development Programme (PDP). Research conducted by Gedye, Fender & Chalkey, (2004) reported that in the early 2000's there was an increased pressure for HE to prepare students for the world of work. One way in which educational institutes tackled this was to introduce PDPs into the curriculum. PDPs enable students to reflect on their own learning, performance and achievements in order for them to begin to plan their personal, career and educational development (Lumsden, 2015).

Engaging in PDP activities has been seen to produce benefits such as, an understanding of how to create a CV and drafting a cover letter, support for applications and interviews – i.e., reflecting on the transferable skills gained. And enabling students to have an understanding of their future plans and how to achieve them (Tucker, Duncan & Davies, 2015).

The benefit of universities engaging in the transition more is that, practically, it affects how well a university scores on assessment. One aspect of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) – which is in place to assess how well universities are able to ensure excellent outcomes for their students (Office For Students, 2019), is the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) (Unistats, 2019). The DLHE questionnaire asks graduates to share their current position – whether they are unemployed, employed, studying further or travelling. Details are also taken on pay, role and the type of employer they work for (Unistats, 2019). As seen in the literature review of this paper, in 2017, over half of 14 million graduates were employed in a non-graduate role (Office for National Statistics, 2017). The current research also found that out of the twenty participants interviewed, there were only three participants who were employed in a degree-relevant graduate role, with the others working part-time roles such as waitressing, or being unemployed/seeking work. A benefit for institutions to engage with this transition more would mean students would be leaving education better prepared not only to seek work, but to participate in applications and interviews, and have clearer goals to meet their career plans. The more prepared students are to enter the working world, the more success they will have in the process of job seeking, more able to present their transferable skills and personal development to prospective employers. This would mean the DLHE data collected by universities will be enhanced, with more students feeling able to enter into graduate roles. Thus, institutes can meet more of the criteria of the TEF.

Alongside, engaging in the transition would benefit universities in the sense that graduates would leave university with a sense of loyalty to the university. In providing both academic and personal development support, graduates will feel better prepared and well supported by the institute, and so will become loyal alumni, and

may consider remaining at that institute for further study. Understanding that it is within the universities best interest to engage with this transition, student awareness begins with the university

changing the way they approach preparation, considering how advertising graduate success may lead to a more passive approach, and utilising the opportunity of hearing from graduates themselves about how they can help their current students further than existing approaches. Yet, once this has been achieved by the university, it is ultimately down to the student to accept the open hand, and thus those who are willing and open to the support will see more benefits than those who remain passive.

Limitations of the study

One limitation of the study is that it involved those who were still in postgraduate education. Although valuable research findings came from their accounts, it was not a true transition experience in that they had not left the educational system. In future research, sampling to include only those who had graduated (whether with an undergraduate degree or postgraduate degree) will overcome this issue.

As understood, transitions are continual processes which span from prior to making the transition, to the adjustment period. The current research study involved a sample of graduates who had mostly made the transition within the last year, and thus their accounts only highlighted initial experience. The research therefore did not consider how those who were finding it difficult at the point of interviewing may have adjusted later on, missing out on exploring *how* they in turn facilitated their transition. Implications for future research could take a longitudinal approach and follow-up participants to see how and why their transition may have changed over time.

In this sample, the graduates were undergoing two types of transitions, one being the transition out of education and into various types of (non) employment, and the other being the transition into adulthood. Therefore, the research is not able to explore whether the transitional experiences were shared with those who are graduating as mature students. Would mature students, who have presumably already had experience of the working world, navigate the transition smoother? How would their transition differ if they were losing the student identity but had already gained their 'adult' identity? With this in mind, future research may obtain a sample of those who graduate from university as mature students and compare the findings against the current study.

Strengths of the study

One strength of the current research is that it took a holistic approach in exploring the transition from university, not limiting itself to studying the adjustment into the working world. In taking on a wider qualitative approach, the research enabled new models of transition to be discovered, such as the Model of Transition Success, which answered the *why* questions to much of the previous research into transitions, particularly the research into the transition into the working world finding that graduates hold inaccurate expectations, for example (Gardner & Lambert, 1993).

The flexibility of the semi-structured interviews used allowed for participants to disclose their expectations of post-transition life in reflection of their previous transitions, explaining how they understand that to progress into the next step, you have to work hard at your current step. Not only does offer an explanation as to why these individuals hold inaccurate expectations (Gardner & Lambert, 1993) – expecting to succeed with ease – it further reinforces the argument that care needs

to be taken by universities when considering their methods of preparation for the working world, such as guest speakers.

The analysis enabled the discovery of the Model of Transition Success, which demonstrates why these individuals hold certain perceptions of the transition out of university being one of ease – through their experiences of previous transitions, and through the observations of others. The development of the model enabled a contrasting argument to be presented to the research which suggested that graduates are unmotivated to explore career avenues (Tarigan & Wimbari, 2011).

