Reaching home

Policy and practice for students living in the parental home

June 2015

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Foreword

The student population has become ever more diverse over the last few decades in all sorts of different ways. Both the further and higher education sectors have a challenge in keeping up with that diversity and responding to the different needs of different groups – but to do that, we have to understand those groups better.

When I was elected Vice President Welfare one of my goals was to ensure that NUS didn't just focus on the groups we've always worked with, and that we highlighted the experiences of those who might be overlooked. Whether that's care leavers or nursing students, there's so many voices that need to be heard. So I'm really pleased to publish this report into students living in the parental home during study. As it outlines, the fact that those living in halls or in the private rented sector often have more visible challenges which mean other groups get forgotten about – and make no mistake, this as true of the student movement as it is of institutions.

This report draws together the available evidence on these students, to explain their characteristics and motivations, as well as analysing why moving away for HE study is so prevalent. Then it takes an unusual perspective for an NUS report, asking what policy and practice currently exist in institutions, and what the motivations are for what's in place. It shows that the experiences of students living at home are often hidden and as such their needs may not be being met.

To be clear, NUS isn't suggesting that living in the parental home during study is inherently good or bad: for some people it's absolutely the right decision, but for others it's not. Of course, we wouldn't want any decision to be made on the basis of finance alone – but as the evidence demonstrates there often will be a variety of factors involved. What we do want is for universities and colleges to recognise that students living at home will have specific needs and to reflect those needs in their policies and practice.

This is a particularly detailed report, reflecting its origins as a MA dissertation, and I hope both students' unions and the sector take the time to reflect on its findings and take the recommendations forward.

Colum McGuire
Vice President Welfare 2013-15

Executive Summary

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Executive Summary

The research project

Students at the 2014 NUS national conference mandated the organisation to explore the situation of students living in the parental home during study. This report aims to help students' unions and the higher education sector gain that understanding. It is based on an MA dissertation and focuses on England for this reason, though will have relevance for the rest of the UK.

It is formed of two main sections. First, an extensive literature review outlines the historic trend data for students living at home, as well as the available evidence on the motivations and characteristics of those who choose to do so. It also sets out the historic context which explains why moving away from home to go into higher education is seen as the default for younger students in particular. Secondly, NUS conducted a small-scale qualitative research exercise, where staff at seven institutions with high proportions of students living at home were interviewed to understand what policy and practice exists and why. Finally, the report makes various recommendations for students' unions and the sector to consider.

Understanding students living in the parental home

Proportions living at home during study

The proportion of full-time students living in the parental home during study in the UK is around 20% according to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). This proportion has been fairly stable since the late 1990s, and early evidence suggest the increase in tuition fees in 2012 has not had any immediate effect.

Living at home was previously far more common, despite the higher education system being much smaller, and prior to the Second World War the proportion exceeded 40%. It declined after 1945 to reach less than 10% in the 1980s, before increasing to its present level in the 1990s.

The figures hide regional and institutional variations, and living at home is more common in Scotland and for students studying at newer universities. In addition, living at home during study is less common in the UK than in most continental European countries.

Characteristics and motivations

The available research suggests that students living in the parental home during study are more likely to be from poorer backgrounds, from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds, from families with no previous experience of HE and to hold lower pre-entry qualifications. It is likely women are more likely to live at home than men though there is some conflicting evidence in this respect.

There are a complex set of motivations, though it is clear that finance, and a desire to avoid

debt, are key factors. Cultural influences are also important: this can include family expectations and caring responsibilities, but also an alienation from the perceived culture of higher education or certain institutions, which the student helps to manage by living at home and maintaining their existing friendships and networks.

Historical background

To put the situation of students living in the parental home in context, it is necessary to understand why the default assumption remains that students should move away from home for study. There can be said to be three principal historical factors: official attitudes to residence in the post-war period, the structure of the student finance system and the concept of university as a rite of passage.

In the 1950s and 1960s the higher education sector was convinced of the benefits of 'residence' – a particular concept which involved students living in halls with their peers, but also postgraduate students and academic staff. Successive policy interventions encouraged students to move away from home, and whilst the concept of residence fell out of fashion, accommodation provision became part of the recruitment strategy of institutions and the encouragement to move away remained. Although in the early 1970s concern about the costs of the policy led government to consider how the proportions moving away might be reduced, in the last 40 years there has been no attempt to influence student behaviour in this manner.

In the 1960s the student finance system was constructed to enable students to meet the costs of moving away, and although this is now reflected in the maintenance loan system rather than the grant, the system remains geared towards enabling student mobility. Changes to student finances, especially the initial introduction of loans and then fees did increase the proportions choosing to live at home, but subsequent fee increases have not had a similar effect.

Finally, there is a strong belief in university as a 'rite of passage' for young people, which gained momentum in the 1960s as students rebelled against restrictive accommodation rules, and is now seen as a middle-class norm. Popular concern at the idea of students having to move back home after study reinforces this attitude.

Primary research methodology

For the primary research element of this report, staff working in student services or related areas were interviewed at seven institutions across England. The institutions were chosen using purposive sampling: as they had a high proportion of students living in the parental home, it was thought they would be most likely to have policy and practice in place. The data from the interviews was then analysed thematically and compared with existing literature. The anonymised findings were then presented as below.

Findings

Institutional knowledge and understanding

Interviewees were asked about institutional data collection on residential situations and what, if any, analysis was carried out on that data. The responses suggested any data that was collected was not commonly understood, though in some cases certain analyses were carried out. Interviewees also questioned how robust any data collection might be and that even the HESA figures may not reflect the true picture.

Categorising student residential situations

Residential situations were categorised in a number of different ways by different institutions, some of whom would make the distinctions between those who lived on or off campus, or between those who lived close to the institution and 'commuter' students. The interviewees did not necessarily identify students living in the parental home as a specific category and it was suggested that this may be an outdated way of considering students' residential situations given changing family structures and student profiles.

Practical considerations: finances and travel

Most interviewees considered financial factors to play a key role in the decision to live at home, in line with the available evidence. This was seen as a potential barrier to gaining the most from university, as did the concern that the time and practicalities of travel into the

institution might restrict opportunities for extra-curricular activities.

The role of family

Interviewees also saw the influence of family as critical in decisions about where to live, especially for Black and minority ethnic students, again in line with the available data. There was a mixture of views as to whether living with family had a beneficial or detrimental effect on a students' academic success: some felt that for some the family would provide additional support and encouragement, but others were concerned the influence of family attitudes, or perhaps caring responsibilities or other obligations, may mean some students being less successful than would otherwise have been the case..

Institutional support

Several interviewees suggested that the considered there was an institutional responsibility towards those of students living away from home, and particularly those in halls. Conversely, there was a belief that students living in the parental home would use that support structure when problems arose.

Missing out on the 'full experience'

There was a prevalent belief in the idea of 'the full student experience' (though different phrases were used) and that, for younger students, living at home meant missing out on some essential part of that experience. If there was no precise definition of the full experience, it was generally agreed that the ability to build up social networks in higher education was compromised by living at home. There were

concerns that those students who saw higher education simply as a means to gain a qualification might not participate in extra-curricular activities – though it was also acknowledged these might not be provided in a way that students living at home would find easy to access. This was thought to affect these students' sense of 'belonging' to the university or college, with implications for retention. Finally, there were concerns that younger students would lose out on the opportunity to gain key life skills and a sense of maturity if they lived in the parental home.

Adapting to the university or the university adapting?

None of the institutions interviewed had any specific policy in relation to students living in the parental home, though for some it was a factor considered when drafting policies. It was not thought that there was a great deal of impetus to consider these students, outside of welcome and induction processes. Even here it was acknowledged that such processes might be too geared towards those who move away from home. Other institutional services like a crèche or car parking were also thought to be important. However, it was acknowledged that often the default is still assumed to be moving away.

Conclusion

Taking the literature review and the evidence collected through the primary research exercise, it was clear that the experiences of students living in the parental home are largely hidden, obscured by the more obvious needs of those moving away from home. There was

limited policy and practice in the institutions interviewed, and whilst they are not necessarily a representative sample, and further research is required, this does not appear to be uncommon across the higher education sector. Yet the data indicated there are some potential links between residential situations, academic success and student outcomes that should be explored further.

More generally, the needs of these students should be considered. Separate provision is not necessarily the solution, but considering the needs of these students when creating policies and carrying out activities is essential. Whilst moving away from home remains the experience of the majority, the needs of this minority must not be overlooked.

Summary of Recommendations

Data

- Data on residential situations of students should be collected and analysed by HE institutions
- HESA should examine the concerns about data quality and, if necessary, take steps to ensure the statistics are robust
- The HE sector should review the categorisation of residential situations and whether it remains relevant

Understanding

- Further research should be carried out by the HE sector on the links between residential situations, academic success and outcomes, to help confirm the validity of these findings

- Further research should also seek to gain an understanding from these students as to the changes, if any, required in policy and practice

Experience

- Institutions should consider the impact of finance on student decision-making in relation to residence when developing bursary and scholarship policy
- Institutions should ensure living in the parental home (or commuting) is a factor in the design of policies and activities, including induction, with a focus on generating a sense of belonging – note that separate policies and activities are not necessarily required
- Students' unions should also consider how such students can be better involved in activities and provided for in services, and should work with the institution to ensure it takes action
- Both institutions and students' unions should engage students living in the parental home to gain their input when revising policy or practice
- In general the measures in this section are intended to help to make the experiences of those students living in the parental home less hidden but any alternative means of doing so should also be considered

Introduction

"I don't believe living in the parental home and playing a full part in university life… [are] mutually exclusive, I just think they're more difficult."

Interviewee, University E

Introduction

"I don't believe living in the parental home and playing a full part in university life… [are] mutually exclusive, I just think they're more difficult." (interviewee, University E)

The default image of the higher education (HE) student as young, full-time and living away from their parents when attending university has changed little over the decades. This idea of a student may in turn reflect the belief that there is an ideal: students benefit most from HE under certain conditions, and those whose circumstances are different are at an automatic disadvantage. This report examines the idea of students through the prism of those students living in the parental home during study. Do universities recognise these students as a specific group, as distinct from those who move away, and what are the underlying assumptions that shape policy and practice as a result?

"Moving away from home thus remains the standard experience for most young students."

There is a significant historical legacy shaping modern understanding. In the immediate post-war period there was a prevailing belief in the HE sector of the importance of 'residence': a student would only be able to benefit to the greatest extent from university if they lived in halls amongst a community of scholars, dining and socialising with their peers and with more senior academics, as in the Oxbridge colleges. In large part this was to enable the transfer of certain values and attitudes regarding the purpose of HE, especially among those from less wealthy homes, "who have the ability to profit by a university education but not the background which would give that ability full scope" (UGC, 1957: p9). By contrast, living in the parental home would preclude such development, so much was done to encourage students to move away. Various policy interventions proved successful: whereas some 41% of full-time undergraduates were living in the parental home in 1945/46 (UGC, 1957: p44), by the mid-1980s fewer than 10% of young, first-degree entrants would do so (HEFCE, 2009: p11). Amidst changes to student finance and a rapid expansion of HE the trend would partially reverse, with the proportion returning to around 20% by the mid-2000s (ibid.). Whilst the significant increase in tuition fees in England in 2012 might have been expected to have influenced this further, there is no current indication it has done so (HESA, 2015).

Moving away from home thus remains the standard experience for most young students. Various societal forces can explain this resilience, but institutional policy is significant: though for most institutions the idea of providing 'residence' as an all-encompassing arrangement fell out of favour from the late 1960s, 'accommodation' is now marketed as part of the essential student experience, a recruitment strategy rather than an educational imperative (Silver, 2004). Such is the cultural attachment to moving away, the propensity to do so goes remarkably uncontested in modern politics despite the cost of student maintenance support, much of which goes towards rent.

