

**Exploring Student  
Wellbeing in Higher  
Education**

**By**

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## **Abstract**

Wellbeing is consistently linked to student experiences or satisfaction within Higher Education (HE). Simultaneously, students' health needs are becoming more complex and mental health issues more prevalent within the widening population. However, students' lived experiences are missing from the evidence, creating a gap in what is understood about how students experience their wellbeing. This research used a needs assessment survey of 105 students to inform a phenomenological based methodology on student wellbeing in HE. The research was designed to explore their individual inside and outside contexts. Drawings and interviews from six undergraduate students, were utilised to uncover a deeper understanding of their lived experiences and their wellbeing. In addition, students described what influenced it, how they maintained it, and how they made sense of their experiences.

The students described their wellbeing as personal, contextually based and separate but connected, to health and its dimensions. They highlighted influences affecting their wellbeing including their personality, identity and sense of self; their future goals, people and relationships; and their sense of belonging and community, roles and responsibilities, money and the division of their time and work. These influences are interconnected and linked to their ability to make sense of their experiences and construct a sense of wellbeing. Several students' in-depth perspectives illustrated that wellbeing might not always be positive, and may comprise of both hedonistic and eudemonic theories of wellbeing, and salutogenic ideas of being human. The findings have been represented within a theoretical framework adapted from Engestrom's (2001) CHAT Theory, Berger and Luckman's (1989) Social construct of reality and Kelly's (1963) Personal Construct Theory. As part of my research a prism and matrix of wellbeing was developed. This enables the findings to be presented in a visual mode with finite detail, allowing insight into wellbeing as it is experienced by students in HE.

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## **1.0 Chapter 1 Introduction**

*“We recognise that sometimes things happen that are outside of your control. To help with this you can access trained professionals for the support, advice and guidance that you need to successfully continue with your studies.”*

*(Institution 1, 2018, Support Advice and Wellbeing)*

The above quote represents the kinds of information and support students within my own Higher Education (HE) institution might seek, about their wellbeing.

Simultaneously, there is a widening participatory student body with a more diverse set of needs and expectations. As well as, an increasing rate of young people entering HE with mental health difficulties (Mental Well Being Higher Education Group (MWBHE), 2015; Hagell, 2017).

Moreover, conversations, critical incidents and students retelling their experiences of their wellbeing in HE when they have sought support, has influenced this research. Moreover, reflection and critical analysis of both national and institutional student satisfaction surveys (Higher Education Funding Council for England, (HEFCE) and Higher Education Policy Institute, (HEPI) 2016; 2017) have been linked to student experience (Lenton, 2015) and graduate outcomes (Dept. Education, 2017) have heightened my drive to explore the wellbeing of students from their perspective. Especially, given an overall emphasis on the medicalised perspective of student health and experiences that respond to a crisis or specific issues instead of being proactive (Hagell, 2017). Perpetuating the need to understand the experiences of students’ wellbeing in HE, from their perspective, is central to understanding how and whether HE might best support students’ wellbeing. Especially if HE is to be able to respond and fulfil its responsibilities as an educator of the whole person rather than merely providing education as a means to an end (Apple, 2013; Carr, 2005; Fry *et al.*, 2014). Furthermore, the desire to develop my own pedagogical practice to facilitate positive wellbeing for students and staff and to be able to provide evidence to shape how my institution influences and prioritises wellbeing have been central to why and how this research has been undertaken.

This research has come about now given my own opportunity to develop research that can provide a new and original perspective about wellbeing and inform the evidence

base. Equally, the rising interest and priority given to student experiences and outcomes within HE, lends an opportunity for this research to inform the transitions that are occurring in HE currently (Higher Education and Research Act, 2017; Burgess *et al.*, 2018). While shaping the broader discourses about wellbeing as a positive notion that might shape wider aspects of human development. This research explores the individual perceptions of students, and what influenced their wellbeing. Alongside, how they described it, maintained and managed it and how they made sense of their everyday lived experiences. The central desire to gain insight into and represent how the individual's lived experiences influence their wellbeing, as they build their lifeworld, has shaped the philosophical and research approaches used to design and implement this research.

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the context and development of the research issue, including the researcher's professional background and growth of the research questions. This chapter presents a summary of findings from a literature review of relevant evidence with emphasis on wellbeing in society currently and in HE. This section also includes the role and responsibility of HE and how HE has responded so far. Providing an overview of the philosophical and methodological research approaches used to design and implement the research project. The overall contribution and importance of this research are considered alongside the adaptation and development of the theoretical framework to illustrate the findings. This framework enabled the development of a theoretical matrix to allow insight into how students construct their wellbeing. The initial research questions are also posed to illustrate how the research developed over time and with continued reflection, synthesis and critical analysis as suggested by Smith *et al.*, (2009) and Newby (2010).

### 1.1. The Researcher's Professional Background and Development of the Research Issue

My professional heritage includes a career in nursing, midwifery and health visiting including health promotion and public health roles. Throughout these different career experiences, my responsibilities have included my own professional development (Bassot, 2013) educating and supporting children and families in health and wider social-economic matters and the teaching and assessing of other professionals within varied roles and disciplines (Eraut, 2007). My transition into HE as a lecturer

practitioner, then as a senior lecturer has given me the opportunity to expand my professional development and knowledge as a professional in HE.

As a HE professional, I have worked within several undergraduate, non-professional programmes with a multidisciplinary staff team. These roles have allowed me to inform and develop educational programmes and shape my own and others practice (Bassot, 2013; Moon, 2006). As a HE professional from a health promotion and public health heritage, I have developed an interest in how students experience HE and their wellbeing, as they undertake their studies. I consider wellbeing to be a holistic notion connected to but separate from health rather than a medically driven idea, related to ill health or disease (Baggott, 2013). These values come from my heritage as a professional concerned with health promotion and positive health (Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) 2015) and my role as an educationalist. Boyd and Harris (2010) link these values to my wide variety of both professional and personal roles and experiences.

As a member of a multi-professional team in HE, I have developed, explored, and enacted values and principles around the importance and value of education. I have also developed professional approaches to my teaching and learning strategies that consider the individual as unique and central to what I do. I value each individual and believe that they are unique. For me, my role as a HE educator is to support all students to succeed, by developing educational programmes and learning experiences that enable students to foster their curiosity, learning, independence, autonomy and their academic and personal development. My ethic of care, as described by Keeling (2014) includes the belief that education is one way for individuals to reach their potential and that for some; it may offer empowerment and the opportunity to gain more than economic or material things.

Experiences of working with students from a widening participation background have resulted in me developing an interest in how students experience HE, their wellbeing, and how they manage and describe it. Whether wellbeing should be the responsibility of HE or other agencies, is a discourse central to the role of HE; as is the part of HE in empowering others, building the individual's capacity enabling them to act with agency and autonomy (Keeling 2014). Eraut (2007) and Bassot (2013) suggest that such reflexive analysis and evaluation affords me the opportunity for deeper learning and critical engagement with my development as a human being and professional.

Keeling (2014) argues that these beliefs and actions relate to the ethics of care and certain responsibilities linked to HE and its professionals.

My own experiences have also coloured this research including my own experiences as a student and my development as a researcher and educator. As well as with awareness of and participation in discourses around student experiences, wellbeing and healthy university strategies, as suggested by Moon (2006) and Bassot (2013). These experiences have reiterated the need for this research to be reliable and trustworthy as evidence to inform my professional practice and HE itself, including those involved in the development of policy and services to support students (Holliday, 2008; Newby, 2010). Moreover, this research should accurately represent those it is about and those it is likely to impact in the future. Correspondingly, this research needs to be reliable and acceptable as evidence to inform others concerned with wellbeing, across different disciplines and contexts (Yardley, 2000; Dooris, 2013) by adding an original contribution to the evidence.

## 1.2. The Context of Wellbeing

The following section provides an overview of the literature currently informing the evidence base, including wellbeing and its current context, the context of HE and the philosophical methodological and theoretical approach of the research. Although wellbeing has been a topic of interest throughout history more recently, the evidence base has predominantly focussed on defining and measuring wellbeing. For some, lacks a theoretical base from which policy or practice might be developed (Long *et al.*, 2012). Furthermore, there is a dominance of literature from medical and psychological disciplines, narrowing the evidence and impeding progress in establishing a detailed understanding of wellbeing, or its importance across different contexts (Dodge *et al.*, 2012). Further, wellbeing and the language associated with it is often conflicting, confusing and ambiguous (Eraut and Whiting, 2008). Meanwhile, Becchetti and Conzo, (2017) and the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, (2013) argue that wellbeing is a concept, rather than a construct. Moreover, Huta and Ryan (2010) argue that wellbeing includes hedonistic or eudemonic ideas that are experienced within the moment, as life satisfaction for example, and over the lifespan respectively, overlapping as life plays out. Highlighting that together, a more holistic perspective of wellbeing is gained which influences how wellbeing is constructed by the individual (Huta and Ryan, 2010).

However, these elements are seemingly separated for much of the literature, which seems to predominantly investigate hedonistic perspectives of wellbeing. Hence the over-emphasis upon research that enables a level of definition and measure.

Simultaneously shifting the emphasis towards terms such as satisfaction, happiness or material gain and productivity (Jongbloede and Andres, 2015; Capic *et al.*, 2017).

Alternately, Hagell (2017) links wellbeing to elements of health or a medical perspective of health, including thinking about how to reduce disease or ill health.

Contrastingly Positive Psychology (2015) identify wellbeing as a positive notion, separate to health and with a focus on psychological wellbeing. While others link wellbeing to broader ideas or more eudemonic ideals about being human (Huta and Ryan, 2010; Dooris *et al.*, 2017) and that wellbeing is, therefore, difficult to define, measure or place into practice.

### 1.2.1 Wellbeing and its Current Context

Defining and measuring wellbeing is problematic, across disciplines given the diversity of interplay between wellbeing, the particular context, the nature of the research and different language used. Interestingly, Cook *et al.*, (2016) argue that a definition of wellbeing is not needed or possible, given its complexity, contextual and subjective nature. While Atkinson (2011) argues that current definitions and measures linked to satisfaction or emotive notions like happiness, are of no value resulting in an impasse between researching wellbeing and enabling research to inform practice, policies and systems within some disciplines. Indeed, these circumstances have resulted in the repeated need for research to gain a more in-depth understanding of wellbeing across different contexts and groups (Michalos, 2008; Positive Psychology, 2015). Such issues highlight the importance of selecting the appropriate research approaches according to the topic and research question, as suggested by Newby (2010) and Silverman (2014). Alternately these issues clearly identify the conflicts of evidence from different disciplines and contexts within the evidence base. These difficulties illustrate the inherent gaps and need for further research that is designed to uncover different perspectives of individual people's experiences in settings such as HE.

Furthermore, sociologists and social scientists consider wellbeing as a subjective notion and argue that using positivist knowledge as evidence has fragmented,

misrepresented and undermined the importance of wellbeing (Bartrum, 2011; Dodge *et al.*, 2012). Moreover, the evidence base currently places emphasis upon notions such as life satisfaction, physical health, esteem and material items that provide little or no insight into how individuals experience, or secure their wellbeing (Bartrum, 2011; Positive Psychology, 2015). Alternately, others argue that our understanding of wellbeing is medicalised and simplistic with emphasis upon avoiding illness or disease rather than health, resulting in crude, incomplete and narrow evidence (Cronin De Chavez *et al.*, 2005).

Eraut and White (2008) identified that even within disciplines related to wellbeing: there is confusion and different language and meaning assigned to wellbeing. Placing different significance and importance upon wellbeing, undermining its potential to impact an individual's life or policy (Eraut and White, 2008). Dodge *et al.*, (2012) argue that the evidence base is fragmented and narrow, given the emphasis upon positivist research. Undermining the potential and importance of wellbeing in wider contexts, especially given the lack of individual or group perspectives or research from different contexts that might enable wellbeing to be prioritised (La Placa *et al.*, 2013; White, 2008). The literature highlights the lack of theory to underpin professional practice, services or policy reducing the prioritisation and significance assigned to wellbeing (Dodge *et al.*, 2012; La Placa *et al.*, 2013).

Alternatively, the emphasis upon measuring wellbeing and the construction of scales, indices, models and tools with relatively little theoretical underpinning (Kelly *et al.*, 2012; Public Health England, 2015) has added little to the evidence about how to facilitate wellbeing within different sections of society. Importantly the tools and scales produced are mostly contextual and predominantly utilise positivist research approaches. The objective nature of these scales and measures are problematic and narrow given the subjective nature of wellbeing calling into question their accuracy and robustness (Dodge *et al.*, 2012; Cook *et al.*, 2016). In reality, the objective-based measures lack depth or transferability across contexts, reducing their reliability to inform different disciplines and the practice that might support and facilitate individuals' wellbeing. Equally, positivist knowledge and its associated influence and power within health and medicine are problematic when considering how to prioritise wellbeing in different contexts (Green and Tones, 2010; Hagell, 2017). These issues have a significant impact on the importance assigned to wellbeing within policy and

practice in many disciplines (Carlisle *et al.*, 2010; Public Health England 2015).

Despite recommendations for more subjective research from different disciplines, contexts and groups, there remains a lack of robust, theoretically underpinned evidence about wellbeing (Michalos, 2008; Positive Psychology, 2015; Burgess *et al.*, 2018). Nor is there a measure that is valid across different disciplines or contexts, leading to the criticism that measuring wellbeing is a misplaced objective over understanding how to facilitate wellbeing. Furthermore, there is little or no evidence designed to understand how individuals, groups or communities experience wellbeing (Green and Tones, 2010; Baggott, 2013). Nor is there research uncovering how to facilitate someone to construct a positive sense of wellbeing. Rather than the dominant idea that wellbeing is connected to health and that it is always positive. Overall, there is a lack of balanced, robust evidence to inform the development of practice, policy or services so that wellbeing can be facilitated or prioritised (Long *et al.*, 2012; La Placa *et al.*, 2013).

Within wider literature, wellbeing is associated nationally, internationally and globally with sustainability and economic progress and as a crucial part of being human and human society, but is often overlooked (Antonovsky, 1996; Dodge *et al.*, 2012). However, the lack of robust evidence has reduced politicians and policymakers' motivation to place wellbeing at the centre of policy, or to go beyond collecting statistical evidence and measuring wellbeing (Carlisle *et al.*, 2010; Center for Disease Control and Prevention, (CDC) 2013; Office National Statistics, (ONS) 2017).

Despite evidence that wellbeing might facilitate wide reaching benefits for both the individual and society (New Economic Foundation, (NEF) 2008). Meanwhile, others argue for wellbeing to be prioritised given its link to economic progress, sustainability and the interdependency of human society (Dodge *et al.*, 2012; CDC, 2015). While others link it to positive outcomes in health, education, communities and employment across genders, ethnic groups, cultures, age groups and contexts (Dodge *et al.*, 2012; La Placa *et al.*, 2013; Public Health England, 2015). Nationally, internationally and globally, the importance of wellbeing is beginning to be realised, and the drive begun for it to influence policy is gathering pace (Harvey and Taylor, 2013). However, moving beyond data collection is slow, despite wellbeing's potential for a more salutogenic influence on individual's health and wellbeing and more widely, human

society (Inglehart *et al.*, 2008; ONS, 2017).

Wellbeing has also been linked to wider and more desirable political values around social capacity, cohesion, reduced ill health and disease, the reduction of poverty and increased satisfaction and quality of life (Public Health England, 2015; ONS, 2017; 2011). Some argue that wellbeing increases an individual's ability to participate in society and increases social and economic wellbeing through increased employment capacity and production. This thinking has fostered the idea that wellbeing should be a central tenant for policy within wider politics (Carlisle *et al.*, 2010; O'Donnell *et al.*, 2014). Others add that wellbeing may influence human society and what it is to be human, with national, international and global consequences (Bourke and Geldens, 2007; La Placa *et al.*, 2013). However, policy makers are slow to enact wellbeing within policy, reducing its potential to affect people's lives, despite evidence that it might be integral to positively influencing human society (Andrews *et al.*, 2014). Perhaps indicating that although such outcomes might be desirable for human development politicians are reluctant to instil wellbeing into policy given the potential for them to get it wrong (Bache and Reardon, 2013). Alternately, politicians' ideals are centred on the notion of re-election rather than wider societal gain (Bakshi, 2014).

The section above has highlighted the main themes within the evidence about wellbeing, including the preoccupation to define or measure wellbeing using positivist research approaches rather than interpretative research. The result being the understanding gained reduces the opportunity for wellbeing to inform policy, given the narrow and fragmented evidence base currently available. Indeed, wellbeing, as a global, international and national ideal has perpetuated these issues for some, leaving wellbeing lacking significance and importance across different agendas in wider society (Andrews *et al.*, 2014).

Furthermore, Eraut and Whiting (2008) identified wellbeing across different contexts as ambiguous and difficult to define, given its different meanings across different contexts and disciplines. An issue still not resolved within the evidence base some ten years later. The desire to explore students' perceptions and understanding of their wellbeing; from their perspective, rather than my interpretation as a researcher has been an aim of this research. Within the next section, the context of wellbeing and HE will be analysed in relation to the current literature.

### 1.3. The Context of HE

Significant changes in HE policy and practice since 2009 have influenced the very nature, purpose and day-to-day operation of HE institutions. Within this evolving HE environment, wellbeing has been neglected for alternate priorities (Carey, 2013; Peseta, 2017). The following section will analyse HE's current context before moving towards considering HE's role in relation to wellbeing and the current place of wellbeing within HE.

Within HE, the current context is one of continued change given increased political, economic and social pressure, influencing the nature and priorities of HE (Apple, 2013; HECFE and HEPI, 2015; Burgess *et al.*, 2018). The political pressure and policy-based changes experienced within HE has been noted as dramatic, unrelenting, chaotic and more globally impacting than any other changes since the inception of Universities in the 13<sup>th</sup> century (Biggs and Tang, 2007; 2011 Altbach *et al.*, 2009). Political interest and pressure on HE have resulted in institutions finding themselves with different lines of accountability and responsibilities (Apple, 2013) altering the nature and value of a HE education (Biggs and Tang, 2011). Institutions are monitored and ranked as they act in response to systems designed to enforce marketization, priorities and policies that increase competition between institutions (Dept. BIS, 2011a; HECE and Higher Education Academy, (HEA) 2015; HEFCE and HEPI 2016; 2017; Burgess *et al.*, 2018). Meanwhile, politicians argue that these systems ensure professionalism and increased standards within HE (HECFE and HEPI, 2017). Others argue that such measures are de-professionalising and restricting, removing the autonomy and influence of the sector and politicalising HE to its detriment (Munn, 2008; Ball, 2003; 2012). Ball (2012) and Apple (2013) argue that these measures alter the focus of HE towards business priorities rather than education and personal development. The volume and pace of these changes have altered the nature of HE, including its purpose, priorities and role changing how HE is perceived across society.

Changes to student funding (that transferred fees for HE charges to students, via a loan scheme (Dept. BIS, 2011a; 2011b) and widening participation policies that increase access to HE (Dept. BIS, 2011a; 2011b; HEFCE, 2017; 2015) have changed how HE institutions develop and operate. These changes have driven alterations in how HE institutions develop and deliver their curricula; the kind of programmes they

run and the staff they employ (Teaching Excellence Framework, 2017; HEFCE and QAA, 2017). These circumstances ultimately shape their ability to survive in the market place, given the power and influence afforded by prospective students (Quinn, 2011; Sadler, 2012; Rose, 2012). Indeed, in the 1990s about only 15% of the populous attended HE institutions but by 2011 the percentage had moved towards 40% with some political parties striving to influence the number towards 60% (HEFCE, 2015; HEPI and HEA, 2017).

Moreover, HE staff experience competing priorities, as they struggle to address and support a student population from ever wider audiences (Hagell, 2017; HEPI, 2017), competing targets and performance markers set by others (Corbin and Logon, 2008; Carey, 2013; Peseta, 2017). Moreover, HE professionals struggle to meet the needs of more and more students with complex needs, without appropriate expertise, training, policies, and services to support them (Munn, 2008; Ball, 2003; 2012). Despite these issues, some argue that HE may provide answers to societal ills, given their ability to reduce poverty and increase social mobility (Ball, 2012; Peseta, 2017). The changes within student funding and increased access by wider participatory students how universities carry out their roles and what they do operationally has shifted and staff struggle to ensure their roles and responsibilities are fulfilled given increasing demands and conflicts between their academic roles and professional status (HEFCE, 2015; HEPI, 2017).

An emphasis upon student recruitment, increasing retention, and ensuring positive student experience and satisfaction now drive HE institutions' priorities and are linked to institutional success (Apple, 2013; 2012; Johansen *et al.*, 2014). These measures undermine the potential for HE institutions to consider more holistic notions such as wellbeing. More recently the emphasis has moved from student satisfaction or experience surveys (Dept. BIS, 2011a; 2011b; HEFCE and HEPI, 2015); towards graduate outcomes and excellence frameworks for teaching, research and long-term employment, shifting the role of HE beyond education (Dept. Education 2017; Hipkin, 2018). However, these measures are predominantly reliant on the interpretation of objective data, despite the subjective nature of students' lived experiences. Furthermore, the government's agenda in shaping HE's priorities and driving their role towards business and employment is at odds with understanding subjective phenomena such as wellbeing. Hence, the delay in responding to or even

accepting the importance of wellbeing according to some and continued emphasis on positivist research and evidence (Dolan and Metcalfe, 2012; Hendriks *et al.*, 2014). These issues have resulted in the overall importance of wellbeing being misinterpreted given the fragmented evidence, which is currently informing HE policy and priorities. These circumstances have reduced HE's ability to underpin their responsibilities with evidence that is reliable, robust, and offers a theoretical basis to shape their own priorities, practice, and policies that promote student wellbeing.

The section above has highlighted some of the main contextual changes within HE including funding and widening participation, and the move to make student recruitment, retention and satisfaction priorities and indicators of institutional success (Apple, 2013; HEFCE and HEPI, 2017). Moreover, these challenges have changed staff priorities and instilled targets and indicators of success. Which in turn, define their institutions status; underpinning the development of the HE sector as a market place and education, as a commodity (Ball, 2012; Apple, 2013; Peseta, 2017). These policy and priority changes have reduced HE's ability to operationalise other priorities such as wellbeing (Dooris *et al.*, 2012; Peseta, 2017; Sutton, 2017). The next section will consider the role and responsibility of HE to promote the wellbeing of its students, linking this to their wider role in relation to wellbeing and society.

### 1.3.1. Current Place of Wellbeing within HE

Within HE, promoting student wellbeing has been linked to the student experience, success and the interventions that shape service development rather than proactive health promotion or notions linked to wellbeing (Dooris and Doherty, 2010; Cawood *et al.*, 2010; Dooris *et al.*, 2012). Currently, there is little or no emphasis upon student wellbeing, other than from estranged perspectives such as student experience, recruitment, study support services or retention information. Meanwhile, institutions have developed student/staff liaison systems, student feedback, and other student voice and participation mechanisms, to monitor and improve student experiences and retention. However, these do not link to why students leave HE or do not enter a particular HE institution, narrowing the understanding gained and marginalising the importance of wider notions like student wellbeing (Blair and Valdez-Noel, 2014).

These instruments narrow and misrepresent students' experiences and make evidence unreliable, fragmented and largely controlled by those outside of the sector, reducing the clarity of any messages gained (Batchelor, 2012; Carey, 2013b). The surveys, measures and institutional ranking systems that are used to identify and measure institutions' success, undermine the importance of wellbeing for students in HE (Batchelor, 2012; Baron and Corbin, 2012).

Current services and support provided by HE institutions focus upon traditional health issues associated with HE students, medicalising their wellbeing and focusing on a specific element of their health rather than their wellbeing as a holistic notion (Healthy Universities, 2016; MWBHE 2015). However, these problems may not necessarily be relevant to the more diverse student body within contemporary HE (Public Health England, 2015; HEFCE & HEPI, 2017). Some research reflects upon psychological elements relating to success or happiness in HE (Marshall and Morris, 2011) and others focus upon evaluating mental health interventions (Laidlaw *et al.*, 2015; MWBHE, 2015). Meanwhile, yet more research focuses on student experiences and satisfaction rather than student wellbeing, reducing its usefulness to inform proactive practice or policy, instead medicalised notions of wellbeing within HE (University of Edmonton, 2006; Dooris, 2009; HEFCE and HEPI, 2017). Dooris (2009) identified that many interventions and policies around student health are underpinned by biomedical models of health; which emphasis treatment, compliance, and reducing risk of disease and illness. Instead of health promotion or societal models which enable ownership and agency (Baggott, 2013). Research has continued to identify the need to consider wellbeing as a positive construct, connected to settings or social models of health. However, with seemingly little progress; given the emphasis on notions linked to student health problems (Tsouros *et al.*, 1998; Wilson and Mabhala, 2009; Cawood *et al.*, 2010). Perhaps highlighting the need for research such as this that explores wellbeing of students from their perspective.

Furthermore, wellbeing as a separate notion to health or as a responsibility and priority for HE is not emphasised beyond its measurement related to student satisfaction or experience (Van-Petergem *et al.*, 2007; Blair and Valdez-Noel, 2014). Equally, the emphasis on the measurement and evaluation of student wellbeing is often via estranged notions including experiences and satisfaction, undermining

wellbeing as a holistic notion (Dooris, 2013; Small and Atree 2015; Healthy Universities 2016) and fragmenting what is understood about it within HE. Alternatively, wellbeing is linked to certain health interventions and their evaluation (Hall *et al.*, 2011; Marshall and Morris, 2011; Dooris, 2013; Healthy Universities, 2016). Alternately, wellbeing is identified as an element of health rather than a separate construct, reducing its value and importance but also its prioritisation in HE. Especially, given the emphasis on health problems or student experience, reducing the likelihood of universities management teams prioritising it (Dooris, 2013). Keeling (2014) identified that wellbeing may be related to an ethic of care and needs to be prioritised within HE's role as an agent of society. However, political drivers and priorities emphasise the measurement of satisfaction and student experiences, misplacing emphasis upon these which creates a specific kind of evidence. Inadvertently, adding to the narrowness of the evidence currently shaping what is understood about student wellbeing in HE.

Institutions who have moved towards promoting student health omit wellbeing or prioritise particular student health problems over wellbeing or health, as proactive goals (Healthy Universities, 2016; Dooris *et al.*, 2017). The preoccupation with using medical models to promote student health in HE has reduced the impact it might have on student health (Scriven and Hodgkins, 2012; Dooris, 2013). It would seem from the evidence that HE institutions seemingly underestimate the potential for wellbeing, instead, focusing on more narrow priorities such as student experience. In reality, much of HE fails to perceive the importance of wellbeing and views it as an additional and unimportant agenda. Especially given the lack of funding, expertise, and prioritisation of wellbeing within policy (Doherty *et al.*, 2011; Dooris, 2013).

Moreover, how HE may develop and respond to students needs is highly influence by the HE policy, political agendas, pressure and the prioritisation of stakeholders. HE institutions must respond to these pressures to ensure survival and status in the sector (Peseta, 2017). Arguably, HE itself needs to be convinced with evidence of the importance of wellbeing, especially if it is to reach beyond traditional student health problems. HE institutions, are expected to achieve their broader responsibilities connected to more salutogenic priorities within society (Keeling, 2014; Dooris *et al.*, 2017). It is therefore timely that this research was undertaken and that it provides the evidence to enable HE to realise the significance of

wellbeing.

#### 1.4. Philosophical, Methodological and Theoretical Approach of the Research

This section illustrates the principles behind this research that led to the philosophical approach as Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Because of its ability to uncover the in-depth understanding of the individual's experiences of a particular phenomenon within people's everyday lives (Van Manen, 2014; Conklin, 2014). IPA was utilised as a way to analyse the materials, given its ability to be representative of participant's experiences, and add texture and depth to the understanding gained (Smith *et al.*, 2009; Van Manen, 2011).

Phenomenology is a philosophical, methodological and theoretical framework that enables insight into how individual's experience a phenomenon. As well as how they make sense of their everyday lived experiences to construct their lifeworld (Van Manen, 2011; 2014) underpinning its central importance within this research. Van Manen (2014) suggests that phenomenology offers the researcher in-depth insight into how the individual thinks, feels and behaves within their everyday context. Kelly (1963) links phenomenology or more specifically, IPA, to how individual's make sense of their experiences to construct their world. Similarly, Berger and Luckman (1989) identified systems that the individual uses to objectify, subjectify and reify their interpretations of their experiences to enable them to assign meaning to them.

Moreover, Finlay (2014) highlights that phenomenology enables insight into the interconnectedness and interaction between the individual, society and the world and vice versa. Smith *et al.*, (2009) and Dahlberg (2015) reiterate that IPA enables the exploration of the individual's experiences from their viewpoint, at a point in time. Which enables insight into how individuals are shaped by and interact with their world. Smith *et al.*, (2009) highlight that IPA enables the systematic nature of a phenomenon to be uncovered in a humanising way, allowing the descriptions from participants to depict a sense of being there, which can inform the evidence base and practice in a particularly rich way.

##### 1.4.1. Design and Implementation of this Research Project

The design and implementation of this research have been coloured by the need to provide a, in-depth insight into each student's experiences of their wellbeing within HE, from their perspective. Equally, the drive to represent a range of student's voices

within the evidence base has coloured the overall methodology and methods, according to Newby (2010). Especially given the lack of this particular perspective within the literature and its importance in informing the evidence-based and practice in both HE and wider contexts (Moon, 2006; Eraut, 2007; Bassot, 2013).

Moreover, the design of this research has been influenced by student support services in some HE institutions focussing on health issues such as mental health problems, drug, and alcohol abuse and sexual behaviours or infections, with little student input or voice influencing the interventions used beyond evaluation (Cawood *et al.*, 2010). More recently, institutions have begun to develop policies and services related to a wider participative student body; such as those with learning needs and disability support for students. Particularly, given the links to educational satisfaction and success, rather than the focus being the promotion of wellbeing (Cawood *et al.*, 2010). These issues have been further driven by increasing mental health issues within the student body (MWBHE, 2015; HEA 2016). The design of this research has been set out to address the lack of contextual evidence and supporting student participation and representation so that student voices may inform future services and interventions (QAA, 2011). This research will be pivotal in terms of its capacity to influence the development of proactive, effective, appropriate and relevant interventions, that promote student wellbeing in HE as a positive notion.

### 1.5. Conclusion

This chapter has set out the background and context of the research providing an overview of the professional background of the researcher and the growth of the research issue and the context of wellbeing and HE currently. Providing an insight into the philosophical and methodological approaches undertaken in the research project. The initial research title and questions were;

#### Initial Research Title

Overarching Title; An Exploration of Student Wellbeing in Higher Education (HE).

#### Initial Research Questions:

1. How do undergraduate students in HE define their wellbeing?
2. What influences student wellbeing within undergraduate study programs in HE- (non- professional based);

a) Outside of university? b) Inside university?

## **2.0 Chapter 2 Literature Review**

This chapter gives an overview of the literature and affords the critical analysis of the evidence base around wellbeing, wellbeing within HE and the current context of HE. As with all literature reviews, this chapter illustrates what we already know about wellbeing and HE, and how these themes interlink currently. Moreover, how and whether there are gaps in the literature is highlighted, which has enabled the development and refinement of the research questions and the design and implementation of the research process (Newby, 2010; Hewitt- Taylor, 2011). This process enabled me to critically reflect upon several areas of literature within the current evidence enabling the decisions and processes undertaken to focus on the best way to answer the research questions and represent each student's experiences of their wellbeing (Newby, 2010; Padgett, 2012). Simultaneously, ensuring the quality, validity, and trustworthiness of this research according to Yardley (2000) so that it will be considered as evidence, to inform future practice and policy (Padgett, 2012; Silverman, 2014).

The student experience, healthy universities and the international and national perspective of healthy universities, are also given their connection to student health and wellbeing. Throughout this chapter, gaps, and elements shaping the research questions, design and implementation are drawn out and the influence upon this research highlighted (Huberman and Miles, 2002; Newby, 2010). The literature used to inform the review has spanned across various domains of literature, policy and professional disciplines. The process of reviewing the literature has extended throughout the study period of this doctorate.

### **2.1. Literature Review Process**

As suggested by Huberman and Miles's (2002) primary research, theory and policy are essential elements to be included within a literature review, to gain insight into what is understood about the topic to be researched. Padgett (2012) suggests that secondary research and opinion pieces may add a sense of different discourses within a particular topic but that they are less influential to the research design. Moreover, some opinion pieces were also useful to give a level of understanding about the nature, context and culture associated with wellbeing, especially given

their degree of influence within the certain disciplines, as suggested by Holliday (2008) and Newby (2010).

An extensive array of sources was incorporated within the review, including journal articles, books, e-books, government policies, documents and websites, non-government agencies and charity reports, documents and open access journals, conference documents, and other relevant agencies or organisational websites, reports or conference papers from the United Kingdom (UK), Europe, World Health Organisations (WHO) and other relevant networks associated with the areas of study.

Overall, wellbeing-based articles and books were restricted to those from 2005 onwards, given the need to gain an understanding of the historical and cultural aspects of wellbeing but also the pace of change in the relevant disciplines. Similarly, articles and materials around HE and healthy universities have been restricted to 2009 onwards, given the nature and pace of change within the sector. Older key texts have been utilised given their particular importance in shaping the research. While a mix of books and journal articles have informed the methodology and methods sections, given the need to ensure the inclusion of core texts and the development of methods themselves (See Chapter three, Methodology).

The HE institution's electronic library was particularly useful given the extent of access to open and peer-reviewed journals, e-books, books and an institutional database of items that have been developed by staff. These items extend across faculties and professional disciplines, as echoed within the broader literature. The literature search was carried out initially and then continually updated via external search engines such as Feedly and various Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feeds. On-line data reports and information were also rechecked to incorporate these into the review given the rate and kind of changes and policy development within HE and regarding wellbeing.

Eraut and Whiting (2008) highlighted the inconsistent, confusing and ambiguous language associated with wellbeing as problematic to the development of policy that might hold wellbeing as a central goal. For this reason, the following phrases were used as search terms interchangeably; Wellbeing, Well-being, and Well Being. Alongside terms such as; definitions of, measures/ measuring of, challenges to, in higher education/ University, in further education/HE, student experiences in HE,

health and universities, healthy universities, wellbeing and HE/ university, health promotion universities/ HE.

### 2.1.1. Key Texts Linked to this Research

The development of the research question, its overall design and methodology was initially shaped and influenced by three key theoretical ideas. Firstly, Berger and Luckman (1989) and their analysis of how individuals build their view of reality in their everyday lives. Secondly, Kelly's personal construct theory (1963) provides a theoretical explanation of how individual's make sense of their experiences because they construct multiple personal constructs as they build their world and understand it and themselves. Finally, Engestrom's (2001) 3<sup>rd</sup> generation of Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) highlights how individuals think, feel and act and allows a level of flexibility, adaptability across different disciplines and contexts and illustrates how individuals learn and make sense of their experiences (Roth and Lee, 2007; Roth *et al.*, 2012).