The development of this model also enabled an analysis on those students who had managed a smoother transition, seeing that some students are more pro-active, and therefore do more preparation than the model suggests. Findings suggested that these are students who are more aware that their progression into a career is not reliant on a degree alone. These realisations often came from work experience, or talking with others who are experienced in the field of interest.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the post university transition is unlike any transition that has faced those making it so far, and thus it needs to be approached accordingly. It is a major life change and can be deemed the end of an era in that graduates say goodbye to the education system that they have been a part of since their early childhood. The transition brings about expectations from the individuals, and from others, and if these expectations are not realistic, nor perceived to be achievable, it can lead to graduates feeling as though they have not succeeded.

Universities have the opportunity to take an active engagement in this transition, and support the students past their academic achievements, leaving graduates to feel

better prepared for the working world, strengthening the alumni links, and bettering the chances of these students succeeding well in the workplace. Institutions would benefit from improving their relationships with not only current students, but with previous graduates, seeing those relationships as an opportunity to leave their students feeling confident to take what they have learnt at university into the working world. The transition does not just incorporate the transition into a place of employment, but of the transition into adulthood, and graduates should receive guidance on both of these aspects in order to increase the chances of them experiencing a smooth transition. Future research in this area must consider plausible ways in which the current research findings can be adopted into the education system, taking recommendations from the discussion and advancing upon these further. For example, replicating the current study but introducing a follow-up analysis of the participants, to map their transitional journey, and how they ultimately, adjust into the transition. Observing this adjustment can offer further clarification on how individuals are able to cope, and facilitate their own transition, enabling further guidance for those pre-transition.

The ultimate goal is to make the transition out of education not something which individuals look upon with uncertainty or dread, but a transition they see themselves capable of making as they have with previous transitions. Nonetheless, students must be advised that the transition out of university will not and does not follow the Model of Transition Success they have come to know, and thus they must approach this transition with inquisition and ask themselves, and others, how they can best prepare for such a change. This means taking responsibility by engaging in PDP and putting themselves in good stead for graduating.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A – Interview schedule

Why did you decide to go to university?

What did you study whilst at university?

Was this something you had always wanted to study? What career did you have in mind?

How long has it been since you graduated?

What did it feel like to graduate?

Take me back to a month before graduating, what sort of feelings were you experiencing?

Did you have any worries about graduating?

How did you prepare for life after university?

How did your university help you prepare?

Is there anything you wish they would have helped you prepare more with?

What sort of difficulties have you experienced since graduating?

How well have you coped with these difficulties?

What coping mechanisms do you have in place?

Did you anticipate you would come across these difficulties?

What major changes, besides graduating, have occurred in your life?

What are you now doing with your life after graduating?

Is this where you expected yourself to be?

How did it feel to be at a point in your life where the next step of the education ladder was replaced with the 'real world' and all its possibilities?

What have you noticed about the real world that's different to how it was at university?

How was your transition into university?

What sort of time-frame do you have in place for the things you want to achieve?

How do you measure your personal success?

What is the main thing you miss about university?

What advice would you give to someone who is about to graduate in the summer?

APPENDIX B – Information sheet (f-t-f interviews)

Dear participant,

As part of my postgraduate study, I am conducting a piece of research focused on the transition from university life, to graduate life; covering a number of different topics such as job status, housing situation and the challenges and opportunities faced during your transition. This is an area that has been neglected within academic research so far, and so the study will shed light on an under-researched topic. Your participation, therefore, will be beneficial for building the foundations of an important research area.

The study will require you to take part in an interview which will normally last around 45 minutes. During this interview, you will be asked a number of questions, covering topics such as; how you prepared for graduate life, whether or not your expectations of graduate life have aligned with reality, and what sort of issues you may have faced. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your participation at any point during the interview and two weeks following the interview.

Interviews will be recorded for the sole purpose of transcription and data analysis at a later point during my project. Your data will be securely stored, pseudonyms will be used in place of your name to ensure anonymity, and locations of your place of study will be changed, thus ensuring the strictest confidentiality and anonymity.

There are no foreseeable risks associated with taking part in this study, however, if any topics are brought to discussion that you do not feel comfortable talking about, you are welcomed to not disclose information. Similarly, you have the right to terminate the interview at any point, should you feel the need. Information will be provided following the interview about where you can find psychological help and support in the unlikely case you should feel you need it.

If you have any further questions regarding this research study, please feel free to contact:

Researcher - rebecca.moynihan@hud.ac.uk

Academic supervisor: Dr Derrol Kola-Palmer - d.kola-palmer@hud.ac.uk 01484 472809

Academic supervisor: Dr Susie Kola-Palmer - s.kola-palmer@hud.ac.uk 01484
471014

APPENDIX C – Consent form (f-t-f interviews)

Participant name:

Date:

Please read carefully the following form, and tick the corresponding box to show your consent.