This lack of political debate is reflected in the comparatively small body of recent research on the experience of students who live in the parental home. Moreover, the focus of the research that does exist has been on student attitudes and behaviour in regards to living in the parental home, and there remain many questions about the modern perspective of institutions. How far does institutional policy and practice assume that students living in the parental home lose out on opportunities to accumulate the social and cultural capital residence was thought to provide? If they are recognised as a separate group, how far do institutions expect such students to adapt their behaviour to the institution's norms, and how far do institutions adapt their norms for such students? What does this suggest institutions could change in policy or practice? The aim of this study will be to offer some initial conclusions and a starting point for further exploration.

Four research objectives were developed:
1. To outline the characteristics of those living in the parental home during study.
2. To explore the historical context in relation to students living in the parental home.
3. To examine present institutional policy and management and identify whether students living in the parental home is identified as a discrete issue.
4. To analyse the motivations behind any policy stances taken or assumptions made.

Chapter 1, the literature review, will seek to address the first two of these research objectives, examining in detail the historical trends in relation to students living in the parental home, their modern characteristics, and the wider historical context. Chapter 2 will briefly outline the research methodology employed to meet the second two research objectives. Chapter 3 will present the findings of the research. Finally, Chapter 4 will offer some conclusions and recommendations for the HE sector and suggestions for further research.

Note this research is based on a Master's dissertation submitted to the UCL Institute of Education in 2014. Due to the constraints of a dissertation the main focus is on English institutions and higher education, though research looking at the experience in Scotland in particular is referenced, and the findings will nevertheless have some relevance to all three devolved nations.

It is hoped that this report will add to the relatively limited understanding of students living in the parental home, reviewing existing

work and generating useful new data that HE
practitioners can use to reflect on the relative
importance of residential situations in their
policy and practice, and what changes, if any,
may be necessary as a result.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

"All these aspects reinforce the perception that moving out of the parental home to go into HE – and staying out – is the standard, and preferable, experience for young people."

Chapter 1: Literature Review

1.1 Trends in students living in the parental home

The proportion of full-time students living in the parental home during study has varied significantly over the decades, reflecting a number of historical forces that will be outlined in the final section of this literature review. It should be noted that caution is required when reviewing the statistics available: different methods of reporting statistics and different definitions of 'student' used in collection over time mean that datasets are not exactly comparable, and data for the years between the early 1960s and mid-1980s is incomplete in the published sources.

Figure 1 illustrates the proportion of students domiciled in Great Britain and living at home in the middle years of the last century, as recorded by the University Grants Committee (UGC).

The chart looks at undergraduate students studying at universities specifically, and does not include those students undertaking HE courses in teacher training colleges or further education institutions. For comparison, 1961/62 the proportion of those in teacher training colleges living at home during study was similar to university students, whilst for those studying in further education institutions it was much higher, at 47% (Committee on Higher Education, 1963b: p173). For university students, the data shows a steady decline in the proportion living at home, from a pre-war rate of above 40% to around 20% by the early 1960s.
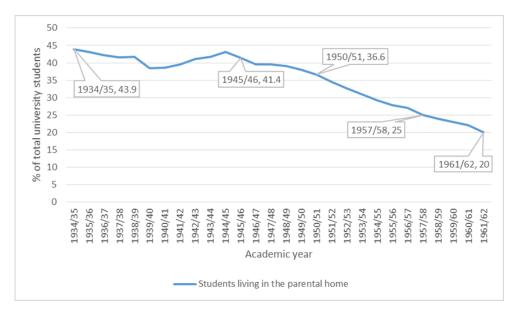

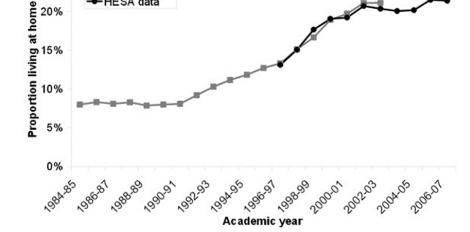Figure 1: University students domiciled in Great Britain, living in the

parental home 1930s-1960s (adapted from UGC, 1957: p44 and

Committee on Higher Education, 1963b: p184)

The proportion of university students living at home would continue to drop over the next decade and more, to 18% by 1967/68 and then 15% by 1974/75 (Morgan and McDowell, 1979: pp3-4) – again, this figure excludes those studying in other types of institution. Students attending colleges of advanced technology – later, polytechnics – still had a greater propensity to live at home, but the proportions doing so were in even sharper decline: some 41% of students at colleges of advanced technology lived at home in 1967/68, but in 1974/75 only 28.5% of polytechnic students did so. If the decline was not entirely uniform across the sector – the proportion of students attending colleges of education who were living in the parental home rose in the same period, from 15% to 28% (ibid.) – overall living away from home continued to increase in popularity.

Figure 2 displays data from Local Education Authorities (LEAs) and the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), collated by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), and indicates that in the mid- to late-1980s just 8% of students lived in the parental home. The measurement here is of young, first-degree entrants domiciled in England and Wales, and thus not directly comparable to more inclusive figures in the Figure 1 (HEFCE, 2009: pp10-11). However, it is clear that an overwhelming majority of such students chose to move away from home, even allowing for the trend reversing somewhat from the early 1990s. By the 2006/07 academic year the proportion had reached a plateau of around 20%, last seen in the early 1960s, and it has remained at roughly this level, at least up to 2012/13 (HESA, 2015).

Figure 2 Proportion of students living at home according to data collected from LEAs, 1984-85 to 2006-07

(Source: HEFCE, 2009: p11. Base = young, first degree entrants in England and Wales)

Regional variations

The UK-wide figures over the whole period examined disguise significant regional variations. Prior to the Second World War, Scottish universities and the Victorian-era civic universities in England (Durham excepted) had a far weaker tradition of residence than Oxbridge and recruited far more from their local areas – three quarters of the 12,000 students at the five biggest universities in 1935 lived within 30 miles of the institution they attended (Carswell, 1985: p4). Whilst this situation changed in the post-war period with the UGC and others promoting the idea of residence (discussed in more detail in the final section), in Scotland particularly there remained a greater tendency for students to live at home. Robbins would report 49% of Scottish HE students lived at home in 1961/62 (Committee on Higher Education, 1963b: p174); in 1956 no fewer than 77% of students at Glasgow University did so (Brothers and Hatch, 1971: p51). In common with the rest of the UK, the proportion would decline over the decades, though it would still remain higher than the UK average, for example recorded at one-third in the mid-1990s (Kemp and Willington, 1995 cited in Rhodes, 1999: p67) and at 37% in 2004/05 (Callender and Wilkinson, 2006: p7).

The UK stands in contrast to most of its neighbours in Europe. Of the 24 countries represented in the Eurostudent IV research (Orr et al, 2011), only five nations have lower proportions of students living in the parental home; most of these are Scandinavian nations where geography may have a part to play. The report suggests that, like Scotland, there is simply a stronger cultural norm to stay in the family home in most other European nations, though generalising across the entire continent is of course difficult. Perhaps most fascinating is that the Eurostudent IV research found that, across Europe, students from 'high' social backgrounds were more likely to live in the parental home during study. In England, as we will see, the opposite is true.

1.2 Modern students living at home: identities, characteristics and motivations

This section will look at the identities of students living in the parental home, as the categorisation of such students is more complex than it may first appear. It will also outline the literature published in the last decade that has described the characteristics and motivations of those who choose to stay at home, and the extent to which this influences their experiences of HE.

"The UK stands in contrast to most of its neighbours in Europe."

Identities

As HE has grown, it has encompassed mature students in ever greater numbers, the vast majority of whom already live in their own home (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), 2014: p9). For this reason, students living in the parental home are now a subset of a wider group of students who do not choose to move away to go into HE. There is no single agreed definition for this wider group: such students have been variously identified as

'commuter students' (Helsen, 2013), 'day students' (Christie *et al*, 2005), 'local students' (Abrahams and Ingram, 2013) or 'students living at home' (BIS, 2014). However, these differing approaches introduce potential difficulties in comparing research findings, as each study may examine groups that differ to greater or lesser degrees.

Moreover, any broad category can disguise differences of experience amongst certain subgroups. For example, the graduate employment outcomes of younger students living in the parental home have been shown to differ from mature students living in their own home, with the latter group accruing certain advantages from their greater prior work experience (Purcell *et al*, 2012: p131). There are also differences in how such students view themselves; in their study of 'day students' in two Scottish institutions Christie *et al* (2005) identified three subcategories that cut across age lines, based on the attitude taken towards HE: absorbed students, pragmatists and 'separate worlds'. Absorbed students were those who sought the normative student experience and could feel they were 'missing out' on opportunities to socialise; pragmatists balanced HE with other commitments and accepted they could not have a normative experience; whilst 'separate worlds' actively sought to distance themselves from their idea of a 'student' and maintained a strong distinction between education and home. Across all three groups the idea of HE as a transition or rite of passage was rejected to some degree. The mature students in the sample were less concerned by developing

social networks, and though this was more important to younger students, for the pragmatists amongst them this could not come at the expense of part-time employment and the financial independence from their parents it allowed (ibid.: p15). Even so, the students in the study felt they should "receive more recognition and support from the institution" than was currently the case (ibid.: p24).

Few other studies look specifically at the identities of those living in the parental home. However, Patiniotis and Holdsworth (2005), referencing the work of Archer and Hutchings (2000), make the point that the working class identities of many students who choose to live in the parental home might be seen as incompatible with HE, and that the choice to live at home is in part a mechanism to provide some sense of security for those students.

Characteristics and motivations of those choosing to live at home

The most recent large-scale study into the characteristics and experiences of students living at home was conducted by researchers at the Higher Education Careers Service Unit (HECSU) and published by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS). It used data collected through the Futuretrack study of more than 120,000 English-domiciled students who entered HE in 2006/07, surveyed throughout their courses and in the initial years afterwards (BIS, 2014). The HECSU analysis examined the specific data on those students who stated that they lived at home during study, a sample size of slightly more than

28,000. In regards to the characteristics of such students it found:

- There was a relationship between lower UCAS tariff scores and an increased likelihood the student would live at home, and between study at a lower entry tariff institution and an increased likelihood the student would live at home.
- Women were more likely to choose to live at home than men.
- Students with parents whose occupation was routine or semi-routine were more likely to live at home.
- Students whose parents had not experienced HE were more likely to live at home (ibid.: p9-10).

The authors acknowledge the quantitative nature of their data does not provide a full explanation of the motivations for living at home, and most particularly does not explain the role of finance in decision-making. Patiniotis and Holdsworth (2005), in their earlier study looking at a smaller sample of students studying at institutions on Merseyside, found broadly similar relationships between the characteristics discussed above and the propensity to live at home, though in their study men were found to be more likely to live at home than women, which may reflect regional differences. Most strikingly, 78% of the students they surveyed who were living in the parental home cited financial reasons for doing so. That noted, the authors characterise the relationship with parental occupation and previous experience of HE as a proxy for the levels of cultural and economic capital in the

household (ibid.: p86), and suggest that family attitudes and expectations may play as crucial a role as finances. Nevertheless, they are clear finance is a key factor, both the desire to avoid student debt by reducing expenditure on rent, utilities and food, but also the ability to continue to engage in pre-existing part-time employment (Holdsworth, 2005), mirroring the findings of Christie *et al* (2005). The report of the *Student Income and Expenditure Survey 2011/12* (SIES) notes that students living in the parental home are amongst the groups most likely to work part-time during the academic year (Pollard *et al*, 2013: p115).

"Most strikingly, 78% of the students they surveyed who were living in the parental home cited financial reasons for doing so."

There are also clear differences in the proportions living at home during study in relation to race. Black students are much more likely to live at home than their white peers (Ball *et al,* 2002, see also Connor *et al*, 2004) with the SIES (Pollard *et al*, 2013: p56) recording that 61% of Asian and Asian British students domiciled in England lived at home, compared with 19% of white students. This has been linked to the correlation between ethnic minorities and lower socio-economic status (Christie, 2005); however cultural issues, both in terms of family pressure for such students to live at home, and also alienation from the culture of HE in some

institutions also appear to play a factor (Ball *et al,* 2002).