The adaptation of Engestrom's CHAT Theory (2001) enabled me to illustrate how each student experienced their everyday wellbeing; including their thoughts, feelings, actions and how they made sense of their experiences, to construct their wellbeing (Ashton, 2014). Adding a new dimension to our understanding of wellbeing, and uncovering the commonalities or particularities (Bainbridge, 2015) that enable cross-contextual understanding of wellbeing, as suggested by Long *et al.*, (2012).

Correspondingly, Bainbridge (2015) identified particularities and commonalities within the materials that enables the depth and complexity of the findings to be represented. These core texts further offered me as a researcher, the opportunity to consider how the individual's experiences might shape how or whether the individual constructs their reality, or what Van Manen (2011; 2014) describes as their lifeworld, which constantly shifts and reconstructs as the individual moves through their daily lives.

Furthermore, this research was shaped by the desire to uncover the student's perspective of their experiences and how this influenced their wellbeing, including how they described or defined their wellbeing, made sense of their everyday experiences and maintained and managed their wellbeing.

## 2.2. Wellbeing

### 2.2.1. Wellbeing; Construct or Concept.

Within the literature, there is a historical conflict about whether wellbeing is a concept or construct (Tsouros, 1989; Hendriks, 2014). Bassot (2012) argues that the nature of a construct includes shifts in status, subjectivity, and evidence that whatever is being considered, links to an individual's experiences, rather than a collective or group consensus as with a concept as suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Within the literature, wellbeing is identified as shifting and having a subjective nature, inferring it is a construct rather than a concept.

Alternately, Andrews (2012) and others highlight that wellbeing is a social construct given the active role of the individual in interpreting their world and constructing its meaning. Furthermore, evidence that different genders, age groups, ethnic groups, and individuals define and experience their wellbeing differently (Cronin De Chavez *et al.*, 2005; Levy and Sabbagh, 2008; La Placa, *et al.*, 2013) infers its status as a construct given the individuality of these experiences. Within psychology, wellbeing is linked to personality (Kelly 1963; Long *et al.*, 2012) and emotions further underpinning the individual focus (Bullough and Pinegar, 2009; Bartrum, 2011; Positive Psychology, 2015). Whereas social scientists argue that the individual and world interact and that it is influenced by culture, society and others (Andrews 2012; Scott *et al.*, 2012; Becchetti and Conzo, 2017). Contrastingly, others argue that wellbeing is the absence of anxiety, mental ill-health or depression, linking it to notions of individual capacity and psychological constructs such as resilience (Levy and Sabbagh, 2008; Carlisle *et al.*, 2010). Hence, the evidence suggests that wellbeing is an individual and contextually influenced construct, rather than a concept given the active role of the individual, from inside themselves, their contexts and how they experience and construct it and their reality (Berger and Luckman 1989; Bassot, 2012) reiterating the importance of the lived experience (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Andrews, 2012).

Furthermore, the different language, ambiguity, and confusion associated with wellbeing, across different disciplines and contexts, has led to the misrepresentation of what we understand about it (Eraut and White, 2008) and how we have researched it so far. Reinforcing Dodge *et al.*, (2012) recommendation that wellbeing needs to be understood from different perspectives, by those experiencing it and within different contexts. Correspondingly, the preoccupation around defining and measuring

wellbeing; and the failure to do so, has offered no clear or consistent evidence which provides a commonality or consensus that might inform practice or policy.

Unfortunately, the persistence of vague terms and no cross- discipline consensus reduces the transferability and generalisability of the evidence, reducing any potential for wellbeing to be placed into practice or policy perpetuating the ambiguity of the language associated with wellbeing (Eraut and White, 2008).

This conflict of status has restricted and misrepresented how wellbeing has been researched, understood, and how it has been measured thus far. According to Kelly (1963), wellbeing is a part of an individual's personal construct because he argues that the individual makes sense of their experiences and creates multiple personal constructs, to enable them to build their understanding of their world and themselves. Bassot (2012) argues that concepts are broad, shared ideas that are agreed by many and are measurable and generalisable, indicating why the literature is perhaps preoccupied with defining and measuring wellbeing instead of how it is experienced in everyday contexts.

The need to develop robust evidence that moves across disciplines and contexts, about the status and how wellbeing might be experienced is clearly needed (Burgess *et al.*, 2018). This research was designed to uncover the individual's perspective and represent their lived experience. Including what wellbeing might be and how they made sense of their experiences to maintain, manage and construct their wellbeing.

### 2.3. Defining Wellbeing

Historically wellbeing has been related to healthy living and physical and spiritual health, extending from the Ancient Egyptians and Greeks (Bergdolt, 2008). However, in contrast before World War Two wellbeing was conceptualised as part of health, including the notion that health was the absence of disease and disability (WHO 1948) or alternately, linked to capacity and functionality (Keyes, 2014). Over time, health became a concept that was expanded to include wellbeing, undermining wellbeing's importance or difference to health and perpetuating its medicalisation as illustrated by the World Health Organization (WHO) (1948) definition of health:

“... a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity” (WHO, 1948, pp. 1).

This medical perspective of health, or more accurately ill health, has dominated the

literature and research about wellbeing. Moreover, the emphasis on health and the positivist approaches and disciplines such as health and psychology have dominated the evidence base (Dodge *et al.*, 2012; Cook *et al.*, 2016). Research from these disciplines has a particular stance which has prevented wellbeing from gaining influence or importance within wider social, political, economic and professional disciplines; simultaneously reinforcing the emphasis of wellbeing as connected to, or part of, health, or more specifically, medicine (Dodge *et al.*, 2012).

The continued dominance and power of medical and psychological research has narrowed the kind of research undertaken over several decades (Ryff, 1989; Cook *et al.*, 2016). Indeed, Ryff (1989) and others continually reiterated the link between health and wellbeing and used objective elements to both define and measure wellbeing as part of health. This medicalised perspective of health and the joining of health and wellbeing has been perpetuated by the kind of research undertaken (Dolan and White, 2007; Dodge *et al.*, 2012). This dominance of objective research with its particular focus has resulted in a narrowness of the evidence and fragmented how different disciplines within medicine and health define and measure wellbeing (Ryff 1989; Dolan and White, 2007). Moreover, these approaches have continuously linked health and wellbeing as similar, medicalising both and linking them to the absence of disease. Alternately, in psychology, health and wellbeing are linked together, and understanding is drawn from the absence of mental health, rather than either being positive or separate constructs. Some time ago, Dolan and White (2007) highlighted the idea that health and wellbeing might be separate but connected, and that the issue difficulty in understanding both were linked to their medicalisation.

Huta and Ryan (2010) highlighted wellbeing as a separate construct to health that was made up of a combination of two elements. Firstly, hedonistic ideas of wellbeing, associated with the pursuit of happiness and comfort and the immediate time frame. Secondly, eudemonic principles of wellbeing which link to the development of the individual as the best they can be and reaching one's potential (Huta and Ryan, 2010). However, Dooris (2017) and others have linked similar notions of wellbeing to salutogenic ideas of health and health promotion as a positive means to instil wellbeing within settings. Others link wellbeing to human development and the broader ethics of being human (Keeling, 2014). Moreover, notions such as happiness or satisfaction have become synonymous with wellbeing, perhaps indicating the

dominance of hedonistic perspectives of wellbeing (Huta and Ryan, 2010; Cooke *et al.*, 2016). Unfortunately, there appears to be a limited amount of research exploring these ideas and a dominance of approaches that identify hedonistic ideas of wellbeing. These approaches have reduced our ability to explore wellbeing in an unbiased or lived everyday perspective, reducing our potential to understand how wellbeing might be experienced and positively promoted (Bache and Reardon, 2013; Bakshi, 2014) or policy developed (Harvey and Taylor, 2013). This gap may have contributed to the incomplete picture and difficulty in defining wellbeing (Bache and Reardon, 2013) and its incorrect coupling with health. Reiterating the importance of this research given its focus on students' lived experiences rather than any one aspect.

Indeed, Cook *et al.* (2016) argued that objective data alone fails to uncover what wellbeing is and how it might interplay in different contexts-illustrating the need for more interpretivist approaches to uncovering people's experiences of their wellbeing (Cook *et al.*, 2016). Equally, the lack of consensus about defining wellbeing has added to the ambiguous nature and objectification of research reducing the potential to prioritise other forms of research. Appasamy *et al.*, (2014) highlighted the need for research using more diverse and creative methodologies to explore the individual's contextual experiences of their wellbeing. Both Appasamy *et al.*, (2014) and Burgess *et al.*, (2018) concluded that research with certain groups and across different contexts is needed to enact wellbeing. Dodge *et al.*, (2012) and Long *et al.*, (2012) both argued the need for research to provide a theoretical framework to inform practice and policy. More recently, some research has begun to explore wellbeing as linked to an individual's capacity and as a positive notion in some contexts (MWHE, 2015; Thorburn, 2015). Dooris *et al.*, (2018) also noted the drive to facilitate alternate research approaches to explore wellbeing as a positive notion. Thus, the drive towards more interpretivist research to explore wellbeing in different contexts is being realised as recommended by Cook *et al.* (2016) and further underpin the development of this research its methodology and focus.

Moreover, different disciplines have defined what wellbeing is differently. Within public health, wellbeing is still identified as the absence of illness or disease and life quality, rather than life length alone (Harvey and Taylor, 2013). Alternately, nursing has linked wellbeing to the experiences and feelings of those with health issues or in need of care (Sturgeon, 2012). Whereas, Mixer *et al.*, (2013) included holism and

naturalistic perspectives of health in his work towards defining wellbeing. Moreover, Michalos (2008) and Sturgeon (2012) highlighted the influence of professional culture and particular principles in the construction and research about wellbeing. Alternately, social scientists have linked wellbeing to sustainability and life quality (D'Acci, 2011; Scott *et al.*, 2012). Whereas, Mixer *et al.* (2013) and Scott *et al.* (2012) linked wellbeing to life satisfaction and subjective wellbeing, including material elements and satisfaction or other emotions. Similarly, Diener *et al.* in 1999, and later Diener (2012) investigated the positive and negative effects that influence individual's wellbeing, in the hope of understanding the individual's experiences of their wellbeing in more depth. These different approaches between professionals even within the same setting, illustrate the potential importance and complexity of wellbeing and its ability to impact people's everyday life; highlighting the lack of transferable evidence to inform practice or services. These nuances in the evidence base underpinned this research's development to ensure it was able to uncover what wellbeing might be and what it was not, from the perspective of those experiencing HE daily, as students.

The need to understand what influences wellbeing and how it is constructed is reiterated throughout the literature. Long *et al.* (2012) argued that there was a clear gap in the evidence and a lack of research focussed specifically around wellbeing and its facilitation. Whereas, Jongbloed and Andres (2015) argued that there is still the need for a definition of wellbeing to understand the wider dimensions associated with it, such as health or education and how these inter-relate to affect an individual's experiences and their wellbeing. Leading them to the conclusion that research designed to uncover an in-depth understanding of what constitutes and shapes wellbeing, and how individuals perceive and experience their everyday lives, is needed. Meanwhile, Dodge *et al.*, (2012) recommended that research needs to represent the voice of people, and their experiences of wellbeing, to evidence professional practice and policy. In this research this led to the broadening and refinement of the research questions, the development of a needs assessment survey and the use of IPA to ensure the representation of the student's voices and uncover their experiences of their wellbeing within HE as suggested by Smith *et al.*, (2009) and Van Manen, (1990; 2014).

Understanding how it might be facilitated is currently lacking within the evidence

base. Some argue this is because wellbeing is and should be connected to sustainability and quality of life (Dodge *et al.*, 2012; CDC, 2013). Alternatively, life satisfaction, holistic health and wellbeing, economic growth or subjective wellbeing, have been highlighted as central to gaining a theoretical understanding of wellbeing so that policy and practice can be developed and shared (Dolan and Metcalfe, 2012). However, the lack of such research has reduced the potential for wellbeing to be central to policy or practice for individuals, different contexts or across society (Becchetti and Conzo, 2017; Capic *et al.*, 2017). These contradicting perspectives highlight the need for research that enables insight into how wellbeing is influenced, constructed and reconstructed. While enabling insight into how experiences and contexts interplay, and the influence of wellbeing on different people and their future development as a human being, hence this research.

Recently, the idea that centralising wellbeing into policy might result in certain desirable outcomes (such as higher quality of life, sustainability, economic stability and growth, social cohesion, democratisation, increased choices and freedom) has driven heightened interest in wellbeing (Public Health, 2015; Topp *et al.*, 2015; World Economic Forum, 2017). Alternately, poverty reduction and health inequalities have heightened the agenda to uncover more understanding about wellbeing (CDC, 2013; Topp *et al.*, 2015; Public Health England, 2015). However, the current evidence base lacks subjective research that enables insight into how individuals' experience wellbeing; reducing the potential to develop effective policy across different levels of government, populations, cultures, (Topp *et al.*, 2015; World Economic Forum, 2017) contexts and groups (O'Donnell, *et al.* 2014; Hendriks *et al.* 2014). However, these debates are not new, Vingilis and Sarkella, in 1997, concluded that there was a need to understand the context from the viewpoint of the individual. While Hendriks *et al.*, (2014) has argued that these challenges underpinned the slow progress or even reluctance to operationalise wellbeing.

Similarly, Wallace and Schmeuker (2013) highlighted the need to use wellbeing data received from across disciplines, agencies and government, to inform and drive the development of policy. However, Wallace and Schmeuker (2013) also highlighted the need to include people's own assessment of their wellbeing and satisfaction with their lives. Alongside the need for strong governmental leadership to drive the development of evidence and policy to prioritise wellbeing. Wallace and Schmeuker

(2013) identified the importance of coalitions to support the allocation of resources and evaluate policy for societal progress. However, they also argued the importance of mobilising and disseminating an agenda from the government to communities.

Importantly, projects such as those by the New Economic Foundation (NEF, 2008) have highlighted the potential for particular actions to increase the capacity of individuals to experience wellbeing as a positive construct. However, the NEF (2008) project assumed all individuals had the capacity, time, access and ownership of their circumstances to enable them to underpin their everyday lives with the 5 ways recommended. However, it could be argued that although the five ways were clearly evidenced and of benefit to the individual, there was little will beyond the report to influence overall policy. Unfortunately, this project was not rolled out or secured in practice or policy, highlighting the potential importance of both to instil positive outcomes and capacity in an individual's everyday life. Certainly, many identify the need for research to inform both intervention and practice and for both to be supported by policy for research to move beyond recommendations (NEF, 2008; Diener, 2012; Jongbloed and Andres, 2015). Equally, others argue the need for effective policy to ensure the reduction of individual inequalities or the building of capacity for wellbeing to be facilitated (Harvey and Taylor 2013; La Placa *et al.*, 2013).

Meanwhile, Jongbloed and Andres (2015) argued for the need to develop research that provides a theoretical understanding of wellbeing that can be utilised across disciplines and used to underpin policy. Throughout the literature, wellbeing is defined and measured, but without an agreed definition. Concurrently, multiple measures (Diener, 2012; La Placa *et al.*, 2013) and theoretical frameworks are restricted to particular contexts or disciplines, undermining the research as evidence that can inform other disciplines or contexts. The result is little coherent understanding of wellbeing and a reluctance to place wellbeing into policy or practice either in society or within particular contexts (Eraut and Whiting, 2008). Such difficulties have resulted in a lack of importance being associated with wellbeing (Jongbloed and Andres, 2015). There is a clear need for research that develops theoretical understanding and ensures that findings can be communicated, critically analysed and evaluated to enable a deeper understanding of wellbeing as a priority (Newby, 2010).

Interestingly, Harvey and Taylor (2013) highlight the challenges of interpreting epidemiological and other objective data, to inform the planning and protection of people's health, identifying that these difficulties relate to the complexity and difficulty of enacting the data into policy and practice (Harvey and Taylor, 2013). The need for research, that provides a different perspective to the evidence, rather than continuing the same focus upon defining or measure wellbeing is therefore clear. Whereas, Hausman (2012) and Andrews *et al.*, (2014) argued for the development of cross-contextual research, using different methodological approaches, to cultivate the theoretical understanding of wellbeing. Indeed, these gaps in our understanding of wellbeing informed the overall approach, research questions and methodology of this research. Especially, given the need to explore wellbeing from the perspective of those within the context of HE, namely students, to provide new evidence and inform both my practice and HE policy.

#### 2.4. Measuring Wellbeing

Despite the myriad of tools, indices, indexes and scales designed to measure and quantify wellbeing across different disciplines, there remains a lack of consensus about how to measuring wellbeing (Inglehart *et al.*, 2008; Keeling *et al.*, 2012; Capic *et al.* 2017). The reliance on undefined concepts such as satisfaction or happiness (Inglehart *et al.* 2008; Keeling *et al.* 2012). Unfortunately, according to Capic *et al.*, (2017) the vague and unclear use of terms such as satisfaction or happiness, have detracted from the reliability of tools to measure wellbeing, given a lack of consensus about how they may be defined or how they link to wellbeing.

Cummins *et al.*, (2014) highlights the notion of wellbeing is related to happiness and satisfaction, using subjective wellbeing markers but then objectively linked and plotted responses to measure levels of happiness and satisfaction. This reliance on notions like satisfaction and happiness have added confusion and reduced the subjective data to an objective perspective. According to Newby (2010), this reliance on researcher's interpretation of concepts such as satisfaction and happiness that are at odds with each other reduces the ability of the measures to be used as evidence because they are not verified or defined with consensus. Moreover, Cook *et al.*, (2016) argued that the underlying premise of these measures is that people are usually happy and satisfied, which relies on assumption and is therefore problematic. Especially given that there is no clear understanding of what satisfaction or happiness

might look like within people's everyday contexts (Cook *et al.*, 2016).

Interestingly, Inglehart *et al.*, (2008) refuted the kinds of measures built upon such concepts previously, arguing that their inability to map and evaluate any fluctuation of the individual's mood and experiences made them unreliable. These findings undermine the importance placed upon using objective measures or the use of wider ambiguous concepts such as happiness or satisfaction and reduce the reliability of tools and measures that measure the individual's wellbeing. Moreover, the emphasis upon these hedonistic notions potentially narrows our understanding of how wellbeing might be experienced or be comprised in different contexts or throughout the individual's lifetime according to Huta and Ryan, (2010).

Alternately, tools and measures have been identified as potentially narrow and unreliable given their objective focus, nature and the assumption that such knowledge is automatically accurate. For example, Capic *et al.*, (2017) set out to evaluate a measure of wellbeing developed by Cummins (2014) which relied upon individual's numerically scoring their wellbeing against indicators and their life satisfaction. Capic *et al.* (2017) explained that life satisfaction was positive when subjects gained a score range of between 70-90 points when using Cummins (2014) homeostatic theory. Such variation might have a significant impact on an individual in reality, although this is perceived as without significance within the data analysis used by Cummins (2014) in the initial measure. Furthermore, Capic *et al.*, (2017) and Cummins (2014) research challenges notions of reliability and validity, given the lack of psychometric testing in the original measure used in both pieces of research.

Furthermore, small sample sizes and retesting of subjects (up to 10 times) undermined the reliability of the scale in both studies according, to Creswell (2012). The over-reliance upon objective measures and their narrowness and unreliability of some of the measures developed, is illustrated here. Van Manen (2011; 2014) highlights that the objective focus of research might create a lack of insight into how people experience wellbeing. These issues and an emphasis upon objective indicators and scales undermines the potential for us to understand and measure wellbeing accurately. Undermining the reliability of the measures developed and underpinning the need for more subject research.

The continued trend towards objectively measuring a subject construct remains problematic and reduces the applicability across various disciplines and contexts.

Diener *et al.* (1999) reviewed literature that centred on the interaction between psychological elements and life satisfaction. Including pleasant and unpleasant effects within the individual's life and how they interplayed to influence the individual's wellbeing, over 3 decades. Diener *et al.* (1999) recommended the need for different research approaches to develop theoretical evidence by analysing how and why different effects might be different circumstances and contexts. Later Diener (2012) reiterated the need for theory to enable understanding of the types and detail of what subjective wellbeing was and how it was experienced. These recommendations add weight to the research approaches utilised within this thesis, adding a potential significance to any findings.

The notion that wellbeing as a process, which differs across different groups and contexts (Diener, 2012; White, 2008; Andrews *et al.*, 2014) undermines the importance of measuring wellbeing. Perhaps emphasising the potential importance of identifying what influences its construction. According to Bourke and Geldens (2007) the array of scales and measurement tools depend upon assumption and identify that different groups, ages, and contexts have different perspectives of what constitutes life satisfaction or wellbeing. Bourke and Geldens (2007), identified that measures need to be different for young people compared to other groups in society. Arguing that multiple scales are therefore needed to avoid the misrepresentation or marginalisation of certain groups, simultaneously undermining the value of measuring wellbeing with one measure for all. Kelly *et al.* (2012) suggest that contextual experiences alter how life satisfaction might be defined and measured, implying the importance of understanding what influences wellbeing rather than measuring it, as within this research.

Furthermore, Fors and Kulin (2016) suggest that national wellbeing measures may be inadequate for international or global means, especially given the emphasis upon life satisfaction, cultural and societal differences. Fors and Kulin (2016) identified that the concept of quality of life, cognitive processes and effect, were more accurate in measuring wellbeing globally than at other levels. Indeed, they highlighted that the quality of life measures illustrated worse levels of subjective wellbeing than when life satisfaction is used, but that quality of life measures is more comparable across countries; especially, in some high and middle-income countries such as the UK. Fors and Kulin (2016) concluded that subjective wellbeing rankings using quality of life

measures might be more accurate and useful to develop central policy in different countries. Previously, Michalos (2008) identified that wellbeing was more than a subjective process or balance between people's perceptions, feelings, thinking and doing, recommending that these elements needed to be considered in more depth when measuring wellbeing. Although Michalos' s (2008) recommendation is based on research in educational settings, the relevance and link between wellbeing and these broader elements may be significant in understanding wellbeing across other contexts. The importance of research to understand how individuals define their wellbeing is consistently echoed by others (Thorburn, 2015; Kelly *et al.* 2012). Interestingly, Fors and Kulin (2016) link quality of life measures rather than satisfaction, to measuring wellbeing nationally, internationally or globally, identifying satisfaction as insufficient in understanding wellbeing from a wider perspective. In contrast to its use in national measures of the populations wellbeing in the UK as produced by the office for national statistics.

In conclusion, there is no shared definition for wellbeing, nor is there a shared or effective measure that might transfer across disciplines or inform policy or practice within different disciplines, groups or wider contexts (Fors and Kulin, 2016; Long *et al.* 2012). Moreover, what wellbeing might be or how it might be measured across different contexts is inconsistent, disjointed and lacks theoretical underpinning. These issues have reduced the potential for wellbeing to be placed within policy or for it to inform practice within different professional disciplines or contexts. Furthermore, the complexity, subjectivity and contextual nature of wellbeing are not represented within the literature. Creating a gap in our understanding about how individuals and groups experience their wellbeing within their daily lives, undermining the potential to evidence practice and policy that might enact wellbeing into people's everyday contexts. Conversely, the literature illustrates that wellbeing is a construct that shifts and needs to be constructed and reconstructed by the individual. In short, the literature identifies that there is a need for research that gains insight into both individual's and different group's lived experiences of their wellbeing within different contexts, which enabled the development of a theoretical underpinning of wellbeing. These conclusions underpinned the expansion of the research questions, the methodological approach used and the design of this research, to ensure its originality and importance within the evidence base (Smith *et al.* 2009; Newby, 2010).

## 2.5. Socio-Political Context of Wellbeing

Bache and Reardon (2013) highlight that wellbeing has only become of interest to policymakers in the UK and European Union (EU) since 2009, with the UK government only beginning to shift the wellbeing agenda since 2012. These moves have been driven by an economic crisis, societal development and sustainability issues and wider notions of progress in a global community, (Bache and Reardon, 2013; Wallace and Schmeuker, 2013) rather than philanthropic values about society and government responsibilities. At the same time, public health and health promotion policy in England, have seemingly considered wellbeing as an outcome of health, rather than separate to it, shifting towards a more holistic notion of health (Public Health England, 2015). However, Public Health Britain (2015) highlights the need for wellbeing to be at the heart of policy and calls for more contemporary indicators to measure wellbeing, before the government can allow the development of policy. NHS England (2015) and Public Health England (2015) both identify the need for policy to enable wellbeing rather than the policy be about wellbeing. Alternatively, the need for a theoretical framework that will enable wellbeing to be at the centre of policy and bridge the gap in evidence has been clearly identified (White, 2008; O'Donnell *et al.*, 2014). Although Bache and Reardon (2013) highlight that there is still a need to develop more subjective and context-based evidence that might inform policymakers and enable policy to be enacted in practice.

Cook *et al.* (2016) recently identified that the evidence informing policy and notions of wellbeing are inconsistent and confusing. Highlighting the imbalance of literature towards objective measures and inconsistent understanding about what wellbeing might be in reality. Indeed, notions highlighted as missing within measures by Diener and Eunkook, (1999) remain missing from measures now in 2018. Including the role of personality, character traits such as temperament, cognition, and future goals and the individual's ability to make sense of and adapt to their environment, or experiences according to Capic *et al.*, (2017). Alternately, Cook *et al.*, (2016) argued that there needs to be more research into how the everyday operationalisation of wellbeing might look, to enable wellbeing to be enacted into policy and practice.

The Office of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2016) and World Economic Forum (2017) highlighted that government policy needs to have wellbeing at its centre to address the issues of economic crisis, sustainability and development. Rather than the current emphasis being upon gross domestic product measures and life satisfaction, which are no longer adequate measures of progress nationally, internationally or globally (OECD, 2016; World Economic Forum, 2017). Arguably a more subjective understanding of wellbeing is needed, given the need to address the complexity of it and ensure the population's wellbeing and sustainability, via effective policy (OECD, 2016; World Economic Forum, 2017). Within its forum, OECD (2016) encouraged countries to develop measures and evaluative systems to plot progress, supporting the development and evaluation of national, international and global systems to support the move to wellbeing as a central principle of policy. Previously the Office of National Statistics (ONS) began to collect data sets around wellbeing initially from existing data collection systems such as the household survey and later measures such as the What Matters to People and the National Wellbeing Surveys to inform policy (ONS, 2015; 2017). However, these surveys remain objective and based around life satisfaction and health, reducing the importance that might be assigned to wellbeing across other contexts. Undermining and fragmenting the evidence informing national, international and global policy.

Meanwhile, the UK government seems preoccupied with gathering evidence, rather than enacting it into policy (Peseta, 2017), arguably indicating the government's inability to capitalise on evidence. Alternatively, a political agenda that emphasises short term political gains, as opposed to salutogenic values, undermining the likelihood that wellbeing will be prioritised by politicians.

Currently, within England and the UK as a whole, there are significant challenges, debates and policy moves because of the crisis and challenges facing the National Health Service (NHS) and its perpetuated fragmentation and collapse. In England, the political, economic and societal changes and continued policy shifts the NHS have raised the debate about how or even whether, the NHS might be sustained (Baggott, 2013; Kumaniyika, 2014). Including its importance in ensuring the health of the population and future health needs of society (Public Health England, 2015).

Similarly, these pressures on the NHS have begun a shift of emphasis and highlighted the need to move towards health promotion and disease prevention, rather than merely disease treatment (Jones and Douglas, 2012; Kumaniyika, 2014). These challenges are further perpetuated for the NHS by the finite economic and human resources, increasing costs, changes in care and technology and demographic changes in the population. For example; high expectations and a culture around free health care as a right magnify the problems being experienced by the NHS throughout the UK, despite differences within Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England, adding to its collapse and reducing its ability to continue to meet the needs of the population (Harvey and Taylor, 2013). These circumstances have caused a shift in emphasis in England, towards prevention rather than cure, raising the importance of wellbeing and driving an agenda change within society and policy (Jones and Douglas 2012; Public Health England 2015).

This change in emphasis has resulted in an apparent shift by the English government to change the emphasis and culture around illness and health within the UK population. Towards personal responsibility and the increased importance of health promotion and public health as a cornerstone to preventing ill-health in the future population (NHS England, 2015; Public Health England, 2015). The resultant reorganisation of the NHS and public health services and the ring-fencing of funding for public health and health promotion, have resulted in the policy being developed at a pace to separate the NHS and Public Health in England. Correspondingly, reprioritising health, public health and health promotion over ill health and acute services (Public Health England, 2015; NHS England, 2015). These moves have begun to highlight the importance of wellbeing within communities and the need to embed it into organisations, services and settings such as schools, workplaces, prisons and universities (Scriven and Hodgkins, 2012). Although there is currently little robust policy to ensure such moves are implemented (Public Health England, 2015; Scriven and Hodgkins, 2012). Within this context, HE institutions have been given some level of responsibility in promoting the health of their students (Public Health, 2015) however; there is a lack of clarity as to how this is to be done. A lack of policy that frames or supports HE to carry out this responsibility and little evidence to advance

either is also problematic. Although others argue whether such responsibilities should not be linked to HE (Peseta, 2017; Ball 2012); the English government clearly illustrate the role of HE within broader health promotion policy and guidance (Public Health England, 2015). However, Wales and Scotland governing bodies have interpreted these elements differently.

Globally, the World Health Organisation (WHO) moved wellbeing into the global arena some time ago, developing a 5-point well-being index in 1998. The Wellbeing Index (WHO, 1998) has been used in numerous countries, across cultures and scenarios to measure wellbeing. However, this scale uses a medical model of wellbeing and fails to highlight how individuals or groups in society might experience wellbeing. Indeed, Topp *et al.* (2015) evaluated the WHO (1998) wellbeing index and found it to still be highly valid and reliable across countries and contexts in identifying depression. However, such a conclusion highlights the medicalisation of wellbeing, while emphasising the focus on mental ill-health rather than wellbeing as a positive construct, reducing its reliability or potential to inform any positive or proactive health promotion or public health initiatives or policies. Arguably, these kinds of measures have reduced the potential for the operationalising of wellbeing globally, internationally or nationally.

This section has highlighted the main themes connected to the socio-political influences impacting wellbeing currently and how these have influenced how wellbeing is perceived, which includes the duty of HE in England to facilitate the wellbeing of all HE students. The following section provides a perspective of the changing contexts of HE, student experience and the notion of student voice and participation within HE. Providing an overview of the current literature around healthy universities, both nationally and internationally and highlighting the impact of the literature upon this research.

## 2.6. The Changing Context of HE

Altback *et al.*, (2009) highlighted the increased political interest in HE and the adoption of business priorities as changing the nature, purpose and outcomes assigned to HE. This shift began with the Department for Business Innovation and Skills (Dept. BIS, 2011) being assigned responsibility for the development and monitoring of HE. The

adoption of business priorities increased the level of control and enabled the politicisation of HE. McArthur (2011) highlighted that these changes redefined HE's role as an agent of education and provider of knowledge through research. Ball (2012) highlighted that these changes had driven the commodification of education, arguing that as HE sells its educational programmes and is driven by business priorities, it is less about education. Similarly, Crosia and Parvera (2013) raised the point that HE had become embroiled in notions of performativity, targets and conflicting priorities. Highlighting that these are problematic for HE institutions, staff and students alike, changing the purpose of HE and reshaping its nature given its politicisation.

New responsibilities and levels of accountability assigned to HE by politicians have altered how HE institutions operate and their position within contemporary society, according to McArthur (2011) and Apple, (2013). Moreover, Apple (2013) identified the emphasis upon business principles, performance and targets have shifted responsibilities towards student satisfaction and evaluations as markers of success. Alternately, ranking and use of markers such as employment, earnings and subjects have been linked to HE accountability with the development of the Graduate Outcomes Survey (Department of Education, 2017). Equally, the expansion of Teaching Excellence Framework, which uses Longitudinal Education Outcomes will govern institutions' priorities and define which subjects HE offers, moving forward (Department of Education, 2017; Hipkin, 2018). Reiterating Johansen *et al.*, (2014) concern that HE's purpose and ability to survive will be dependent upon forces outside its control. These measures undermine HE institutions' autonomy and place their focus at odds to ensuring the quality of education being provided (Lenton, 2015; Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE, 2016; 2017). These issues have resulted in the adoption of certain priorities and operational strategies that have changed the role and accountability of HE and its status in contemporary society.

Apple (2013) also links these shifts to the development of competition and marketization of HE and that business priorities, and development of the market place in HE, have resulted in the reframing of what constitutes a HE education. The Department for Education (2017) conversely argued that the development of different indicators of success has added diversity and competition to the market place. Moreover, Crosia and Pervera (2013) identified that some HE institutions have

moved to become large corporations, multi-national or global businesses. While Peseta (2017) and Lenton have argued that others have failed to survive, reshaping the market place and changing the culture of those left. Peseta (2017) and Lenton (2015) both express concern about these markers of success and their influence upon the marketplace. Especially given that the markers are designed to measure objective notions of satisfaction, positive experiences, employment and favour particular subjects, as measures of success. Arguably at the cost of broader or more diverse subjects or the value of a HE education as a means in itself (Lenton, 2015). The inherent gaps in understanding how these markers are compiled and what they mean across institutions, areas of study and even across the ranking systems, has been criticised consistently (Peseta 2017, Lenton, 2015). Moreover, how these changes influence the move to instil wellbeing into HE or enable students from wider participatory populations to engage is unclear. In the meantime, HE is experiencing the development of policy that influences its priorities from outside; shaping its future and creating a market place which may be at odds with prioritising wellbeing given the shifting markers and priorities in use.

The persistent use of ambiguous, objective language and complex rankings systems, are problematic and reduce particular institutions' ability to diversify and maintain their autonomy. Equally, Hipkin (2018) argues that these systems favour some institutions over others or rank dissimilar institutions next to each other. Equally, the push to instil traineeships, apprenticeships, internships, and employment into well-paid jobs as markers of success (Hipkin, 2018) is problematic, and changes the fundamental shape and provision in HE (Department of Education, 2017). While others argue that they misrepresent HE and are politically biased (Sutton, 2017; Apple, 2013). Indeed, some time ago, McArthur (2011) identified the rankings used by the government as problematic, given their use to proclaim what a successful HE institution looks like. However, such warnings have failed to influence the pressure on HE to ensure it becomes an agent of politicians and governmental agendas; rather than esteemed educational institutions, as in the past. Highlighting, by default, how success might be established. Peseta (2017) highlighted that these surveys do not have the capacity to offer an in-depth insight into how students experience HE. While Sutton (2017) and previously Apple (2013) have highlighted the need to understand what experiences facilitate students personal and educational success and how their

wellbeing might influence their success.