I consent to taking part in an interview focused on my transition from university

I am happy for my interview session to be recorded to aid the data analysis

I am aware that the information I disclose will be used to form the researcher's thesis

I understand that I have the right to withdraw my participation at any point until a month before the project completion date

I am aware that my anonymised data can be accessed by the researcher's supervisors, and I accept this

I have been given the opportunity to ask any questions regarding the research and have had my questions answered satisfactorily

Participant's signature

Researcher's signature

APPENDIX D – Debrief sheet

Thank you for choosing to take part in my research study. The interview you have just taken part in is part of my thesis project as a researcher at the University of Huddersfield. As a researcher, I am particularly interested in investigating the transition from university to life after graduation and what sort of experiences (both positive and negative) individuals find themselves having. In so far, this area of transitioning literature has gone untouched, which strikes as surprising, given graduating from university is/could be perhaps one of the biggest transitional periods a person will face. The research that we do have on transitions (from school to university) suggests that there are a number of different issues that could surface during the adjustment period, i.e., changes in identity, expectations not aligning with reality, becoming physically/psychologically overwhelmed. Thus, it is anticipated that similar issues will arise following an individual's graduation, with perhaps more niche issues such as financial pressure/housing situations.

The aims of this research project, therefore, are to uncover what it is like – from an individual's perspective – to graduate from university, regardless of where they find themselves next. To do this, I am interviewing participants on where they find themselves following their graduation, and how well they feel they are able to adjust to this transition. It is expected that my research findings will enable us to understand just what it is like to graduate from university and what sort of challenges graduates may come across in the 'real' world. These findings could prove particularly beneficial for developing university programmes etc., which look at tackling some of the challenges graduates face.

If you require any further information with regards to my research, which you feel has not been covered in this debrief sheet please feel free to contact myself or my thesis supervisors (details below) where we will be more than willing to answer any further questions you may have. If you do experience distress following completion of this study, please see the names and contact details below of organisations that can help.

Please be aware that you have the right to withdraw your participation following a month up to the project's completion: 17.09.18. The data you have provided in this interview will remain confidential and your identity will remain anonymous through the use of pseudonyms.

Rebecca Moynihan: Rebecca.Moynihan@hud.ac.uk

Derrol Kola-Palmer: d.kola-palmer@hud.ac.uk

Susie Kola-Palmer: S.Kola-palmer@hud.ac.uk

APPENDIX E – Information sheet (email interviews)

Dear participant,

As part of my postgraduate study, I am conducting a piece of research focused on the transition from university life, to graduate life; covering a number of different topics such as job status, housing situation and the challenges and opportunities faced during your transition. This is an area that has been neglected within academic research so far, and so the study will shed light on an under-researched topic. Your participation, therefore, will be beneficial for building the foundations of an important research area.

If you are receiving this information sheet, it means that the interview will be carried out over email. The email interview will require you to type up responses to the questions provided as detailed as possible. It may be the case that I will respond with some further follow-up questions should I feel the need to ask you to elaborate on any points. During this interview, you will be asked a number of questions, covering topics such as; how you prepared for graduate life, whether or not your expectations of graduate life have aligned with reality, and what sort of issues you may have faced. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your participation at any point during the email interview and two weeks following the interview.

The data obtained through the email interviews will be copied and pasted into a separate word document, stored securely, with a pseudonym being used in place of your name to ensure anonymity. Similarly, locations of your place of study will be changed, thus ensuring the strictest confidentiality and anonymity. The original email thread will be deleted from my inbox and deleted messages after the word documents have been saved.

There are no foreseeable risks associated with taking part in this study, however, if any topics are brought to discussion that you do not feel comfortable talking about, you are welcomed to not disclose information. If at any point you wish to terminate the interview, simply send an email explaining you wish to withdraw yourself from the study. Any data obtained up until that point will be deleted. Information will be provided following the interview about where you can find psychological help and support in the unlikely case you should feel you need it.

If you have any further questions regarding this research study, please feel free to contact:

Researcher - rebecca.moynihan@hud.ac.uk

Academic supervisor: Dr Derrol Kola-Palmer - d.kola-palmer@hud.ac.uk 01484 472809

Academic supervisor: Dr Susie Kola-Palmer - s.kola-palmer@hud.ac.uk 01484 471014

APPENDIX F – Consent form (email interviews)

Participant name:

Date:

Please read carefully the following form, and tick the corresponding box to show your consent.

I consent to taking part in an interview focused on my transition from university

I am aware that the information I disclose will be used to form the researcher's thesis

I am aware that my data can be accessed by the researcher's supervisors, and I accept this

I understand that I am able, and strongly encouraged to, terminate the interview at any point should I feel distressed, as well as up to one month before the project completion date

I have been given the opportunity to ask any questions regarding the research and have had my questions answered satisfactorily

I consent to taking part in the aforementioned study

Participant's electronic signature

Researcher's electronic signature

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