Experience during study

Much of the literature in regards to the experience of students living in the parental home during study focuses on the social networks and non-academic activities a student living at home does or does not access during the course. HECSU's analysis showed that there are minor differences in the participation in 'career development' activities but significantly less involvement in 'extra-curricular' activities (BIS, 2014: p10). In her work, Holdsworth found that when the students in her survey were asked if they agreed with two statements – 'I am enjoying a good social life' and 'I have made friends easily' – the responses indicated that, "*the* variable that has the biggest impact on the odds of students agreeing with both statements is whether a student has left home" (2006: p503).

Holdsworth (2006: p154) argues that the ability to integrate is restricted by the 'othering' of those that live at home: "discourses about identity, debt and friendships are differentiated by residential status". Students living at home may not feel they 'fit in' because they do not meet the stereotypical image of the student, and moreover those who move away can use living at home as a socially acceptable proxy for class, and to make assumptions on that basis (ibid.). Perhaps for these reasons, Thomas (2002: p436) found that students who did not live in 'student' accommodation were "more likely to feel marginalised from their peers and… that they occupy a lower position," a

conclusion also reached by Wilcox *et al* (2005) in their study on social support for first year students. The evidence suggests that the social networks that are believed to play such an important part in the university experience are harder to form for students living in the parental home.

There have been some attempts to address these issues. Thomas (2012) reports on a number of pilot projects funded by HEFCE and the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, attempting to understand 'what works' in relation to student retention. Two of the projects undertook specific activities in relation to students living at home: these included virtual social spaces, induction activities and social activities organised by academic departments as part of or adjacent to the curriculum. These had the overall aim of engendering a sense of 'belonging' among students, which the study argues is critical to retention levels, building on the work of Quinn *et al* (2005). However, the report does not make any distinction between older and younger students and whether the exact interventions should differ for either group. Meanwhile, Helsen (2013) reports on a project at Kingston University which worked with students to develop initiatives to improve the student experience of those who commute. The ideas included a resource centre and lounge for commuter students as well as raising awareness of issues amongst university staff.

Outcomes

There is popular concern that students living at home are disadvantaged compared with their peers who move away, with one newspaper

article going so far as to say the choice is "damaging young people's social skills and their employability" though the research this is based on does not appear to have been made public (Tickle, 2007). At first glance this concern is perhaps supported by the Futuretrack research which found that, following the end of the course, young students who lived at home were the most likely to be working in a non-graduate job and earning less than £15,000, and less likely to be confident about their future job prospects (Purcell *et al*, 2012: p131). This may in part be due to a reluctance for such students to look beyond their local labour market: Furlong and Cartmel (2005: p19) found that graduates from disadvantaged families in the west of Scotland, the majority of whom lived at home, were highly reluctant to look beyond Scotland for employment, whereas four in five would accept a job in their home town.

However, the HECSU analysis of the Futuretrack data (BIS, 2014) is clear that whilst there are statistically significant differences in outcomes for younger students who live at home compared with those who move away – these are less apparent for mature entrants – the researchers believed this could mainly be accounted for by pre-existing student or household characteristics, or those of the institution, or were related to the subject studied. The researchers concluded that living at home did not in itself explain the differences in outcomes, the one exception being a lower likelihood of achieving a first or upper-second class degree, for which there was a statistically significant difference for those living in the parental home even once other factors were eliminated (ibid.: p11). Even so, this does not eliminate the possibility that the choice to live at home, so often related to social class, requires specific consideration when addressing these disparities.

1.3 The idea of 'residence'

In the vocabulary of HE a variety of terms are employed to describe the places students live. Some are more common than others: for example, various configurations of communal dwellings provided by universities – and increasingly the private sector – are referred to as 'halls of residence'. However, is most cases these buildings do not meet the definition of 'residence' as it was once commonly understood in universities. Silver (2004) has described residence as a 'tradition', one abandoned by the 2000s in favour of providing 'accommodation' which, though employed by institutions as a recruitment tool, serves no wider purpose than providing students with somewhere to live.

Like many traditions, residence does not have a single agreed definition, though there are broad common themes. The University Grants Committee (UGC) acted as a champion of 'residence' as an essential part of university education in the 1950s, commissioning Professor W Roy Niblett to chair a subcommittee on the future of halls of residence. The subcommittee did not provide a simple definition of residence as they understood it, though they were clear that it was more than simply somewhere to live. Critical to this was the fact that the residence would, "contain a large enough number of

people who are able and willing to nourish its intellectual life," including as a minimum a warden – normally a member of academic staff – and students from all levels of undergraduate and postgraduate study contained within building designed to encourage a communal existence (UGC, 1957: p12).

Residence was seen by its advocates as the best mechanism for a student to fully benefit from HE. Certainly, in commissioning Niblett the UGC's starting point was that it was preferable to other forms of accommodation. In his foreword to the report its then chair, Sir Keith Murray, wrote:

> "Residence in the university is of course the ideal way of extending the student day. The [University Grants] committee have from their earliest days commended halls of residence as desirable provision for common life and for the interplay of mind upon mind." (UGC, 1957: p*v*)

A contemporary academic, Dorothy Silberston, listed eight "commonly accepted" reasons residence was thought to benefit students. They can be paraphrased as:

- An introduction to a way of life and standard of living they may not have previously known
- The experience of living away from home and organising their own affairs
- Increased tolerance and mutual understanding arising from being brought into contact with others from a range of backgrounds

- Faster formation of friendships than if the student left campus to go home or into lodgings at the end of each day
- Being united under one roof with a common educational purpose in an atmosphere conducive to learning, leading them to regard education as more than a utilitarian exercise
- Greater opportunity for discussion and informal contact
- The development of ease and poise in social relationships
- No responsibility for domestic chores, allowing the student to concentrate on their work (adapted from Silberston, 1960: pp13-14).

In an earlier articulation of its benefits another academic, Cyril Bibby would add "avoidance of the waste of time and the strain involved in daily travelling to and from home" (Bibby, 1953: p187), but the purely functional benefits of residence were secondary to the belief that it enabled an immersion in academic life beyond the classroom. As Niblett would put it: "'the nine to five mentality' has been described to us as the great enemy of university education– the assumption, in other words, that university experience is contained in a specific programme related to a limited working day" (UGC, 1957: p9).

"Residence was seen by its advocates as the best mechanism for a student to fully benefit from HE."

For the most part, institutions and academics no longer advocate the type of residence envisioned by Bibby, Niblett and Silberston. Yet it may not be entirely true to say, as Silver (2004) has, that the tradition has been abandoned completely, rather it has been adapted. Accommodation may be a recruitment tool, but many of the benefits residence was assumed to provide could also apply when living in modern halls of residence or shared homes in the private rented sector.

1.4 The historical context

The final section of the literature review will explore three key, inter-related areas that go some way to providing some historical explanation for the various changes in the post-war period outlined in the first section. It will cover the changing attitudes in the HE sector to the nature of residence and accommodation; changes in the provision of student finance to individuals; and changing attitudes to the independence and autonomy of young people in society and in HE.

Changing policy and institutional attitudes

As has been outlined, in the rarefied world of immediate post-war HE, there was a strong consensus around the importance of 'residence' as one of the most effective means of facilitating the exchange of ideas and culture, of creating an academic community, and of establishing certain values and attitudes in students. So convinced were the Niblett subcommittee of this, they made little attempt to provide supporting evidence of the impact of residence in their report (UGC, 1957), and would characterise those students not in

residence – living either in the parental home or in approved lodgings – as a problem to be solved. At least by inference, there was a particular issue in relation to social class in an era where the expansion of HE was gathering pace: "the modern student has not an easy task to achieve, coming as he frequently does from a background where the aims and standards of university life… are not understood" (UGC, 1957: p8). Accepting that providing residential places for all students was a logistical and financial challenge, the report considered various possible alternatives but of each suggestion the committee believed "that in educative value, the alternative was a second best" (UGC, 1957: p40).

The 1963 Robbins Report would also consider residence in the light of an expanding HE sector. It would take a slightly more nuanced view, arguing that whilst "the educational and social advantages of living away from home should have great weight," (1963b: p211), the provision need not be 'residence' in the specific sense given to it by Niblett and others. This was partly due to the cost, but also as Robbins did not believe residence to be suitable for all (1963a: p195). Consequently, Robbins recommended diversity of university accommodation provision where possible – but the increase in student numbers meant "a great expansion of university residence is needed at once" (ibid.). Though not as wedded to formal residence as Niblett, Robbins did not believe any greater proportion should live at home during study in order to alleviate the pressure. This attitude was despite the report's extensive analysis of the costs, conditions and

educational impact of different forms of accommodation concluding that in certain areas – the likelihood of having a single room, and the cost to public finances, for example – living at home did provide a demonstrable advantage. For Robbins, however, these points could not outweigh the disadvantages arising from extended travel time and fewer opportunities for extra-curricular activity (1963b: pp210-211).

Both Robbins and Niblett provided the underpinning for contemporary HE accommodation policy, though it can be argued their conclusions simply reflected the prevailing ideology of the sector at the time. Even before Robbins reported, the UGC had insisted any new university foundations in the early 1960s made provision to house at least 3,000 students on campus (Brothers and Hatch, 1971: p327). The newly founded universities at Kent, Lancaster and York would adopt a collegiate structure that echoed Oxbridge, with residence as a key feature (Beloff, 1968). Geography was a further factor in their decision-making, as most such 'greenfield' institutions were sited in smaller towns and cities with fewer local students to call upon than their redbrick peers (Carswell, 1985: p61-62). However, the dominance of residence would prove temporary, perhaps even illusory. When Brothers and Hatch published their extensive review of student residence in 1971, they found considerable attachment to the formal concept of residence amongst university administrators, but paradoxically a shift in provision towards different forms of accommodation such as self-catering flats or bedsits (1971: pp337-338), as

institutions sought to reconcile ever-increasing demand, the high cost of providing traditional halls and rapidly changing student attitudes towards independent living (ibid.: pp60-61). Moreover, some of the previous assumptions in regards to residence were under question, with researchers such as Marris (1964) and Jones *et al* (1973) unable to find clear evidence of any educational benefit, though the social benefits were usually easier to identify.

As student numbers continued to grow, the pressure on budgets caused government take an active interest in residential policy the early 1970s, with the Department for Education and Science (DES) aiming to reduce expenditure on new accommodation and student finance. They saw polytechnics as one part of the solution, for though Anthony Crosland had not argued for the creation of polytechnics as a way to increase the share of students living at home (Crosland, 1965), their costs were lower than for universities in part because a smaller proportion of students were in residence (Sharp, 1987: p47). The DES saw this as one of the main rationales for expanding polytechnics over traditional universities: overall student numbers could increase at less overall cost (DES, 1972). The Department also wanted universities to act and encourage more to live at home, stating it was "unrealistic and unnecessary for such a high proportion of students to reside and study at a distance if equally acceptable courses are available to them within travelling distance of their homes" (ibid.: p37). The House of Commons Expenditure Committee (1972: para 95) concurred: "we do not accept… the virtually

complete freedom of at present enjoyed by students to opt for advanced courses in any part of the country they choose should continue without any restraint".

Identifying how such a policy might be achieved was rather more difficult. The DES had no specific suggestions; the Expenditure Committee proposed the sector be given some time to experiment with "voluntary methods" including the requirement to select at least one local university on the UCCA form (1972: para 98). However, if these proved unsuccessful "stronger measures" would be justified, including a moratorium on any further construction of purpose-built accommodation (ibid.). Meanwhile, the DES sought to examine whether any potential policies to compel students to study closer to home were viable, and if so what they would entail. The report of this research, completed in 1977 and published later in an amended form by Morgan and MacDowell (1979), concluded that the practical difficulties were likely to be insurmountable. The findings suggested students far preferred moving away from home, and to force them to do otherwise would require either changes to student finance that richer students could circumvent, or a highly complex administrative system that could not guarantee any eventual savings (ibid.: pp142-143). In the absence of any clear alternative, the DES did not attempt to engineer greater numbers living at home. Indeed, the proportion living at home would increase still further into the mid-1980s as seen in Figure 2 above.