Alternatively, Peseta (2017) highlights the ability of HE institutions to influence their own future given their ability to provide research which could be an important tool in terms of promoting institutions' capacity and evidence. While also providing them with the opportunity to question and critically evaluate the logic and justice of current policy, resetting the notions of power and accountability in HE. Apple (2013) and later Peseta (2017) highlighted the need for HE to provide research around the relevance and accuracy of the measures and scales used to rank success. To enable HE to take ownership of its priorities and develop its own measures of success.

However, the governments continued to drive towards developing measures linked to success in particular subjects, longitudinal educational outcomes, and employment in well-paid jobs will potentially reduce the potential for HE to be creative and respond to changes in wider employment sectors. Sutton (2017) links HE's current culture of performativity to neoliberal capitalist values and suggests that the moral energy and purpose of HE is to educate and shape society.

Furthermore, Sutton (2017) endorses the need for HE to present alternative evidence and dialogue, to reframe the over-emphasis upon objective measures and performance. Placing the responsibility with HE to provide reliable, logical evidence to argue for its role in providing education of a higher level; and transform the current culture towards a more socio-human world (Sutton, 2017). Although Sutton's (2017) view, is rather critical and somewhat moralistic, he articulates the point that HE does have a responsibility and role, beyond government, to offer transformative experiences to students and influence society. Especially given its ability to create knowledge through research, to influence its own future, success and society as a whole. Perhaps indicating that this research may inform and shape the discourses within HE around student wellbeing and experiences, adding a new perspective to both.

### 2.7. HE and Student Experience

Student's positive outcomes have been linked to teaching and learning excellence, increased engagement, student choice, positive learning outcomes and social mobility (Dept. BIS, 2011; 2016) rather than student wellbeing. This evidence contributes to a

growing focus and framework of evidence designed to support HE and promote societal principles rather than wellbeing. Unfortunately, much of this literature is at odds with the data collected to identify student experiences and inform HE priorities and policy (HEA and HEPI, 2017; Hagell, 2017). Equally, a lack of consensus about what might be included within these principles has resulted in an unclear, fragmented and incomplete perspective of what student experience is (Hipkin, 2018). Furthermore, continued data recycling and analysis from student surveys and evaluations around student or graduate wellbeing (HEFCE, 2017; HEA and HEPI, 2017) continue to add confusion within the evidence. Baron and Corbin, (2012) and Sadler (2012) argued that such foci had failed to identify factors that impact student's ability to engage with their studies from outside of HE. The Department of Education (2017) and BIS (2016) highlighted how HE might support students to gain educational outcomes that enable their future employment and wider development (Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) 2017: HEFCE, 2016). However, what it is to be a student in HE or how students experience HE is misrepresented given the objective nature of evidence and evaluative notions associated with student experience. Arguably, detracting from what the reality of being a HE student might mean.

Indeed, there is little evidence of the health needs of students or how HE might best meet these needs (Hagell, 2017). Furthermore, there is increasing concern around how to manage and support significantly increasing numbers of students with mental health issues (HEFCE, 2017). Hughes and Wilson's (2017) research highlighted how a range of different services improved student efficacy and reduced their anxiety. However, most interventions it was concluded, were reactive, interventionist and focussed upon student's health issues. This approach reduces the potential to develop more proactive or preventative measures instead (Hughes and Wilson, 2017).

Moreover, there is no funding or training for HE academic staff that might enable them to support students beyond their academic role. Ball (2012) argues such responsibilities are not part of being an academic tutor and that the requirement for tutors to engage with student wellbeing issues add to the dilemma and struggle many academics in HE experience daily. Moreover, other HE services or medical based approaches and interventions remain largely in silos (Dooris, 2013; Healthy Universities, 2016) disjointing student's experiences of their health, education and

wellbeing.

Hughes and Wilson (2017) also identified that within HE as a whole, there is a disparity between how institutions might support students with disabilities or mental health difficulties-advocating for a shift from medical-based interventions and services, to a more alternative, creative or therapeutic approach to wellbeing (Hughes and Wilson, 2017). Hughes and Wilson (2017) identified that most interventions undertaken in HE remain based upon deficit notions of health or mental illness issues. The link between student and staff wellbeing is also often misunderstood or misrepresented. Hagell (2017) identified that the focus of support and intervention remains upon services, agencies and medical approaches or students in crisis, rather than prevention or proactive approaches. As a consequence, this reinforces the siloed nature and medical emphasis because the services are locally developed and dependent upon the particular institution's perspective of student experience (Hagell, 2017). These circumstances undermine the ownership and autonomy of students and their wellbeing, creating inequalities for students across HE (HEFCE and HEPI, 2017; Hagell, 2017). One might, therefore, argue that different students' needs are not being met and their wider wellbeing is undermined.

Targets around student experience, recruitment and retention and the use of data from surveys about HE leavers (HEFCE, 2016) have been used to set performance targets for staff and have changed the expectation upon and of staff (Sadler, 2012; Rose, 2013) changing the role of HE professionals and the culture in HE. Furthermore, expectations of staff and students have changed within these changing priorities and shifts of power (Sadler, 2012; Rose, 2013). Others argue that student experiences and satisfaction are problematic and have influenced the expectations of both staff and students Negatively changing their relationships and impairing the capacity of HE to fulfil its role in preparing future workforces (Trede *et al.*, 2011; Rose, 2013; Department of Education, 2017). Ball (2003; 2012) has repeatedly argued that targets associated with recruitment and student experiences resulted in the commodification of HE, which resulted in changes to the role and identity of HE staff, highlighting that this has reduced the capacity of HE to influence its own destiny (Ball, 2012). Interestingly, the Department of Education (2017) highlights these issues, and the inequality between HE institutes to accept widening participatory students, as connected to the use of higher tariffs of entry by some institutions; which

perpetuates the unequal level of accountability experienced between institutions across HE (Apple, 2013). Moreover, Sadler (2012) has argued that issues of monitoring student satisfaction and experiences restrict the status of HE and reduces its ability to influence wider society. Young, (2008) argued that this has negatively impacted on what society sees as the role of HE. For Peseta (2017) this has reduced the autonomy and altered the culture in HE changing staff relationships with students.

Interestingly, Bourke and Geldens (2007) found that young people experienced the notion of satisfaction and achievement differently compared to other age groups; undermining the notion of what might be meant by student experiences and satisfaction across a more diverse student populace. Conversely, such moves are linked to removing the ownership and responsibility for their learning from students (Peseta, 2017; Apple, 2013; White, 2008). Small and Attree (2015) argue that the need to evidence positive experiences and satisfaction has led to a culture where students are perceived to have power. With the expectation that they will complete multiple levels of evaluation, feedback and responses, that perpetuate customer based relationships with students. While Blair and Valdez-Noel (2014) argue that this context reduces rather than building students' ownership and autonomy over their education and learning. Sturgeon (2012) suggests such issues are perpetuated by changing perspectives of professionalism associated with broader political changes which have changed the relationships between students and staff and the professional behaviours and attitudes that are encultured within changes to HE curricula and priorities. For some these circumstances have resulted in students adopting behaviours that critically evaluate the performance of the HE institutes and staff, seemingly putting them at odds (Mokgele and Rothman, 2014) resulting in what McArthur (2011) refers to as commercialising the relationship between tutors and students.

Contrastingly, the drive to prioritise student experiences and positive outcomes have changed the institutional culture in HE. This shift is towards providing an array of support, academic services and interventions shaped by medical notions of health, rather than using more proactive and holistic approaches to support student wellbeing, as a whole (Hughes and Wilson, 2017; Dooris *et al.*, 2017). Most recently, research and teaching excellence frameworks (HEFCE, 2016; 2017) and the move to

establish the Office for Students (Higher Education and Research Act, 2017) have continued to change the culture within HE in favour of students. Although The Office for Students (Higher Education and Research Act, 2017) argues for its role in the improvement of student experience, wellbeing and social mobility, calling for further research around to expand the evidence to inform policy and services to support student's positive outcomes. These perspectives have changed the relationship between HE staff and students with staff perceiving that students have increasing power, influence and control at their expense (Van-Petergem *et al.*, 2007; Peseta 2017; Sutton 2017).

Meanwhile, others argue that these issues create a sense of struggle for HE professionals as they manage their professional role, identity and competing priorities, altering the culture of HE and their relationships with students and colleagues (Beck, 2010; Boyd and Harris, 2010; Sadler, 2012). Peseta (2017) links these notions to performativity and wider contexts such as unknown outcomes related to Brexit. While others note that cultural shifts towards performance and self-evaluation and the drive for staff to set their own targets, are steeped in the changing expectation and politicisation of HE (Ball, 2012; Sutton, 2017). Perspectives that are reiterated by the prioritisation of student experiences, employment, consumerism and accountability and by the development of the Office for Students and the research and teaching and learning excellence frameworks (Higher Education and Research Act, 2017).

Moreover, others identify particular student behaviours and attitudes aligning to consumerism and customer services, rather than educational gain and quality (Peseta, 2017; Sturgeon, 2012). While others argue that the lack of expertise and funding available and the absence of policy to support HE, creates difficulty and conflict (Apple, 2013; Peseta, 2017). Dooris (2013) argued that the fragmented and silo'd approaches used in HE that undermine, rather than promote, student health and wellbeing. Especially, given the dominance of medical approaches and the lack of proactive, settings approaches to student wellbeing used (MWBHE, 2015; HEA, 2016).

Students' engagement in HE is complex and extends beyond mere teaching and learning strategies (Baron and Corbin, 2012; Axelson and Flick, 2010). The role of the outer life contexts of students needs to be recognised, and the interplay between

students' different life contexts and their experiences in HE needs further exploration. Peseta (2017) and Giambona et al., (2016) highlighted the importance of developing research within the sector, without over-emphasis upon numerical data, targets and performance indicators. The importance of this research is significant because it affords a snapshot of several undergraduate students' experiences of their wellbeing from their perspective, as opposed to what HE thinks they experience.

Throughout the literature, notions of consumerism and customers have been linked to particular student behaviours and attitudes, from the perspective of academic staff, misrepresenting the students' experiences. Equally, how individual student's everyday experiences shape their behaviours, actions and wellbeing in HE is lacking (Sturgeon, 2012; Garcia-Aracil, 2009). The methodological approach used within this research extends from its ability to allow insight into how students construct the meaning of their experiences and construct their reality, uncovering the lived experiences of each student (Spinelli, 2005; Smith *et al.*, 2009; Finlay 2014). These approaches to the research provide a nexus of understanding between the current evidence and the student's perception of their experiences and wellbeing in HE. Moreover, by using IPA, how students feel, think and act in relation to their wellbeing will be uncovered (Smith *et al.*, 2009; Dahlberg, 2015). IPA enables a more in-depth analysis, exploration and understanding of wellbeing to be uncovered, to inform HE practice, research and policy from the bottom up, as suggested by Dooris and Doherty (2010).

#### 2.7.1. Student Voice and Participation in HE

A critical perspective, which is currently lacking within the evidence base around student experience, is that of the students within HE (Sturgeon, 2012; Laidlaw *et al.*, 2015; Sutton, 2017). Research to uncover how students make sense of their experiences and construct their wellbeing will enable insight into how students might be supported to experience positive wellbeing, or how they might be facilitated to gain support when needed. Student voice and participation research have predominantly centred on the development, implementation and evaluation of educational programmes or interventions (Boorman *et al.*, 2014; Lenton 2015, QAA, 2017; Sutton 2017). There has also been research around student engagement, agency or ownership of their learning and the development of teaching and learning strategies (Clegg, 2008; Beck, 2010; Mokgele and Rothman, 2014). Baron and Corbin (2012) associate such strategies with student engagement and quality

assurance.

Interestingly, such perspectives are vital to ensuring that HE understands its role within a changing context (Rose, 2013). Especially given the changing emphasis and desired outcomes of a HE education that now seemingly includes their educational outcome, employment, future satisfaction and economic gain, rather than their emancipation and personal development (Trede *et al.*, 2011; Batchelor, 2012; Rose, 2013).

Simultaneously, the literature highlights the caution and reluctance to use student voice as a means to develop co-constructed notions of education and success; undermining the rate and acceptance of student voice and participation systems by academics. Especially given the associated power, influence and the potential impact upon the principles and priorities of HE (Carey, 2013; Boorman *et al.*, 2014).

Importantly, Batchelor (2012) warned that some students' might be marginalised within HE, unless the power differentials at play are addressed, and the students and systems are cultivated, from positive and equitable principles. Batchelor (2012) highlighted the power and influence that has been expanded and linked to the changes in funding, competition between institutes, and how to best to manage learning and student satisfaction. Whereas, Teelkan (2011) and Beck (2010) suggested positioning students and staff at the centre of HE development and others advised providing the opportunity to foster positive systems that enable institutional development, from a balanced understanding of student experiences and satisfaction (Baron and Corbin, 2012; Blair and Valdez- Noel, 2014).

In conclusion, there is a clear need to highlight the voice of students, given the drive to understand the context of their experiences; rather than the agenda of others. Equally, the need to understand how students manage and make sense of their experiences, the interplay and interconnection between elements of their lives and how they construct and reconstruct their lifeworld; including their wellbeing is central to supporting student's positive wellbeing (Berger and Luckman, 1989; Dahlberg, 2015). The need to ensure the representation of the student's experiences and voice within the research was central to the development of the research questions, methodology and methods from the outset. The aim is to ensure an in-depth exploration of each student's perspective of their wellbeing (Merrill and West, 2009; Van Manen, 2014).

## 2.8. Healthy Universities

Despite policy released through various government departments, non-governmental agencies and organisations, health promotion strategies are often slow, sporadic and reactionary rather than proactive (Baggott, 2013). According to Scriven and Hodgkins (2012), this undermines their potential to benefit the population's health and wellbeing within settings such as HE. In contrast, there is a lack of evidence that establishes the positive importance and impact of community and settings-based health promotion initiatives. Especially, given the emphasis upon health within people's everyday lives including the potential that Universities have for influencing student's health and wellbeing throughout their lifetime (Holt and Powell, 2017). Unfortunately, despite various drives from within the HE sector itself, including the development of networks, charters and frameworks of assessment, there is a lack of policy that supports, guides or funds universities as healthy places (Healthy University Networks, 2016). The growing interest in health and wellbeing and the need for research within HE about positive wellbeing illustrates the importance of this research.

Unfortunately, both the Healthy Universities Network, (2016) and more recently, the Leadership Foundation for HE, (2018) highlight the lack of effective leadership which could enable healthy university strategies to be enacted within HE priorities consistently. Unfortunately, health promotion initiatives remain evaluative and often carried out in silos (Dooris 2013), with the emphasis remaining upon medical notions of health or particular health issues (e.g. mental health) (MWBHE 2015), rather than proactive health promotion or wellbeing (Scriven and Hodgkins, 2012). The potential for students to benefit from proactive health promotion or wider community and whole settings approaches is therefore undermined; as is the potential for HE to realise the importance of health promotion and wellbeing as drivers for proactive policy and health promotion interventions. In the meantime, health promotion strategies and policies are reactionary, sporadic and restricted to predominantly evaluating interventions (Dooris 2013). Dooris (2013) reiterates that there is a need for a change in mind-set from silo-based interventions to more social or setting based approaches to health promotion in HE.

More recently a system of networks and universities that move towards establishing health promotion strategies nationally, internationally and within Europe (Scriven and

Hodgkins, 2012; Dooris, 2013; Healthy Universities, 2016) continues to share practice and policy. Moreover, the Okanagan Charter (2015) set out a health promotion framework which extends health promotion from campuses towards international initiatives. Setting out recommendations to promote student's health but with little attention upon wellbeing itself. Indeed, Tsouros *et al.*, (1998) identified that healthy universities would be best established through using health promotion approaches associated with healthy settings some twenty years before illustrating the slow pace thus far. Despite Dooris, and Doherty (2010) highlighting the need to build evidence, to shape the priorities for Universities and to bring to the fore their role in prioritising health and wellbeing. Repeatedly, the Healthy University Network has developed and shared health promotion practice and research, building the network to support health promotion across the UK, Europe and internationally in HE (Health Promoting University Network, 2016; Dooris *et al.*, 2017). However, what is lacking is the political will, policy and the funding for such priorities to be realised, so as that the potential health and positive student experiences might be facilitated in a more holistically.

A lack of leadership and drive within HE management to prioritise student health and wellbeing, has been identified as problematic in establishing healthy settings principles and healthy universities in the UK (Healthy Universities, 2016; Leadership Foundation for HE, 2018). The associated lack of evidence reduces the significance of wellbeing to be realised, in and by, HE. The somewhat piecemeal approach to instilling health promotion strategies throughout the sector (Dooris, 2013) has resulted in fragmented and narrow evidence around student needs and how these may be identified and facilitated during their experiences within HE (Hagell, 2017). Moreover, most institutions developing interventions and services rely on medical principles of health that emphasise approaching all students' health needs as problems, rather than focusing upon wellbeing (MWBHE, 2015; Dooris *et al.*, 2017; Hagell, 2017). Whereas, the use of social models or multidimensional views of health and wellbeing, might be more apt given their association with positive outcomes, effective health promotion and healthy university principles (Baggott, 2013; Public Health, 2015). Interestingly, Apple (2013) and Peseta (2017) highlight the lack of progress across HE, related to the pace of change, the politicisation of HE and the dominance of business agendas. Dooris (2013) suggested that the culture of, and

working in silos within HE, is un conducive to instilling public health principles and settings approach into universities. Importantly Dooris *et al.*, (2017) highlights the importance and need to build an evidence base and share good practice via networks. In order to share research so policy and practice can be underpinned by theoretical evidence. Earlier, Dooris (2013) tied these shared practices and a need for proactive health promotion, to sustainable principles that enabled buy-in from institutions. Thus, the development of evidence that is theoretically based and informs HE practice is paramount in enabling the mindset changes needed in establishing the importance of wellbeing within universities.

#### 2.8.1. International Perspective of Healthy University Strategies

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has been a significant player in promoting wellbeing within the global context of health. Including its work on defining and measuring wellbeing on the global stage. However, it has had little impact on influencing how vital wellbeing is in the UK, or how evidence might provide the basis of policy and practice in everyday individuals lives. Topp *et al.*, (2015) highlighted how WHO has moved to shift the concept of wellbeing to standalone, from health, through joined-up working and approaches within public health and health promotion. However, WHO has been criticised for developing strategies that are hard to operationalise into policy and inform practical interventions, within local communities such as universities (Dooris, 2013; Hendriks, 2014; Topp *et al.*, 2015).

Equally, Stock *et al.*, (2010) and Hall *et al.*, (2011) identify the importance and progression of instilling healthy university systems across the UK, Europe and internationally. Similarly, networks that enable partnerships, sharing of practice, and the development of evidence on which to base strategies and policy, increase the sustainable universities agenda (Healthy Universities, 2016). The literature consistently suggests that the key to moving HE forward in promoting student health and wellbeing is sharing good practice and robust research (International Health Development Research Center, (IHDRC) 2017; National European and International Network of Health Promoting Universities, 2017; Dooris *et al.*, 2017). Overall, the development of healthy universities in Europe, internationally and globally, offers an opportunity to promote wellbeing. Especially given the potential to impact life quality,

sustainability and lessen negative health and wellbeing experiences for the individual. Underpinning the work contributed by the healthy university networks and shifting the agenda towards wellbeing.

However, US and Canadian universities seemingly have no responsibilities associated with health or health promotion but focus interventions on student behaviours associated with healthy eating, drug and alcohol intake, sexual health and other risk behaviours in not too dissimilar approaches to current UK networks (Vamos and Hayos, 2010; American Healthy Colleges, 2017). Furthermore, HE institutions across Canada and America seem to be experiencing similar changes of priorities to UK and European Universities (Vamos and Hayos, 2010; Peseta, 2017; American Healthy Colleges America, 2017), perhaps reiterating the importance of establishing wellbeing as a priority within HE, globally. Highlighting the need for research that enables the link between student experience, wellbeing and its importance, to be established.

## 2.9. Overall Impact of literature Review upon this Research

The need to understand how individual students' experienced wellbeing in their everyday contexts, both inside and outside of HE, was essential to inform my pedagogical practice and uncover how students' contexts influenced their experiences and wellbeing. Indeed, the need to support and promote student wellbeing as a positive phenomenon, given widening access and the increasing emphasis upon student mental health or health issues, led to a need to uncover what students understood about their wellbeing and how they maintained and managed it.

Greonewald (2004) highlighted that the gap in the evidence enables the researcher to review and adjust their research questions, in this case, the research questions being expanded to ensure the research would explore wellbeing more in-depth than the initial research questions. Furthermore, I developed a needs assessment survey to identify what students understood about wellbeing, how they described it and the language that they might use, because of the literature review and De Vaus's (1996) recommendation about surveys as tools to inform other elements of research.

The desire to represent each student's voice and their everyday experiences, to facilitate a proactive and health promoting stance, was central to ensuring how wellbeing might be facilitated. The need to understand how the individual students made sense of their experiences and managed their wellbeing within their everyday lives (Smith *et al.*, 2009; Van Manen, 2011, 2014) added another layer of questions to the research design. These principles also resulted in the need to consider the most appropriate methodology to best answer the research questions, as suggested by Newby (2010). The methodological approach drawn out from the literature were identified as IPA given its ability uncover an in-depth understanding of the individuals lived experiences and offer a systematic framework to consider the research as it unfolded (Finlay, 2014; Dahlberg, 2015). Equally the aims of the research shaped the research methodology and process given the desire to proactively support students to own their health and wellbeing and to develop knowledge, skills and behaviours that enable them to do so positively, whenever possible. According to Van Manen (2014) these principles would shape the research process as I ensured a critically reflective stance within and as the research process unfolded. Newby (2010), argued that these principles and the aims of the research informed the

research design the choice of methodology, methods and processes of material collection and analysis as well as the presentation of this thesis. According to Yardley (2000), these principles actions and research practices ensure the quality and reliability of the research and its ability to be considered as evidence.

As a result, this research will enable a contextual understanding of wellbeing from a particular perspective. Facilitating a more in- depth understanding, and more diversity of evidence, to inform practice, policy and services development in HE. Moreover, the literature highlighted the kind of research that might best facilitate the explanation, dissemination, evaluation and cross contextual analysis of wellbeing. While enabling the positioning of wellbeing within the context of the individual and HE. This literature review resulted in the following research title and sub-questions being developed

#### 2.9.1. The Overarching Research Title and Questions;

**Overall Title;** Exploring Student Wellbeing in Higher Education (HE).

Key-Questions

1. How do undergraduate students in HE describe their wellbeing?
2. Who and What influences student wellbeing within their everyday lives
  - a) Outside university?
  - b) Inside university?
3. How do individuals make sense of their experiences and construct their wellbeing?
4. How do students maintain and/ or improve their wellbeing within their everyday lives?

## **3.0 Chapter 3 Methodology**

### **3.1. Introduction**

The following chapter illustrates the philosophical and methodological approaches which influenced the design and approaches within this research. Equally, my positionality as a researcher and professional in HE is considered alongside how they have influenced this research. Critical, reflexive analysis and evaluation of the literature about qualitative research approaches and the aims of this research, led to the use of phenomenological approaches. Primarily given phenomenology's ability to enable insight into the individual's lived experiences of their everyday contexts (Van Manen 1990; Smith *et al.*, 2009). Throughout, the chapter argues for the approaches utilised, including IPA, the methods used for material collection and the analysis of the findings as suggested by Newby (2010). Ensuring the context of the research has informed the research design and the participants' experiences are represented. From this point, the word participant/s is used to refer to those individuals participating within the research who are HE students.

### **3.2. Philosophical and Methodological Approach Underpinning this Research**

The philosophical and methodological approach used within this research arises from its central purposes. Namely, exploring the wellbeing of students within HE from their perspective and how they make sense of their experiences to inform their wellbeing (Finlay, 2014; Dahlberg, 2015). Moreover, the importance of ensuring the student's voice is represented has also coloured and shaped the decisions towards the use of phenomenology as a philosophical and methodological approach (Newby, 2010). The need to enable the reader to gain an accurate, coherent and transparent insight into how this research has evolved has also informed the level of transparency and coherence strived for, within both the research process and the drawing together of this thesis (Holliday, 2008; Smith *et al.*, 2009; Dahlberg, 2015).

Dahlberg (2015) and Smith *et al.*, (2009) argued that phenomenology is a philosophical, methodological and theoretical framework that explores the individual's every day, lived experiences and how they make sense of these, to develop their lifeworld. Finlay (2014) and Van Manen (2014) both argue that phenomenology enables insight into how individuals construct and reconstruct their reality. Reiterating that the individual's experiences of a particular phenomenon, such as wellbeing, is uncovered, from their perspective, within a

particular context and time. Contrastingly, Van Manen (2014) identifies the individual's making sense strategies as a continuous process and part of the nature of being human and experiencing a particular phenomenon.

Phenomenology as a natural philosophical and methodological approach is highly suitable for this research, given the overarching aims of this research (Groenewald, 2004; Newby, 2010).

### 3.2.1 Researcher Positionality, Influence and Importance within the Research

Newby (2010) and Engstrom and Sannino (2010) suggested that the underpinning values of the researcher shape the research question, its aims and the research process; resulting in the choice of particular research methodology and methods being chosen.

As the researcher, I have influenced the overall process given my particular ideological and epistemological position which shape the principles by which I carry out any research, according to Newby (2010) and Conklin (2014). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) link these principles, standards, values and beliefs to the idea of particular paradigms, which form the basis of a certain set of research approaches. According to Michel (2008) and Hammersley (2012), my position as a researcher and my health background and professional values link to interpretivism. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) and Andrews (2012) reiterate this given my beliefs that there are numerous truths and realities and that the individual has their own unique perspective; which shapes and is shaped by, their experiences as they actively experience their world. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) suggest that my value of subjective notions of knowledge and that a holistic perspective of the individual is imperative to understanding their experiences. A point that Hewitt-Taylor (2011) link to my influence over the research in so far as the development of the research questions, and the shift towards particular methodological approaches over others.

According to Hewitt-Taylor (2012) my career within HE, as a programme director of a large undergraduate, non- professional degree programme, within a University in the south of England; has fostered my interest in understanding how students experience their wellbeing because of my professional interests. Indeed, my career in HE has enabled me to gain certain insight into the changing context of students and their wellbeing over time. For example, being aware of the changing role of HE (Apple, 2013; Peseta, 2017) the students' role as co-constructors of their learning (Carey, 2013b; Boorman *et al.*, 2014) and as active agents within their world

(Bassot, 2012) have shaped my thinking and desire to understand more about how students understand their wellbeing. Importantly the need to represent and interpret the student's experiences is pivotal to the research because of my desire to shape my practice, services and policy in HE. According to Bassot (2012), this emphasis is linked to constructivism, given the individual constructs and reconstructs their reality, from the inside out, as they experience it. Geertz and Clifford (1983) and Berger and Luckman, (1989) identify these concepts as part of the development of the individual, within their own context, culture and over time. IPA uncovers how the individual experiences their everyday lifeworld and constructs their reality; allowing me to represent how students make meaning of their experiences and how these impacts the construction and reconstruction of their wellbeing, and lifeworld. Hence the rationale for using IPA (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Newby 2010).

Newby (2010) and Conklin (2014) highlight the importance of the researcher within the phenomenological process because of the special relationship and level of interpreting the participant's experiences needed to ensure their representation. Newby (2010) identified the importance of the interplay between the researcher and participants within the research process as central to the researcher's position within the research, and the depth of understanding gained. According to Merrill and West (2009), the researcher cannot help being socially situated and that their experiences and culture form a unique lens, through which the sense being made by others is important. Spinelli (2005) and Smith *et al.*, (2009) identified the researcher as a tool within the research, highlighting that they cannot and should not, be separated from the research. Similarly, Newby (2010) identified that phenomenological research is underpinned by its ability to provide subjective knowledge that is contextual, and which offers multiple truths or perspectives, reiterating the importance of the researcher within that process.

Moreover, Van Manen (2014) highlighted the importance of the researcher understanding and accepting that phenomenology impacts the researcher and participants, while only providing a snapshot of the phenomenon under study. However, such a snapshot is an important perspective, given the lack of such understanding in the current evidence. Meanwhile, Conklin (2014) argues that the researcher's attitudes and beliefs underpin the research and shape its designs and

methods, making it phenomenological. Likewise, Smith *et al.*, (2009) argued it is the depth of analysis and the unique insight gained within the research process; that ensures the research aligns to phenomenological research rather than research approaches that are about a phenomenon. Smetherhem (1978) highlighted that the researcher inside the research offers another perspective of a particular phenomenon; one which should be valued because it adds a unique dimension and reliability to the research. Newby (2010) suggested that adopting an open, professional and transparent approach to the research reduces issues of researcher power, differentiation or bias, which enabled the relationship between participants and researcher to be positive and support the research process.

Smith *et al.*, (2009) highlight the importance of the researcher's attitude and ability to adopt a level of doubt or critical, reflexive analysis and evaluation throughout the research process as it evolves as linked to the quality of the research. Alternately Newby (2010) suggests the researcher's position and personal perspective is intrinsic to ensuring the quality of the research and that this is intrinsic to the best research practice. Moreover, Smetherhem (1978) identified this as insider research, suggesting that I, as an insider to the area of study, add a dimension to the research that enables it to inform my professional practice. Moon (2006) argues that professionals researching their field of practice are crucial to research being responsive and ensuring the practice is up to date and effective. Alternatively, Bassot (2013) highlights the importance of me as a tool and my responsibility to shape the process. Suggesting that to ensure its reliability, validity and trustworthiness, I use reflection, and critical evaluation as the research unfolds. My own attitude and ability to adopt a critical, reflexive stance to and inside the research, was central to ensuring the research was responsive and yielded the depth of understanding gleamed, so that it can be considered as evidence (Smith *et al.*, 2009; Van Manen, 2014).

### 3.3. Methodology

Phenomenology as a philosophical and methodological approach which centres around the exploration of how individuals describe, understand and construct meaning to build their reality (Finlay, 2014; Van Manen, 2011; 2014). Moreover, how the individual interacts with the world, the meaning given by them to their lives, existence and experiences; how they view the world, and in turn, how the world views them, is central to phenomenological research (Van Manen, 1990; 2014; Finlay, 2014;

Dahlberg, 2015). Dahlberg (2015) argued that Husserl developed phenomenology as a means to understand the psychological processes undertaken by the individual to shape their lifeworld. Whereas Heidegger's extension of Husserl's work was, according to Finlay (2014) and Dahlberg, (2015) designed to explore and understand the cognitive processes, the interplay of the individual's experiences, culture and historical nuances of their world.

Holliday (2008) highlights the importance of phenomenology, given the principle that human beings are born into a milieu of cultural and historical environments. Holliday (2008) argues that these are integral to understanding an individual's experiences of a certain phenomenon. Alternately, Berger and Luckman (1989) viewed this milieu as providing resources and experiences that influence how the individual seeks to understand their everyday life. Spinelli (2005) reiterated that the individual is an active agent in their lifeworld, with influence upon their world and vice versa. According to Van Manen (2014), IPA enables the voice of the individuals to be heard; reiterating its ability to explore the everyday lives of individuals, underpinning the rationale for its selection as the methodological approach for this research (Smith *et al.*, 2009).

Furthermore, Spinelli, (2005) and Smith *et al.*, (2009) suggest the continued analysis of the process, methods and materials within IPA should be reflexive and critical, to enable the findings to be in-depth and enriched; so that the researcher can interpret the phenomenon with clarity and openness. According to Smith *et al.*, (2009) the need to ensure the emphasis remains on understanding the phenomenon of wellbeing and the individual's experience of it, IPA is the most appropriate methodology for this research. Especially given that IPA enables me, as the researcher, to explore the individual's experiences from their perspective, enabling insight into how they make meaning of their experiences to construct their wellbeing (Smith *et al.*, 2009; Newby, 2010). Merrill and West (2009) identify that certain social research approaches are built around the individual being an active agent in their world; so that how they mould their world is uncovered through the meaning they give to their daily lives. IPA is concerned with an individual's particular experiences and how they make sense or meaning of their experiences and construct their reality (Berger and Luckman, 1989; Van Manen, 2014). Thus, according to Finlay (2014), using IPA enabled the complexity and multi-dimensional processes the individual's used to

experience and construct their lifeworld, to be revealed. Allowing insight into how students in HE experience, understand and construct their wellbeing.

### 3.3.1. Research Design

Overall, the phenomenological and methodological approaches undertaken within IPA have influenced the design of the research process and methods selected. Smith *et al.*, (2009) highlight IPA as a systematic approach to phenomenological research that underpins the principle of representing the voice of participants. Especially as they make meaning of their everyday experiences and lives, to construct their wellbeing (Smith *et al.*, 2009). Yardley's (2000) evaluative principles for qualitative research shaped the critical evaluation of this research, as it evolved. While supporting how and what needed to maintain a sensitivity to the context of the research. Yardley (2000) argued that such actions fulfilled illustrated a commitment to rigour and underpinned the importance and impact of the research. Holliday (2008) and Hewitt-Taylor (2011) also acknowledge the importance of continued, critical, reflexive analysis and evaluation; to ensure that this thesis reflects what was actually done, and that it provides an ongoing dialogue of events, that capture its nature. Additionally, Geartz and Clifford (1983) and Newby (2010) suggested that such transparency and openness enables this research to be accepted as evidence, to inform practice and policy. The following sections will now set out the research process in finite detail, in order to provide the rationale for the decisions and route taken.

### 3.3.2. Researcher's Position as a Potential for Bias, Power or Influence

Drake (2011) suggested that the professional position of the researcher may be open to the issue of insider bias if there is a power differentiation between the researcher and participants. Within this research, my professional role and the position of researcher could have had the potential to impact upon student studies and outcomes (Drake, 2011) creating a potential area of conflict. To reduce such issues, I developed criteria of inclusion and the needs assessment survey to allow students to self-refer to the IPA methods of the research. Newby (2010) identified that such actions ensured the reduction of any issues of inequality or bias against, or by, participants or myself. I also adopt an open, honest, respectful and collegial attitude with participants to maintain and ensure a conducive environment within materials collection and analysis events as suggested by Newby (2010). Moreover, Smetherhem (1978) argued that these attitudes enable participants to engage with less anxiety, as they would perceive

an equal power distribution. Equally, I was aware of and used interpersonal and communication skills to optimise each participant's engagement. These measures enabled participants to be supported and to feel at ease and valued, so that they could share their experiences without issue. Smetherhem (1978) argues that such measures and accepting the potential possibilities of power and bias; enabled me to counter them within my research practice, countering their influence in itself. Moreover, these measures come from my professional values around ensuring that each participant's needs are met and developing excellent research practice (Drake, 2011). While the NMC (2015) states, such principles are the basis of ethical professional conduct and practice.