"...by the mid-1990s the sector as a whole had ceased to view accommodation as an educational imperative and instead saw it as a recruitment tool."

For the next twenty years there would be markedly little academic debate in regard to student accommodation compared with the often intensive studies of the preceding quarter century. Such discussion as there was centred on the recurrent difficulties facing students in finding accommodation at the start of each year (Rudd, 1980; Griffiths, 1989), whilst government appears to have ceased considering the issue at all. The 1997 Dearing Report into the future of higher education barely considered student accommodation, except to echo concerns about cost. It argued that living away from home was "an important and valued part of the higher education experience. However, given limited resources it is arguable that this experience, however valuable, it is not one which should be gained at the expense of the taxpayer" (NCIHE, 1997: para 20.104).

Silver (2004) argues that by the mid-1990s the sector as a whole had ceased to view accommodation as an educational imperative and instead saw it as a recruitment tool. Certainly Blakey saw contemporary student accommodation policy through a decidedly consumerist lens: "today the educational institution is competing for every student: they must also compete for their custom in the area

of student accommodation and offer the best for the least if they are to succeed" (1994, p81). It is notable that students living in the parental home are not mentioned at all in his analysis, nor other than in historical terms are they mentioned in Silver and Silver's 1997 study on the student experience.

Blakey reported a substantial increase in the number of bedspaces offered by universities as a result of the renewed expansion of HE at that time. The number would increase from 148,000 to 248,000 between 1990 and 1995, as "almost all HEIs have concluded that they do not have enough accommodation to compete effectively with other institutions" (1994: p74). Moving away from home was not only sold as part of the essential student experience, but it had become big business in its own right, underscored by the entrance of new, private providers of purpose-built student accommodation such as Unite and Jarvis, partly encouraged by HEFCE (Silver, 2004) and with an obvious commercial interest in encouraging students to move away from home. However, neither institutional nor private hall capacity kept pace with the expansion of HE and the private rented sector was also absorbing ever-increasing numbers of students, partly driven by the rapid growth in lucrative buy-to-let mortgages after their introduction in 1996 (Leyshon and French, 2009). By the 2012/13 academic year this accounted for 30% of full-time undergraduates, the largest single housing category (see Figure 3 above).

In the mid-2000s the numbers of students living in the private rented sector was leading

to complaints about the 'studentification' of certain areas of university towns, connoting a negative social and environmental impact on the rest of the community (UUK, 2006). However, in contrast to the 1970s, not even the most vociferous critics were suggesting the solution to the problems of student housing lay in greater numbers living in the parental home. Instead, influencing the choices and behaviour of those who moved away was seen to be the priority, whether through the construction of more purpose-built student accommodation, the restriction the numbers of houses of multiple occupancy in certain areas, or campaigns to make students better neighbours (UUK, 2006; Smith, 2008). Thus, though the proportion living in the parental home has certainly increased from its 1980s nadir, this does not appear to have been due to any intentional governmental or sector impetus.

On the one hand, attitudes in the 2000s were transformed compared to those of the 1950s. Silver (2004) and Tight (2011) point to a number of factors underpinning this transition, not least that in a mass higher education system providing the sort of intimate academic community that 'residence' suggested was likely impossible. Yet if the formal concept of residence no longer features overtly in most institutions' attitudes to housing, this has not translated into a general view that students ought to live at home during study: the cultural attachment to moving out of the parental home into communal living has survived the last 60 years. Only very recently, with public expenditure once again under strain, has there been tentative consideration that policy in this

regard might be revisited: a former Secretary of State has suggested encouraging more to live in the parental home, and thus reduce the student support budget, as a means to ensure the maximum investment can be made in teaching (Denham, 2014). However, this remains a minority view: the emphasis remains on student choice in a sector encouraged to see students as customers (Barnett, 2013). The proportion living at home has increased over the last 25 years, but this change could not be ascribed to any official policy on the matter, either from government or the sector itself. For a potential explanation we must turn to a different factor.

Student finance

The changes in the availability and nature of student finance are intertwined with student housing. Reflecting the earlier attitudes towards residence described above, policy was at first geared towards allowing many more students the freedom to move away from home. However, as the system grew ever larger, pressures on public finances brought about changes which influenced a proportion of students to live at home – though they were still very much the minority.

The Education Act 1944 empowered local authorities (LAs) to offer scholarships towards the fees or maintenance of students in HE. By 1958/59, 87% of applicants to LAs in England and Wales would secure an award (Ministry of Education, 1960: pp119-121). However, awards were discretionary and LAs could restrict funding to that necessary for study at a local institution even if the student wished to go

elsewhere (Ministry of Education, 1960: p5). In 1960, the Anderson Report recommended a standard entitlement to maintenance grant funding, including higher rates of grant for those who chose to live away from home, not only to allow students freedom of choice but because study away from home was the ideal: "the value of higher education lies not only in the instruction the student receives but also in the contacts he makes and the life he leads within the student community outside the lecture room and the laboratory" (ibid. pp5-6). It was not thought this would result in a revolution: "we do not think it likely that students will move to far distant institutions; those who would benefit more from attending a local institution will still wish to do so" (ibid.).

However, the Robbins Report credited the availability of standard grant rates, the higher rates for those living away from home, as well as increased competition for places, with encouraging students to move away even where they did live within easy commuting distance of a university (Committee on Higher Education, 1963b: p185). This was not, in Robbins' view, any bad thing, but as HE expanded such policies became increasing expensive. The UGC attempted to limit the direct public expenditure outlay on capital construction of residences from 1970 (Expenditure Committee, 1972: para 89), but student finance simply became an indirect subsidy, as the loan funding universities secured to meet the costs of construction were repaid through rent paid by students using their grants (Carswell, 1985: p95). However, when the financial pressures of the 1970s led

government to consider how the numbers living at home could be increased (DES, 1972) even the more hawkish Expenditure Committee would not countenance reducing grants in order to do so (Expenditure Committee, 1972: para 97).

"...contemporary evidence suggests a reluctance to incur debt that may have given some students cause to consider cheaper accommodation options."

From the mid-1980s, increased participation in HE was stretching public finances still further. The academic year 1990/91 saw the introduction of student loans for maintenance, and contemporary evidence suggests a reluctance to incur debt that may have given some students cause to consider cheaper accommodation options (Callender and Kempson, 1996: p85). Perhaps as significantly, though not always recognised, the introduction of loans came after another change: the Housing Act 1988 substantially deregulated the private rented sector and eliminated rent controls on most new tenancies, thus increasing rental costs (Rhodes, 2006). At the same time, entitlement to housing benefit was removed for almost all full-time students in private rented accommodation (DES, 1988) so there was both an increase in housing costs and an effective cut to support for students. The housing benefit changes led one commentator, albeit one employed by the NUS, to warn of "increased

parental dependency" (Stephens, 1990), contrary to one of the primary aims of the student loan policy, which was to reduce dependence on parental contributions (Farrell and Tapper, 1992). Whilst the evidence does not demonstrate cause and effect, taken together these changes correlate with the increase in the proportion of students living at home.

Later in the 1990s the Dearing Committee would consider whether, in the interests of costs, to remove the 'elsewhere' and 'London' rates of grant, and only offer such additional costs through loan funding (NCIHE, 1997: para 20.104). They did not recommend doing so, given the needs of rural students and the need for a diverse sector, but this was the result when the Blair government abolished the maintenance grant altogether for new students from 1998/99 and increased the student loan to compensate, introducing higher rates for those who moved away. At the same time means-tested fees of up to £1,000 were introduced. These changes coincide with a jump in the proportion of students living in the parental home (see Figure 2 above). A few years later, Callender (2003) surveyed prospective students in schools and colleges in England, and found the respondents employed a variety of strategies to minimise debts. The most common, mentioned by 50% overall and 63% of those in lower socio-economic groups, was 'applying to universities nearer my home'.

Fees rose again twice more in England, in 2006 and most recently in 2012 to a maximum of £9,000, prompting popular predictions of a

further leap in the proportion of those living at home (Kelly, 2011; Tobin, 2011). In reality, however, the increase in the proportions living at home since 2006 has been modest (see Figure 2). Any impact on student decisions as a result of fee rises may have been blunted by the reintroduction of grants at £2,700 per year, without any differential rates for place of residence as with the maintenance loan. Thus finance may have an influence on the choices of students in regards to living at home, but it cannot provide a full explanation.

Student independence and the rite of passage

The comparative resilience of the proportion of students moving away from home can also be explained by the strong cultural belief that university represents a rite of passage, one that by necessity involves leaving home. The strength of this belief varies and it is not as prominent in Scotland. Nevertheless, wider changes in attitudes towards young people, maturity and independence are a third factor that has influenced the trends in the numbers of students living in the parental home.

Residence may have been thought to facilitate a student's maturation, but moving into halls was not intended to signal complete independence for younger students. The age of majority for most purposes was 21 until 1971, and until that date universities acted *in loco parentis* for students under that age who had moved into their care (Committee on the Age of Majority, 1967: p114), giving a sense of legal and moral obligation to universities, who would often impose significant restrictions on student behaviour. Even when the age of majority fell to 18 in 1971, reflecting pressure from young people and students for greater autonomy, Silver (2004) argues that university attitudes towards discipline and oversight did not change overnight. This can perhaps be illustrated by the NUS conference of that same year passing policy demanding twenty-four hour mixed visiting in halls, and for every student to have a key to their own room (Dowdney, 1971).

Perhaps because of this lingering sense of moral oversight in halls, at much the same time Brothers and Hatch would trace a growing preference for 'independent living' in flats (1971: p323), as would Morgan and MacDowell in their study later in the same decade. Moreover, in the latter study, 49% of the students who did not live at home stated "desired independence and freedom" as the main reason they chose to leave (1979: p120). By the early 1980s, NUS would confidently state: "the vast majority of students… prefer to live independently of their parents and, indeed, free of the restrictions of living in someone else's home" (Baker, 1982: p26, quoted in Silver and Silver 1997: p41). Reflecting these attitudes, university rules were gradually relaxed until provision ceased to be 'residence' in the old sense, and by 1994 Blakey could declare that, "there was little or no pastoral care" in most university accommodation (1994: p73). Therefore the cultural impetus to move away from home remained, but now increasingly decoupled from the original educational aims.

Tight believed these changing attitudes in society and culture and their impact on student accommodation marked, "a move away from the notion of a rite of passage, and a stress on the importance of moving away from home" (2011: p120). However, this is arguably something of a false dichotomy: as Holdsworth states "the transition to university is an important rite of passage, and one that is very much ritualised" (2006: p505), though only for the middle classes for whom moving away to university is seen as the standard. At least for the middle classes, the corollary to this stress on moving away is the rise of contemporary concern in respect of young people who move *back* to their parents' home following graduation, often characterised as a problem – for example, as a burden to the parents who may also have elderly relatives to care for (Sage *et al,* 2013), but which could also be seen as undermining the independence and maturity university is supposed to create. All these aspects reinforce the perception that moving out of the parental home to go into HE – and staying out – is the standard, and preferable, experience for young people.

Conclusion

The literature review sought to outline the statistical data relating to students living in the parental home during study, what we know about their characteristics and motivations for doing so, and the various historic and cultural factors which mean the proportion doing so has remained relatively low despite changes to finance and in the context of the expansion of HE over the last fifty years.

One of the most significant gaps in the literature, especially in the last forty years, is any study of institutional attitudes, policy and practice in respect of students living in the parental home. Thomas (2012) and Helsen (2013) aside, little has been done to identify what, if anything, is or should be in place. Nor has there been work to analyse the assumptions and attitudes underpinning any activity. This remainder of this research project intends to shed some light on these areas and suggest where further work could be fruitful.

"…the cultural impetus to move away from home remained, but now increasingly decoupled from the original educational aims."

Chapter 2: Methodology

"The research project aimed to gain an understanding of what policy exists and why."

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This chapter will outline the methodology employed to meet the final two objectives in the study: an exploratory approach informed by case study methods, primarily using interviews with staff at seven universities chosen through purposive sampling. It will explain why this strategy was selected, and describe the chosen approaches to sampling, data collection and data analysis, including the ethical considerations and limitations of each of these approaches and the mitigations taken in each case.

2.1 Approach

The research project aimed to gain an understanding of what policy exists and why. However, due to time constraints a holistic study of the entire HE sector was impractical. It was also unclear whether widespread specific policy or practice exists, and where relevant activity is apparent, this is not always specific to students living in the parental home. Consequently, the research project had to be flexible enough to explore why policy and practice is not in place, as much as the motivations for anything which is. This suggested the most appropriate and useful strategy would be to examine a smaller number of selected institutions in depth, informed by case study methods.

Yin (2003: p1) states that, "case studies are the preferred strategy when 'how' or 'why' questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and

when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context." This description neatly encapsulates the justification for adopting case study methods in this instance. Once it was established whether or not specific policy and practice exists, the 'how' and 'why' questions were likely to provide the most useful data and to suggest further lines of inquiry. It was recognised that this strategy would be unlikely to provide a definitive picture of the sector's attitudes and practices, nor from single interviews would this be true even of the individual institutions involved.

"The study set out to recruit between six and eight institutions to participate in the research."

This study has taken a primarily exploratory approach, where the main purpose is to develop an understanding of the situation, in order to develop some hypotheses which can then be taken forward by future research. In addition, the data was be compared with the findings of the literature review, especially in terms of historical concepts and attitudes, to determine whether any of these are still relevant to the modern context.

The study set out to recruit between six and eight institutions to participate in the research, with the data collected through a semi-

structured interview with each participant and a review of certain documentation. The sampling and data collection approaches are outlined in greater depth below, but by involving multiple universities this research sought in part to address one of the key criticisms of case studies: the difficulties inherent in generalising from the data collected. Whilst the universities involved in the research cannot be said to be a representative sample of the whole sector – and nor were they intended to be – the use of multiple interviews nevertheless allows for common themes to be identified. Conversely, this approach enables exceptional data to be highlighted as such, and provides some possibility for that exception to be explained by a particular context.

Even so, a case study approach, like all research strategies, has its limitations. Whilst in this research project the interviews have generated rich data, which we believe will contribute to the understanding of the topic studied, it is acknowledged that caution must be taken in extrapolating from that data. The exploratory approach of this research is intended to develop propositions which can then be tested through future research, rather than provide a definitive picture.

2.2 The sampling strategy

To select the institutions who would be approached to participate, a purposive sampling strategy was employed. It was theorised that those institutions with either the highest *proportion* of students living in the parental home, or the highest *absolute numbers* of such students, would be the most likely to have

specific policies or activities, and as a consequence provide the most useful data.

To identify the institutions in these two categories, the Higher Education Information Database for Institutions (HEIDI) was accessed. Using the statistical returns on residence term-time residence, derived from each institution's data returns to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) a table was created to rank universities first by the proportion of full-time undergraduate students living in the parental home, and second by the absolute number. Those institutions with at double the national (mean) average proportion or absolute numbers of students living in the parental home were then taken to represent those with the highest such metrics. Very small HE institutions, with fewer than 2,000 students in total, were discounted, so as to focus on those more likely to have developed policies and activities. Across the two categories there were in total 23 different institutions – four solely in the former category and 15 solely in the latter, and four who fell into both. From these, eight institutions were approached: he institutions chosen were selected to provide, as far as was possible, diversity in terms of geographic location both within England, and between city and less urban locales, as well as a cross-section of older and newer universities. The intention was for at least six interviews to be conducted in order to provide a suitably diverse dataset, with no more than eight given the time constraints. Similarly, the decision to focus on England was driven by the constraints of the project.

Of the eight universities approached, seven responded to the request for an interview. The interviews were given on condition of anonymity, an issue discussed in the section below, but Table 1 below gives a high-level profile of each including the broad geographic region and broad band of total student numbers. The descriptors are kept imprecise as greater precision might enable identification, but the universities selected represent a cross-section of the sector, including ex-polytechnics and 1960s foundations. The universities are listed in the order the interviews were conducted, which was essentially random.

Table 1: Profile of participating universities

University	Region[1]	Total students
A	North	>20,000
B	South	>20,000
C	South	<10,000
D	South	>20,000
E	Midlands and East	>20,000
F	North	10,000-20,000
G	Midlands and East	10,000-20,000

Within each university, staff working across the university on the student experience or student engagement were approached as potential interviewees, generally those working below senior management level. In some cases, no staff existed with this exact remit and the researcher relied on other initial contacts. In around half of the institutions the researcher was then referred to colleagues, either more junior to the initial contact or working in a different area. This included staff working in residential services in two cases, and in another a staff member working in the student advice service.

In part, this choice to approach staff from middle management was made on the basis that such staff would likely be more willing or able to participate, and be more willing to talk to a student researcher, than more senior colleagues. It was also thought this strategy could avoid some of the issues related to elite interviewing, where those in positions of power are the interview subjects. Richards (1996) has argued that such interviews can often provide "highly subjective" interpretations of events, as the individual may feel a greater need to defend the decisions they may themselves have taken, or the institution they represent.

A third factor in this decision to approach these staff in particular was the usefulness of their perspective. Universities are complex organisations, often employing thousands of staff across both academic and administrative roles. As such, it is highly unlikely there is one single view or opinion on the subject matter within an institution. However, it was thought that staff working on the student experience or student engagement, or as close to these areas as was possible, would be most likely to have a

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[1] 'North' refers to the English government regions of the North West, North East and Yorkshire and Humber; 'Midlands and East' refers to the West Midlands, East Midlands and East of England; and 'South' to the South West, South East and London.

sense of the overall picture in the university and any intended direction of travel.

2.3 Data collection techniques

The primary means to collect data on each participating university was a semi-structured interview with the identified member of staff; the interview schedule can be seen in Appendix A. The interview sought to cover three principal areas: the understanding and use of any data on students' residential situations; the perceived advantages and disadvantages for both student and institution of living in the parental home during study; and the specific influence, if any, of residential situations on policy and practice within the institution. A mixture of closed and open-ended questions were employed, with the focus on the latter.

All interviews were conducted by telephone, largely as the geographic dispersal of the interview subjects would have made face-to-face interviews impractical. Using the telephone also allowed the participants, many of whom had busy schedules, to select a time most convenient for them.

Finally, to enhance the data collection a number of documents were sought, including the institution's access agreement, strategic plan and any plans or strategies relating to accommodation or widening participation. The intention here was to supplement the interview data and provide a rounded picture of policy and activity. Where any documents were not available to the public, the participants were contacted to ask if the documents could be provided in confidence.

2.4 Approach to data analysis

In the next chapter, the data is analysed around a series of themes, which largely reflect the initial structure of the interview. The analysis follows a set pattern to ensure a consistent and logical presentation of the findings: the data collected under each theme is described, then analysed, before being evaluated in light of the literature review and historical analysis in Chapter 2.

In order to generate this thematic analysis, each interview was transcribed and then coded using basic descriptive terms, with codes revisited after each individual interview to ensure consistency. These descriptors were then clustered into broader interpretive codes and finally those interpretive codes were developed into overarching themes which provide the basis of the analysis.

"All interviews were conducted by telephone, largely as the geographic dispersal of the interview subjects would have made face-to-face interviews impractical."

This process was selected as a means to ensure the analysis started with the interviewees' responses and built these up into overarching themes, in order to avoid a situation where pre-determined themes dictated what was seen as

relevant in the data, resulting in an incomplete analysis.

2.5 Ethical considerations and limitations

It is important to repeat that this research cannot, and does not, claim to be generalizable across the entirety of the HE sector in England, though it is intended that it will develop some propositions which can be taken forward in future work.

To ensure informed consent, especially as the interviews were recorded, ahead of each interview the participant was emailed an information sheet outlining the project and its aims, their rights as participants and the safeguards around anonymity and the confidentiality of the raw data. A consent form was sent for the participant to return, and as an added measure consent was then reconfirmed verbally at the start of each interview, including express consent for the interview to be recorded. In addition, it was made clear to participants that they could withdraw from the interview at any time, and for any reason. The recordings and written notes were kept in password-protected files, and destroyed once the process was complete.

In respect of potential bias, two main issues arose. Firstly, whilst care has been taken to provide a setting where participants felt able to provide honest and open responses, the data collected may nevertheless contain inaccuracies. These could be as a result of genuine mistakes, being unaware of relevant information, or due to inaccurate recall. It was hoped the participants selected might be in the best position to have the most complete understanding and the use of multiple interviews was intended to gain a broad picture and reduce the risk of bias from one single example. Secondly, the fact that the research was connected to the National Union of Students (NUS) and was explained to the participants. This presented a risk that the participants would, even if only subconsciously, adjust their answers as a result. The risk was mitigated by stressing that the confidentiality and anonymity of the process in pre-interview communication, immediately before the interview commenced and, where appropriate, during the interviews themselves. In addition it was explained that this research was a genuinely open enquiry: the researcher was not seeking to prove or disprove any particular theory.

Chapter 3: Findings

"The fact is you've got commuter students, some who are travelling two hours, you know, they can be late for lectures, they miss things, they don't come to things that are additional to their course that other students get, and so sometimes they feel they miss out or lag behind."

Chapter 3: Findings

This chapter will present the findings of the research, which consisted of interviews with staff at seven universities in England with high proportions or absolute numbers of students living in the parental home. In addition, public documentation for the participant universities such as strategic plans and access agreements were reviewed. The interview schedule used as the basis for each can be seen in Appendix A.

The research sought to identify whether students living in the parental home were identified as a discrete issue within institutions, and what assumptions and motivations lay behind any policy or practice. Transcripts of each interview were analysed for descriptive themes, which were then clustered into interpretative codes and finally brought together into overarching themes. Each theme will be discussed below, with the findings presented, analysed and placed in the context of the literature at each stage. Whilst overall it was found that students living in the parental home were not considered as a discrete issue in most cases, and that specific policy and practice were limited, it was in understanding the underlying assumptions and attitudes towards different residential situations that the research provided greatest insight.

3.1 Institutional knowledge and understanding

The participants were asked a series of questions about their understanding of the data in relation to students living in the parental home at their institution, and whether the institution as a whole sought to analyse this data in any way. The answers suggested generally low familiarity with any data on students living in the parental home within each institution, though some limited analysis work was being carried out in certain cases. Indeed, even high level statistics such as the proportion of students in the institution concerned who lived in the parental home appeared little understood. Furthermore, questions were raised about the quality of the available data and the robustness of the data collection.

When asked whether they knew what proportion of students at their institution who were living in the parental home, four of the interviewees could not say. Of the remaining three, two could give an approximate figure, with only one – University B – being confident this was correct. University D understood the proportions of students ineligible for National Scholarship Programme (NSP) accommodation bursaries, as they were not liable for rent. Whilst this could be a proxy, as the statistic did not include any students from households earning more than £25,000 per year, or those on NHS-funded courses, it may not be an accurate reflection of the overall proportion. Similarly, there was little certainty regarding the extent to which the proportions living in the parental home had changed in recent years, if at all. Only one, again University B, was clear

that it had, and in that case the numbers living in the parental home were increasing. Most of the other interviewees could only give an instinctive response, and although there is no guarantee these perceptions were accurate there was nevertheless a clear regional trend. The three universities in the South felt the proportions living at home were increasing, whereas the two in the North felt they were decreasing. University E in the Midlands and East felt the proportions had not changed in recent years.