### 3.3.3. Ethical Dilemmas and Responsibilities

Punch and Oancea (2014) highlight the moral, ethical and professional responsibilities I have as the researcher to ensure that this research was carried out in a manner that prevented harm, was respectful, and facilitated honesty and integrity. I ensured ethical principles underpinned the research design from the beginning of the proposal, then as the research proceeded (Beauchamp and Childress, 2013; Institution 1, 2017b). My continued use of critical reflection ensured I was responsive to each participant and their contexts (Newby, 2010). For example, the need for each participant to feel that they could be open and entrust me with their perspectives without judgment, (Smith *et al.*, 2009) was integral to the relationship between myself and participants. These values shaped the needs assessment survey content, the IPA methods, and how the sessions were carried out.

Moreover, other particular areas of ethical consideration and critical reflection included the emotive and sensitive nature of what might be covered and uncovered, within the research process (British Education Research Association (BERA) 2011; Beauchamp and Childress, 2013; Punch, 2014). In addition, I was the programme director for the education programme that participants were recruited from. Although I only taught on some optional and core modules, I might influence their contribution to the research (BERA, 2011; Creswell, 2012; Institution 1, 2017a; 2017b). These elements resulted in the development of criteria for inclusion, to reduce issues of power or bias from either myself or participants, to ensure the reliability and validity of the research and ethical research practice.

#### 3.3.3.1. Criteria of Inclusion

The criteria of inclusion were developed to support participants to engage and address any ethical issues (Beauchamp and Childress, 2013). Possible issues included the conflict that joint and combined studies students might have experienced between study programmes. Also, the diversity of the student body was considered to ensure fair representation of students, including their campus locations. Any students I had taught were not included to prevent any potential for bias and power differences (Beauchamp and Childress, 2013). (See Appendix 2; Inclusion Criteria).

Newby (2010) and Smith *et al.* (2009) highlight the potential for some participants to use the research as a therapeutic or personal intervention. To avoid these issues, the participant information and consent emails highlighted the non-therapeutic nature of the research. Furthermore, I was evident within the process, that participant needs and support could be actioned should they need, via central university processes. (See Appendix 3; Invitation and consent Needs Assessment Survey and Appendix 5; Information and Consent IPA, for further information).

#### 3.3.3.2. Ethical Considerations and Clearance

Throughout the research, I enacted the professional strategies and actions that enabled the ethical treatment of participants, other students, staff and colleagues, stakeholders or groups and the institution where the research was conducted. Furthermore, I moved to ensure that people have been prioritised, the research and methods were effective, safety was preserved, and that professional practice and trust were promoted to ensure best research practice was maintained (NMC, 2015; Institution 1, 2017a; 2017b). In practice, this means ensuring that, at all times, a professional stance was undertaken and my attitudes, values and actions were based upon respect, access, inclusion, consent, confidentiality and anonymity (Beauchamp and Childress, 2013). As suggested earlier, critical reflexive analysis was a central premise to ensure the measures taken to shape the research process, material collection and analysis, were a fair and accurate representation of each participant's experiences. A sense of honesty and transparency within the process, to those involved or near the process, was centred around building trust and a professional obligation to ensuring that the materials were not misrepresented or misused (Punch, 2014; NMC, 2015). The necessary institutional processes within the research proposal and ethical clearance process were completed and presented to an appropriate panel, resulting in clearance being granted accordingly (BERA, 2011; Institution 1, 2017a; 2017b) (See Appendix

1; Ethical approval letter). Concurrently, general arrangements around material storage, security and destruction were undertaken. Likewise, the inserted excerpts of individual participant's material used to illustrate the findings within this thesis, are identified via a coding system known only to myself and shared with my supervisors, to ensure anonymity and confidentiality (Beauchamp and Childress, 2013). Furthermore, notions of reliability and truthfulness continued to shape the research process in order to ensure best research practice and the worth of the research to inform the evidence base (Yardley, 2000; Newby, 2010).

#### 3.3.3.3. Informed Consent; Anonymity and Confidentiality

Using the inclusion criteria students were invited to participate in completing an online needs assessment survey. This invitation was extended via an email containing information about the research and its purpose (See Appendix 3; Invitation and consent: Needs Assessment Survey). All participants were self-selected by undertaking the online survey within which all participants were allocated an individual anonymous identification by the survey engine, to ensure anonymity and enable a level of integrity to the data (Creswell, 2012). Participants could access and complete the survey in one go or pause and return, to enable them to participate (Creswell, 2012) and reduce the potential for student's personal or academic agendas preventing them from doing so.

All ethical principles including consent, anonymity, withdrawal, confidentiality and safety, were communicated to participants alongside the steps that had been taken to ensure successful ethical clearance (See Appendix 1; Ethical Clearance Letter). Within the last section of the survey, participants could complete a self-referral section expressing that they might wish to participate in the IPA phase of the research.

#### 3.3.3.4. Sample and Participants

The overall target population for the research included 686 students, from a particular undergraduate programme within the researcher's own institution. The inclusion criteria were applied to this group to obtain a purposive sample of 334 students. All of these students were invited to complete the optional needs assessment survey on-line (See Appendix 4 Needs Assessment Survey Questionnaire). 105 students (31%) undertook this survey. According to Creswell (2012) and Silverman (2014), this percentage is considered a good response rate. At the end of the online survey,

students were invited to express an interest in participating in the drawings and semi-structured interviews. I then scrutinised the biographic criteria of the 24 that expressed an interest in participating in the next research phase, so that the sample would be representative, (De Vaus, 1996) of their area of studies and subsequent professional sector (Rolfe, 2012; Department of Education, 2014). As a result, 6 students were invited to participate in the next phase of the research. Smith *et al.*, (2009) argue that the purpose of the IPA research should drive the kind of sample, given that there is no one way to sample participants within IPA research, but that it is essential for participants to have experienced the particular context and phenomenon under study. However, the sample and research design must ensure the research methodology and methods facilitate participants to answer the research question (Newby, 2010; Dahlberg, 2015). As a result, the sample for the interviews is both representative and purposive (Van Manen, 2014; Dahlberg, 2015). The sample included 5 females and 1 male, representing ages from 20-57 years with students from the first generations into HE and above. According to Van Manen (2014), this sample size and type was ideal for IPA research, especially given the depth of understanding uncovered within the research process.

The sample was then invited to take part via email invitation, containing the relevant student information (See Appendix 5; Information and Consent; IPA). Throughout this process, participants were informed and supported to participate within the principles set out by the institution and relevant research and professional bodies (BERA 2011; NMC, 2015; Institution 1, 2017a; 2017b). Throughout the research, participants' anonymity and confidentiality were maintained by the use of pseudonyms. Alternately, those not selected, were contacted and thanked for their interest.

### 3.3.3.5. Validity and Truthfulness

Huberman and Miles (2002) highlight that rigour and reliability within qualitative research link to concepts associated with multiple truths and perspectives. Yardley (2000) offers a set of principles to underpin qualitative research and ensure its reliability and validity through coherence, transparency, openness, and clarity of the research process, to ensure the quality and evidence worthiness of qualitative research. Yardley (2000) and Newby (2010) both identify the importance of ensuring these principles allow the reader to follow the process of research and "see" how the findings and conclusions have been arrived at.

These principles led to the development of a needs assessment survey to consider what students already understood about their wellbeing, the language they used about it and how the research design might be best approached to uncover student's lived experiences (Van Manen, 2014). The use of drawings and interviews were centred around their potential to uncover an original perspective and facilitate an in-depth insight into what might otherwise be uncommunicated within interviews alone (Buckley and Wearing, 2013; Rose, 2013). Moreover, these methods were designed to enabled an in-depth understanding of the complexity and interplay of influences and contexts that might otherwise be lost, missed or fragmented according, to Merrill and West, (2009). Moreover, according to Dahlberg (2015), IPA offers a systematic framework to develop the research and analyse the findings. While informing any decisions and actions throughout the research to address the gaps and respond to the research process and contexts as they unfolded (Smith *et al.*, 2009; Finlay, 2014).

### 3.4. Methods

A needs assessment survey was undertaken by the participants to find out what they already understood about their wellbeing and to gather participants for the IPA phase of the research. The following sections lay out the methods used to offer a why, when and how of the research design, and clear insight into the research process (Yardley, 2000). Within the research process, I intended to be what Conklin (2014) calls, being phenomenological, rather than merely doing phenomenology. For example, I used an attitude of reservation and doubt as a lens for reflecting upon the research process which enabled me to consider the process through different lenses, underpinning the robustness and rigour of the research.

#### 3.4.1. Needs Assessment Survey

De Vaus (1996) suggestion that the overall purpose of a survey should inform its development and analysis supported the development of the online survey as mixed methods. Creswell (2012) linked the process of survey development to its ability to inform the other methods within the research process; underpinning the rationale for using the needs assessment survey before the IPA phase to inform that phase of the research.

##### 3.4.1.1. Design of the Survey

The survey was designed using a mixed methods approach, including free text and

Likert scales, to enable participants to have the opportunity to express their perspectives in different ways (See Appendix 4: Online Needs Assessment Survey Template) (De Vaus, 1996; Creswell, 2012). The questions were designed to provide a level of corroboration across different sections of the survey. While providing a basis, from which to identify gaps, in what students knew while allowing insight into the depth of the respondent's knowledge about their wellbeing (Creswell, 2012). The aim being that this approach would enabled me to uncover actual language or meaning used by participants which could then be used to inform the language used within the drawings and interviews sections of the research. I also developed a prompt list to support participants to expand their meaning and explore their experiences in more depth (Newby, 2010; Rose, 2013). The list also helped ensure the language used within the survey was clear and unambiguous, and that space was provided for participants to express things that were not listed or acknowledged as choices, as suggested by Newby (2010). There was an intention to encourage respondents to have ownership of their answers and build a level of autonomy, which enabled them to feel confident in their participation (De Vaus, 1996).

#### 3.4.1.2. Distribution and Data Collection

The survey was distributed via an online platform (Bristol Surveys) that enabled students to either complete it in one go or pause it and return later. The rationale being to allow all those who wished to participate, to do so (Creswell, 2012). Email invitations and information were used to invite the sample to respond. Newby (2010) suggests that the invitation via email facilitates a better response rate due to the level of control and autonomy that is possible. From a potential sample size of 334, 105 (31%) participants completed the survey; this is a good response rate, according to Silverman (2014).

#### 3.4.1.3. Analysis and Impact of the Needs Assessment Survey

Quantitative data within the survey was analysed by identifying and comparing variables and their frequency across individual participants, sample and questions, as described by Creswell (2012). Which allowed me to gain an in-depth understanding of student's perspectives but also the areas within the survey where more understanding was needed. For example, the need for more detail in some areas of the survey, informed the prompt list and semi-structure questions used within the interviews.

The qualitative data was analysed for description and themes then particular relationships between themes, participants, groups or the sample as a whole (Huberman and Miles, 2002; Newby, 2010). The analysis enabled a list of prompts and particular phrases to be developed for the interviews, to gain clarification or unpack language used by participants. This list of prompts was also designed to facilitate participants to clarify their meaning or inferred ideas in more depth, without leading or stunting their thinking in the session (Punch and Oancea, 2014). Within these findings, gaps or a lack of depth in the responses enabled me to develop further the drawing and interview methods. For example, I developed the prompt list, which enabled me to consider the need to use particular language to enable participants to respond without inferring any judgement or leading their response in a particular direction. The list also enabled me to consider the practicalities of the drawing and interview sessions so participants could be facilitated to express themselves (Groenewald, 2004) and be represented. Indeed, the needs assessment survey was central to the design and development of the IPA methods, as suggested by De Vaus, (1996) and Creswell (2012) reiterating its value within the overall research process.

### 3.4.2. IPA Methods

The value of IPA is the opportunity it provides to understand how individuals experience their everyday lives from their unique perspective and the differences or commonalities across cases (Smith *et al.*, 2009). Within IPA research, all perspectives are valued and given equal importance, as the emphasis is the phenomenon under study, rather than the reliability of the research (Newby 2010; Van Manen, 2014). Especially, given its emphasis upon the particular phenomenon, rather than developing generalisations as with other methodological approaches (Van Manen, 1990; Smith *et al.*, 2009). Van Manen (2014) argued that IPA is used to understand the experiences of those in a particular context, time and in relation to a particular phenomenon. Indeed, Ashton (2014) highlighted the importance of representing the research process and communicating it clearly and coherently as crucial in understanding the phenomenon being studied. The following section lays out the methods used and offers a clear insight into the research process (Yardley, 2000). However, it needs to be noted that these methods were not developed in isolation, but because of a critically reflective and flexible approach throughout the research (Newby, 2010; Silverman, 2014).

### 3.3.2.1. Drawings

According to Orland (2010), visual methods enable a particular perspective of lived experiences to be uncovered, enabling a deeper understanding of what is being studied. Rose (2007) and Mitchell (2011) identify drawings as an underutilised research method, reiterating their potential in uncovering the cognitive meaning assigned by individuals to events, experiences and their daily lives. Moreover, I considered that using drawings might enable new aspects of each participant's experiences to be illustrated; adding an opportunity for an individual's creative and non-linear thinking to be drawn out (Mitchell, 2011). Adding a more diverse perspective and depth to the understanding gained from this research (Bagnoli, 2009; Rose, 2013). I felt it essential that a broad range of perspectives be uncovered and that a visual method enabled participants to illustrate how they made meaning of their contexts and experiences, beyond mere words (Buckley and Waring, 2013).

Moreover, the drawings enabled participants to communicate elements that could be difficult to articulate or experiences that might otherwise be missed or lost in interviews alone (Mitchell, 2011; Buckley and Waring, 2013). Orland (2010) and Mitchell (2011) highlight the importance of using drawings to gain a unique and in-depth perspective of individual participant's experiences and the meaning they make. Holliday (2008) suggests that this approach may provide a unique lens to understand better the everyday individual's taken for granted experiences. Kearney and Hyle (2004) reiterated that drawings offer researchers a way to link to the participant's thoughts and emotions about a subject. Underpinning the usefulness of drawings in ensuring the perspectives of participants were captured in as full a way as possible so that their experiences might be best represented. Drawings were used as both a standalone method and to provide a catalyst to facilitate the discussion within the semi-structured interviews (Buckley and Waring, 2013).

Importantly, West (1996) identified the need to ensure methods reduce the potential for fragmentation of understanding or the loss or misrepresentation of findings given their complexity. The use of drawings enabled the participants a level of autonomy and ownership of their materials, underpinning their active role in the research process, adding a layer of validity and trustworthiness to this research (Greonewald, 2004). While uncovering perspectives of wellbeing that are currently missing from

the evidence (Dodge *et al.*, 2012).

### 3.3.2.2. Semi-Structured interviews

Smith *et al.* (2009) identified the importance of semi-structured interviews as a means of establishing a window to the individual participant's world and focusing participants. The needs assessment survey influenced the drawings and semi-structured interviews in several ways, including how the sessions were structured, the language used and the development of a list of prompts. Throughout the planning and implementation of these sessions, I was conscious of establishing and promoting a relaxed, trustworthy and open atmosphere to enable participants to allow me into their worlds as suggested by Van Manen (2014).

At the beginning of the sessions, participants were shown a list of possible areas we might cover, including the research questions and topics that might support or maintain our focus, as suggested by Smith *et al.*, (2009). Rose (2007) suggested that drawings can be used as methods that might support other methods such as semi-structured interviews. Further to this, I felt that by participants undertaking the drawings first would enable them to focus their thinking and give them ownership and autonomy of their materials. This approach also enabled me to build a relationship with participants, so that they felt they could let me into their world, according to Van Manen (2014). Equally, this allowed the drawings to be used as a catalyst and framework to support the in-depth discussion within the interviews, ensuring accuracy and representation of each participant's experiences (Buckley and Waring, 2013).

## 3.5. Material Collection

### 3.5.1 Drawings

The 6 participants of the purposive, representative sample were invited via email, to arrange an individual appointment to further their views through completing a drawing, and then a semi-structure interview to capture their experiences of their wellbeing. Consent was gained by return email contact and the setting up of a convenient appointment to undertake the session. (See Appendix 5; Information and Consent: IPA). The appointment was on average two to three weeks from the initial email invitation.

Kearney and Hyle (2004) suggested that the position of the drawing task within the session may facilitate the relationship between the participants and myself. Bagnoli

(2009) identified that having little structure to the drawing guidance enabled participants to interact with me and allowed the participants a facilitated level of reflection and sense making, increasing the participant's ability to represent their thinking more accurately. These recommendations and the findings from the survey shaped the general approach within sessions, including an open and flexible ethos, as suggested by Buckley and Waring (2013). This approach allowed comfortable silences or conversations to happen and each participant to feel at ease to design and represent their experiences, in a way that was appropriate for them; facilitating the development of a relaxed atmosphere and enabled participants to build a relationship with me during the task. Buckley and Waring, (2013) suggested that this approach would enable me to ensure the power between participants and myself was evenly distributed which enabled participants to share their experiences in more depth and enabled them to feel autonomous and own their materials. Buckley and Waring (2013) suggested that this approach would also enable me to gain a more in-depth understanding of each participant's world and build trust and shared respect with participants.

This relaxed and open approach facilitated the sessions to unfold and comfortable silences or conversations to happen. Allowing the participants to feel at ease to design and represent their experiences in a way that felt appropriate to them (Buckley and Waring, 2013). Participants' drawings were not restricted they were able to use symbols, drawing, words, colour, shape and other elements as they wished, to enable them to let me into their way of thinking, as suggested by Orlando (2010). Nor was there any restriction on the time used to do the drawing to ensure participants had time to design, develop and ensure that their ideas or thoughts, which were not easily transmitted by other means, were facilitated. These approaches enabled me to draw upon each participant's representation of their thinking and experiences in making sense of their world and their ideas about their wellbeing (Buckley and Waring, 2013; Rose, 2007). Moreover, these approaches enabled the uncovering of participants' thinking, adding value to the materials as suggested by Bagnoli (2009).

I provided the necessary items such as paper (A4, white) pencils, pens and colouring pens with a range of colours so that the participants had a sense of choice and control. Enabling them to select their tools to do the task without overwhelming them with choice or inferring expectations about their artwork (Crilly and Blackwell 2006).

Each participant was then asked;

“Please use the paper and pens to draw something that you feel represents who and what influences your wellbeing, in and outside of your studies, and includes how you maintain and manage your wellbeing, and how you make sense of experiences.”

As each participant began, I moved to another area of the room to enable them to have cognitive and physical space to draw. I then undertook free flow observation notes to be able to gain an understanding of how the participant undertook the task and any small interactions with me (Smith *et al.*, 2009). These notes were valuable as an insight into the participant’s attitudes and engagement with the task and enabled me to more easily establish priorities for the interview, enabling me to offer support for the task (Orlando, 2010). Overall the sessions were no longer than 45 minutes for each participant, with each participant being offered a break before beginning the interview.

#### 3.5.2. Semi-Structured Interviews

The interviews were held within the same session as the drawings (with a break as participants wanted) so the environment remained relaxed, open and collegial. Each session overall took 60-90 minutes for each of the six participants, including drawing. Before their interview, participants were shown a sheet of areas that they might discuss with me, to enable transparency, maintain focus and support the interviews (Smith *et al.*, 2009; Merrill and West, 2009). Each participant’s drawings were used as a catalyst for discussion, allowing them a place to start and support, as suggested by Orlando (2010) but also a point of focus (Buckley and Waring, 2013). During the interview, I wrote notes and used a Dictaphone to ensure accuracy of the material collected. These recordings were then transcribed to enable analysis of the interviews. At the end of the session, we chatted over how the next steps of material analysis would occur and participants were asked if they wished to know the outcomes of the study.

#### 3.6. Materials Analysis

Analysis of the materials took several weeks, and included looking and relooking at the drawings; reading and rereading the transcripts and listening to the recorded interviews numerous times. I began to draw out the descriptive, emergent and superordinate themes that form the basis of IPA analysis, as suggested by Smith *et al.*,

(2009) by immersing myself into each participant's materials. The context of the research could then be captured as each participant's experiences were uncovered alongside the relationships and interactions of and between individual's particularities and then later commonalities emerged from the materials (Merrill and West, 2009; Bainbridge, 2015).

Appendix 6, Material Analysis and Flow Chart illustrate the process undertaken to analyse the findings, including the development of student's individual or particular findings and group or common findings, respectively, before illustrating the continuance of the findings into the Prism and Matrix of wellbeing as a theoretical framework.

### 3.6.1. Drawings

Crilly and Blackwell (2006) identify that analysis of visual materials is complicated and contextually driven. They suggest that their system of graphic elucidation allows a systematic approach to drawing analysis and insight into each participant's drawing, on different levels. Bagnoli (2009) suggested that the analysis needs to be flexible as well as contextually based and responsive to the material. To ensure that the findings were representative of the meaning given by the participant, I analysed the drawings in several stages, using Crilly and Blackwell's (2006) framework. Which included a descriptive analysis, enabling particular themes to be drawn out, then chronological analysis, including how each participant used language, colour, words, symbols, metaphor, and the use of space, positioning and drawing order. These measures enabled me to gain insight into the meaning of the drawing; as well as the relationships and interaction between materials (Crilly and Blackwell, 2006). The descriptive themes were then re-analysed and again subjected to a critical lens and alternate perspectives; to check my interpretation but also the clarity, coherence and representation of different participant's materials.

Following this stage of analysis, I was able to establish some particular and common descriptive and emergent themes across the drawings and transcripts for each participant. Adding representation and coherence of the overarching emergent themes as they were drawn from each participant's materials, checked and rechecked (Groenewald, 2004).

The emergent themes were then analysed to develop into broader contextual or

superordinate themes (Smith *et al.*, 2009). This process enabled a level of depth and clarity to ensure the representation of the meaning and enabled the interaction and relationship with each theme to be analysed across each participant, their different materials and then participants as a group. This building of layers of analysis and allowing materials to emerge ensured the students were represented clearly, according to Smith *et al.*, (2009). This process of elucidation was identified by Crilly and Blackwell (2006) as a robust and reliable way to analyse drawn materials. This layered approach enabled the analysis of the drawings using a step by step framework that was consistently and critically evaluated throughout the process. Allowing a level of robustness and transparency of the analytical approach, as suggested by Rose (2013). While also providing an in-depth insight into how the individual's made sense and constructed their wellbeing, as a continuous process undertaken within the moment or over time (Berger and Luckman, 1989; Moon 2006).

### 3.6.2. Semi-Structured Interviews

The interview transcripts were analysed using what Smith *et al.*, (2009) identify as a process of abstraction. Whereby themes are drawn out from the descriptive analysis, then grouped and regrouped, to gain an understanding of their relationships and interaction between them and separately; as they are moved or swapped around, allowing emergent themes to be developed. These emergent themes were then subject to subsumption, which in practice, is an analysis of themes as separate or linked to others (Smith *et al.*, 2009). Again, moving pieces of text from the individual participant's transcripts to identify which become more or less prominent enabled me to develop overarching or superordinate themes (Smith *et al.*, 2009). These processes allowed reflection, doubt and space to be used to cast a critical eye over the layers and different perspectives to be considered. The themes from the materials could then be checked, rechecked as they emerged and re-emerged across the materials, particular participants, and the group as a whole (Smith *et al.*, 2009). For example, the notion of coping, linked with relationships, the personality of participants but also other people and different types of coping. The interaction and relationship between superordinate themes were considered within each method, then across the methods, including language, metaphor, colour and the use of space; to ensure representation and meaning of these elements within individual's drawings than across all the drawings (Bagnoli, 2009; Smith *et al.* 2009). This process enabled the notion of particular and

commonalities to be uncovered, shaping the development of the following chapters and theoretical frameworks development.

### 3.6.3 From Parts to Whole

Following analysis of individual cases, emergent and superordinate themes were brought together and analysed across participants and their materials, enabling me to identify which themes were particular or common to participants (Bainbridge, 2015). Providing insight into the parts and the whole of the findings, including the complexity, relationships and significance of some themes over others (Smith *et al.*, 2009) or what Bainbridge (2015) and Merrill and West (1996) link to particularities and commonalities. Eventually, the analysis from each participant was extended across all participants and all materials to ensure transparency, clarity, coherence and in-depth understanding (See Appendix 6, Material Analysis and Flow Chart). This systematic approach enabled me to identify the links and relationships between cases, materials and across research questions. While providing an opportunity to ensure the findings represented all the nuances of different individual's experiences (Merrill and West, 2009; Bainbridge, 2015), ensuring the completeness of the findings and at the same time, reducing any fragmentation or loss of understanding (West 1996; Merrill and West, 2009). Huberman and Miles (2002) and Creswell (2012) both identify this multi-layered approach to analysis as systematic. Smith *et al.* (2009) consider these steps to be integral to the microanalysis of the individual's experiences and IPA analysis. However, the process, as suggested by Smith *et al.* (2009), was messy, complex and time consuming, but fascinating and frustrating simultaneously. Without this process, the depth of understanding might have otherwise been lost or reduced, influencing the quality of the findings and the representation of each student's wellbeing (Van Manen, 1990; 2014).

### 3.7. Conclusion

The above chapter has provided an overview of the research design and the rationale for the methods used within the overall research process as it unfolded; throughout, Yardley's (2000) principles around adopting a coherent, open and accurate account of the research process have been used. Simultaneously, this enables the reader to follow the research and provides transparency to ensure the validity and acceptability of this research as evidence (Newby, 2010; Yardley, 2000). The following chapters will present the findings from each student experiences, uncovering what Bainbridge

(2015) illustrates as their particularities. Later chapters will then move to illustrate commonalities between participants before drawing together the findings.

## **4.0 Chapter 4 Parts and Particularities**

### **4.1. Introduction**

Within phenomenological research, the analysis of materials extends throughout the research (Smith *et al.*, 2009; Finlay, 2014). Holliday (2008) highlights the material analysis process as messy, uncomfortable and personal. For me, this process included reading and re-reading, looking and relooking at participant's materials to develop an in-depth, reflexive yet critical perspective. The process allowed time and space to stand back and use alternate lenses to interpret and reinterpret the participant's material allowing student's voices to be brought out; including what was said and not said (West 1996; Van Manen, 2014). Smith *et al.*, (2009) and Van Manen (2014) suggest that the analysis process is iterative and that the analysis unfolds as the research does, echoing my experience. The insight gained enabled me to gain in-depth insight into each individual's materials, the whole of their materials and vice versa. Smith *et al.*, (2009) referred to this approach as double hermeneutic analysis. Correspondingly, Bainbridge (2015) suggests that this process enabled me to uncover the particularities and commonalities of all the participants. Offering me the opportunity to gain a rich and in-depth insight into different students everyday lived experiences. Although time consuming, this enabled me to interpret what the participants have interpreted themselves (Van Manen, 2014). Throughout, I tried to stick as closely as possible to the frameworks suggested by Smith *et al.*, (2009) and Crilly and Blackwell (2006) to maintain the robustness, criticality and transparency of this research; and ensure the representation of participants.

Considerable numbers of extracts and images from the participant's materials have been used to illustrate their particular experiences (Smith *et al.*, 2009). Providing a starting point from which the reader might "see" into the participant's lived experiences uncovering an understanding of their particular experiences and their wellbeing. This approach took time and mirrors Van Manen (2014; 2011) and Smith *et al.* (2009) suggestions about writing, rewriting and using reflexive critical analysis to ensure the student's perspective were represented.

This chapter sets out to illustrate the breadth of the findings. The reader needs to consider that the omission or frequency of themes across participants and materials does not necessarily determine the lack or level of importance or impact of the theme

overall. Some themes may only occur once, but be profound and far-reaching (Van Manen 2011; 2014). Conversely, other themes may be of less significance overall or particular to a participant, but carry no less significance to them. Some themes were identified across all participants and materials but may have different connotations; adding significance and insight into how the individual experiences their lifeworld and wellbeing (Van Manen, 2014; Berger and Luckman, 1989). Hence, we begin with each student's experiences of their wellbeing, before moving in chapter 5 to consider the overall findings and commonalities across the students' experiences in more depth.

All participant's names are pseudonyms. Text from the participant's drawing analysis is in *blue italics*. While text from interviews is in *black italics*, non-italic black text represents the analysis undertaken by myself. Each participant from here on in is referred to as a student. Each student's section provides an overall context and insight into each student's context and enables a glimpse of each as a starting point. By no means are these comprehensive perspectives, nor do they follow the same format, given the individual nature of each.

## 4.2. Anne

### 4.2.1. Her Context

Anne is a single, female aged 22 and declared her ethnic origin as Black Caribbean, although she considers herself British. Anne came to Britain with her family after being given refugee status, aged three, following her family's evacuation, from Montserrat, after a natural disaster. She had always considered herself British, given the British status of Montserrat and then her move to the UK. She is clearly proud of her culture and enjoys her family and extended family. Anne's immediate family includes her parents and one sibling, a sister whom Anne feels is her best friend. Anne lived in her family home before coming to university and did not work. Her family is based in central England. Anne was not the first generation of her family to attend university; members of her extended family (Aunts, Uncles) had attended previously. She is a "people person" by her own description and is usually at the centre of social events, yet not in a loud or noisy way but as a catalyst for fun.

Anne lived with her parents and sister with contact from her extended family. Anne comes from a family where religion is central to their lifestyle, given that her father is

a minister in her church. She openly acknowledges that her faith is important to her and that those involved in her church are “family” denoting the kind of relationships she experienced with them. When she came to University, she lived in halls in her first year and then in private accommodation with friends for year 2 and 3 studies, as is the norm. Anne studied at the main and largest of the campuses connected to the university and could walk into university from her accommodation within fifteen minutes. Anne was in her final semester of her 3<sup>rd</sup> year of her studies during the material collection session. Her personality is friendly and approachable; she is bubbly, enthusiastic and appears confident and happy. She is a sociable individual, has a good sense of humour, and is well known and liked within her cohort. My relationship with Anne was as a module tutor.

4.2.2. Anne’s Drawing



#### 4.2.2.1. Anne's Description of her Drawing

*“Well this is me and life, and just how it affects me, this is a river, and I am on the boat, in the river. This is music, dance, arts and stuff; I really enjoy that, that's like a release for me. I am a people person I love meeting people, strangers, and talking to them, meeting new people. Good and bad Friends throughout the years, you can't separate them though cos they go together and influence each other, my friends, my friends here and all of it really...makes you appreciate people, what to look for, and they are definitely a major factor in welfare....*

*“Hmm, self-esteem, self-concept and emotions, emotions have a lot to do with how you perceive things and how you cope with things, I have my little bubble and my cloud with the lightning that's all the emotions that you feel, I don't tend to feel the bad ones. Hmm.... I am really positive, so I don't tend to feel those I tend to be positive... I am a Christian, my Dad's a Pastor, so I've been brought up around this, so the values, the church and my church is quite small, so it's like an extended family...” (Pg1)*

Anne's description of her drawing clearly illustrates the connection between her, her experiences and contexts. Underpinning the notion that the individual cannot be separated from their context and vice versa. She also illustrated her role in interpreting her experiences and constructing her wellbeing. Equally, she highlights her personality as integral to her wellbeing and its reciprocal relationship with her identity, self-esteem, self-concept; or what Kelly (1963) referred to as her personal construct, and emotions. Which also reiterates Berger and Luckman's (1989) notion of how the individual reifies their reality, with their thinking and behaviours. Moreover, Anne is an active agent in constructing her reality, or lifeworld and her wellbeing (Van Manen, 1990).

#### 4.2.3. Anne's Experience Related to her Dyslexia Diagnosis

*“It was in second year, \*\*\* module and I just couldn't get it and really slowed down, I do slow down when I am nervous, but I just wasn't getting it, and I was slow at reading anyway... but it was ridiculous and I was reading three words like every 10 seconds... so slow.*

*Then the deadline came, and I was talking to another friend on another course, and he said, Babe, do you think you might be dyslexic? He had it and it was the same...so*

*I looked online, and there was loads of tests for it, and I did about ten of them. They all said I was a high risk of dyslexia, and I went to my tutor and \*\*\*\* said we will put you on a Negotiated Learning Plan (NLP.) Then we can get you tested. Hmmm, then they (Student services) got me tested and Yeh...I was both happy cos then there is a reason that I am like this, but then I was a little bit angry then too, cos I was what, 21!! ...And if I didn't come to University, I wouldn't have been diagnosed.... How? What? That's why I thought well, then maybe that is why God gave me it, cos I will be able to help other children, or I could use it to my advantage for others. So yes, I believe that.... Long pause, emotional.... at least I know why I am the way I am, but then my self-esteem did lower again then cos I am disabled, and I had to counsel myself out of that I am still in the process... long pause... ” (Pg7)*

This extract highlights the sense of struggle and feelings of fear, loss, denial, anger and bargaining Anne felt. Highlighting how emotions and Anne's identity shifted as the experience unfolded. Kubbler-Ross and Kessler (2014) associate such emotions and behaviours with loss or in this case, Anne's loss of her identity and self.

Moreover, it illustrates the nuances of how Anne tries to make sense of the experience and begin to reconstruct her sense of self and identity, as someone who has dyslexia. Together with the idea that she has a disability, in order to reconstruct herself and her wellbeing.

Anne's inability to make sense of her experience indicates that wellbeing may be perceived negatively, positively or neither, according to the individual's experiences and contexts. Moreover, the shifting of her wellbeing initiated certain emotions, thinking and behaviours, as reactions to her experience and related to her need to make sense of it; to reconstruct her identity, personal construct, lifeworld and wellbeing. Anne's dissonance between her wellbeing and her inability to make complete sense of her experience illustrates how the meaning of significant experiences are constructed over time. With the individual coming to a point where some level of "being" is managed; rather, than wellbeing, or "unwellbeing."

Moreover, Anne infers the notion of being pushed or pulled, within her particular experience and contexts. However, she also illustrates that her wellbeing in other contexts remains positive, although her experience has had a negative impact on her personal context. Illustrating that she still experienced a positive level of wellbeing in other contexts.

#### 4.2.3.1. Personal Context, Including Personality, Identity and Self

Throughout her materials, Anne confirms the influence of her own personality, identity, self and particular traits as integral to her wellbeing. Reiterating her active role in her lifeworld and in constructing her wellbeing. Correspondingly, she influences her own wellbeing and reality by reifying her own personal context (Berger and Luckman, 1989) and sense of wellbeing over time with certain behaviours and actions.