Where the proportions were thought to be shifting, interviewees offered several suggestions as to why this might be the case. Universities in the South suggested that the increase in those living at home may reflect the increasing costs of accommodation, and it is certainly true that in the south of England, most particularly London, student accommodation is more expensive than the north (NUS, 2012). However, local circumstances may also have some bearing: two of the universities in the South do not allow students whose family home is within a certain radius of the university campus to apply for a room in halls, due to pressure on campus accommodation, and in at least one of these there had been a recent focus on recruiting from areas within that boundary. Conversely, the two institutions in the north both cited the fact accommodation in their cities was cheaper as one explanation for the proportion living at home falling, with University A seeing increasing numbers of students from the south of England moving to study there. For University F there was a belief the shift might

also be explained by a change in attitudes by students towards their independence:

> "I guess it's maybe one of two things, really. It's either that what the institution is offering is not as appealing as it once was [laughs], or it might just be the case that local students are getting a bit more ambitious or worldly in where they'd like to go."

There was some suggestion that different subjects attracted different types of students, with healthcare courses mentioned as being more likely to recruit from 'local' populations, compared with certain courses which would have a more 'national' profile, and that changes in these subjects could influence the overall picture.

In most cases, the interviewees were not basing their conclusions on empirical evidence, and none were aware of comprehensive analysis within the institution of the experiences of students in different residential situations, or of statistical data being circulated to any significant extent. Three institutions mentioned that if any analysis did take place it would be by a 'planning department' or similar, though perhaps only for the purposes of collating the HESA return. Some relevant analysis was being carried out as part of wider work: in two universities residential status was being used as a variable in separate projects looking at the student experience, one on retention and the other on attainment, though neither project had at that point come to any conclusions. Another university had looked

specifically at the experience of their commuter students. There was a more general sense that analysis was undertaken to ensure that housing provision for those who chose to move away was adequate and to enable the institution to plan accordingly. University A said of their accommodation services:

> "it's absolutely crucial to recruitment and if it ever went wrong for any reason the impact would be horrendous… it's important people [in the university] do reflect on that."

Two institutions raised the issue of whether the HESA data returns on living arrangements were accurate, particularly in relation to the proportions living at home. University A did not believe that the addresses given by students at the time of application necessarily matched their term-time addresses: as students' term-time accommodation may not be confirmed at the point initial information is submitted they will use their parents' address, but fail to update this when accommodation is secured. Moreover, as so much communication from the institution is now via email there is less impetus to keep the postal address up to date. University D cast similar doubts, stating that there had been issues in reconciling those students who applied for an accommodation bursary for the NSP but who were still registered as living at home on the university's records, either as they have not updated their address or had put the correct address but nevertheless selected the wrong accommodation category on the form when registering. University A contended that as this

record had no connection to funding for the institution, ensuring the accuracy of the data would be a low priority. In both cases the belief was that as a result of these potential flaws the HESA data likely overestimates the proportions living at home.

That there is a limited focus in the universities on analysing the experiences of their students across different residential situations is not altogether surprising: as the literature review has outlined these have been the subject of only a small number of major research projects since the 1970s. Perhaps the most extensive of those looking specifically at students living at home, though not specifically the parental home, has been the project analysing the Futuretrack data (BIS, 2014). However, this report has only recently been published, and in any case may lead institutions to conclude that it is not a significant variable. Furthermore, although institutions have to collate the data on their students' choice of accommodation, at the time of writing data has been made available through the HEIDI database for the 2012/13 academic year only. In the absence of internal reporting of the data, there is a sense of hiddenness about this group of students. Conversely, the much more visible presence of halls of residence has the opposite effect and the potential problems caused by inadequate capacity in university accommodation better understood. Silver's (2004) view that recruitment is seen primarily as a recruitment tool by institutions is supported by these findings, though as will be seen, they may also evidence that his contention that the 'tradition'

of residence has been abandoned by institutions is open to greater debate.

4.2 Categorising student residential situations

Any lack of understanding of the situation of students in the parental home may in part derive from the heterogeneous approach to the categorisation of students' residential situations in the universities interviewed. The categories used did not necessarily identify these students as a specific subgroup, perhaps arising from the local context of each university suggesting different priorities or more appropriate categories. In some cases, there was a sense that the concept of 'students living in the parental home' has outlived its usefulness to the modern HE sector.

A number of different alternative categories were used by participants when answering the questions posed. For example, in describing students' residential situations, four universities reported they used 'commuter students' as a category, the emphasis being placed on the extent to which students have to travel into the university campus, rather than with whom they live. University E stated:

> "My guess is… that it's a low proportion who live in university accommodation. We have a lot of what we would call commuter students, whether they are all living in the parental home is another question."

A fifth institution, University C, did not use the phrase 'commuter students' but made it clear

that the principal distinction they make in considering residential situations is between those who have to travel and those who do not:

> "The students living in the local community tend to be part of the university campus community… then there are students living further afield, who typically don't engage as much with us. And a large amount of those will be living in the parental home; some will be independently living, they'll be mature students et cetera… so we don't separate out between those in the parental home and living in other independent situations."

As the two quotes illustrate, the concept of 'commuter student' is broad, lacking differentiation between older and younger students, as well as those who live in their own home or in their parents' home. Potentially, it can include those who have moved away from home to attend university but have nevertheless chosen to live some distance from the campus.

For University G, the important distinction was between 'on campus' and 'off campus' students; in other words, the dividing line was whether or not the student was living in halls of residence or in any other residential situation. University F referred throughout their interview to "home/local students", which reflected the fact a high proportion of their students are from the city in which that university is sited, and thus a distinction is made between these students and the commuter students who come

from further afield, as well as those who move to the city for university.

Finally, it was pointed out by two universities that the concept of 'students in the parental home' might be an outdated term in the context of modern family structures. University B stated:

> "we're conscious that a lot of our students would not identify their home with the parental home… because a lot of our students and the households they come from often don't contain the parents or they're living in quite a different situation… [for example] 'I'm living with a guardian', 'I'm living with my sister', 'I'm living with extended family'."

On the whole, the range of terminology in operation reflects the lack of consistency in the literature, as well as the variety of individual terms used elsewhere. There were notable differences: 'day students', the term employed by Christie *et al* (2005) in their study of students in Edinburgh, was not used by any of the universities interviewed, whilst the popularity of 'commuter students' as a category in the universities interviews is in contrast to its relatively limited use in academic studies in the UK, with the exception of the comparatively small-scale report by Helsen (2013). However, the body of recent British scholarship looking at student residential situations remains small; as the term is much more commonly found in American research (see for example Jacoby,

1989 or Kim and Rury, 2011) this may be influencing discourse in the UK.

In any case, it did not appear that 'students living in the parental home' was a category that was seen as particularly useful, and not in regular usage other than as part of the data returns to HESA or in reference to student loan rates. This was in part a product of universities wanting to be more inclusive in institutional practice, with 'students in the parental home' inferring a younger age group or a more restrictive definition of family arrangements than was felt useful, and because the more important common denominator was felt to be distance from the institution and the consequent travel time required.

4.3 Practical considerations: finances and travel

The principal advantage to students to living at home, mentioned by six of the seven universities, was the financial benefit arising from lower housing costs, albeit one offset by a lower student loan rate and the potential for higher travel expenditure. This fact was seen as so obvious as to merit little further comment, though it was interesting that social class was not mentioned when considering this point. The possible exception was University D, who believed the "stagnant nature" of student finance, with rates of loans and grants failing to keep pace with inflation, would mean more students choosing to live at home, creating barriers to access:

> "We will see… I hate to say it, two different streams of higher education:

the richer ones who can travel, who can choose the university, y'know, like the posh ones… and then there'll be the ones who can't afford to live in halls and just vote with their feet, and that cuts out the universities they can choose and the experience they can have."

This concern, that students in the parental home do not have access to the same quality of student experience, would be a leitmotif in all of the interviews, and this will be discussed in more detail below. However, a further practical barrier was the time and inconvenience of commuting to university, and to a lesser extent its cost, is seen not only as a disadvantage in itself but the source of many of the barriers to greater involvement. As University B put it:

> "The fact is you've got commuter students, some who are travelling two hours, you know, they can be late for lectures, they miss things, they don't come to things that are additional to their course that other students get, and so sometimes they feel they miss out or lag behind."

Financial consideration are indeed a major factor for students in the decision to remain at home, as reported by Patiniotis and Holdsworth (2005), Christie *et al* (2005) and others, all of whom are more explicit about the connections to social class on this point. However, the other main economic rationale identified in the literature, the ability of students living in the parental home to maintain pre-existing part-

time employment in their local area, was mentioned by a smaller number of interviewees, perhaps indicating this is less well understood. Indeed, one interviewee assumed living in the parental home would reduce the need to work. However, University F also noted that, in their experience, a student living in the parental home often had family connections to local employers, and this enabled them to more easily gain relevant work experience.

4.4 The role of family

Some aspects of living at home were seen as having the potential to enhance the student experience: in particular, the role of family was seen to be crucial for certain groups, though this view was not entirely unqualified. Certainly, there was a widespread belief that some groups of students faced particular difficulties in adjusting to university, particularly those from families with limited experience of HE. University A stated:

> "If you're local, particularly not from a traditional university-going background… the perception is you have to give up your friends, give up your social life wherever you live and replace that with a new one. It's quite scary, I think."

Living in the parental or family home was seen by the interviewees to provide a sense of stability in a time of transition, and a potential framework of support that enabled these students to navigate HE more easily and to access support when it was required. As University C stated:

"Because so much is changing for our students, particularly our younger students… having parents who are there to go home, to vent to, to ask questions of, to get support from – that's quite important."

University G saw this potential too, though in this case this view was tempered with the possibility that family obligations could also impact negatively on academic outcomes:

"They might be more successful or likely to persist if they're at home. I guess on the converse side of that, if their home life is unstable or their home life is going through some turmoil… if they're having to provide more care to their parents… or having to work more to support the family that's a distraction to their studies and that can be an obstacle for them."

Further concerns about family were raised by University B. Though they could see advantages to living at home in terms of family support, the interviewee felt living at home could mean some students being less likely to acquire certain skills because of the family environment:

"I see a lot of students who come from generations of worklessness, and because they continue to live at home during term-time I see a real lack of development in some of those employability skills… so I think some of

the disadvantages for some of our students is the fact that they may be surrounded by a situation that isn't as nurturing as it could be for their overall development."

In addition to this concern, two of the interviewees were wary of parents who were seen to take too active a role, for example contacting the university directly when problems arise, and University C felt this happened more commonly when students lived in the parental home. With HE characterised as a transitional experience, such interventions by parents were seen as stifling the development of those students.

Though family was considered an important factor for all students living in the parental home, interviewees additionally identified three minority groups for whom family connections had additional importance. Firstly, family was highlighted as particularly important for black and minority ethnic (BME) students. Not all interviewees identified that their BME students were more likely to stay at home, but those who did were clear that cultural attitudes towards family had a significant influence on this decision. There was no consensus on whether this represented an advantage or disadvantage in general.

The need to be near family was mentioned in reference to two other groups, and again in both cases interviewees were equivocal as to the benefits and disadvantages. University C contended that a further group for whom direct support from family is a critical factor in their

decision to stay at home was disabled students, noting they faced difficulties in finding suitable accommodation and were perhaps also more reliant on their parents due to their disability. However, there was a concern that these students may miss out on the "full experience" as a result. Secondly, caring responsibilities, either for children, or for elderly or disabled relatives was also mentioned by several interviewees as a rationale for living in the family home, with University F stating that it was a benefit to "the family unit" if the student in this situation could study whilst living at home. Conversely, University G saw a caring responsibilities as more of a potential barrier, which could disrupt a student's academic progress.

The influence of family was therefore seen as holding both significant potential as well as risk for students living at home. The conception of family support as a positive influence on academic performance and outcomes of students living in the parental home – that they may aid accumulation of cultural capital – is a fascinating possibility, and one which the existing research does not address in detail. Of course, it is unlikely there is a uniformly positive picture, and Holdsworth (2006: p510) has made tentative conclusions about the potential strains on family relationships that can be caused by living at home whilst attending university, especially where HE is not part of the family experience. She links this phenomenon to the levels of cultural capital held by the student prior to attendance, and the dissonance between the student and their family either created or perceived as new

cultural capital is gained. University B's concern that a student's family may, in some cases, exert a negative influence on student attitudes and stop them getting the most from the experience provides an interesting, modern parallel to the belief articulated by Niblett (UGC, 1957) that living in residence was critical in enabling those from less elite backgrounds to become accustomed to the culture and aims of HE. The topic as a whole is worth further exploration, perhaps with reference also to social capital theory and the importance of family networks.

The belief that BME students are more likely to live at home is confirmed by studies such as that by Pollard et al (2011). However, this is only one factor: Ball et al (2002) have noted that family pressure is a key factor in the selection of institution for many BME students, but they are clear that financial concerns are as important, which in turn reflects the relationship between social class and race. Similarly, various studies have looked at the experience of student parents and carers (NUS, 2009; Hinton-Smith, 2012 and NUS, 2013), and though student parents may be less likely to live with their own parents, it is clear that attending a university close to home is an important factor in decision-making, and that balancing caring responsibilities and study can be challenging. However, the particular impact of residential situations on disabled students and those with caring responsibilities remain an area where further research could prove enlightening.

4.5 Institutional support

In purely utilitarian terms, the fact that students living in the parental home may rely more on their families for pastoral or academic support was seen as a benefit to the institution, on the assumption it meant those students made less use of the support services provided by the university: in the words of one respondent, they were "less of a drag on resources". This view was accompanied by a lingering sense for several of the universities that they retained an *in loco parentis* role for those younger students who move away, especially those who live in university accommodation. This was articulated both in practical terms, for example that students who move away require greater support through hardship funds, but also a sense of general responsibility for students' wellbeing, perhaps because of certain legal pressures. University D said:

> "When they're here, we do have a responsibility for their health and safety and, y'know, when we were nearly getting swine flu or whatever… [there was] lots and lots of work done about 'how do we cope with something happening in the halls of residence?'"

It was argued that if a student lives in halls this allows the university to more easily identify when they require support, accompanied with a role in enabling personal development and promoting maturity amongst younger students, if necessary disciplining those who misbehave. Those who lived in private rented accommodation were seen as less the

university's responsibility, but still more so than those in the parental home perhaps by encouraging them to be good neighbours at least in part to maintain good relations with the local community by reducing noise or litter, though this may also owe something to the need to maintain a good institutional reputation in a heavily marketised system (Watson, 2013). Any lack of focus on the experience of students living at home can therefore be at least partially explained by the fact they present institutions with less of an obvious 'issue', reinforcing the hiddenness of their experiences. Conversely, whilst Silver and Silver have argued that there has been an "abandonment of the most significant features of *in loco parentis*" (1997: p49), supported by Tight (2011), these finding suggest belief in at least a vestigial role remains in many cases, and this provides key context to institutional attitudes towards accommodation.

3.6 Missing out on the 'full experience'

This echo of traditional attitudes towards the role of student accommodation was also evidenced elsewhere. In discussing the disadvantages to living at home, the interviewees would repeatedly use certain phrases: the "the full student experience", "the full campus experience" or the "full university experience". These would be contrasted with the potentially truncated experience of students who were "just attending classes". University C put it as follows:

> "If students are not able to live on campus or in shared accommodation

then they are missing something which is a significant part of the student experience."

The interviewees would describe this 'full' experience in different ways, but a number of recurring themes emerged: building social networks amongst the student population; engaging with extra-curricular activities; feeling part of a wider campus community; and transitioning to adulthood. It should be stressed there was no precise or common definition, and nor were these themes mutually exclusive. One respondent acknowledged this slightly undefined quality by characterising the 'full student experience' as a "mythical construct". However, interviewees were all concerned that those living in the parental home would be "missing out" on some or all of these experiences, which was to their ultimate detriment.

Several of the interviewees saw the capacity to make friends and contacts to be a key part of the university experience, with concern that students living at home may find it more difficult, or be less interested, in doing so. Living in halls would allow for the natural formation of friendships with flatmates, whilst it was feared a more instrumentalist focus on attending the course gave fewer such opportunities. University D saw halls as critical in ensuring a broad range of contacts:

> "If you think about the informal networking, the 'old boy's network' – and it still exists – that those people [living in halls] will have greater

networks if they're not living at home. It's where you rub shoulders with different subject areas, isn't it? Whereas if you're just coming in for your subject you're not really going to rub alongside someone who's doing a very different subject."

University A argued that local students would prioritise the maintenance of friendships in the local area over forming any new contacts, in contrast to those in accommodation:

> "Those students who go into accommodation are very keen to make a group of friends, to fit with people as soon as possible and to have that whole experience… whereas a lot of local students, students who can commute, y'know they're very keen not to lose that link [to old friends]."

For University F there was a slightly different version of this concern: many of their local students apply in cohorts, having previously attended school or college together. Once in university, they continue within these pre-existing friendship groups, causing issues with behaviour as the break between school or college and university is less well defined, but also making it difficult for international students or those who have moved away to break into those friendship groups. However, they also felt that these groups of local students may also act as mutual support and so there were positive aspects to this situation. Even so, University F felt that it was important for a university with global aspirations to have a "diverse" campus

with students from a variety of cultural backgrounds, and that too many students from the local area would threaten that diversity.

The lower involvement in extra-curricular activities of students living in the parental home was also cited by many of the interviewees, whether the university nightlife, sport, student societies or employability activities. University E was worried that they were:

> "…in danger of having a generation of students who, five years after they graduate, look back and think 'if only I'd made more use of that time.'"

This situation was linked to students seeing university as simply a means to gain a qualification, though as University B pointed out there could be a lack of consideration for commuter students when activities are organised, for example where classes finish at 5pm but many meetings and activities do not commence until 7pm. As a result, students were often without a suitable space available in which to wait, and nor did they wish to wait for that length of time.

The barriers to making friendships and participating in activities were seen to disadvantage for the individual student, but the cumulative effect was also seen to affect the entire institution. This was articulated through the idea of 'belonging' and the extent to which students living in the parental home felt part of the wider university community, and the particular impact this had on retention and

success. Three universities were especially insistent on this point: University E referred to the work of Thomas (2012) on belonging, which they believed showed that this was the "the single most important factor in whether students stay the course." They went on to say:

> "I believe firmly that developing a sense of belonging is more difficult for students who start university with the notion that they're going to travel in every day, and maybe arrive with the expectation that their principal purpose in going to university is just to attend their classes."

University D made a comparison between students at the main campus and those at franchise colleges. Retention on the main campus was higher and this was attributed, at least in part, to the greater sense of belonging generated by living on campus, as well as the accommodation bursaries those living away from home could receive.

Finally, many of the interviewees were concerned that in living at home, younger students were missing out on one of the key benefits of the traditional experience of university: the rite of passage. This was articulated in different ways, but centred on the belief that moving away enabled students to develop responsibility and independence in a way that would be less likely if the student remained at home. University G encapsulated this view:

"University life is about transitioning to becoming an adult and being on your own and being responsible for your decisions, and it's obviously about getting your education, but part of that is being able to learn about how you fit in with the world. And if your parents are sitting there telling you what to do or making sure you do go to classes, you're not making those decisions for yourself and I think it delays that development."

This perspective formed the corollary to the discussion on the role of family outlined above, where even the positive outcomes of closer family involvement were feared to lead to such students potentially losing out on the chance to use their university experience to transition to adulthood. Others were clear they believed that this was not a universal aim for students; as University F cautioned: "that's only a disadvantage if that's the experience you wanted."

The available literature confirms many of the interviewees' views. Students living in the parental home do appear less likely to participate in extra-curricular activities, though the analysis of the Futuretrack data suggested participation in 'career development' activities was not significantly different (Holdsworth, 2006; BIS 2014). They also face challenges in establishing friendships at university, though Thomas (2002) and Wilcox *et al* (2005) have both suggested the class prejudices of those moving away were as much of an issue as any reluctance on the part of such students to make

friends. The idea that 'belonging' is a key factor in retention has been suggested by Thomas (2012) as University E pointed out, albeit through pilot projects which will need further evaluation. The perceived link with accommodation might be reinforced by the fact that most students living in university owned halls are first-years (NUS, 2014) and drop-out rates are highest in the first year in part because "social resources [are] at their most limited" (Gorard et al, 2007: p95).

Taken together, the evidence shows the institutions interviewed are concerned that students living in the parental home may fail to develop the social capital that they see as a specific benefit of the full university experience, reflecting not only more recent research but a long history of associating residence with better socialisation (Thoday, 1957; Marris, 1964). However, the additional concern that students living in the parental home may find it more difficult to feel part of the university community with its implications for retention, alongside the concerns outlined above that influence of family on attitudes to matter such as employability, suggests a further intriguing possibility. Is the idea of an academic link to 'residence' – or at least accommodation – being revived?

3.7 Adapting to university or the university adapting?

Each of the interviewees was asked whether residential situations were addressed through institutional policy or practice, and if so how this manifested itself. The responses suggested that residential situations had only a very limited influence on either policy or practice in

these institutions, and would usually be a factor in the design of policies rather than a focus. This prompts a question: do universities aim to adapt the student to university life, or adapt what they do to the student?

When asked whether residential situations affected policy only one interviewee stated unequivocally that it did. Certainly, none of the universities had a specific policy in relation to students living in the parental home, nor for any of the related categories outlined in section 3.2 above. In addition, there was little reference to residential status in either access agreements or the published strategic plans of the universities involved. Where accommodation was mentioned it was only in respect of bursaries for those wishing to take up places in halls, with the exception of one institution which had created a hardship fund to pay for the travel costs of students with significant commutes. The institution confident that residential situations affected policy, University C, stated the key distinction made was whether students were on or off-site. This influenced the events laid on during 'welcome week', as well as affecting the operation of a number of ancillary services, for example ensuring convenient opening hours and online access. There did not appear to be a specific policy document in this regard, rather that residence was factored in when determining other policies.

Though they were often less confident that residential situations influenced policy, this same principle – residence was a factor but not a particular focus – applied to the other

institutions. University F suggested it was a standard prompt when considering more general work:

> "We often hear the phrase, 'what are we doing to engage our local/home students?' So I think the question gets asked a lot and people are mindful of it, but I don't think we'd ever go so far as to write anything specific for them."

When asked why residential situations were not reflected more in institutional policy, a range of potential explanations were offered. A lack of leadership from senior management on the issue was mentioned, as well as the lack of any "critical mass" of pressure or a specific incident which could spur change. There was some reluctance in universities B and F to write policy or undertake separate activity for students living at home; for University F this was to avoid any sense of segregation, whilst University B has run separate activity in the past but found it was not well attended. They were seeking instead to consider how best to ensure commuter students had a sense of belonging, and that general activities were more accessible in terms of timing and facilities. Others suggested that the research projects outlined in section 3.1 could generate specific policy or activity depending on their findings.

The area most frequently mentioned by interviewees when asked about specific activity was welcome and induction. In two cases, the universities still placed a focus on inducting those moving into halls of residence, though in

the others the intention was to include all students. There was perceived to be a legacy issue where such activity had historically been the preserve of the accommodation office and in one case the move to a more general programme of activity had started only in the most recent academic year. However, most were now trying to ensure all students were able to be part of welcome activities. In addition, there were a small number of other facilities and services which the institution might provide that were thought to be relevant to students living in the parental home, if not exclusively for their benefit, including car parking for those with caring responsibilities and the provision of a crèche. None were aware of any students' union activity or policy, with the exception of University B, where the SU was keen to raise awareness within the institution of these students.

The finding that there was limited policy and activity in the case study institutions reflects the limited evidence in the literature, and it is possible the work of Thomas (2012) and Helsen (2013) has been too recent to have had a discernible impact at the time of the interviews. Nevertheless, it is hard to escape the conclusion that even in these universities, with some of the highest proportions of students living in the parental home, moving away is still seen as the default and the lack of policy and practice reflects this attitude. This is signalled through various means, some of which are more and less obvious. For example, University D reflected that the rates of student loan listed on the university website defaulted to those payable to students moving away from home,

with the parental home rate listed in brackets afterwards. Moreover, this norm is reinforced by staff working in HE, as it will be likely to reflect their own personal histories and beliefs in the benefits of university: two of the interviewees mentioned that they expected their own children to move away to university in due course, and would see this as preferable. University A reflected on the influence this culture would have on current students:

> "All the students who are here now – what are they going to want for their kids? They're going to want the same thing aren't they? If they had a good experience at university, and going away to accommodation is the norm then I think that'll carry on being the norm."