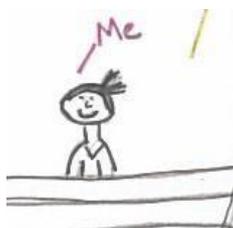
*Anne's Drawing illustrates her personality, identity, self-image and concept using images, emoji's, metaphor and words within her drawing. For example*



*Anne also uses metaphor and weather to link her personality and traits to her drawing.*



*Illustrating her personality using colour and emoji's as well as facial expressions on figures, throughout her drawing, including herself, in the boat.*



In her interview, she expanded “Yeh, so that’s the flag of Monserrat and that’s the coconut tree, to me that’s like my culture and stuff. That’s been a big thing for me. ...Especially coming to Uni, cos I never knew the differences in culture, like I thought I was English and like basically, British, but there are a lot of differences...

Hmmm, ... I have a need to be liked, and I seek people’s approval, and to me, I just like to make friends, the more, the merrier, I just like to make friends, not that I don’t like the internet ones, but I prefer to have loads rather than just two friends... I am quite a positive person, hmm... you only live once so be just be happy that’s just my motto. Hmm, self-esteem, self-concept and emotions, emotions have a lot to do with how you perceive things and how you cope with things ...” (Pg1-3).

Anne illustrated her active role in her identity, personality, sense of self, esteem, linking these to her wellbeing similarly to Kelly’s (1963) personal construct theory. She also recognised certain traits within her personality as influential, including her positivity, outlook, optimism and humour as part of enacting her identity and personality; but also, as a reciprocal means to underpin her perspective of life and personality (Strickhouser, Zell and Krizan, 2017). For example, her need to be needed and liked, which she linked to her naivety and childlike behaviours-identifying their influence on her personality, outlook and relationships with others. Alternately, Anne illustrated the complexity and multiple elements of influence upon her and her wellbeing and that they cannot be separated.

*“Well, it depends...sometimes yes, but, no, it depends on things really and what’s happening ... Hmmm, you can’t separate them really, one does the other. I put them on the river banks cos one is Uni, one is outside Uni, but they are all important. They mix up really; some are both ...” (Pg16).*

#### 4.2.3.2. People and Relationships

Anne illustrated the importance of people and their different relationships and roles in supporting her. Including the influence of her relationships with friends, family and HE staff. Linking them to her ability to make sense of experiences but also in shaping her personality, independence and efficacy.

##### 4.2.3.2.1. Family and Extended Family

*Anne’s drawing illustrated different roles for different people and that relationships changed over time*

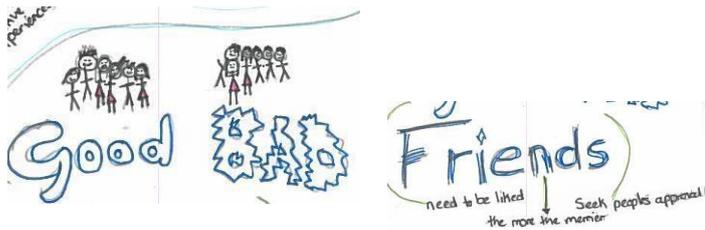


Anne highlights the role of her family, given her dad is a pastor and underpinning the central values and beliefs within her family, yet equally illustrating the different roles of her parents

*“My Dads a Pastor, so I’ve been brought up and ...hmm, around this so the values. The church and my church is quite small, so it’s like an extended family... and prayer, helps me, if I am going through a hard time with work or whatever, then praying does get me through, I do feel better.” (Pg2)*

##### 4.2.3.2.2. Friends

*Anne’s Drawing*



Anne clearly illustrated the different roles of her friends; including the role of a friend in her diagnosis of dyslexia.

She also highlighted the importance of talking to certain friends, given their shared experiences and knowledge. Moreover, these perspectives allow Anne to see alternative perspectives, reflect and gain insight into her own experience, to make sense of her own experiences through stepping out of them.

#### 4.2.3.2.3. HE Staff

*“... All the staff on our course, they were so supportive and really helped, our course is so brilliant, and I have spoken to others about their course and their tutorials are horrendous*

*.... I understand you're at Uni now and have to be a big girl or big boy, but well you guys generally care and you help us. You want us to graduate and get a good degree and that's the sense I get. I really love that (nodding).” (Pg8)*

These extracts illustrate Anne's sense of community and belonging, as pivotal to her sense of being a student, but also the role of HE staff, and other students in supporting her.

#### 4.2.3.3. Beliefs, Behaviours and Attitudes

Anne illustrated the interplay between her beliefs, behaviours and actions throughout her materials including;

##### 4.2.3.3.1 Faith

*Anne's Drawing illustrates the values and influence of her faith and family*



And in her interview;

*“Yeh time, just saying if God gave you this. Think of it as a gift...maybe it could help other children develop, or understand things better. You never know, what path it's putting you in, so don't worry darling ...”*

And

*“I ... ate food; (laughs)...had some time and talked to people.” (Pg8)*

Anne highlighted the role of her faith, values and beliefs in making sense of her experience. Alongside time, space, talking and reflection with those people in her life. She also indicates the role of particular behaviours, such as praying and talking to God. For Anne, these behaviours link to her ability and capacity to cope as they gave her space and time and opportunity to talk and reflect. She also linked her beliefs to certain behaviours around food, exercise, socialising and alternately comfort and coping. She uncovers her deepest thinking and a sense of her own role in her outlook in line with Kelly's (1963) identity construct theory; although she realises that she has not made sense of her experience.

In conclusion, Anne enabled insight into her perspective of her wellbeing as she explored her particular experience. She also illustrated her own role in her wellbeing given her personality (Kelly, 1963) and that her wellbeing might be positive, negative or neither showing the contextual and personal nature of wellbeing (Dodge *et al.*, 2012). She also illustrates the interplay of her contexts and personal construct in pushing and pulling to shift her wellbeing; underpinning that theory that wellbeing is an individual construct. Equally, Anne's ability to interpret her experience to a particular stage of understanding but not to accept or internalise her experience across her lifeworld (Berger and Luckman, 1989) has had implications for her identity and personality; as she failed to make sense of her experiences and fully reconstruct her identity and wellbeing. These findings illustrate that wellbeing might be constructed either in the moment, over time (Schon, 1994; Moon, 2006) or not. A state of wellbeing not acknowledged in the literature currently. Moreover, Anne's struggle with her diagnosis of dyslexia had significant implications for her identity, as it forced her to reshape her perspective of herself and her wellbeing (Kelly 1963). Strickhouser, Zell and Krizan (2017) concluded that someone's personality and health status were entwined, but did not consider the impact of disability, undermining the importance or impact of such a diagnosis upon people's wellbeing.

### **4.3. James**

#### **4.3.1. His Context**

James was a single, male student, aged 21 years old at the time of the research and in his second year of his studies. James considered himself to be Black British. He studied at the largest of the campuses connected to the university. Before coming to

University, James lived at home with his mum, younger brother and sister. At the time of the research, James was living between his family home and privately rented accommodation. His family home was about 45 minutes' train journey away from University. His private accommodation was shared with other Uni students and about fifteen minutes' walk away from campus. James reported that he had positive male role models in his uncles, but he was closest to his Mum. He was the first person in his family to attend university and felt a level of pressure and familial expectation. At times James suffered from being homesick, for example, being aware of the family being together and feeling isolated and missing people.

James worked part-time within the sector related to his studies, full time when he could. During holiday time, James worked and saved money for his University studies and living, he was financially independent of his family. James had a clear goal after his studies, to "become a teacher." James's personality was reserved until he got to know people, then he would be more relaxed, and friendly. He appeared to lack confidence at times and tended to withdraw and listen rather than participate. He is known to most of his large cohort but had friends with a small group of female students. He had a good sense of humour and liked to socialise, have fun and shop, but adhered to his principles and was loyal.

#### 4.3.2. James's Drawing and Description



*“This is me at the beginning, (pointing to figure on the page) then things it boils down to, time constraints, work and deadlines and whatever. It makes me feel like I am being rained on. The mountains are one for each year; I have got to climb the mountains and get over the rivers... So, there are things like family and peers and workload and fun and workload balance. Then when I have got to get over the mountains, I get the ice cream and the good stuff (laughs)... This is my rucksack, and this is my problems that I have got to overcome, and over time as I get rid of them, I get rid of my rucksack. That's the weather, it gets better as things get better, so I am doing this (Scrolls up and down of the mountains with his finger, as travels across the page). So at the end; ice cream and chocolate, Yes! (Nods assent).” (Pg1)*

James illustrated the influence and interrelationship between his personal construct, his contexts and experiences, throughout his drawing. He uses words, colour, space, symbolism, image and metaphor to communicate how his wellbeing is influenced within his lifeworld.

#### 4.3.3. James's Experience with People and Relationships

James's health and wellbeing were impacted by his relationships with his

housemates in his first year of studies, as they changed from positive to negative



*[James's Drawing](#) illustrated the first mountain, representing year one studies, and the river representing the impact his housemates had upon his physical and emotional health*

In his interview

*“Some of the things they did to other people were mean and hurtful, and it just wasn't a healthy environment. It was disgusting as well, like they would leave plates there for weeks, and the house would be disgusting, then we got mice as well. It wasn't a pet mouse! No! (shakes head and expresses disgust with facial expression). I moved home at that time, cos that was the end” (Pg3)*

James's experience came about from his outside HE context and more specifically, his group of housemates in University accommodation, continuing as they moved to private accommodation. James's experience illustrated the negative impact those living with James had on his health and wellbeing. The interplay and influence of their relationship with James is clearly linked to his everyday life, given the nature of the relationship. Devovan and Macaskill (2013) suggest that James's experience might be significant, given the shared experiences and spaces with his housemates.

Which formed the basis of their relationship and by default, the depth of influence they had upon his physical and emotional health. What is inferred are the different values and norms between James and his housemates, which shaped how they treated him and others, leading to the breakdown of their relationships.

The change in the relationships between James and his housemates had a far-reaching impact on James's health and future friendships

*“It's only been since the start of Uni; I think it's the whole housemate situation that made me that way now” .... There is one person I will talk to about things.... He's someone I used to live with, the only one I still talk to. We both talk to each other; he is a good friend, I trust him, and he does me.” (Pg2-3)*

James illustrates the importance of trust as a particular value and basis for relationships and friendships. Providing a level of insight into why he might now manage and perceive his friendships differently; given the impact of this experience upon his personality, self- confidence, self-esteem and outlook, alongside his physical

health (Strickhouser, Zell and Krizan, 2017) and its impact upon his wellbeing.

This experience shows the connection between relationships, the shared environment of living space and the role of values and norms in building relationships. Illustrating the shared values which underpin the kind of relationships experienced with others. For James, this experience illustrated the interplay between his wellbeing, emotional and physical health and his personality; highlighting the notion that wellbeing is linked to the individual's personality (Kelly, 1963) and how they perceive it. While illustrating the interconnection between our wellbeing and our health, as suggested by Baggott (2013). In James's case, this almost stopped his return to HE, underscoring the link between wellbeing and retention of students highlighting its importance and need to be a prioritised (Okanagan Charter, 2015; Laidlaw *et al.*, 2015).

#### 4.3.3.1. Family and Friends

Family and friends were instrumental in supporting James during his experience but had different roles and relationships with him

*“So, everyone helps me a lot, so if I have financial problems, they help me and they are buying me a car for my 21<sup>st</sup> as well (laughs and smiles, shifts body language to be more relaxed) .... Everyone, my Mum and Uncles, my brother, Gran... and my Friends. Yeh, they help loads, and I think my peers here help to cos...cos everyone is motivated and everyone wants to do well, so yeh, they help” (Pg2).*

#### 4.3.4. Personal Context Including Personality, Identity and Self



James's Drawing illustrates him *“being rained on”* and the rucksack as described above.

James retells his experience of returning home

*“... I spent most of my time in the house, in my bedroom, away from everyone. It was my 21<sup>st</sup> birthday, and I cancelled my party... because I wasn't up to seeing anyone. Then slowly I got better, started going to work as well, then I got back to myself... I need time on my own... I don't really eat, if... I'm not well or have a lot on my mind, or it's not straight... Then I will go days without eating or drinking and don't realise... Things keep going round and round; I try to forget things. I usually meltdown, then one day it will just click, and I go back to normal. I just get to the point where I just get sick of it and stop it.” (Pg3-4)*

James highlighted the role of his personality, sense of self and power, linking these to his behaviours and wellbeing; including his destructive attitudes and behaviours and his sense of struggle, and need for space as a means of making sense. He linked this to his personality and poor sense of self, confidence and esteem. He illustrates emotions including anger, loss, denial and frustration as reactions to his experiences. Kubler-Ross and Kessler (2014) link these emotions to individuals experiencing a loss. James also illustrated the role of his confidence, self-esteem, sense of self and identity within his behaviours, inferring a struggle to make sense or cope was linked to his capacity. James linked these strategies to previous experiences and learnt behaviours

*“Yeh... its experience really, I have had to deal with a lot... (Looks away) I am not a talker (shakes head), well sometimes, but not often.” (Pg4)*

James illustrated the role of time, and behaviours, including analysing, reflection and self-isolation which were destructive. Eventually, time and space enabled him to restore normality and reconstruct his lifeworld and wellbeing. Berger and Luckman (1989) would suggest this reinforces his behaviour and links to internalising the meaning of the experience. Correspondingly, James illustrates self-reliance and awareness, but also a sense of powerlessness at times, which influences his behaviours around future friendships.

In conclusion, James’s particular experience illustrates the role and influence that certain people and relationships have on his wellbeing. Reiterating the importance of shared values and norms in establishing relationships but also that relationships change and shift. Arguably, his behaviours and strategies to cope and make sense of his experiences link to his socialisation and previous experiences and his future relationships; illustrating the interplay and interdependence of influences for individuals. Reinforcing his idea that there are different roles for different people. James’s experience illustrated the connection between himself, his wellbeing and health; illustrating the connection and interplay between certain behaviours, attitudes and actions in coping or making sense of experiences.

Baggott (2013) suggests such nuances need to be considered when seeing how to support and promote student health and wellbeing in practice. Simultaneously, illustrating the contextual and individual nature of wellbeing as suggested by Dodge *et al.* (2012). However, it also underpins the importance of the messiness

of experiences and how learnt behaviours and previous experiences informed his reconstruction of his wellbeing over time (Berger and Luckman 1989). These elements highlighted the importance of illustrating the complexity, messiness, interdependence and interplay of experiences, the individual and sense-making within the theoretical framework that would describe the findings and inform practice services and policies in HE.

#### **4.4. Charlotte**

##### **4.4.1. Charlotte's Context**

Charlotte was a single female aged 21 at the time of the research, she considered herself to be White British and was in her third year of her studies at the largest of the campuses connected to the university. She lived in private rented accommodation and could walk into university within fifteen to twenty minutes. She is the only child and the first of her family to attend university although she has a friend who had attended university before.

Charlotte returns home in university holidays, to work full time to earn money to support herself financially. She worked for a charity as a carer of vulnerable adults with particular needs and loved her job. Her end goal was to become a teacher. Charlotte was a friendly individual and had a sense of humour, preferring to be around others rather than alone. Charlotte had several close friends at university and at home and enjoyed their company. Her hobbies revolved around her sports teams; she played rugby and hockey for the university and enjoyed the team, sense of belonging and status this provided. Charlotte openly reports she does not enjoy going clubbing or drinking and eats to eat, rather than enjoying food or cooking. She would rather watch TV to shut off or go out to play sport. She is very self-conscious but independent and able to plan and motivate herself, working hard at her studies. Charlotte had a history of suffering from panic attacks and anxiety, for which she accessed support and services at university and within the NHS.

#### 4.4.2. Charlotte's Drawing

FRIENDS	WORK (BAENARDOS)	SPORTS	HOUSE MATES	MY HEALTH
TOUR	FRIENDS	LECTURERS	MONEY	HOME
MYSELF	COURSE	STRESS	FAMILY	UNIVERSITY LIFE
DOCTORS	HOUSE MATES	FAMILY	SPORTS	PRESSURE

= NEGATIVE  
= POSITIVE  
Some are both negative and positive.

##### 4.4.2.1. Charlottes Description of her Drawing

*"My drawing is a grid with green text and red text on some boxes; green is positive influences... Yes, (nods affirmation) it took a lot of thinking, I found it hard (looks down) .... used up my brainpower... (smiles)."*

*The red squares, they are negative (body language closed), but the ones that are underlined are both (Nods head). Hmm... (Voice wavering) ... It was hard to think of positives.*

*Hmm... I don't know what to say. (Voice wavering and low). I have never been... I have always found it hard, to think of positives in my health and my wellbeing. Things like that are very... hence a lot of the negatives are very..." (Charlotte begins to cry; Taping and interview suspended).*

*After a break, Charlotte continued. "Cos it might help others understand." (Pg1)*

This extract illustrated how Charlotte influenced her own wellbeing as she undertook the task and began to explain her drawing. In doing so, she realised her own impact upon her wellbeing and her negative outlook around her health. Charlotte experienced

an emotional reaction, a sense of struggle and unravelling, as she reflected upon her wellbeing; illustrating the emotions and tension between the realisation that she had negatively affected her own wellbeing, with her behaviours and actions. She correspondingly recognised the impact her personality and mental health had had on her wellbeing and vice versa. Charlotte maintained some distance between her and her wellbeing, she illustrating both positive and negative influences on her drawing; recognising the complexity and interrelationship within her verbal description of her drawing. The resultant discomfort and conflict were apparent within her admission that she felt it was hard to draw and describe her wellbeing. The internal struggle she felt may explain why the drawing seems compartmentalised, as it illustrates her struggle and desire to distance herself from her wellbeing and emotions as a reaction.

Alternatively, Charlotte shows incredible capacity, bravery and resilience as she wished to continue, despite her experience. Illustrating her need to make sense of the experience but also her drive to help others despite her own difficulty.

#### 4.4.3. Charlottes Experience; Personal Context and role of Mental Health

##### *See Charlotte's description of her drawing*

Van Manen (1990; 2014) highlighted that as an individual begins to shed light upon their experiences, the very nature and their interpretation of them is changed, with consequences for how the individual experiences the particular phenomenon (wellbeing). As Charlotte began to uncover her own wellbeing and tried to express it, she felt significantly challenged, and her sense of wellbeing shifted (Van Manen 1990); undermined her perspective of herself and creating a shift in her sense of wellbeing. Highlighting the interplay between the individual (Kelly, 1963) their health and wellbeing but also the separate nature of health and wellbeing. These events caused Charlotte to react in an emotional way, as she realised the interaction of her sense of self, her mental health and the impact upon her wellbeing.

Identifying within the research her own impact upon her wellbeing and health, that it was negative, and that her behaviours perpetuated her mental health issues. These circumstances illustrated the importance and varied level of influence of the individual in the construction of their sense of identity, health and reality (Kelly 1963; Berger and Luckman, 1989). While illustrating the influence of beliefs and coping behaviours that shape the individual's identity the potential to develop.

These findings have implications for how students might be supported to develop

positive notions of themselves and efficacy and how they might reduce any negative sense of wellbeing.

#### 4.4.3.1. Personality, Identity and Self

*Charlotte's Drawing illustrates herself as a negative influence upon her wellbeing*

MYSELF

In her interview, she expands about her persona as consisting of different bubbles;

*“An outside bubble, me... personally ...happy, bubbly, sure, cocky, confident...*

And ...

*“The inside bubble is the opposite, very much... broken, very shy, quiet and... (shakes head) ...That's the hard bit... (Shakes head looks away).” (Pg2)*

Charlotte links her identity to her mental health, using metaphor to uncover how she portrayed herself differently to different people. She illustrates her active role and denial of her health status to others and illustrates her low self-esteem and anxiety about how others see her and how she sees herself.

*“Yeh it does, cos it lets me be wanted and needed, and that's what I need... love talking to friends and being with them... I don't like being alone, that's when I get unwell. so being wanted and needed is key to coping physically, it helps because I'm busy... and emotionally because I am distracted.” (Pg8)*

Charlotte links her personality and sense of self to her ability to cope and distract herself by visiting or being with others, to divert her attention. These coping strategies are learnt over time and reinforced by her previous experiences, mental health status and sense of self. Correspondingly, Charlotte indicates a level of self-awareness, resilience and ownership of her wellbeing, although it is negative.

#### 4.4.3.2. People and Relationships

Charlotte illustrated a range of relationships as having an influence on her wellbeing including

##### 4.4.3.2.1. Family

*Charlotte's Drawing*

FAMILY FAMILY

Charlotte illustrated her independence from family

but still felt they influenced her wellbeing and that she valued their relationship

*“My top three would be... definitely, my work with \*\*\*\*\*, being back at home and family, yes they are the three big ones.” (Pg3)*

#### 4.4.3.2.2. Friends

*Charlottes Drawing illustrates her friends as both positive and negative at different times.*



*“I came four days late for Uni ... cos I had a holiday and the housemates I had in year one all had that relationship building, they got together and got on and I seemed to be an outsider. So that put a lot of pressure on my health. Then when second year came, they all got a house together and left me on my own. That happened, the same, to the student who does English, so then we got together, and now we are really good friends...” (Pg10)*

These excerpts illustrate the low sense of belonging Charlotte felt at university, given her late arrival, correspondingly illustrating these relationships as challenging for Charlotte.

*“So first year was hockey, second year was rugby, and this year we actually went on tour together. It’s just, fun and games and you get to know people a little bit more.”*

Charlotte gained friends and a sense of belonging from the relationship with friends from her sports teams. Highlighting the importance of shared experiences to a sense of belonging and wellbeing and as important factors supporting positive wellbeing (MWBHE, 2015).

#### 4.4.3.2.3. Others; GP

*Charlotte’s Drawing*



*included her GP as a positive influence on her wellbeing, illustrating the importance of her relationship given her health status in her daily lived experiences*

*“She’s been through everything with me... cos of what happened before Christmas... and I absolutely trust her... I love her... she, we have a really good relationship, so I put her as a positive.” (Pg9)*

Charlotte illustrated the importance of trust and reliability as values underpinning her relationships, especially her GP.

#### 4.4.5. Health Status

*Charlotte’s Drawing illustrated her own perspective of her health as negative,*



*“I think that wellbeing differs from your health, it’s what’s personal to you... It’s like your mental capacity, physical wellbeing... Could it be? No that’s wrong...intellectually... The persona that you give off... the personality... the outside bubble... that other people perceive... “Yeh, ... I don’t know... Maybe if you’re happy in your body, with your weight, your diet, then you’ve got the mental capacity as well, which just affects all of it...” (Pg3)*

Later she used the metaphor of an umbrella to describe her mental health

*“If its sunshine hitting the umbrella then you’re happy, bubbly, and inside is what you feel outside... Then if its hale, sleet anything... that’s negative and its affecting some of your outside... But... you’re not showing it as much... it’s more of the inside (laughs nervously).” (Pg5-6).*

Charlotte clearly considers health and wellbeing as connected and illustrates all the health dimensions as influencing her wellbeing. She also included positive and negative notions of wellbeing. Furthermore, she illustrated a lack of confidence as she sought reassurance as she talked. Interestingly, Charlotte’s diagram is very compartmentalised and estranged from her vocalised experiences, inferring her reluctance to consider her own mental health, inferring her sense of vulnerability, hence the umbrella as a shield or protection.

The shifting nature of Charlotte’s wellbeing is evident as she connects it to her sense of self, identity and her own mental ill-health. Charlotte links her sense of identity to how she thinks others “see” her. Her sense of self clearly affects how she feels about her own identity and how she perceives herself and her wellbeing, influencing how she interacts with her world, and vice versa (Berger and Luckman, 1989; Van Manen,

2014). As a result, Charlotte feels the need for protection or shielding, (her bubbles and umbrella) given her own perception that she is vulnerable because of her mental ill-health.

Alternatively, these circumstances may illustrate that wellbeing may have an opposite; *unwellbeing*; illustrating that wellbeing is pushed and pulled rather like in a matrix, rather than being a process with an end or a scale where influences may be either negative or positive, refuting the literature accordingly (Kelly *et al.*, 2012; Cooke *et al.*, 2016). Similarly, Charlotte's materials illustrate that wellbeing is different to health, but that her health impacts her wellbeing and her sense of self and personality; illustrating the interconnectedness of different elements of the individual's contexts and the personal nature of wellbeing. Equally, these findings also illustrate that Charlotte's wellbeing influences her different dimensions of health and vice versa.

Furthermore, Charlotte's particular attitudes towards her health have reinforced or objectified her perception of her wellbeing, influencing her personality, sense of self and identity and vice versa (Berger and Luckman, 1989). These findings illustrate the interplay of these individual constructs and elements on each other and highlight the complexity of making sense of experiences. For Charlotte, this scenario has resulted in her negative perception of her illness and health that has informed and shaped her reality, including how she views herself and her wellbeing (Berger and Luckman, 1989; Kelly 1963). The interconnectedness and significance of the individual's sense of self, esteem and health beliefs upon their wellbeing are reiterated from Charlotte's materials.

Charlotte's mental health status clearly influenced her wellbeing, her own personal construct and her inside and outside HE contexts. She used metaphor as a way to distance and protect herself from her own mental health. Moreover, this strategy provided space to enable her to talk about it, clearly indicating her active role in her wellbeing but the cross-contextual and interconnected influence of her mental health throughout all aspects of her lifeworld. These findings reiterate that health is separate but connected to wellbeing with significant influence upon how the individual lives their daily life and constructs their wellbeing; in turn, influencing the theoretical framework design, to illustrate such circumstances. Moreover, Charlotte's description of her inside bubble illustrates a negative sense of being that she assigns herself given her mental health, adding a particular colour to her perspective and illustrating her

struggle to accept her mental health issue. She is seemingly confirming Huta and Ryan's (2010) suggestion that wellbeing maybe both hedonistic and eudemonic and that they interact and are interdependent upon each other over time and for the individual to meet their potential.

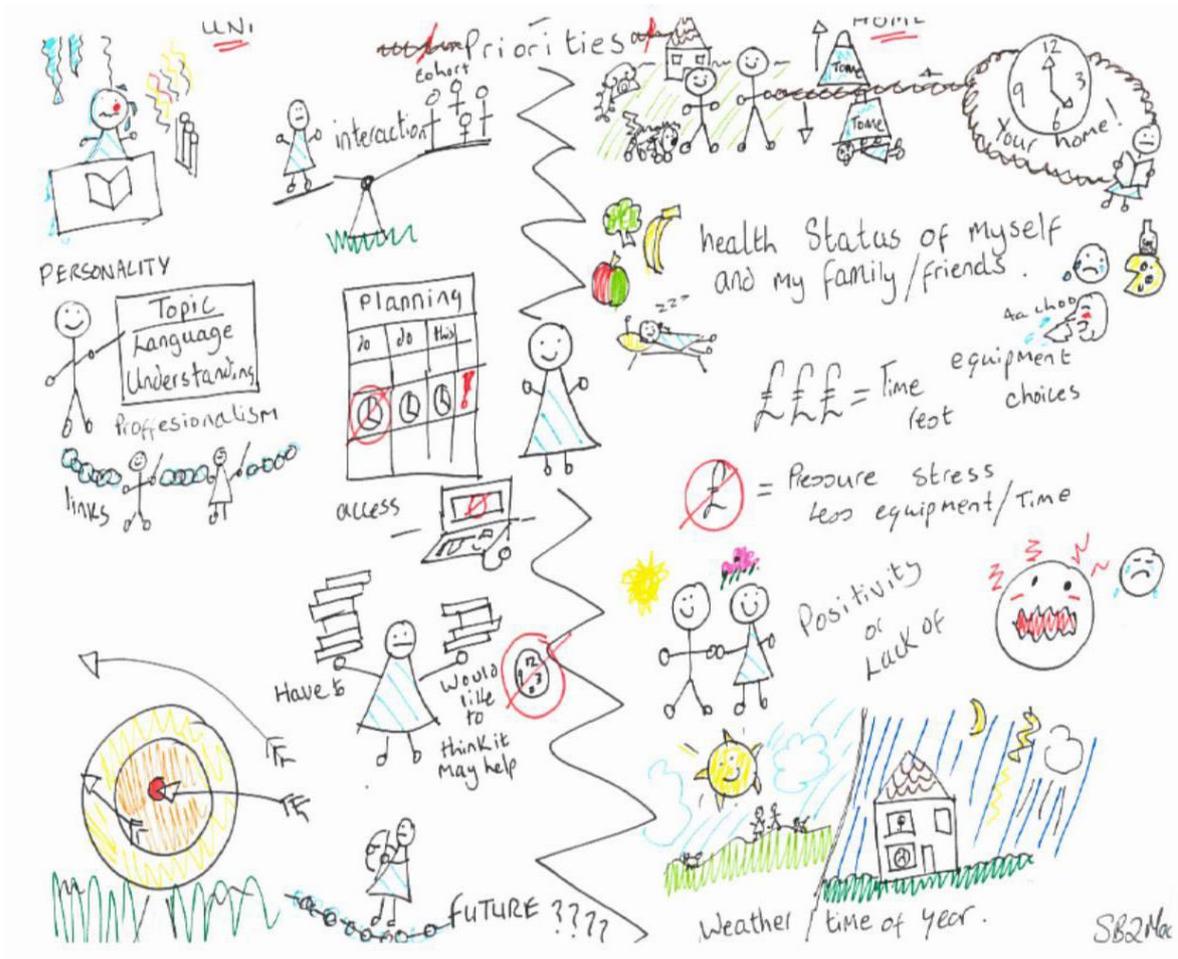
#### 4.5. Susan

##### 4.5.1. Susan's Context

Susan was aged 34 at the time of the research, described her ethnicity as White British, and was living with her partner, son (not the son of this partner) and their dogs, in their family home. Susan has been with her partner for approximately six years, having been married before and then divorced. Her son was aged 14 at the time of the research. She was in her final semester of her second year of studies. Her previous careers included retail and working as a teaching assistant at a local school, and her goal was to become a teacher.

Susan was the first in her family to attend university but felt it important that it might also encourage her son to think about going to college or university. She was one of two mature students in her cohort, Susan being marginally the elder of those two. She had assumed the role of matriarch in their cohort, developing strategies within the group to ensure individuals were "getting on" and "cheering them up" or "chivvying them along." Susan would describe her personality as bubbly, confident, and friendly, although she can be attention-seeking, she is warm hearted, helpful and had a sense of humour.

#### 4.5.2. Susan's Drawing and Description



“So... I separated them, but they are next to each other to show they affect each other. I put priorities at the top because that's how I see everything, in terms of priorities... The sides flip over, they are dependent on each other... yes (nodding). This all has an effect on this (pointing to the home side of the page, and hand moving to Uni side). It is mostly home on Uni, cos of my priorities. They can be the other way round if I am under a lot of time constraints, obviously, trying to share my time and things, but not fully. This is me in the middle, obviously it's split between the university and home; and obviously, the main thing is your priorities, they are the pulls. There are always pulls and priorities and trying to get them right, these are the priorities and there is always priorities (Pointing to images on home side of the page). Obviously at home my priorities are, my family, my home etc. and this is whether at the time this is the weight they are putting on you; whether it's heavy or it's light, obviously affects how you can be.” (Pg1)

4.5.3. Susan's Particular Experience; Outside HE Context Priorities, Role, and Responsibilities  
*Susan's Drawing illustrates herself, son, partner and their dog outside their house, towards the top of the page inferring their priority alongside her cohort on the Uni*



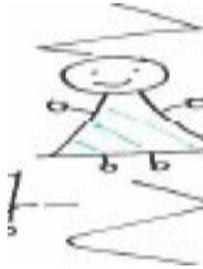
*side. She also illustrated their link to time constraints and priorities using a clock, weights and chain.*

*“This is me in the middle, obviously it’s split between the university and home; and obviously the main thing is your priorities, there the mains things, they are the pulls. There are always pulls and priorities and trying to get them right, and these are the priorities and there always priorities... And this is me at home trying to study and this is them with a lasso and saying ‘Oh you’re home, you can come and do this’... but obviously, you just don’t get the time cos they think she is here so she doesn’t have to do anything. Not that I have a pile of books with me, no (laughs).” (Pg1)*

Susan illustrates how her role as a parent, and responsibility to prioritise her son above all else, influenced the contexts of her everyday life. This illustrates her level of independence and organisation but simultaneously identifying that she felt her son belonged to her and shaped her identity and purpose. While denying her partner’s responsibility for her son, as a significant adult. Moreover, her role as a single parent was clearly central to her identity and wellbeing as suggested Forste and Jacobsen (2013). Susan saw her role as a student as less of a priority than caring for her son; despite him also being a sense of motivation. Susan may have developed this perspective and personality traits, given her previous experiences and as a result of having lone responsibility for her son. Susan seemingly reiterates Forste and Jacobsen’s (2013) conclusion that single parent roles and responsibilities were negative factors affecting student wellbeing within HE. Susan's son as a driver for her studies also illustrated the intricacies of the different roles and the fluidity of circumstances she experienced within her experiences of HE.

#### 4.5.3.1. Personality, Identity, Self and Coping

##### Susan's Drawing



*Susan is in the center of the two contexts, Uni and Home and there is a jagged line between the two, illustrating the two contexts pulling and pushing.*

*“I am very much one person, just through life so on. So, he is my number one priority and I would rather fail at university and lose everything to make sure his future is going okay.” (Pg18)*

And

*...I think it comes down to personality, how I run my life, and so on, it's how it comes, as a priority.” (Pg20)*

Susan links her personality and sense of self to her independence and priorities and how well she manages these. Susan clearly linked her personality, outlook, self-confidence, sense of control, power and sense of self, to her own personality and how she built her lifeworld and wellbeing. Susan's level of confidence and self-awareness might be because of her age, gender or life experiences. Moreover, the role of being a parent with responsibility for another and her role as a long-term partner may have shaped her perspective of her roles and responsibilities, underpinning her sense of identity, importance, power and efficacy, reinforcing her roles and responsibilities.

Susan also recognised the role of others and their behaviours, needs and personalities as influential upon her own, influencing her ability to be positive and how she felt, including her ability to cope and manage her priorities, including her studies. Susan also illustrated the role of her own and others' emotions, time, the weather and place throughout her materials.



*including him, her son and friends.*

*Susan's Drawing illustrates the role of herself and her emotions using metaphor emoji's, faces and symbolism to depict herself and personality traits at particular points of influence. She also annotates "positivity or lack of it" as linked to the relationship between herself and her partner and how she copes with others,*

In her interview she highlights

*"Positivity... is important, or lack of it... so what's going on at home; if it's all sunshine and roses you're okay, but if its arguments and stress it's going to affect everything... But even if you are having stress with friends or things like that, it affects you, so your outlook on everything has a knock-on effect, with you. (Pg2)*

These findings link the role of her positivity, personality and outlook to Susan's lifeworld and wellbeing.

#### 4.5.3.2. People and Relationships

Susan continued to link people and relationships as key to her wellbeing within her experience including her

##### 4.5.3.2.1. Partner and Child

Susan illustrated the importance of her relationships with her son and partner and her own wellbeing.

##### 4.5.3.2.2. Friends, Peers and Cohort

*Susan's Drawing illustrates the balancing of relationships between herself, her friends and cohort.*



Susan reiterates her role as a friend in her interview “(Pointing to diagram) If you have got friends crying, who require you, sick family and eating junk (laughs).” (Pg2)

These excerpts underpin the different roles and relationships she has with others as linked to her wellbeing.

In conclusion, Susan’s role and responsibility as a single parent influenced her identity, personality and wellbeing but also her ability to engage and manage her studies (Forste and Jacobsen, 2013). Her decision to prioritise her son impacted his and her own wellbeing. Susan’s materials illustrated the complexity and connectedness of the responsibilities and priorities of her role as a parent. She also illustrated the role of her own and others emotions, time and its constraints and how these conflicts impacted her wellbeing given competing priorities over time. Susan also illustrated the varied influence and importance of relationships, including that people might be both positive or negative and that they and tools and resources might be motivators or barriers.

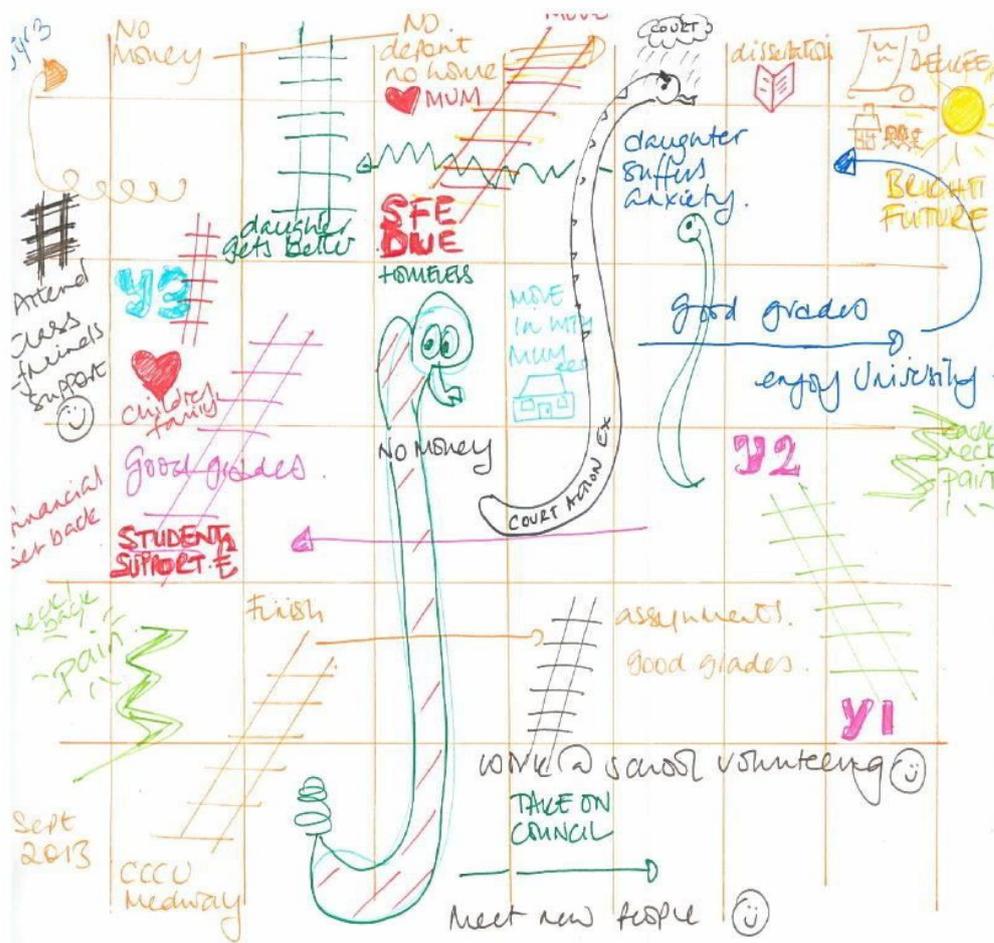
## 4.6. Jean

### 4.6.1. Jean’s Context

Jean was aged 45 years old at the time of the research; she declared herself as a White British female and “divorced or single parent, with two children.” Jean lived with her mum, son and daughter after being made homeless several weeks earlier. She lived with her family in a small village, about fifteen minutes from her children’s school and drove to Uni each day. Jean’s children were to her ex-husband, and they were aged 8 and 10 respectively. She identified herself as a Christian and attended church regularly. She was in the final semester of her third year of studies.

Jean was the oldest in her cohort and seen by all as the matriarch in the group. Jean’s personality was quiet, friendly, unimposing but confident and secure in her own self-worth and identity.

#### 4.6.2. Jean's Drawing and Description of her Drawing



Jean's Description of her Drawing within her interview included;

“Okay education as my let out, the drawing is a natural progression through my studies. It's my bright future... the sunshine here (pointing). That's how I am at the end... because what happened is... I have had such a journey... of literally, snakes and ladders. I've gone from having money... then it's been taken away from me. Without a very few people, my Mum especially, to help me... With the housing. Student support services who have helped me at times, when I have really needed that extra funding; just to see me through a tricky period... I don't think I would have fared very well, to be honest with you. So, I do owe a lot of that to university, for being part of that... belonging.... so, the snakes and ladders represent the ups and the downs.

I finished year one then assignments-and the flow goes round like this (tracking flow of diagram for clarity with finger). Snakes are down things, ladders are up- snakes

*are things you have to deal with, not necessarily downs, unplanned things, really. I was homeless but actually, it wasn't that bad and my children have had a fantastic time, we had time with my family and my Mum. That sense of belonging, in the village... if we hadn't done that and the move to the school and everything.” (Pg1-2)*

#### 4.6.3. Jean's Experience Inside of HE as Distraction and Linchpin

*“Although it's been a bit of a struggle, the last couple of months... I am very grateful. To be a Mum... to have health, to have my family, however, small that is... and to be a student because being a student... Being a student, although time restraints are... hmm... difficult, at times, cos I haven't got the cover for the children, and with everything else it's my linchpin. It's something that I hold onto when the waters get really rough, but I can go to University one or two times a week, and I do go to University, for that very reason... It's my bright future... the sunshine here (pointing on drawing) yes... that's how I am, at the end...” (Pg2)*

Across her materials, Jean illustrated how her wellbeing had been significantly influenced by a series of personal circumstances outside the University; including homelessness; her ex-husband trying to remove the children; and her financial ruin. Jean evidenced that she felt University was a positive distraction and a place to be because it was facilitating her future, and a way out of her circumstances, illustrating the value she holds on education. She highlighted HE as providing her future, a way out of her circumstances and clearly illustrates the value she holds on education. She links learning to her confidence, power, control and her self-efficacy as linked to her capacity to manage her wellbeing as suggested by Bartimote-Aufflick *et al.*, (2015). Highlighting the role of her personality, sense of identity and self, but also her ability to cope and resilience. Jean linked her HE experiences to her future social mobility and emancipation, in line with traditional principles underpinning HE, rather than more recent agendas around employability or a means to an end (Carr, 2005).

##### 4.6.3.1. Community and Belonging

Jean illustrates an array of different relationships linking this to her wellbeing and sense of belonging rather than her popularity or sense of being needed

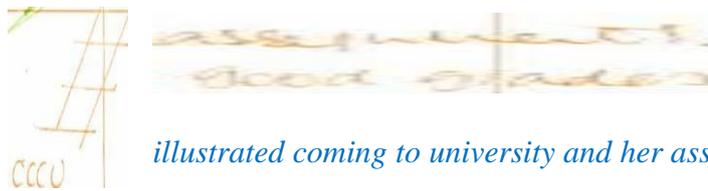
*“...There's lots of love in my life, my children, my mum, my friends feature very heavily in that, that support means everything. But genuine support, again it's all*

*right having Facebook and using it as a bit of a cohort group, to maybe put some bits and pieces on, but I am not a big social media fan ... I'd rather have that cup of coffee with someone and that face to face chat then that. I don't think I would have fared very well, to be honest with you, so I've....do owe a lot of that to university for being part of that...belonging .... (Pg3)*

Jean illustrated her need to belong and the importance of community; reiterating that her sense of belonging and being within both contexts is vital for her wellbeing. Moreover, she illustrates different relationships and people and their different roles across her materials, as connected to her wellbeing.

#### 4.6.3.2. Places and Spaces to Study

##### Jean's Drawing



*illustrated coming to university and her assessment grades as positive towards her wellbeing across her drawing linking the positive HE experiences as influencing her wellbeing.*

Jean reiterated above the importance of HE as a place but also as a space to learn and immerse herself in other things away from her everyday negative experiences, providing her time and opportunity to talk and see other people.

#### 4.6.3.3. HE systems, Extenuating Circumstance

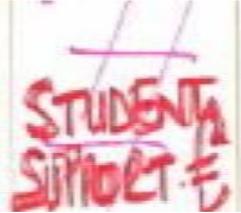
*"I had an NLP in year 3, cos I spoke to \*\*\*\*, which was brilliant. I had kinda got about six weeks behind... I just found it really difficult then to catch up. But over that Christmas period, it really helped. It was space, you know, I have still got a lot of work to do for my dissertation, but I know what I am doing and where I have to go again." (Pg5)*

This excerpt reiterates the importance of Negotiated Learning Plans as a tool, to give her space and time to engage with her studies and remove the stress and allow some control over her studies. Moreover, Jean talked about the importance of her study behaviours, spaces and habits

*"I use the Kitchen table... or the dining room table. I have a bag for each module, it's got everything I need in that bag, the books in it. I've narrowed it down now, if not*

they get piled up the walls, and then I just grab the bag I need for that particular assignment then I just pile up the table. I have my own study music in my I-Tunes file; I play that Icelandic music and Yeh, I spread out, I like to have my space. I like to sit at the table, spread my stuff out, have a cup of coffee and my notes or whatever... and just get on with it... it's my time, you know." (Pg6)

#### 4.6.3.4. Student Services



*Jean's Drawing illustrated the role of HE student support played, supporting her wellbeing given its position near a ladder, including the financial advice and support they gave her.*

*"So, I went to student support services who have helped me at times, when I have really needed that extra funding, just to see me through a tricky period. I spoke to them and they put me into contact with somebody, who is a solicitor, who is going to meet with me and give me advice. She cannot act for me cos she has not got a license, but she can give me the ins and outs, so moving forward that's been a lifeline.*

*I have to say... all the tutors have all been so supportive, they pointed me in the right direction, listened..." (Pg4-5)*

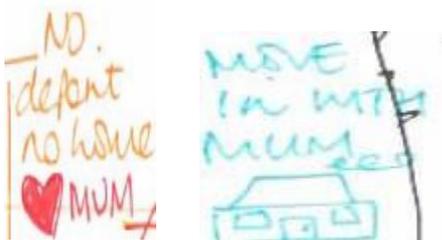
These excerpts reiterate the importance of Jean's relationship with HE tutors and her ability to work in partnership with them, to access certain systems and services; illustrating her sense of capacity and coping, while offering insight into her limits and maturity in asking for help.

#### 4.6.3.5. People and Relationships

Jean highlights the role of certain relationships within her experience, underpinning her view that different people have different roles and influence at different times.

##### 4.6.3.5.1. Family

*Jean's Drawing illustrated the importance of her Mum throughout her drawing, including love hearts and ladders given her positive role in supporting Jean financially, emotionally and practically.*



Clearly, the relationship between Jean and her Mum is pivotal to Jean's wellbeing. She has provided practical, emotional and

financial support, enabling Jean to continue her studies and providing her with a home.

#### 4.6.3.5.2. Children



*Jean's Drawing Jean's children are represented, including their positive relationship, love, emotions, and sense of family, using hearts a house and smiley faces. She simultaneously defined what she felt was her responsibility to her children, despite her experiences.*

And “*My children, have a huge impact, if they are happy, I am happy, but flipping that round I am the captain of the ship, so when I am happy they are I am very aware of that. So, when I have got a lot on, I know I do but I mindfully try not to put it on them.*” (Pg9)

Jean clearly links her role as a parent and her relationship with her children, as positive influences upon her wellbeing. Although she equally illustrated her worry and stress when her daughter experienced ill health. These circumstances clearly link to her sense of responsibility and role as a parent but might also link to her personified notion of responsibility and guilt around being a divorced mother who is also a student, and the associated renegotiation and pressure of being both (Forste and Jacobsen, 2013). This belief and experience may have been reified by her sense of family, belonging and her personality, (Berger and Luckman, 1989) but equally the complexity of parental responsibility and roles, and their influence upon her wellbeing.

#### 4.6.3.5.3. Friends

*My really, really, good friends are not on Facebook, you know the ones where we go and get the kids to climb trees and go to the beach, so my tier one friends. As they are more diluted that's where they are... different friends, different times, different relationships...*” (Pg10)

Jean highlights the quality of her relationships with others rather than numbers of friends, as important, and clearly links shared experiences and values as central to their status. Moreover, Jean's perspectives about her friendships might be linked to her level of confidence, life experience, and maturity, especially since she recognises the potential for relationships to change over time.

4.6.3.5.6. Personal Construct, Personality, Identity and Self within her interview, Jean describes her personality

*“Well, I would say they have impacted (her experiences) ... as a person I’ve read a lot of philosophy when I was younger... so I was aware, very aware. I am more like spiritually minded then I am material minded... It sounds a bit sickly at times, but I am very grateful. For basic things, like health... wellbeing and family, love and all of those things. Cos, I think, you can’t buy them... and because I have seen people of my age... and you know watching them, have serious illnesses, some have come through, some haven’t... again it makes me more grateful for what I have got.”*  
(Pg2)

Jean highlights that her wellbeing links to herself, her education, personal philosophy, and outlook on life, but also previous experiences, linking her wellbeing to her sense of belonging and community, all of which impact upon her identity. She later highlights how her personality traits and sense of responsibility, ownership and independence play a role.

*“As an individual, I take responsibility for my actions. So sometimes I mess up, sometimes I get it right, but that’s down to me completely. I am always prepared to try something new, so I never think, well I’ve got to 45 so I must be right. I will always take other people’s opinions on board, cos you know what, if there is a better way, so if it’s not working, I will always try something new. In the past I’ve had jobs and things happen that have affected me and I’ve changed because of them...”*

And

*“I get past it, cos I am quite resilient, but there’s two things, isn’t there? There’s criticism or offering another way round something. If I didn’t feel I had done anything wrong and they were telling me off, but, the flip side of that is... I will say, you know what... I could have done that or done that instead, so look at things from a different perspective.”* (Pg11-12)

Jean illustrated her need to get things right, her independence, ownership and sense of responsibility. Highlighting their connection to herself and her wellbeing. These traits influenced her confidence and resilience, enabling Jean to cope and make sense of her

experiences. Moreover, her ability to critically reflect upon her performance and consider constructive feedback denoted a level of self-efficacy and power.

Importantly, Jean linked these traits and her values to what she believed, how she acted, her education and her relationships with herself and others.

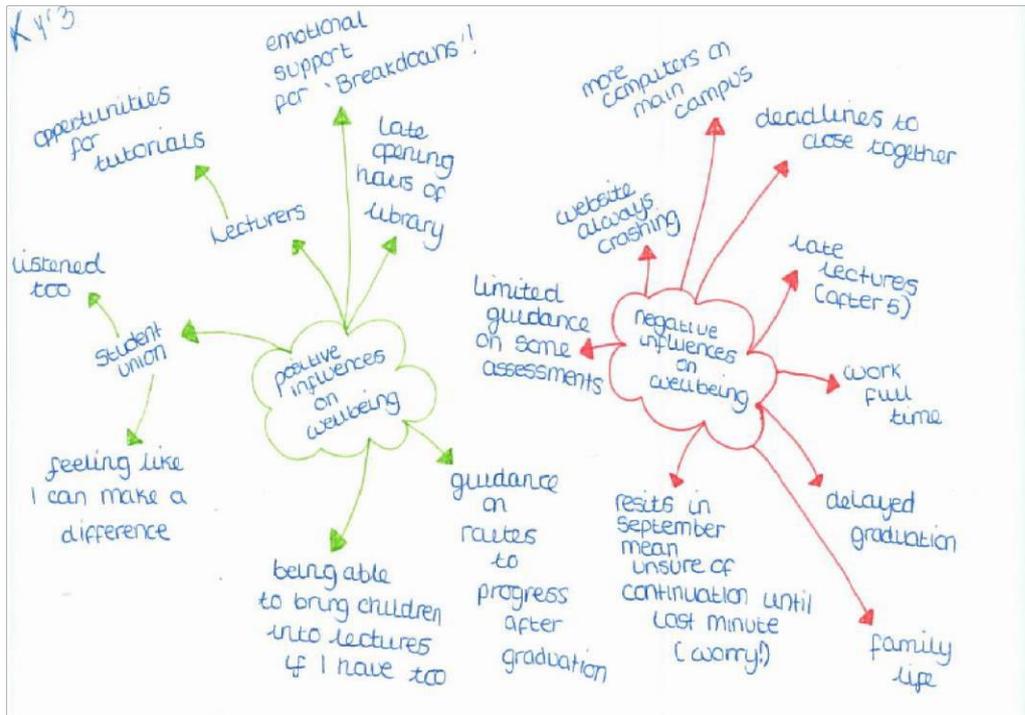
Jean's particular experience illustrated the complexity and interconnection of her contexts. Moreover, these experiences illustrate the fundamental role of money and housing to Jean's wellbeing, alongside her sense of belonging and community. Jean gained a sense that she was managing her wellbeing despite it being "muddled" because University enabled her to have space and step away, so she could make sense of experiences and have some control. Correspondingly, she had space to divert her attention and allow her the opportunity to make sense of her experiences as she learnt. Thus, her HE context enabled her to maintain a sense of being and her wellbeing.

## 4.7. Karen

### 4.7.1. Her Context

Karen was a 34-year-old married female with two children, a boy aged seven and a girl aged eleven. Karen described her ethnic heritage as white British and she lived with her husband, children and their pet rabbit in their family home outside the city. Karen drove to university after work or dropping her children to school. Karen identified she had few friends, given her 40-50 hour working week, on nights. She identified her husband as her soul mate, friend and her rock and *"support during melt downs."* Her husband is also a student at another university nearby and they tend to use facilities at his university to study together. Karen also became an active member of the student union and became the mature student rep, which gave her a new sense of belonging, confidence and voice. She was friendly although reserved and had a small group of peers rather than friends, but they worked well together and shared the same humour and values.

#### 4.7.2. Karen's Drawing and Description of her Drawing

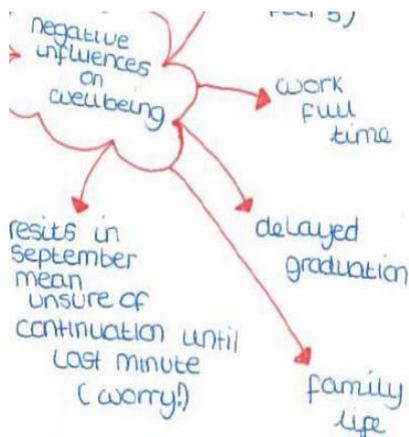


*“The clouds represent the idea of floating and moving, change shape, storing things really. The Spider diagrams form clouds, they helped me think and are what I use when*

*I’m thinking about my plans for essays.” (Pg1)*

#### 4.7.3. Karen's Experience; Conflict between Time, Money, Work and Studies

Karen's Drawing captures her experience within her negative influences on wellbeing as a cloud



Karen's individual experience comes from a conflict between her need to provide an income for her family, working and managing her studies. Karen had been working 40-50 hours on nights throughout her studies but in her final year this affected her grades overall and she failed one module, delaying her graduation.

*“My biggest negative for me this year is the graduation thing, which is what \*\*\*\*\* spoke about a couple of weeks ago. I rang my mum had a rant, had a cry. I think that is really unfair, that if you have a resit, you cannot graduate with everyone else, there is no point, I find that really unfair .... So, I left here (Uni) and I said, well that's it, it's not fair. I am not going to do it or finish the year, there is no point. Until my husband really made me see sense... But*

*that really affected me negatively. I thought I am just not going to do the work then. I took out my books threw them away. I thought no! ... it's not going to happen. I was so annoyed, I have never put my books down and said NO!!*

*I have worked so hard, I said to my husband, I have worked full time, since I started University. I have managed to get this far and then all of a sudden, (clicks fingers) I just got flicked, it really, really bugged me. It took me a week, then I came back round. I haven't even got it on my mind now... I decided to retake the year so didn't put my dissertation in, so they will have to offer me a retake year. That's better, cos then I can sort out my grades and come out with a decent degree." (Pg2)*

Karen clearly illustrated a sense of struggle and frustration, given the impact of her working on her studies. Siddiquee *et al.* (2016) highlighted the potential conflict between the individual's wellbeing and their paid work, personal life and studies. Karen illustrated emotions, both as a reaction to her experience and as a means of making sense of experiences. These emotions included reactions to circumstances such as anger, denial and upset and emotions linked to coping or making sense of her experiences. These emotions included denial, bargaining and finally, acceptance of the consequences of her failed studies. Which Kubbler-Ross and Kessler (214) argue would be like emotions experienced by a loss or bereavement; in this case her graduation with her peers. She also illustrated the role of certain relationships including her husband and mum who helped her make sense of the experience and decide the way forward. These findings illustrate how time and certain personality traits influenced her ability to manage her experience, reconstruct her wellbeing and make decisions. These events showed Karen's resilience, tenacity and coping while inferring her desire to control her future. Forste and Jacobsen (2013) identified this renegotiation of influences and circumstances as linked to negative experiences for students and how they may engage with their studies or not, according to their personality and support mechanisms.

#### 4.7.3.1 Personal Construct, Personality, Identity and Self

*Karen's Drawing does not illustrate her personality but uncovers her need to control and compartmentalise or organise her thinking and everyday life, given its design.*

In her interview

*“I am usually a happy person and don’t believe in being miserable or have time for it...” (Pg1)*

Later

*“Uni has given me confidence to be able to say, I can do this, cos otherwise I would not have done that or I wouldn’t have got this far. I must have something that’s got me this far.*

*I try to be positive, ... my Dad is different, growing up with him was very hard. He has manic depression, he works full time, but he has bouts where is just insufferable. From that I have just thought I will never be like that.*

*My husband always says to me I am not very sympathetic which is very strange for someone in my job but if I am down in the dumps I just think for god’s sake kick yourself get up and get on with it. Usually after that I am fine, I look for the positives in it, cos if you look for the negatives you will find them.” (Pg8-9)*

These extracts clearly indicated Karen had an independent personality and was clear about her own identity, confidence, self and her own role in her lifeworld and wellbeing. She was self-aware, given her previous experiences of her Dad’s mental illness and developed particular traits as a result, including positivity, tenacity and resilience. She had clear perspectives about her own responsibility for and ownership of, her health, mental health and wellbeing.

#### 4.7.3.2. Coping and Resilience

*“I feel that even if I was to bring it up now, it wouldn’t affect me personally. I don’t think there is enough time and to be honest, I don’t think that would change, because there would be financial implications for the university. They would have to have a board earlier and then still have to have the late one, because they could not force everyone to submit early... I was ready to sit in the president’s office and say, Right I am not moving, I was so annoyed.” (Pg9)*

This extract illustrates Karen’s personality and her sense of resilience on the one hand, and on the other, an insight into how she managed the situation and began to make sense of her situation, using critical reflection; illustrating the importance of space, time and other people to talk to. Equally, Karen’s critical reflection on how the university might respond or change, illustrated emotional maturity and resilience, and

the extent that she had made sense of and drawn conclusions from the experience. Importantly, Karen does not blame herself or the University for the failure of the assignment itself, inferring acceptance and maturity in her empathy for others.

#### 4.7.3.3. People and Relationships

##### 4.7.3.3.1 Husband

Karen's husband is her friend, confidante and clear support throughout her everyday life

*Karen's Drawing illustrated one role of her husband*

Alongside:

“Until my husband really made me see sense...” (Pg2).

and their mutual support and role changes as she and then he became HE students

*“My husband was really supportive, he was like; Go for it, change your job, go for it, and it will be fine, we will manage. He has mucked in a lot with the kids. So yeh, I couldn't have done it without him being my child care (laughs). He is at University now, as well, so I sort have inspired him to go. We call him the MAD, Mum and Dad, cos he is at home and looks after the kids and I work. He got a MAD card on Mother's Day. (laughs)” (Pg5-6).*

This extract illustrated the type and changes in relationships between Karen and her husband as they both became HE students and needed to renegotiate their responsibilities (Forste and Jacobsen, 2013; Mokgele and Rothman, 2014). This illustrates the changes in roles and responsibilities they adopted to enable them to both access HE as well as demonstrating the value and worth, they assign to a HE education.

##### 4.7.3.3.2. Children

*“We have two children, one is six and one is ten. The ten-year-old thinks he is funny, thinks he knows everything and has always got the answer. But as for university, because he is now at an age where he has seen us do it, he already knows what A levels he wants to do, where he is going to university...*

*My six-year-old, she is hard, she is a girl... They are positive in that I want to do, well I want to have a good job, and I want them to have everything I didn't have as a kid.*

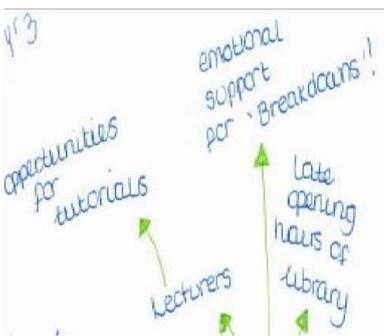
*They can be a negative because if they are sick then I am at home with them, I cannot do stuff. I have to work full time to support them, because obviously, they cannot support themselves.*

*So, it's a bit of both- they are my driving force but they are sometimes an anchor." (Pg4)*

Karen's relationship, expectations and influence upon her children are clear, as is her influence as a role model and particular values about education. Karen also illustrated the influence of her children's health upon her wellbeing given her potential need to look after them, reiterating her role as a carer despite aspects of the mum and dad role being her husband's role.

#### 4.7.3.3. HE Staff and Student Services

##### *Karen's Drawing*



*Karen's drawing illustrated her positive relationships with tutors, access to tutorials and the library as positive influences upon her studies and wellbeing.*

However, she highlighted the conflict of working and managing her time to negotiate support via tutorials at times

*"Well I tried with \*\*\*\* but she could only do two weeks from now, on a Monday morning. That's no good for me cos I still had revision sessions for \*\*\* then. It's as awkward for staff sometimes, as well as for me so I gave up on that. With \*\*\*\* I ended up having to drive to \*\*\*\* to see him.*

Alternatively, Karen's relationship with some HE staff enabled her to have a flexible and supportive experience and manage her learning differently

*"I couldn't have done it without certain staff, some of them have been so great, letting me bring the kids in for sessions or activities, without that I wouldn't have been able to come in and I would have missed out on all that content...." (Pg13)*

This underpins the importance of flexible approaches to student engagement and support for students, who are parents. This clearly relieved Karen's stress and conflict about looking after her children or attending HE, influencing her wellbeing positively.

#### 4.7.4. Work and Employment

The conflict between Karen's need to work to sustain her family's income and the constraints on her time for her studies are clear within her materials.

##### Karen's Drawing



*Karen illustrated the conflict between her needing to work, family life and late lectures, clearly impacting her ability to engage successfully with her studies and succeed, with negative influence on her studies and wellbeing.*

*"The home I work in is palliative care; so, it's really busy at night, they all die at night. It's always the way, so yes, it's really, really, busy, but I prefer nights to days. Cos I can be around for the children, so I do roughly four to five nights a week, twelve-hour shifts. So, it adds up quite quickly." (Pg5)*

Later Karen explains the emotional and physical impact of working, studying and having to take time away from her children, including her feelings of guilt and conflict as suggested by Baron and Corbin (2012) and

*"It can be other influences as well, like my daughter's friends' Mums, neither of them works. They are always going on days out, on trips, and I think huh... They don't work, they don't have to... and I always think they don't work full time and I do, and they are not studying and I am, so they can go out all day... Whereas when I come home from work, my first thought is... Oh just two hours in bed would be amazing. But they are off and out, I can't drive if I have worked, I am too tired. I read somewhere that driving after not sleeping for 24 hours is the same as having an alcohol blood limit over the limit. So, I won't drive. So yes, I am like a zombie, it can be negative in that there is a guilt attached to what other people are doing. But I can see the end goal... so that keeps me going. They are always going to be on benefits, and eventually they will get only really crappy jobs and I am working towards*

*something better than that... it's hard to step out, yeh.” (Pg10)*

This extract illustrated the conflict, constraints and negative health consequences Karen experienced because of her need to work. She also illustrated her motivation for studying, including her family's future and social mobility and the emotional links and conflict between herself, and her contexts. Which forced Karen to prioritise her work over her studies, with negative consequences for her studies (Baron and Corbin, (2012) given her inability to engage with her studies. Although she had no choice given her responsibility to ensure the financial support for her family (Mokgele and Rothman, 2014).

#### 4.7.5. Teaching and Learning Strategies

*“I like seminars better than the big groups and lectures. I like talking and doing the activities... I suppose in year two and one the stress isn't there and if you fail you can't fail your degree, but now you can and not graduate. There is all this stress all of a sudden, you have to do well. Whereas if you could do bits and bobs throughout the module then it wouldn't feel as stressful.”*

Karen is clear about her learning preferences and style, she is confident in how she learns and which type of teaching supports her learning best. Karen links stress and negative emotions to her studies and deadlines, underlining the personal and emotive nature of learning; but also, the opportunity that staged or formative tasks might provide for her wellbeing.

Karen's particular experience illustrates the conflict between roles and responsibilities that she has and in particular, the financial struggle she experiences, given her student status. Moreover, it illustrates how HE might support her, given her own critical reflections and evaluation of her experience. This experience links clearly to the financial stresses of being a student and parent, illustrating the particular impact upon Karen's HE outcomes, experience and wellbeing. Indeed, Karen's context illustrated Hagell's (2017) conclusion that HE grants fail to support student health and wellbeing. Moreover, Karen also illustrates great resilience and coping but alternately, the negative impact of needing to work and the impact of it upon her studies. Underpinning the issue of economic hardship for HE students in HE compared to their counterparts in other parts of the UK (Hagell, 2017).

#### 4.7.6 Conclusion

This chapter has illustrated each student's individual experiences that influenced their wellbeing. Individual's experiences, although particular to them, illustrated the interplay between the students' personal, inside and outside contexts and their wellbeing and lifeworld. Correspondingly, each illustrated that their wellbeing was influenced by a myriad of elements that interconnected and interplayed across their contexts (Dodge *et al.*, 2012; Long *et al.*, 2012). While uncovering their own active role in their wellbeing, (Van Manen, 2014) as they made sense of experiences and constructed or reconstructed their wellbeing and lifeworld (Berger and Luckman, 1989). This chapter illustrates the individual personal and contextual nature of wellbeing, including its ability to shift and change over time in the moment or between contexts. While illuminating the significance of some experiences that did not enable the student to make sense of them and reconstruct their wellbeing. Equally, it demonstrates the nature of influences upon wellbeing as pushing or pulling, in the moment and over time. Identifying some contrasting nuances to how the literature currently understands wellbeing; including that it may be positive, negative or neither and may differ in different contexts of the individual's lifeworld, while likening wellbeing to a matrix of influences. Throughout, students reiterated that the individual cannot be separated from their context or vice versa; inferring that both hedonistic and eudemonic wellbeing may interplay in everyday contexts of student's lives (Huta and Ryan, 2010). Moreover, particular themes have been identified including the role of time, emotions, people and relationships, individual's health status, places and spaces, roles and responsibilities. Equally, some insight into how individual's made sense of experiences, is uncovered and linked to beliefs, behaviours and attitudes; highlighting wellbeing as a subjective, individual and contextual construct.

Chapter 5 will present the commonalities of the different students' experiences across all their materials, focusing on the inside HE context, given the focus of this research and desire to inform HE.

## **5.0 Chapter 5 From Parts to Commonalities**

### 5.0. Introduction

The following chapter illustrates the overall depth of the research findings across the students and their respective materials. The inside HE context is presented given the need to inform this context and the ability of this research to inform and shape HE. Moreover, this chapter builds on chapter four, which illustrates the particular experiences of each student within this research. This chapter returns to the whole, completing the hermeneutic cycle (Smith *et al.*, 2009) and allowing an in-depth insight into students' perspectives of their wellbeing (Bainbridge, 2015).

However, this focus should not detract from the individual's personal and outside of HE contexts, which influence the individual's wellbeing as a whole, and interact with their inside HE context. Nor should it raise the context of HE as more or less important than other contexts, within these students' everyday experiences. The elements may have multiple layers of influence or span across contexts of the individual's lifeworld (Van Manen 2011; 2014). However, for this chapter, common elements that influence how participants describe, maintain and manage their wellbeing, and how students make sense of experiences, are analysed.

### 5.1. Influences Inside HE Context;

#### 5.1.1 People and Relationships

All participants highlighted the importance and varied influence of people and relationships;

##### 5.1.1.1. Cohort, Friends and Peers

All students identified the different roles, types of relationships and different levels of influence particular individuals might have on their wellbeing. They also illustrated their relationships with others using a particular language. For example, friends or peers to signify less formal or predominantly positive relationships with others.

Alternatively, participants used more formal language to differentiate less positive experiences and relationships, for example cohort or peers.

*Anne's Drawing clearly identified different roles for people of influence, using bubbles and words near various groups and individuals to depict the same.*

*Jeans Drawing has written the words in her drawing; "Class Friends- Support" at different points.*

Correspondingly James highlights the different relationships with friends, old and new.

*“But then at home my family really, you can’t separate them though cos they go together and influence each other, my friends, my friends here and all of it really.”*

(Pg8)

While Anne reiterated friends are different and can be positive or negative influences,

*“Good and bad Friends throughout the years, having that makes you appreciate people, what to look for, and they are definitely a major factor in welfare.”* (Pg1)

Throughout the material, the participant’s highlighted that they have different friends for different things as illustrated by Jean

*“Yeh, I have got my small group outside Uni then my small group in Uni, my table, if you like which we have known each other for our three years now so we have stuck together as our table, (smiling) and again that is brilliant, cos there is that encouragement, cos my friends outside of Uni have got a degree already, so they know what it’s like so we can chat. And another friend of mine is doing her diploma, actually, in early years, so she’s got to give that in at the same time as me...”* (Pg5)

Jean also highlighted her friends and peers as important influences, given their role in encouraging and motivating her as above and

*“So yeh they help loads, and I think my peers here help to cos... cos everyone is motivated and everyone wants to do well, so yeh they help.”* (James, Pg2)

Alternatively, single students illustrated the shift in relationships with family as they moved away and became more independent;

*“...So, learning to be independent pay the bills, etc. how you manage that; oh yes, paying the bills do the studying... Yeh, I think that was really hard learning to juggle all that and studying because I’ve never drunk or partied, I didn’t think my Mum would let me come to Uni, but she did. And I made up for it then, and that was awful, sleeping patterns... I think with all first years it’s hard to establish, yeh I am better now (laughs). My Mum and Dad don’t know anything about this, so it’s good. (laughs)”* (Anne, Pg10)

And

*“Yes, cos Mum and Dad help me, at Uni I was on my own, well had friends etc. but I was there for them, not the other way round really.” (Charlotte, Pg26)*

Across four of the six students’ materials, the complexity and changes in friendships and relationships were linked to whether friends were at or had been at university, and understood the nature and pressures of studies. These findings underpin the importance of relationships with others and the student’s ability to engage and have positive experiences within HE (Axelson and Flick, 2010; Baron and Corbin, 2012).