3.8 Section conclusion

This research sought to identify institutional policy and practice in relation to students living in the parental home, and what motivations and assumptions lay behind any activity. The institutions interviewed were chosen on the basis that they each had a high proportion of students living in the parental home and would be most likely therefore to demonstrate specific policy and practice. However, this theory was disproved, and in most cases specific work was limited and these students were not usually identified as a discrete issue. This is not to suggest the universities were unconcerned for these students, but rather the more immediate demands and expectations of those living in university accommodation, and to a lesser extent those in the private rented sector,

tended to obscure the experience of those living at home. This was complicated by an apparent lack of consensus as to how to categorise residential situations in modern HE.

Despite this, the research revealed a rich picture of the motivations and assumptions held by the institutions. The universities participating in the study saw a mixture of rationales, advantages and disadvantages in students living in the parental home during study. There was a strong belief in the normative experience of moving away, and so unsurprisingly it appeared easier for interviewees to list disadvantages. The overall picture appeared to show that though these institutions would not seek to instruct students where to live, those living in the parental home were nevertheless felt to be 'missing out'. A particular concern raised was lower engagement of such students with the university beyond the classroom, whether they participated in the myriad of activities on offer and, if not, whether they therefore gained the maximum benefit from HE.

A striking finding was the extent to which the traditional concerns about this choice of accommodation articulated in the Niblett Report (UGC, 1957) and elsewhere still have their echoes today, not only in the belief that living on campus enables the development of social networks and social capital, but a tentative fear that the academic experience of those living in the parental home may be affected by either family or because the student does not develop a sense of 'belonging'. This research was exploratory and so the findings can only

provide a basis for further research, but they suggest there is significant scope for such work.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

"The experiences of students living in the parental home were often hidden to universities, obscured by the more obvious administrative or pastoral needs of students living in university-owned halls or in shared accommodation in the local community."

Chapter 4: Conclusion

Compared with the extensive debates of fifty years ago and more, the modern HE sector appears relatively sanguine about students' choice of accommodation during study, and certainly less concerned about the academic implications of choosing to live in the parental home during the course. Yet little recent work has attempted to explore underlying attitudes in any depth or even to quantify some of the current practice in universities, and what implications this may have for the student experience.

This study aimed to shed some light on these issues. To do so, it had four principal research objectives: outlining the characteristics of those living in the parental home during study; exploring the historical and conceptual context in relation to those students; examining present institutional policy and practice; and finally analysing the motivations behind any such policy or practice. An extensive literature review sought to meet the first two objectives. The third and fourth were achieved via interviews with staff at seven institutions across England, chosen using purposive sampling from a pool of institutions with high absolute numbers or high proportions of students living in the parental home. This final section will seek to draw conclusions from these elements and suggest some actions for students' unions, the higher education sector and identify areas for further research.

Summary of findings

There are clear relationships between choice of student accommodation and both social class and ethnicity, with students from lower social groups and from ethnic minorities more likely to choose to live at home. Their choices are shaped by a number of factors, including attitudes to debt, family expectations, and the need to manage their transition into the different culture HE may represent. The most obvious impact of this choice appears to be related to the formation of new social networks, which appears to be much more difficult for students living at home. There are also differences in outcomes between students living at home and those who move away, though the interplay between accommodation and other pre-existing characteristics makes causal relationships difficult to prove.

In contrast to today, half a century ago it was considered an educational imperative for as many students as possible to live in university 'residence', living amongst not only their peers but academics too. It is easy to understand Silver's (2004) argument that this 'tradition' has since been abandoned. Student accommodation is no longer explicitly associated with elite ideals of a liberal education, and students are more likely to live in shared houses in the private rented sector than halls of residence. Official policy documents no longer set targets, as Robbins did, for the proportions of students to be

housed by universities (1963a: p196), nor fret, like Niblett, about the availability of suitable wardens to provide the right sort of supervision (1957, pp24-26). Yet the legacy of that era is a powerful, normative belief amongst students and their families that moving away from home is an integral part of the university experience, at least for younger students. This research suggests that this belief is shared by universities, even those former polytechnics where a stronger local ethos might have been expected. They in turn reinforce this culture, not always consciously, and so it endures.

The experiences of students living in the parental home were often hidden to universities, obscured by the more obvious administrative or pastoral needs of students living in university-owned halls or in shared accommodation in the local community. This hiddenness appears exacerbated by a low level of understanding and analysis undertaken on the experience of such students. A further factor is the range of different categorisations employed when considering residential choices, and the resultant differences of emphasis: is distance the more useful way of thinking about the barriers facing students, or the division between those living on campus and off? Is the 'parental home' even a useful category given modern family configurations? Moreover, concerns were raised by some interviewees about the quality of data and whether, even if better disseminated, the statistics would present a true picture.

Most institutions believed that younger students living in the parental home could miss out on

the benefits of the 'full university experience', primarily the sense of independence and transition to adulthood it could provide. In addition, this research argued that the older concept of 'residence' could be said to represent a mechanism by which social and cultural capital was gained. Even if residence has now been abandoned, the interviewees believed moving into different forms of student accommodation could offer similar benefits. However, institutions appeared less certain as to the alternative opportunities they could provide those who chose to stay at home; most work focused on induction, reflecting the relatively limited literature on other interventions and their impact.

Though Silver (2004) has suggested universities no longer see accommodation as part of their educational mission, the interviewees suggested there remains a perceived connection with accommodation and education. Most prominently, institutions recognised that if students living at home did not feel a sense of 'belonging' there were implications for student retention, though specific initiatives in this respect were limited. The interviewees also raised intriguing questions about the role of family on academic outcomes – are they a negative influence or does living in the parental home provide an educational benefit through increased support?

As much as the established social norm of moving away to attend university will likely endure, a substantial minority of students will continue to choose to live at home during study. The findings of this research suggest

that their needs are often overlooked, however unconsciously, and institutions need to do more to ensure these students have the best opportunities to build the different forms of social and cultural capital HE can provide, to engender the sense of belonging so important for retention, and to secure the best possible academic and employment outcomes.

Recommendations

This report was conceived as an exploratory survey and aimed to suggest a range of propositions for further research. As a result the conclusions and recommendations are necessarily tentative and, as only a small minority of universities in England were interviewed, further work should be carried out to determine whether the attitudes and practices of the institutions reflect the wider sector, as well as looking in more detail at the relationship between academic success, social capital and student accommodation, the influence of ethnicity and disability on choices and experience in relation to student housing, and the role of family in all its forms.

Nevertheless, the findings do suggest a number of recommendations for the sector and for students' unions, in improving the quality and usage of data, in furthering our understanding of this group of students, and in recognising their experience is different to the 'traditional' and adapting accordingly. In all these areas, NUS will need to reflect on how it can influence both the sector and students' unions to take them forward.

Data

- Data on residential situations of students should be collected and analysed by HE institutions
- HESA should examine the concerns about data quality and, if necessary, take steps to ensure the statistics are robust
- The HE sector should review the categorisation of residential situations and whether it remains relevant

Understanding

- Further research should be carried out by the HE sector on the links between residential situations, academic success and outcomes, to help confirm the validity of these findings
- Further research should also seek to gain an understanding from these students as to the changes, if any, required in policy and practice

Experience

- Institutions should consider the impact of finance on student decision-making in relation to residence when developing bursary and scholarship policy
- Institutions should ensure living in the parental home (or commuting) is a factor in the design of policies and activities, including induction, with a focus on generating a sense of belonging – note that separate policies and activities are not necessarily required
- Students' unions should also consider how such students can be better involved in activities and provided for in

services, and should work with the institution to ensure it takes action

- Both institutions and students' unions should engage students living in the parental home to gain their input when revising policy or practice

- In general the measures in this section are intended to help to make the experiences of those students living in the parental home less hidden but any alternative means of doing so should also be considered.

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Acknowledgements

Appendix A

Students living in the parental home research

Introduction

Introduce self and project, what the overall aims are and how this interview will assist in furthering those aims.

Thank the participant for their time, and reiterate the participant can choose end the interview at any time and for any reason. They can also choose not to answer any individual question.

Explain that I would like to record the interview to best enable the data to be captured. Reiterate that institutions and individuals will not be identified in the report and the data will not be shared with any other person, and destroyed after a suitable period.

Explain that both institution and individuals will be anonymised in project report; interview notes will remain confidential.

Nothing about the interview (including names of participants) will be passed on to institutional senior management.

Note that I may want to email to check some points subsequently. Will not be ascribing comments to named participants, so will not usually be asking for a formal sign-off.

Although this is for an MA, my employer, the National Union of Students, may wish to publish an abridged version of the report, though nothing would change in terms of anonymity and confidentiality in this case.

Interview will take around 45 minutes, and not more than one hour.

Confirm that interviewee content to proceed after this explanation. Are you happy for interview to be recorded?

NB: The exact focus of the questions may change depending on prior research into the institution's public policy statements/strategy in relation to the student experience. The questions are also starting points and may prompt further questions, or a slightly different line of questions, to explore particular answers.

Interview questions

About your role

1. First just a couple of brief questions so I can understand your role. Please could you confirm your job title and explain briefly what your role is in the University? To whom do you report, how do you fit into the wider management structure?

2. How long have been doing this job here? Have you had any previous broadly similar jobs at this university or elsewhere?

About the university's understanding

3. For your HESA return, the university must submit information on where full-time undergraduate students live during term–time. Firstly, are you aware of roughly how many of your full-time undergraduate students live with their parents during term-time? If so, what proportion do you understand this to be? As far as you are aware – have these proportions changed over the last 5 years? If so why do you think the proportion has changed?

4. Do you, or anyone else in the university, analyse this data on full-time undergraduate students living arrangements? If yes – why do you do this? And what happens to this analysis?

5. Do you breakdown the data any further than the HESA categories? Or in any different ways?

6. Is the data on students' living arrangement distributed to other colleagues in the university? If yes to whom and for what purposes?

7. Do you think there are any advantages or disadvantages for students in regards to living in the parental home during term time?

8. Further to that, are there any advantages and disadvantages for the institution?

9. Do students' residential situations influence policy around student engagement and the student experience? **[IF NO GO TO Q17]**

Residence does influence policy

10. In what way does it influence policy? Which policies does it influence?

11. How did the university make its decisions on policy in this regard? What factors influenced these decisions? Where, or from who, in the University do these policies mostly come from? What is the thinking behind them generally, as far as you can see?

12. Do policies in relation to residential situations get communicated, to university departments and staff, and/or to students and prospective students? If so, how?

13. Does the university undertake any specific activity in relation to students living in the parental home during study? If so, what does it do? What are the aims?

14. Does the students' union undertake any specific work of which you are aware?

15. Does the university have a strategy or policy goal around the proportions of students in different living situations? If so, what?

16. Any other points you'd like to make?
   [GO TO Q22]

Residence does not influence policy (answer is no to Q8)

17. Why do you think residential status does not affect policy at present?

18. Does the university undertake any specific activity in relation to students living in the parental home during study? If so, what does it do? What are the aims?

19. Does the students' union undertake any specific work of which you are aware?

20. Does the university have a strategy or policy goal around the proportions of students in different living situations?

21. Any other points you'd like to make?

Admin questions

22. Are [certain documents] available publically? [If certain documents are not available online] I would be interested in reviewing [documents] if these can be shared, in confidence if appropriate?

23. Once I have completed the report, would you like a copy of the dissertation or a short summary report?

24. If my employer, NUS, decides to publish an abridged version of the report would you like a copy of this document also?

Conclusion

Thank you very much for your time and thoughts today, it's of enormous help to my work. The intention is to complete the dissertation by September, after which I will share the findings with you [if requested]. In the meantime please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

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national union of **students**