#### 5.1.1.2. Housemates

This theme was related to all 3 single students who lived away from home, with housemates. Those with positive experiences of housemates (Anne and to some extent Charlotte) classed them as friends or peers. While James, clearly labelled them as housemates, assigning them a negative connotation given their negative influence upon his health and wellbeing.

However, Charlotte identified the difficulty she experienced building relationships with housemates because she arrived late,

*“Yes... the struggle was with the first year, I came four days late for Uni... cos I had a holiday and the housemates I have in year one had all got that relationship building, they got together and got on, and I seemed to be an outsider. So, that put a lot of pressure on my health, and wellbeing and made me ill.” (Pg10).*

And in contrast, her later experience with a friend who became her housemate,

*“Then when second year came they all got a house together, and left me on my own, which then... it happened, the same, as the student who does English, so then we got together, and now we are really good friends, then we just found other people.” (Pg10).*

Highlighting the variation in experiences and significance of relationships between single students’ and their housemates. Linking such relationships are the shared spaces, experiences and time, which might be either positive or negative as suggested by Shelter (2017). These instances illustrate how meaningful these experiences might be to students’ wellbeing, health (Shelter, 2017) and their ability to engage with their studies. The impact of these issues is underestimated by HE and are not connected to the student experience, beyond the first few weeks (HEPI and HEA, 2017).

### 5.1.1.3. Tutors and HE Staff

Most participants highlighted their relationships with tutors as influential to their ability to engage with their studies, impacting upon their overall outcomes,

*All the staff on our course, they were so supportive and really helped. Our course is so brilliant, and I have spoken to others about their course and their tutorials are horrendous, they don't want anything to do with them. I understand some people might make things up, and you're at Uni now and have to be a big girl or big boy now, but well you guys generally care, and you help us. You want us to graduate and get a good degree, and that's the sense I get. I really love that (nodding).” (Anne, Pg7).*

And

*“Definitely important... (Staff) ... being able to do my learning so I can get on with it and not get stressed. (Nods affirmation) ...Yep.” (Charlotte, Pg8)*

Students' identified that their relationships with staff influenced their wellbeing in three ways; firstly, in terms of academic staff's expectations of them. Secondly, most participants' perceived tutors' expectations of them, which they linked to their ability to develop a relationship with staff, and finally, participants' expectations of the staff.

*“You are the complete guide (laughs)... I know it's my expectations, but I presume your planning says, right we know that you have got this amount of hours, you have got four lectures, so if the lecture takes up this amount of time you will have this left...so I know that it's about our expectations, but we come in and think you know, and I know your human... (Susan, Pg11).*

These findings link the expectations and personalities between staff and students, to the kind of relationships they might build; potentially impacting the students' ability to engage with their studies and gain support (Temple *et al.*, 2014).

*“I think emailing tutors; So, I email them and they give me feedback that way...was good at that and we had a good relationship. \*\*\* always responded to me and helped me in*

*\*\*\*\*(module). There are certain tutors that aren't approachable, and they make it known that they don't want to be approached as well. There is one that will*

*help certain people but not others. I think that's something that the whole year group knows about it, so we are kind of wary about it." (James, Pg8)*

These themes interconnect to others, illustrating a level of complexity, which drew together relationships and teaching and learning strategies. Students also highlighted the importance of staff being friendly, approachable and non-judgmental, and their role as sign posters to other forms of support, as suggested by Temple *et al.*, (2014).

Interestingly, students highlighted the importance of staff personality and approachability above the academic nature of their relationship with them. These findings are in contrast with data about the quality of teaching and learning, student experience and success (HEPI and HEA, 2017). Which currently considers whether staff are helpful or supportive, linking this to their academic role and positive student experience, perhaps highlighting an area for further development. Students recognised the power of academic staff in relation to assessments, expectations and marking, but not necessarily with negative connotations.

#### 5.1.2. Personality, Self and Identity

All students consistently inferred their own active role within their lifeworld and within that, the construction of their wellbeing. Simultaneously, each student's particular experiences highlighted the constant influence and interplay between their personality, sense of self, esteem, confidence and traits such as self-awareness, coping and resilience. Alongside their own role in reconstructed their identity, self and personality, through certain beliefs, behaviours, attitudes and actions (Kelly 1963, Berger and Luckman, 1989).

All the students expressed their perspectives of being resilient or coping, linking their behaviours to personality traits and their particular reactions to experiences. Highlighting the role of previous experiences and their emotions as part of reacting to, or making sense of, events. Students' linked to this to their ability to reconstruct their wellbeing, in the moment or over time.

#### 5.1.3. Community and Belonging

A sense of belonging was expressed by each student as important to their wellbeing. They linked belonging to their identity, roles and responsibilities, including their role as a student and belonging to their university. Their personal culture, confidence and relationships also linked to their sense of belonging, as did shared experiences, space

and time with their peers, cohort and staff.

*“Yeh, so that’s the flag of Monserrat and that’s the coconut tree to me that’s like my culture and stuff. That’s been a big thing for me... Especially coming to Uni, cos I never knew the differences in culture, like I thought I was English and like basically, British, but there are a lot of differences... Some beautiful and some bad, I’ve seen both the good and bad side of it, but I love meeting different people, so that’s where I stand on that so...” (Anne, Pg4).*

#### Jean’s Drawing “Meeting new people.”

Susan identified the different relationships mature students experienced with their peers

*“And last year some of them wanted me to help them, then that’s my day to do that or this, and it has a knock-on effect... Yes, there are several divisions, things like that but I do get on with everybody.”*

*“I was giving somebody a lift, and I was helping another, then sitting with others, so I was linked to everybody. There are a few things but nothing major, and as a whole, it’s a nice group. They all got together at the end, no segregation or anything like that, that’s really good.” (Pg5).*

These findings illustrate the importance of belonging and the role of peers and cohorts in establishing a sense of community. Highlighting the importance of shared experiences and circumstances in establishing a sense of belonging within the HE community, as suggested by Devovan and Macaskill (2013).

#### 5.1.4. Resources and Space to Study

University services, library facilities, IT resources, and a place to study influenced all participants’ ability to engage with their studies. James’s experience of the library was positive, although his motive for attending was linked to personal issues with housemates and not necessarily his studies.

*“We used to go down there a lot, to escape from the house, so I spent about six hours a day every day for a few months in there...There was what we needed, we could even watch the TV’s and football in those rooms at the back, as we worked, it was good...We used to take the rooms at the side cos you can get the TV up on to the big*

screens, we used to take food and drinks, be in there. People used to take quilts in there and whatever...” (James, Pg11).

These excerpts illustrate the library as a useful place and its facilities as supporting students’ studies and broader interests.

*Karen’s Drawing highlights the importance and positive impact of late opening hours in the library, and the negative impact of IT issues and access, because of her learning needs and study patterns.*



*“The library being away from campus; cos that’s another ten-fifteen minutes to walk, then by the time I have found a computer and set up, I probably get about half an hour then I will have to leave to go and get the kids, is it worth it? Probably not...”*  
(Karen Pg6)

Illustrating easy access and location of the library as factors influencing her study patterns and access to support. However, this might also link to the role of time and different learning styles and space preference. In contrast, Jean’s experience on a smaller campus with a shared library, highlights the importance of atmosphere, access and other users in the library as barriers

*“Hmm... personally for me... I find the library is a barrier, but because there is a lot of young people in there (cringes and smiles) ... Sometimes there are international students in there to, they have a different culture, and this is just me personally, it doesn’t make me want to sit down and work... do you know what I mean? I tend to get the books I need and go. I don’t find it a very conducive space.”* (Jean Pg5-6)

The varied use of learning resources and facilities by mature students and those with wider family responsibilities are illustrated here. These findings are in contrast with single students; who lived near or on campus and use the library as a study place and space to be. Across the participants there was a range of resources and different patterns to study preferences, spaces used and resources drawn on; highlighting the diverse needs and learning preferences of students in HE (Fry, Ketteridge and Marshall, 2014). Students also illustrated their ownership of their studies with a clear

understanding of the learning experiences, styles and different needs. Underpinning the importance of quality resources alongside teaching and learning strategies to support student's success (HEFCE, 2017a) and wellbeing.

#### 5.1.5. Money, Income, Lack of Money

Negative wellbeing and experiences relating to lack of money or income were shared across students.

With Charlotte linking the need to work with time constraints and pressure, reducing her ability to engage with her studies

*"... So like reading weeks, I have had to go home and work for the last three years. And over Christmas and everything, then that puts a backlog on all of my assignments." (Charlotte, Pg8).*

Karen's particular experience highlighted the longer-term impact of needing to fulfil her family's economic needs on her success, as suggested by Baron and Corbin (2012). Which resulted in further economic consequences because of the need to repeat a year of study. These findings have implications for student recruitment, retention and attrition, and affirms the issues identified around students experiencing funding, fees and financial difficulties (HEFCE 2017a; HEPI and HEA 2017).

Correspondingly, Susan highlighted a lack of money as linked to lack of choice and resources

*"Money, route of all evil, if you've got money you've got more time, I know that sounds silly but if you've got money you can put it towards doing things, cos it gives you more choice doesn't it? So I'll do this or get that or get this delivered, things like that, which also gives you more equipment as well, if you don't have to run back and forth from the library to borrow a book, you've got more time, it gives you more rest, cos if I had money I would have a cleaner... it's up to you to get everything done though, to make everything work, stretch the pounds. So, it's more stress, less equipment and less time. So, pounds and pence are important." (Pg1)*

Later Susan highlights the financial changes needed for her to attend HE, and the financial support needed from her partner's income

*"I think... I am very fortunate I have been able to do this cos my partner brings in the*

*majority of the wage, and I worked part-time, and we do need that part-time wage, but the maintenance loan you receive from coming to University was equivalent to my part time wage so I could come here and do this and it was the same as me working at pre-school.” (Pg2).*

The conflict and struggle experienced by students linked to money, finances and work are illustrated in these excerpts, highlighting a situation which has seemingly remained unchanged despite the link to poor student mental wellbeing and engagement (NUS Scotland, 2010). These inequities are personified even more given student’s studying in England experience different financial support and funding arrangements from those within Scotland and Wales (HEFCE 2017a; HE Division, 2017). In contrast, Anne identifies that her family was financially supporting her, and that enables her to focus on her studies, reiterating the importance of financial support.

*“... no, yeh, I get the finance like everyone and then my Mum and Dad help me, I don’t work. I am lucky I guess cos most of my friends do, but I can just concentrate on my studies. I just ring ‘Daddddy’ and say please...” (Anne, Pg13, Transcript).*

These excerpts reiterate the diversity of financial circumstances and related issues for students. Highlighting the complexity and stress related to lack of money and the impact of this on student’s ability to engage with their studies and gain the educational outcomes they are capable of, rather than the one they achieve under such circumstances (NUS Scotland, 2010).

#### 5.1.6. Teaching and Learning Activities

All the students clearly identified teaching approaches that enabled their learning best,

*“Sometimes you walk into sessions, and they are really boring, I know sometimes, you have to bombard us with content, but some people do it in a fun way, others just do it, and it’s too much... I think seminars session where we do an activity, then feedback and then discuss with each other and move on. That’s how I like to learn, not lectures...” (James, Pg10).*

These findings underpin the notion that varied teaching strategies are most helpful across larger student cohorts but also reiterates the importance of active learning opportunities. All the students also highlighted the importance of accessing staff for support but chose which staff to gain support from given their personality and

approachability. For example, James's interview text (Above) around specific tutors not being approachable. Furthermore, James highlighted the role of time, confidence and experience within HE as underpinning decisions about tutors and support

*"Yeh, it's more experience at Uni and getting used to how tutors work. The tutors can motivate or demotivate me..."* (James, Pg8).

The importance of staff as facilitators of student engagement and the significance of positive relationships and clear expectations of staff and students in working together is central to students' ability to engage and succeed within their studies. Importantly, the culture of staff and their institution can be linked here as could their particular wellbeing, workload and ability to support students, both academically or pastorally. Moreover, the wellbeing of staff might impact their capabilities or capacity to support students' wellbeing (Burgess *et al.*, 2018).

#### 5.1.7. Workload, Assessment and Deadlines

Students highlighted mostly negative emotions connected to workloads, deadlines and assessments including worry, stress and anxiety. They also depicted various strategies they used to complete assignments

*"Assignment, I read the handbook first then do my research and then build it from there really. I think it will be easier to plan, but I never do- until it's too late. Then my friend checks my grammar, and I check his. We have both got good grades this year so it should be okay."* (James, Pg7).

Alternatively

*"I plan, I can work under pressure cos I have done it as a job, and my Mum said she noticed that I can work under pressure... I am going to make myself do at least a hundred words every day and then even if it is a bit of a rush to the end, I know I have given myself time and reading every day."* (Jean, Pg11)

Different students preferred different kinds of assessment

*"When it comes to doing creative stuff or artefacts I can't do that, I don't like it; I can do the written stuff, but I am not good at arty stuff. Presentations I suffer at as well; I don't like them either. My ideal assignment is an essay."* (James, Pg7).

*"Assessment wise, as a person, I would say I am more of a creative person, so I like*

*doing the posters, presentations, ... I am not very good at because I get very anxious with speaking... Has that got better with more in year two...” (Charlotte, Pg16)*

These findings illustrate the need for varied modes of assessment to enable students to engage and succeed, but also the role of time and experience and students’ confidence. Alongside the negative role played out by worry and stress and its impact on their ability to engage and succeed (Devovan and Macaskill, 2013).

#### 5.1.8. Sense of Journey and End Goals

All participants highlighted a sense of journey in different ways within their materials using language, metaphor, images, emoji’s, clocks, rivers and Jean’s notion of a game board. Students highlighted the constraints upon time as a consistent issue that reduced their engagement with their studies.



Contrastingly single students highlighted motivators such as their future career, material items and money. Students with children or family roles and responsibilities (Susan, Jean and Karen) linked their success to social mobility for themselves and their family. Simultaneously linking their education as a means of securing their wellbeing in itself (Carr, 2005), given the personal or developmental changes experienced.

#### James’s Drawing

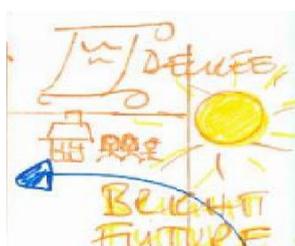
Illustrates material goals at the end of his journey



Explaining in his interview,

*“Yeh, that’s the weather it gets better as things get better... at the end; ice cream and chocolate, Yes! ... my goals and good times.” (Pg2).*

While *Jean’s Drawing* indicates her future goal as a metaphor for a “bright future” but also the journey using snakes and ladders as the basis of her drawing



*“It’s my bright future... that’s how I am at the end... because what happened is... I have had such a journey... of literally, snakes and ladders...” (Jean, Pg3).*

Simultaneously, the role time played, and the ups and downs of their experiences, emotions, journey and study outcomes were illustrated across all students' materials. All the students considered their studies and the end results as motivation. Alternatively, they identified time as a barrier, given its perceived quick passage retrospectively or constraint, in relation to competing priorities, roles and pressures; including work, lack of money, deadlines and assessments.

The participants' daily and personal contexts were interconnected and influenced the construction of their lifeworld (Berger and Luckman, 1989; Dahlberg, 2015) and their wellbeing. These findings confirm their active role in constructing their wellbeing and the complexity, interconnectedness and relationships, between the individual's personal construct and their daily contexts as suggested by Kelly (1963).

## **5.2. Describing Maintaining and Managing their Wellbeing**

Students described their wellbeing as

### **5.2.1. Connected to Health Dimensions but Separate from Health**

Participants' described their wellbeing as connected to their physical, emotional, social and environmental dimensions of health but that it was more holistic than health, underpinning wellbeing as connected to, but separate from health

*"Hmmm it's hard; I would put health there, health with the physical... aspects and maybe mental... and my wellbeing would be the rest of my development so that would be intellectually, language, social, emotional sides of how you cope and deal with life and live your life... hmm... It's how you see stuff, isn't it... Yeh, so wellbeing is more general... Holistic, that's why people say health and wellbeing, cos it's more holistic, it's all together..."* (Anne, Pg4).

Or

*"I think that wellbeing differs from your health is what's personal to you... it's like your mental capacity physical wellbeing... Intellectually... the persona that you give off, the personality... the outside bubble. ... that other people perceive."* (Charlotte, Pg5).

#### **5.2.1.1. Health Status**

All the students identified that their health status linked to their wellbeing, given

its influence upon their health.

*Jean's Drawing shows words metaphor, emoji's and symbols around chronic neck and back pain, placing this near a snake to depict, bringing her down the game board. Furthermore, she uses words and symbols;*



Expanding, “Yes, that’s my neck, my pain, periodically I have to deal with that, it’s there, and then I will have to go to a chronic pain clinic, and then I have to sort that out. ... Yeh, damage limitation and I don’t make a big thing of it cos it is what it is.”

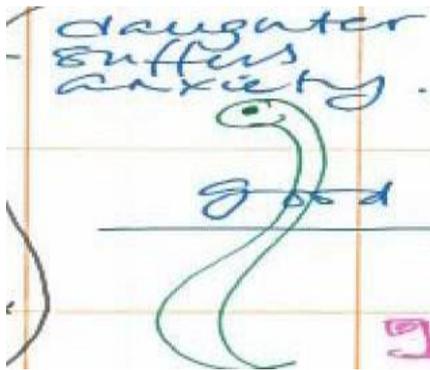
(Pg9).

Jean infers that wellbeing and health are connected, because her health status influenced their daily life, impacting upon her wellbeing, as did others. Highlighting that for those students who experienced some form of ill health, their wellbeing was affected, given its connection to their inability to live their daily lives. These findings illustrated the deficit model of health (Baggott, 2013) alongside the quality of her life (Harvey and Taylor, 2013) as being connected to her wellbeing. Correspondingly, this highlights that wellbeing and health are somewhat taken for granted until they appear to be negatively impacted (Green and Tones, 2010). However, these nuances illustrate that measuring wellbeing is therefore unrealistic and flawed, given the subjective and consistently changing nature of wellbeing (Dodge *et al.*, 2012; Long *et al.*, 2012). These findings are in contrast to the current evidence concerned with defining wellbeing, but emphasise the potential for wellbeing to be both hedonistic and eudemonic in nature (Huta and Ryan, 2010).

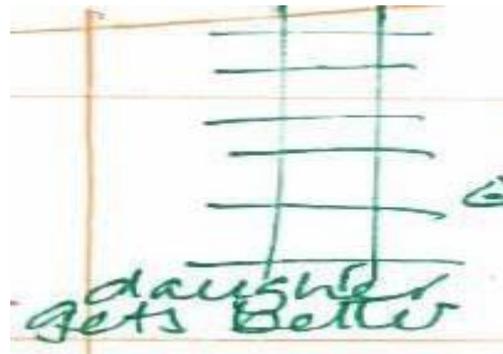
#### 5.2.1.2. Health of Others

Jean, Karen and Susan indicated the influence of the health of others on their own wellbeing

*Jean's Drawing illustrated the potential negative or positive impact of others' health on her wellbeing, including the snake taking down Jean's wellbeing and the ladder taking it up when her daughter gets better;*



*Susan's Drawing*



*On the “home” side of the page, Susan uses metaphor to depict environmental notions of health including pictures of weather, time of year, linking it to health behaviours such as access outside and exercise, taking the dog for a walk and ideas around space, environment and wellbeing.*

Expanding “Not being able to feel well, cos it’s raining or chucking it down... Yeh, I think if it’s a lovely sunny day people and people are like oh what a lovely day....and that’s people around you and they are like, let’s get out... You will be a bit more positive, rather than... ooh what an awful day... and that’s people around you... There is none of that in the winter, it’s all a bit of a lull... and so it’s... Hmm... important.” (Susan, Pg4).

Reiterating the constraints for some students with different roles and responsibilities (Forste and Jacobsen, 2013) and the need to understand such issues in more depth.

### 5.2.2. Personality, Coping and Resilience

Students consistently analysed their own role in constructing their wellbeing, pulling on their experience from their daily lives to describe it.

*“I think that wellbeing differs your health is what’s personal to you... it’s like your mental capacity physical wellbeing. Intellectually... the persona that you give off, the personality... the outside bubble... that other people perceive” (Charlotte, Pg5).*

*“I think wellbeing covers more ... like your health, how you feel, how you’re doing?” (James, Pg9).*

Each student consistently linked their personality, identity, self and sense of positivity to their perception of what wellbeing was, as well as how they experienced it (Strickhouser, Zell and Krizan, 2017). Furthermore, most students identified themselves as constructor and moderator of their wellbeing, considering themselves as responsible for their health. Students linked this to their capacity or ability to cope with particular experiences, and their own reactions, emotions, beliefs, behaviours and actions, which helped them to maintain or manage their health, and wellbeing. Most students (Anne, James, Susan and Jean) identified that they were a resource, linking this to their individual personality, capacity or resilience. All the students identified that it was hard to describe wellbeing, rather than experience it, highlighting that the preoccupation with describing and measuring wellbeing may be misplaced, over understanding the lived experience of it (Dodge *et al.*, 2010). Moreover, students identified that their wellbeing could not be separated from them, or their everyday contexts, which gives it its meaning, and enables its construction.

### 5.2.3. Beliefs, Attitudes, Behaviours and Actions

Each student highlighted certain beliefs, attitudes, behaviours and actions as linked to how they maintained and managed their wellbeing. They identified different behaviours as linked to previous experiences, time and contexts, as suggested by Strickhouser, Zell and Krizan, (2017).

*Anne's, Susan's and James's Drawings: Illustrate behaviours including being with others or groups and balancing things; including food and diet, social lives, dancing and music or being out in clubs, sports, exercise and being outside. Annotation around images of food words and emoji within their drawings including words, emoji and images*

*Susan's Drawing also illustrated sleeping, behaviours around food and drink (alcohol) and putting weight on/dieting as attitudes behaviours and actions that helped her maintain her wellbeing.*

Furthermore, Anne, Karen and James identified that putting on weight, then dieting to lose it, or going to the gym to stay healthy, and monitoring their weight, were part of their everyday behaviours and managing their wellbeing.

Although students illustrated common beliefs, attitudes and behaviours frequency that they carried these out in and the impact of them on their wellbeing, was tied to their personality and means of making sense of their experiences. Other factors they linked included their previous experiences, roles and responsibilities, time, economic situation, other people and relationships

*“Yeh (Nods) or frustrated, then cross, but then it goes ... (Nods affirmation) Yeh, experience really, I have had to deal with a lot.”* (James, Pg5).

These excerpts illustrate that his coping mechanism is associated with behaviours which are learnt (Baggott, 2013). Similarly, Berger and Luckman (1989) identify these experiences as being repeated by James because he has internalised and reified them, so he continues them. James’s also linked his behaviours to his personality, coping, and resilience and reiterated the influence of time and his actions on his health. Equally, this uncovers the interplay, interconnection and interdependence between what student’s experience, think, feel and do (Engestrom, 2001; 2010).

Across students’ drawings, words were used to indicate wider behaviours and lifestyle choices, including “having fun” (James), dancing and music (Anne), “sport” (Charlotte) and “University societies” (Karen). These findings illustrate a wide variety of different behaviours, actions and ways of managing and maintaining wellbeing, between participants. Students also highlighted talking to others, using space and time out, socialising with friends and family, and using distraction to manage and improve their wellbeing, reiterating the potential for healthy initiatives to support student wellbeing in HE (Scriven and Hodgkins, 2012).

However, several students identified the difference between knowing what they should do and being able to do it given lack of time, money, the pressure of deadlines or lowered capacity (Anne, James, Jean)

*“I try and eat well don’t always succeed, but I do try, I know what I should be doing, walk don’t take the car, sleep cos I think my body tells me I have had enough. I don’t drink; I have drunk before, but cos of the medication for my pain. I don’t drink*

*because of my pain, with the medication for my pain, and sleep that's another thing pain and sleep, so you balance those out.” (Jean, Pg9).*

Alternatively, the impact and influence of negative emotions and the need to develop resilience and manage their wellbeing, and that of others, was also highlighted by students (Anne, James, Charlotte, Jean)

*“Managing people’s emotions, a lot, to the detriment of mine sometimes, and on the odd occasion, probably about three times in the last few months that I will just weep. I will just find a room where the children won’t see me and just go... Err, you know, it’s clear and then it’s regroup, and then move on cos it’s also what do you do... you have got to keep going... So, it’s that kind of keep going attitude... yes, yes, definitely.” (Jean, Pg9).*

Equally, previous experiences and the development of management strategies were used as reference points by students to maintain and manage their wellbeing in the future. Illustrating the potential for HE to influence student’s wellbeing through education (Scriven and Hodgkins, 2012) and by expanding healthy university frameworks (Dooris *et al.*, 2010).

#### 5.2.4. Role of Individual’s Health and That of Others

All students identified the relationship between maintaining and managing their wellbeing as linked to their own perception of their health, their health status, and the health of others. All students were clear that their health and wellbeing were separate but connected and related to their own personality, beliefs and actions around health,

*Susan’s Drawing illustrated a balanced scale between herself and her peers and cohort, on the University part of the page and she writes “Health Status of myself and my Family/ Friends” including her own health, her son’s and partner’s, and depicts physical, emotional and mental health with the use of emoji, symbols and image.*

Explaining,

*“This all depends on obviously how you’re feeling; how much work you can complete. So, it depends on who needs you the most, time, everything, whether you are well-rested.*

*(Pointing to diagram) You have friends crying, who require you, sick family...” (Susan, Pg2).*

These excerpts reiterate the role of emotions and the sense of struggle in managing the impact of negative health experiences that individuals may experience; highlighting the complexity and interplay between the individual's roles, relationships and responsibilities, for themselves and others, as well as, illustrating how health experiences impact the individual's wellbeing.

This section highlights the interplay between the individual's personal construct, their contexts and experiences related to their health, and its relationship with their wellbeing. These findings refuted the usefulness of medical models of health, or models concerned with the absence of illness or disease in HE (Baggott, 2013) or health issues and problems (MWBHE, 2015; Dooris *et al.*, 2017) within HE. The potential for settings or community-based models of health promotion has also been highlighted (Scriven and Hodgkins, 2012). Moreover, Anne's experience of being diagnosed with dyslexia, and how she struggled with its label as a disability, rather than it as part of her identity have reiterated how stigma, labelling and being unaware of what might be wrong, or how to get help, can reduce student's capacity to access support (NUS Scotland, 2010). The need for further research into how students may be facilitated better in such circumstances is clear. Equally, Jean's experience of chronic neck and back pain, and how she negotiates her comparative wellbeing day by day, illustrates the need for research which explores how health experiences may link to student's retention or attrition.

### **5.3. Making Sense and Meaning of Experiences**

All the students identified common means of making sense of their experiences throughout their materials. Highlighting the importance of and interplay between, using certain strategies and actions that helped them make sense of their experiences.

#### **5.3.1. Thinking, Cognitive Space and Time**

Across materials, participants used hesitation, cognitive space/thinking time, or pauses, to collect their thoughts and make sense of experiences. These behaviours and actions increased at points where participants had difficulty in expressing experiences, or when individual's reacted with emotions, as they retold events, potentially, making sense of their experiences within the research (Smith *et al.*, 2009). Moon (2006) highlighted this as the individual creating cognitive space, to enable thinking or "cognitive housekeeping" (Moon, 2006 pp. 36) to take place as participants made

sense or assigned meaning. The role of time in terms of its passage, historical context and its role in making sense and affording meaning, is clearly linked to all students' materials reiterating its importance.

### 5.3.2. Reflection, Retelling, Narrative and Story

Students used varying degrees of reflection and analysis as they set about retelling their experiences, using their materials to support their narrative and story, offering their particular perspective. These strategies enabled them to express thoughts and retell events; even when they were emotive and very personal. Moreover, several students highlighted that their story and narrative allowed them to reflect on their experiences and evaluate their internal perspective (Jean, Anne, Charlotte). While others highlighted the importance of these mechanisms in providing space, to gain alternative perspectives which then supported them in making sense of their experiences (Jean, Anne, Karen, Susan) (Holliday, 2008).

*"I come from a family of storytellers, my nan was always telling stories with the reasons behind why things happened. Even my Mum now does it... It's about; stepping back... and reflection, so what happens is, so if something happens, we would sit down, have a cuppa and talk."* (Jean, Pg16).

Most students used metaphor, including rivers, weather, mountains, clouds, snakes and ladders, life as a journey, everyday events and experiences, and emoji, within their drawing and interview to express things that might be difficult to express otherwise.

*"... It's like your mental health is like an umbrella...over the top of it all... then underneath... (hand motions and air draws)"* (Charlotte, Pg5).

Or;

*"... It's my rucksack, and this is my problems that I have got to overcome, and overtime as I get rid of them, I get rid of my rucksack."* (James, Pg1).

Correspondingly, all students used particular space fillers, (e.g. Hmm, Err) words and language, to illustrate the need for thinking or space, to organise their thoughts within their materials. Within their interviews, students expressed emotions in varying ways, including openly becoming emotional, via their body language, language including their tone and voice emphasis, and facial expressions. Equally, as suggested by West, (2009) what was said, and inferred was also important. These findings illustrate the

continuousness and importance of non-verbal communications; both in relation to making sense of events in the moment, or as they are revisited in some way (Van Manen, 1990; 2014).

### 5.3.3. Role of Emotions

All the students consistently expressed emotions across their materials; as either a response to, or as a way of coping with experiences, but also to internalise the meaning of them and their experiences (Berger and Luckman, 1989). Moreover, participants' perception of events was influenced by their emotional state at the time, as events unfolded and as meaning was made. For example, within student's drawings, they expressed emotions using colour, image, words, metaphor, emoji, symbolism, space and position of items, illustrating the synthesis between the experience and their emotions. Illustrating the emotive nature of wellbeing. These findings reveal why the literature links emotive perspectives such as happiness or satisfaction to wellbeing but simultaneously infers their simplicity. These discoveries undermine the reliability of such definitions and the scales and measures linked to them. Moreover, it does not accurately represent the lived experiences of these students.

The complexity of making sense of their experiences gave rise to most students uncovering the link between emotions, experiences, reflective analysis and their perception of experiences. These findings highlight that emotions impacted across their contexts, within the moment or over time. All students expressed negative emotions and a sense of struggle and loss with significant experiences. They also linked emotions to their studies in so far as their confidence and anxiety around their success. These findings confirm wellbeing as a construct bound in the individual's personality, their emotions, context and time. Correspondingly illustrating that they build their sense of wellbeing from inside out, confirming it as a social construct according, to Bassot (2012).

### 5.3.4. Personality, Sense of Self, Identity and Confidence

Students continually expressed their own role in their ability to make sense of experiences despite their different personalities, levels of confidence, self-awareness and identities. The difference was how, their particular traits played out and linked to their beliefs, attitudes and actions to enabled them to make sense, or not, of their experiences. Interestingly, most students linked their ability to be positive to their

ability to make sense of events but also recognised their own ability to create and control the sense they made from their experiences (Jean, Anne, Karen and Susan)  
For example

*(Talking about her role in the Students Union and work) "... because it's part of my positive, because it's made me realise that I can do more than I thought, which has impacted upon my work (Uni) cos when I think, I can't do it; I think well two years ago I could not do the job that I am now, so if I can do that... Confidence (nodding affirmation), yeh, to be able to say I can do this. Cos otherwise I would not have done that or I wouldn't have got this far, I must have something that's got me this far."*  
(Karen, Pg14)

The role of students themselves in their own wellbeing is clearly uncovered in this research, reiterating both the subjective and shifting nature of wellbeing, as the individual moves through their everyday life and contexts. Berger and Luckman (1989) identified that the individual needs to reify their lifeworld and in this case their wellbeing, which arguably illustrates the reciprocal relationship between the individual, the world and the construction of their reality.

#### 5.4. Conclusion

In conclusion, this section has overviewed the elements that might be termed as commonalities (West, 1998; Bainbridge, 2015) that the students' highlighted within their materials. The focus of this section is the participants' HE context rather than the entire findings, given the professional field to be influenced. All the students 'clearly identified that the HE context, although influential on its own, was hard to separate from other everyday contexts that they experienced. All the students identified that their HE experiences had an impact that was significant across their other contexts. Confirming the interdependence and complexity of wellbeing, the individual's personal and other contexts. Moreover, the current evidence defining and measuring wellbeing is shown to be simplistic and unreliable, given the definitions uncovered within this research are much broader, contextually and individually influenced and continuously shifting.

Alternately, this research infers the potential for both hedonistic and eudemonic ideas of wellbeing being connected and interplaying with how students saw their wellbeing (Huta and Ryan, 2010); illustrating the importance of instilling wellbeing in HE so

that it might be responsive to students and fulfil its role as an agent of society (Keeling, 2014).

This research has tried to represent the individual and common experiences of students and their active role within their everyday lifeworld, their wellbeing and vice versa (Berger and Luckman, 1989). However, at times, several students experienced a negative or neutral sense of wellbeing, as opposed to positive, when they were unable to make sense of events and reconstruct their wellbeing. Some common strategies, behaviours and actions that might enable the individual to make sense of events were also linked to emotions at that point in time (Moon, 2006). Equally, the push and pull between influences and how the individual's experience shifts constantly, confirming it as a construct. A point Antonovsky (1996) links to being human. Kelly, (2014) implies that this research has implications for HE in terms of how it supports student's learning and their holistic development as human beings, and their wellbeing, given the broader ethical and societal roles of HE. Correspondingly, the findings illustrated in this and the next chapter are by no means comprehensive but have enabled a snapshot of wellbeing, students in HE experience it.

## **6.0 Chapter 6 Drawing it Together, Back to the Whole**

### **6.0. Introduction**

This chapter sets out the rationale, underpinning principles and the method of adapting Engestrom's CHAT (2001), Kelly's (1963) Personal Construct Theory, and Berger and Luckman's (1989) social construction of reality treatise, into the prism and matrix of wellbeing. This approach allows the reader insight into the structure and flow of influences and student experiences that shape the prism and matrix. The prism and matrix allow the interconnectedness, interplay and relationship between the individual, their contexts, and their wellbeing, to be illustrated clearly, and with transparency. Points and nexus of influence allow the temporal flow of influences to be illustrated, allowing the findings to be explained with a depth and clarity that enables understanding of student's wellbeing.

The second section of this chapter offers a reflection upon the research process, and how it illustrates Yardley's (2000) principles; indicating the quality, validity, reliability and acceptability, of this research, as evidence. Finally, Chapter seven provides a summary of the answers to the research questions, the recommendations drawn from this research and final conclusions.

### **6.1. Rationale for Theoretical Development.**

Phenomenological research does not usually create theoretical frameworks, but is concerned with representing those experiencing a particular phenomenon within their everyday lived experiences (Van Manen, 1990; 2014; Conklin, 2014). The drive to adapt the theoretical framework came from the research findings themselves, given the depth and detail of them and the desire to represent student's perspectives.

Furthermore, the need to provide a clear and in-depth understanding, and prevent any loss or assumptions (West 1996) informed the need to illustrate the findings visually, to support both the explanation of the findings and its dissemination. The particular theories that were adapted included Engestrom (1987; 2001) CHAT Theory, Kelly's (1963) Personal Construct Theory and Berger and Luckman's (1989) treatise on the social construction of reality, given their focus on how individuals think, feel and act. Equally, Yardley's (2000) principles for establishing the quality, validity and

reliability of qualitative research, resulted in the adaptation of these theoretical frameworks, so as to be sensitive to the research and its context and enable its ability to be used as evidence despite such an unusual approach within phenomenology. Ashton (2014) called for research to develop theoretical frameworks to understand, communicate, analyse and evaluate wellbeing, within different contexts. The purpose and findings of this research also provided the rationale to develop the prism and matrix of wellbeing. Moreover, both Silverman (2014) and Punch and Oancea (2014) highlight that theoretical frameworks can be generated to ensure clarity and communication of research findings, especially when the findings are complex. Hence the adaptation of the prism and matrix of wellbeing as a visual theoretical framework because it provides a robust and natural method of presenting the findings given the visual nature of research questions, the array of students' materials and the principles underpinning the research (Bagnoli, 2009).

#### 6.2. Principles Underpinning the Theoretical Framework

Four principles underpinned the adaptation of the theoretical framework. The first being the need to ensure the representation of students' voices (Bagnoli, 2009; Buckley and Waring, 2013). The second being to be able to clearly communicate the findings without loss or assumptions (West, 1989; Bainbridge, 2015) as it is applied, evaluated and adjusted (Holliday, 2008; Newby, 2010). The third being to ensure the mode of representing the findings aids the dissemination of the research so that it can inform my practice and the wider HE community (Dodge *et al.*, 2012; Long *et al.*, 2012; Jongbloed and Andres, 2015). The fourth being, the need to ensure the validity and trustworthiness of the research, so it is accepted as evidence (Yardley, 2000; Newby, 2010).

Engestrom's (1987; 2001) 3<sup>rd</sup>. generation of CHAT theory, Kelly's (1963) personal identity construct, and Berger and Luckman's (1989) social construction of reality essays, were adapted to represent student's individual and common perspectives of their lived experiences, of their wellbeing. The ability of these theoretical frameworks to be flexible, combine and allow me to illustrate the student's perspectives, directly using their materials, underpinned their adaptation (Engestrom, 1987; Roth *et al.*, 2012). Moreover, the complexity of the findings enabled the development of the internal matrix to illustrate the relationship between the individual, their contexts and

their constant influences that push and pull the individual's wellbeing (Bagnoli, 2009). The adaptability of the theoretical frameworks allowed the inclusion of the personal and other students contexts, using multiple spheres within the prism, and allowed the detail of the framework to be illustrated. This design enabling me to communicate how wellbeing might shift, allowing the matrix inside to be evidenced; and the representation of how different students defined, maintained, managed and constructed, their wellbeing to be illustrated.

Engestrom (2001) highlights the 3<sup>rd</sup>. generation of activity theory enables analysis and understanding of the relationship between what people feel, think and do to be communicated. The adaptation of this theoretical framework using the other theoretical perspectives and the direct findings of this research offered the opportunity to illustrate the individual's perspectives, actions and insight into how they constructed meaning and their wellbeing (Kelly, 1963; Berger and Luckman 1989). Equally, others confirmed CHAT 's usefulness as an un-adapted framework to use across different disciplines and contexts (Engestrom and Sannino, 2010; Roth *et al.*, 2012). The design of the prism and matrix of wellbeing was drawn directly from the research findings to ensure clear and transparent communication and representation of students' experiences were presented (Yardley, 2000; Smith *et al.*, 2009). Furthermore, the adaptation of the prism and development of the internal matrix, allow the depth of influences to be included, preventing them being lost, or their importance undermined, as suggested by West (1996) ensuring the research findings are communicated.

The dissemination of the findings will offer insight into wellbeing within HE and across other contexts and disciplines. The theoretical framework means the prism and matrix may enable others to explore wellbeing from their context, discipline or perspective (Newby, 2010). Allowing the theory to be applied, analysed, evaluated and adjusted to ensure its usefulness, reliability and validity (Yardley, 2000; Smith *et al.*, 2009). Overall the theoretical framework was adapted because it allows the illustration of the finite detail of students experiences individually and as a group. As well as how they thought, felt and acted within their everyday lives as students in HE. The flexibility of the prism and matrix means the contextual facets can be adjusted, added to, or spun, as the individual moves through their contexts or across time; enabling its implementation, evaluation and further development (Newby,

2010). The theoretical basis of the prism and matrix allows an in-depth critical analysis of itself, wellbeing and the lived experience, to be drawn out as it is disseminated.

Correspondingly, the in-depth understanding gained provides a new perspective so that wellbeing might be seen in more detail (Finlay, 2014; Van Manen, 2014). Simultaneously, it illustrates the complexity, interconnectedness and relationships between the individual, their everyday lives, their wellbeing, and vice versa; while providing a tool that may enable the dissemination of these and other future research findings. Driving forward the findings beyond the individual or small group within this research (Raskin, 2002). Lincoln and Guba (1985) link the development of theoretical frameworks to ensuring the research has authority and becomes evidence. Moreover, Bamberg (2010) highlighted the importance of representing findings so as not to detract from the particular elements, commonalities or layers of the findings, or the meaning given by participants. The visual representation of the prism and matrix was developed to allow clarity and explanation of the phenomenon of wellbeing and the best representation of the findings (Crilly and Blackwell, 2006; Holliday, 2008); primarily, as it will facilitate others to understand the phenomenon of wellbeing and apply the findings more robustly and reliably.

### 6.3. Method of Adapting the Framework

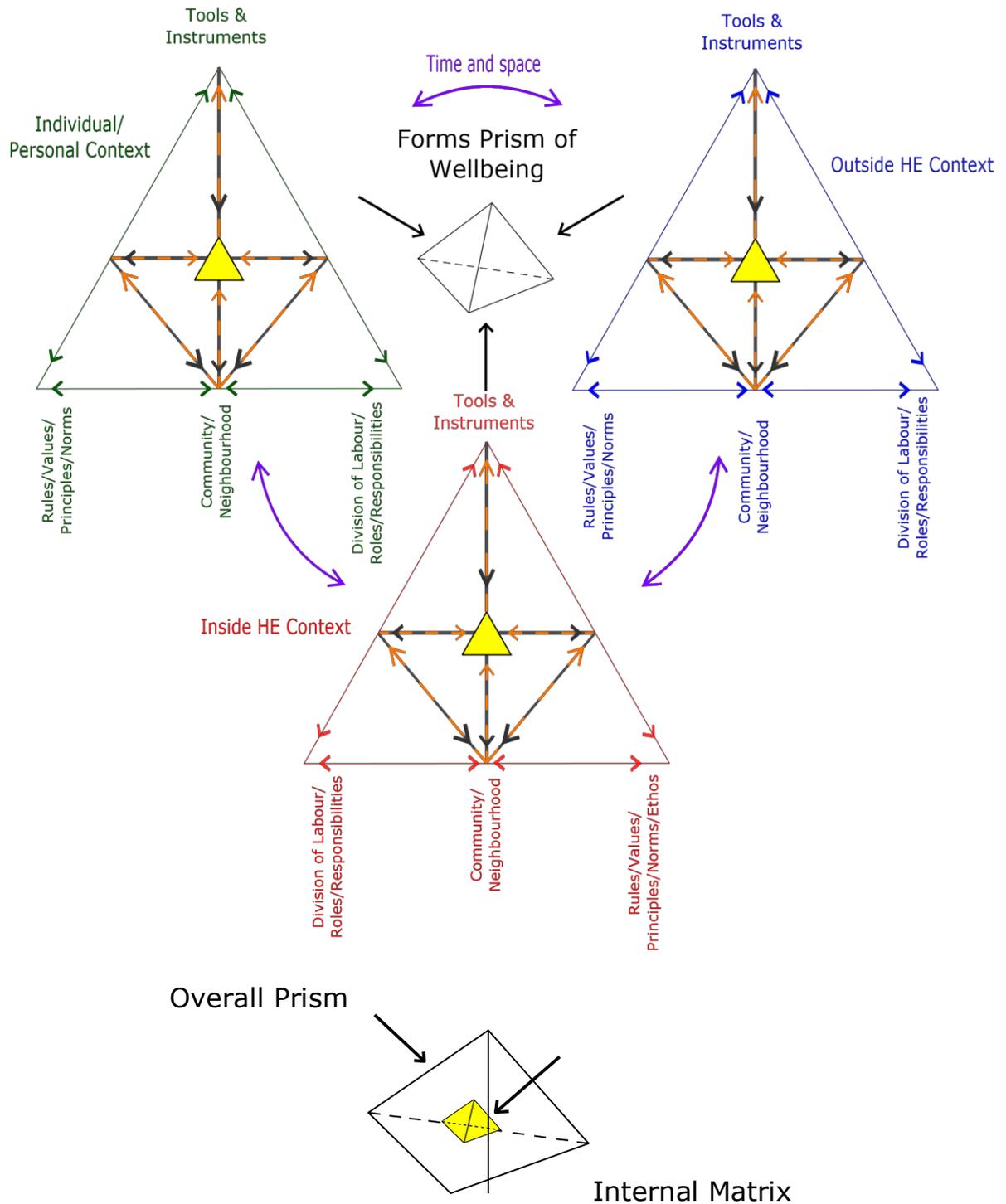
The adapted theoretical framework was adapted to illustrate the complexity, interplay and relationships between what influences students' wellbeing, how they make sense of their experiences and what they thought, felt and did, to maintain or manage their wellbeing. Moreover, it needed to capture wellbeing as a phenomenon, to give a coherent framework to enable the description, explanation, analysis and evaluation of wellbeing, within the students' everyday lives. Ashton (2014) clearly linked the potential for drawings to describe and explain the phenomenon from the first-person perspective. While others linked the visual adaptability of Engestrom's (1987; 2001) CHAT theory to its ability to effectively communicate how people experienced their health or education, suggesting its adaptation across other disciplines and contexts (Engestrom and Sannino, 2010; Roth *et al.*, 2012).

The need to illustrate the phenomenon of wellbeing and not just the descriptions of

the lived experience of students meant that Engestrom's CHAT theory alone was too narrow, and would place the focus upon the individual's experiences, rather than their wellbeing and experiences. However, Kelly's (1963) notion of multiple constructs or contexts enabled the individual's active role and the interconnectivity of their lifeworld, to be illustrated using the spheres of the prism, enabling how they made sense of experiences and constructed their wellbeing to be illustrated (Roth and Lee, 2007; D'albda, 2009). Moreover, placing wellbeing within a matrix enabled the continuous shifts and influences from alternate contexts to be shown. The idea that a prism splits light, or in this case, the individual's particular influences, enables either particular or common elements of influence to be illustrated and allows the prism to bring together the elements. This approach also enabled me to illustrate the influences different statuses and shifts as the prism rotates over time and in space, enabled a particular depth of insight to be gained.

The adaptation of the framework took place over several months and consisted of an iterative process that ran alongside the material analysis and included continued critical, reflexive analysis, evaluation and adjustment and readjustment of the framework throughout the process (Huberman and Miles, 2002; Holliday, 2008). The number, shape, position and the inclusion or exclusion of spheres, points and lines/nexuses and themes were continually subject to critical analysis. These measures enabled the elements to be positioned, repositioned and refined, as I evaluated their potential significance, link to the different contexts and the individual experiences of students. The particular and common elements of the students' experiences were considered, and each theme reviewed critically across individual students and their materials so that their position in the framework could be reiterated or refuted within the framework (Huberman and Miles, 2002; Newby, 2010). Equally, I used scenarios or instances from the students, to see how the framework would respond and how they played out. Holliday (2008) suggests such approaches enabled me insight from multiple perspectives, promoting a more in-depth insight into the individual's experiences, and a deeper, more critically evaluative understanding of the overall findings. West (1996) and Merrill and Est (2009) both suggest that this enabled elements to be included that which might otherwise have been missed, misrepresented or lost.

## 6.4. Overall Structure of Prism of Wellbeing



The overall prism is illustrated in the above framework to represent the individual, inside and outside contexts of HE. The framework illustrates the integral and active role of the individual and their broader contexts within the prism, enabling the

representation of their everyday contexts as students in HE and the construction of their wellbeing within their lifeworld (Kelly, 1963; Bruizzzone, 2014) and vice versa. The overall shape of the prism enables it to rotate as it moves through time, across the individual's contexts and within that their everyday experiences. Within the contexts or spheres, influences assert themselves by pushing or pulling through the points and lines (Nexuses) of influence to reshape the individual's wellbeing. Equally, time, history and previous experiences are reflected through the prism to enable a particular perspective to be seen, enabling the individual to draw on and from, the points and nexuses of influence, as well as their contexts and themselves. To make sense of their experiences, or not, constructing or reconstructing their wellbeing and lifeworld simultaneously. This approach to constructing the prism enables circumstances where the individual's wellbeing is either positive, negative or neither, to be illustrated (See Figure 1-4) and the multi-directional flow and complexity of influences to be seen alongside the relational and subjective nature of wellbeing (White, 2008; Engestrom and Sannino, 2010).

The framework is designed to illustrate the students as active agents within their construction of the own lifeworld and wellbeing (Van Manen, 2014; Dahlberg, 2015). As suggested by Berger and Luckman (1989) and reiterated by the students' materials; the need to illustrate the interplay between the individual and the wider world resulted in the development and adaptation of the points and lines of influence. This enabled me to illustrate how students' contexts and influences supported them to reify, objectify and internalise their experiences and vice versa, to make sense of their experiences. Moreover, this also reiterates the individual as central to their wellbeing and that they cannot be separated from their contexts and vice versa, as identified by students.

#### 6.4.1. Development of Contexts

The table below represents the contexts of students and the respective points and nexus of influence. The spheres of the prism may be added to or reduced according to the individual's contexts. The different levels of push (Orange/ positive) and pull (Grey/ negative) within the lines of influence are illustrated using colour and line widths to represent their individual influence and power. These measures enabled the visual representation of the different relationships and interplay of influences and spheres through the dominance of one colour (influence) over another (See Figure 1-

4). Enabling insight into how different influences play out to push and pull the individual's wellbeing, as they experience their different everyday contexts and experiences. The framework allows me to illustrate the deeper, complex interaction between influences and the individual (Engestrom, 2001; Engestrom and Sannino, 2010) enabling the relational and subjective nature of wellbeing to be illustrated (White, 2008).

#### 6.4.1.1. Development of the Points and lines/ Nexuses of Influence

The individual's contexts and prism all link to the internal matrix to construct the individuals' wellbeing, via points and lines of influence. These work individually to influence the individual's wellbeing and vice versa. The points of influence were drawn directly from student's materials and represent how different superordinate themes may assert positive, or negative influence at any particular time, or within particular experiences. They may also carry influence across other points to operate as part of a wider collective. The nexuses illustrate the operationalisation of the influences between the spheres, points of influence and the internal matrix (See Figure 1-4). Each particular influence point can interact and interplay with others, according to the circumstances at play, in the moment, or over time. The two-way nature of influences create a network of nexuses, that assert influence between contexts and the individual's internal matrix and vice versa. Correspondingly, the relationships between the spheres or contexts illustrate the active nature of the student in their lifeworld and in constructing their wellbeing. The interdependence and relationships between the individual and their contexts are illustrated, enabling an in-depth snapshot of how students are influenced by the particular contexts and points of influence and vice versa.

Within the framework, as illustrated in the table below, the contexts represent particular contextual perspectives. For example, the student's personal everyday context. While the point and lines of influence labelled "Objective of Potential future/ end goals/ outcomes" links to the particular objectives of the subject or context and may be shared or separate. For example, the student, HE and outside HE contexts, shared the objective of positive student outcomes and employment (Dept. Education, 2017; Peseta 2017) but each view their perspective slightly differently, hence the different influences depicted in the table.

Moreover, the points of influence have been adapted within this framework to

illustrate their role within the individuals everyday lived experiences of HE. For example, the point of influence referred to by Engestrom (2001) as rules, has been expanded, to include the principles, values, norms and rules, that shape the particular context. These might be shared or dissimilar within different contexts but include the values and norms associated with how individual's or contexts play these out in everyday reality. Moreover, the point labelled "Division of labour/ time, Roles/ Responsibilities" includes the different roles, responsibilities and priorities within the particular context or for the individual. For example, money or lack of it, directly influenced students' ability to study and their need to work, the resources they drew on, and how they spent their time. These issues resulted in certain constraints on students' time, their ability to engage with their studies, and succeed (Siddiquee *et al.*, 2016). Linking with their roles and responsibilities and negative emotions, such as stress and worry around their studies, assessment and deadlines (Devovan and Macaskill, 2013).

From the points of influence, the network of nexuses depicts the push and pull upon wellbeing, (See Figure 1-4) reshaping the individual's sense of wellbeing as it shifts its shape, as experiences occur and unfold. This links to how the matrix continues to shift the individual's wellbeing as they react and begin to make sense, or not, of their everyday experiences. Arguably, illustrating Berger and Luckman's (1989) suggestion that the individual makes sense of experiences by reification, objectification and internalisation, which in turn, allows them to reconstruct their wellbeing. Each nexus of influence exerts a certain level of influence or power, whether this is positive, negative or both, within different circumstances. For example, the point labelled "People, Tools and Resources" links to the influenced students who identified them as the who and what, that influenced their wellbeing (See Table of context, Points and Nexuses of influences and Figures 1-4). For example, the influence of family, friends and study resources.

**Table 1 Contexts, Points and Nexus of Influences**

The following table illustrates the variety of influence as identified across student’s materials

<u>Points of Influence</u>	<u>Contexts/ Sphere (Perspective)</u>		
	<u>Personal/ Individual Context Themes</u>	<u>Outside HE Context Themes</u>	<u>Inside HE Context Themes</u>
<u>Objectives: Wellbeing Health Degree</u>	Personal Development; Personality/identity Self: Sense of Awareness, Esteem, Confidence Wellbeing	First person to HE: role model, status  Better Lifestyle (Self-family),	Continued Student Recruitment,  Experiences and Satisfaction,
<u>Potential future end goals outcomes (Sometimes Shared)</u>	Health; Physical/ Emotional/Mental Social/Environmental Status/ needs Wellbeing – separate but connected Coping, Capacity, Resilience  Expectations of self and others, Fun, Social Life; new friends, Success Degree/ Qualification, Better Lifestyle (Self family), Material or economic reward Future Career	Material or economic reward  Social Mobility  Relationships with people; different people/ positive and negative times.  Including Partners, Children; as anchors and drivers, Family (Parents, Siblings)  Ext. Family (Grandparents, Uncles, Aunts)	Research, Teaching and learning; Teaching Excellence Framework, Employment, Institutional ranking/ Success Empowerment /Emancipation

	<p>Personal Journey/ goal; development; Confidence, Efficacy Emancipation/ Empowerment of others and self <i><b>Making Sense of experiences</b></i> Resilience, Capacity Emotions as reactions &amp; coping Reflection, cognitive space to think, analyse Tools; talking to others, retelling story narrative, previous/ learnt experiences, Time Behaviours Actions &amp; Attitudes</p>	<p>Friends/ Peers, Housemates - as friends</p>	
<p><u>People, Tools &amp; Resources</u></p>	<p>Self; concept: previous experiences, time, Coping Resilience, Faith, Personality, identity, Self, confidence, efficacy, outlook Emotions; reactions and coping Disability as label/ Identity People &amp; Relationships; Different influence for different people, shared values/</p>	<p>People as resources and tools; Relationships with people; Partners, Children, Family, Ext. Family, Friends/ Peers, Housemates People as positive or negative,</p>	<p>People; Relationships; Tutors Personal Academic Tutor (PAT) Tools/Resources; Curricula, Programmes, Teaching and Learning strategies, Central services Registry &amp;</p>

	<p>experiences Places and spaces; behaviours of self, Behaviours/ Attitudes/ Actions</p> <p>Self/ learnt exercise, food/ diet, alcohol/ drinking</p> <p>Rest and sleeping</p> <p>Humour/ fun</p> <p><b><i>Maintaining and managing wellbeing</i></b> Own Beliefs/ Attitudes</p> <p>Exercise, food/ Diet Rest/ sleeping, socialising, Music, fun,</p>	<p>Children as drivers and anchors</p> <p>Experiences: Shared/ previous</p> <p>Behaviours/ Attitudes/ Actions: of others; Place and Space; facilities resources, choices: influenced by money, Lack of money, time</p>	<p>Admissions etc. Library as a place and resource,</p> <p>Deadlines/Assessment</p> <p>Student services and Study support, Extenuating circumstances systems; ERCF/ Extensions &amp; NLP,</p> <p>Learning support plan (LSP), Policies re appeals, discipline, IT resources; VLE, technology/ books/ tools</p>
<p><u>Division of labour/ time,</u></p> <p><u>Roles/ Responsibilities</u></p>	<p>Roles and Responsibilities; parent, child, sibling, husband, wife, son/daughter, friend, peer, carer, employee / volunteer</p> <p>Time; Passage, constraints</p> <p>Responsibility for own and others health, care priorities</p> <p>Division of labour/ Time work/studies/ deadlines Money, Income or Lack of</p> <p>Money; choice, Priorities</p>	<p>Roles and Responsibilities: parent, child, sibling, husband, wife, son/daughter, friend, peer, role model, carer, employee/ volunteer</p> <p>Time constraints</p> <p>Money, Income or</p> <p>Division of Labour/Time</p> <p>Lack of Money: choice, priorities</p>	<p>Roles and responsibilities;</p> <p>Programme Directors/</p> <p>Module leads/ Tutors/</p> <p>Personal Academic Tutors,</p> <p>Central services staff</p> <p>Division of Labour/Time</p> <p>Timetables</p> <p>Semesters/ Terms</p> <p>Facilities and service provision, Study Support Services,</p> <p>Deadlines/ Assessment</p>

		Responsibility for others health, care, professional responsibility / codes	
<u>Communities, Neighbourhoods Belonging.</u>	Belonging/ Community/ Neighbourhood  Accommodation/ house Home; lived in/ family home	Sense of belonging, community, Work/ Employment	Peers and Friends,  Cohort, Student Union Societies, Study places and spaces, Campus location
<u>Rules / Principles/ Norms/ Values</u>	Values, norms culture, philosophy, ethics, trust, principles; Identity Faith, Attitudes/ Beliefs; about self, health	Faith, Beliefs/ attitudes about Health, self, Values, Norms, Ethics, Culture	Values Norm, Morals Culture, Ethics and ethos  Systems; Extenuating  Circumstances, Semesters/ Terms, Timetables,  Bestowing degree as award

The overall design of the framework allows me to depict the complexity, relationship, connectedness and flexibility, of wellbeing, as illustrated by students in their materials. The individual is clearly identified as an active agent within the construction of their own lifeworld, and their wellbeing, (Van Manen, 2014; Dahlberg, 2015) and that there is an interplay between the individual and the wider world and vice versa as suggested by Berger and Luckman (1989). Equally, the role of time, previous experience, and wider social, economic, political and environmental influences upon the individual, as they make sense and construct their wellbeing, can be seen. The framework ensures that the voices of the students are represented (West, 1996) and is robust (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Newby, 2010).

#### 6.4.2. Internal Matrix of Wellbeing

Figure 1. The Internal Matrix of Wellbeing

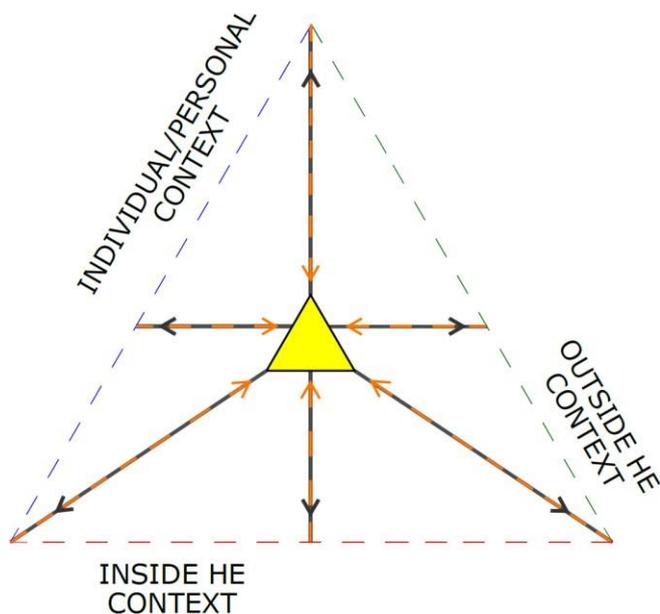


Figure 1 depicts the spheres related to the student's personal, inside and outside contexts of HE. From each context the nexuses can be seen in grey and orange, to highlight the push, pull, two-way flow of influences; it needs to be noted that the two-way flow represents both the influence being positive and negative. Therefore, the influence that a sense of wellbeing might have upon the individual within

their everyday context is illustrated. The design of the lines in this way also enables the thinking, feeling and portraying of certain behaviours and actions (Engestrom, 2001) to be illustrated, enabling the reciprocal relationship between the individual and their contexts and how they maintain and make sense of their experiences across their lifeworld to be illustrated. Overall this figure illustrates everyday circumstances where the individual's wellbeing is constructed and positive, rather than negative. It should be noted that all participants clearly identified that their wellbeing was consistently shifting and that within this matrix, wellbeing can be negative, positive or neither when elements of influence reshape the individual's wellbeing. The following figures add further detail and clarity to how the matrix responds, to depict how particular student's experiences influenced and shifted their wellbeing.

Figure 2 Anne's Particular Wellbeing Matrix

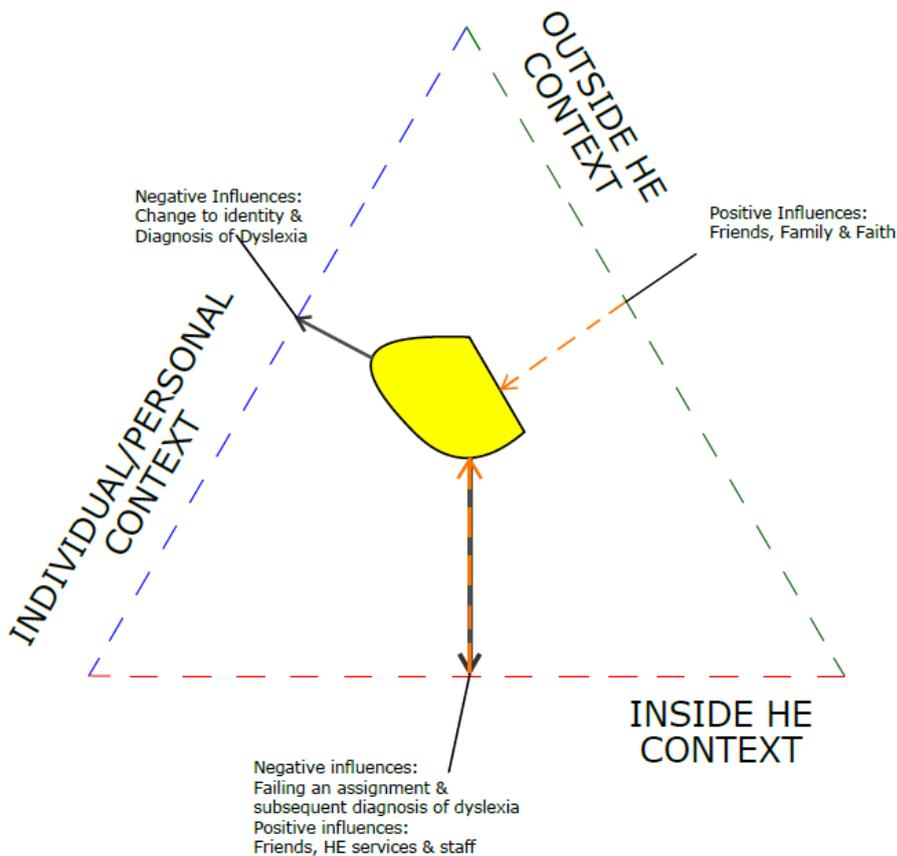


Figure 2 illustrates Anne's particular experience of failing an assignment and her diagnosis of dyslexia, as negative influences from her inside HE context; these issues impacted her wellbeing by pulling it out of shape. The figure shows the impact upon her personal context as she initially reacts and the overall experience unfolds. The figure also represents how Anne tries to make sense of the experience, and her experiences change to her sense of self as her sense of self is pulled out. These shifts affected Anne's esteem, confidence and image, as well as her identity; as she struggled to make sense of her experience and her disability. The positive influences from her outside HE context include her family, friends and faith; because they helped her make some sense or meaning of the experience. The positive influence of HE staff, University services, friends and the support plan put into place to support her studies, are illustrated from inside her HE context. Anne's diagram illustrates the interplay between influences across the different contexts of her lifeworld and that some influences may be both positive and negative according to the event or circumstances.

Moreover, Anne’s matrix illustrates circumstances where no sense can be made as it remains unconstructed or misshapen, within her personal context at the point when she participates in the research. The matrix and wellbeing might not need to be positive in all aspects of the individual’s lifeworld, all the time. The matrix facilitates the illustration of these circumstances because it remains misshapen as the individual (Anne) counters the negative influences by emphasising or focussing on the positive influences they experience. The ability of the matrix to depict such nuances in wellbeing undermines the value of measuring wellbeing with objective, or short-term markers, such as satisfaction or happiness. Simultaneously, reiterating that wellbeing is a combination of hedonistic and eudemonic elements (Huta and Ryan, 2010). The matrix also enables links to salutogenic ideas as proposed by Antonovsky (1996) and Keeling (2014) to be depicted, and the outcomes of health promotion interventions to be evaluated holistically, as proposed by Dooris *et al.* (2017).

Figure 3 Charlotte’s Particular Wellbeing Matrix

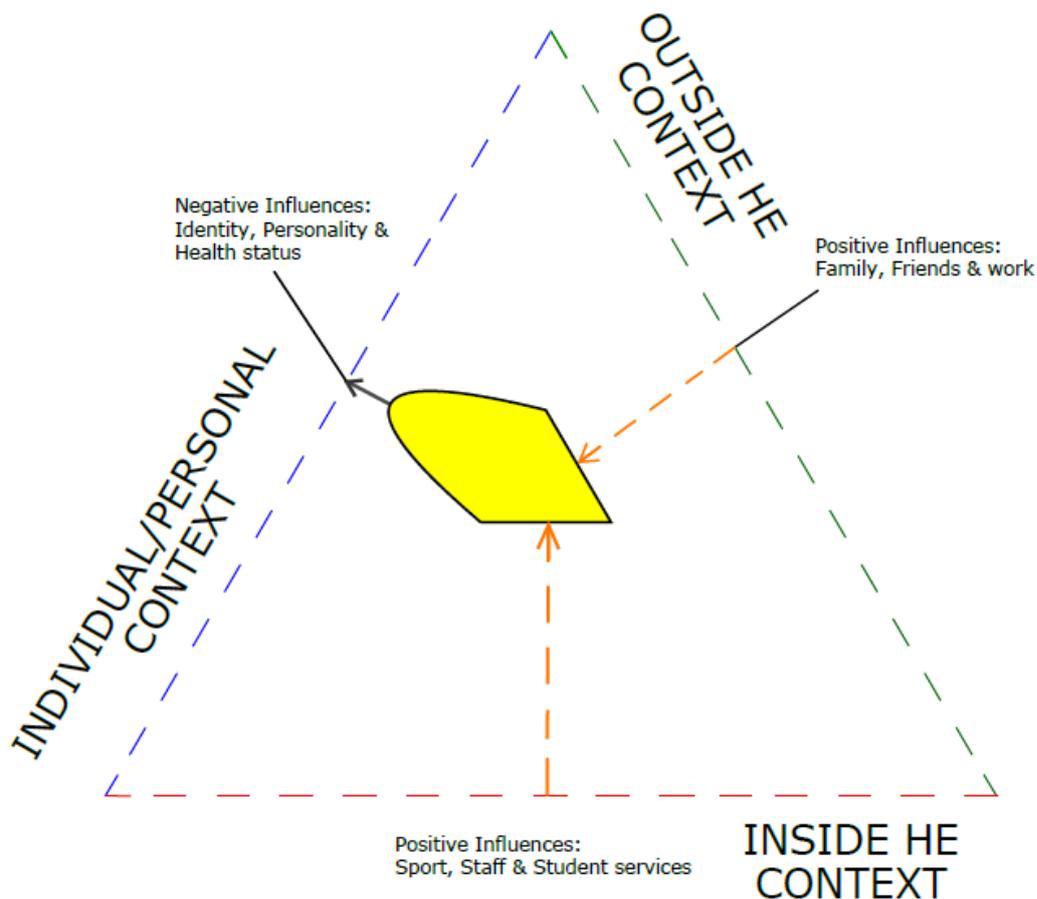


Figure 3 illustrates the negative or pulling influence that Charlotte’s personal context exerts upon her wellbeing given her perception of herself as someone who has anxiety, and her low level of self- esteem and confidence. Simultaneously, her inside and outside HE contexts illustrate positive influences such as her sports, HE staff, student services as well as her family, friends and work from her other contexts. The matrix, therefore, enables the power and influence of the individual and how they make sense and reify their beliefs and behaviours to be illustrated through their particular perspectives of themselves as both Kelly (1963) and Berger and Luckman (1989) suggested.

Figure 4 Jean’s Particular Wellbeing Matrix

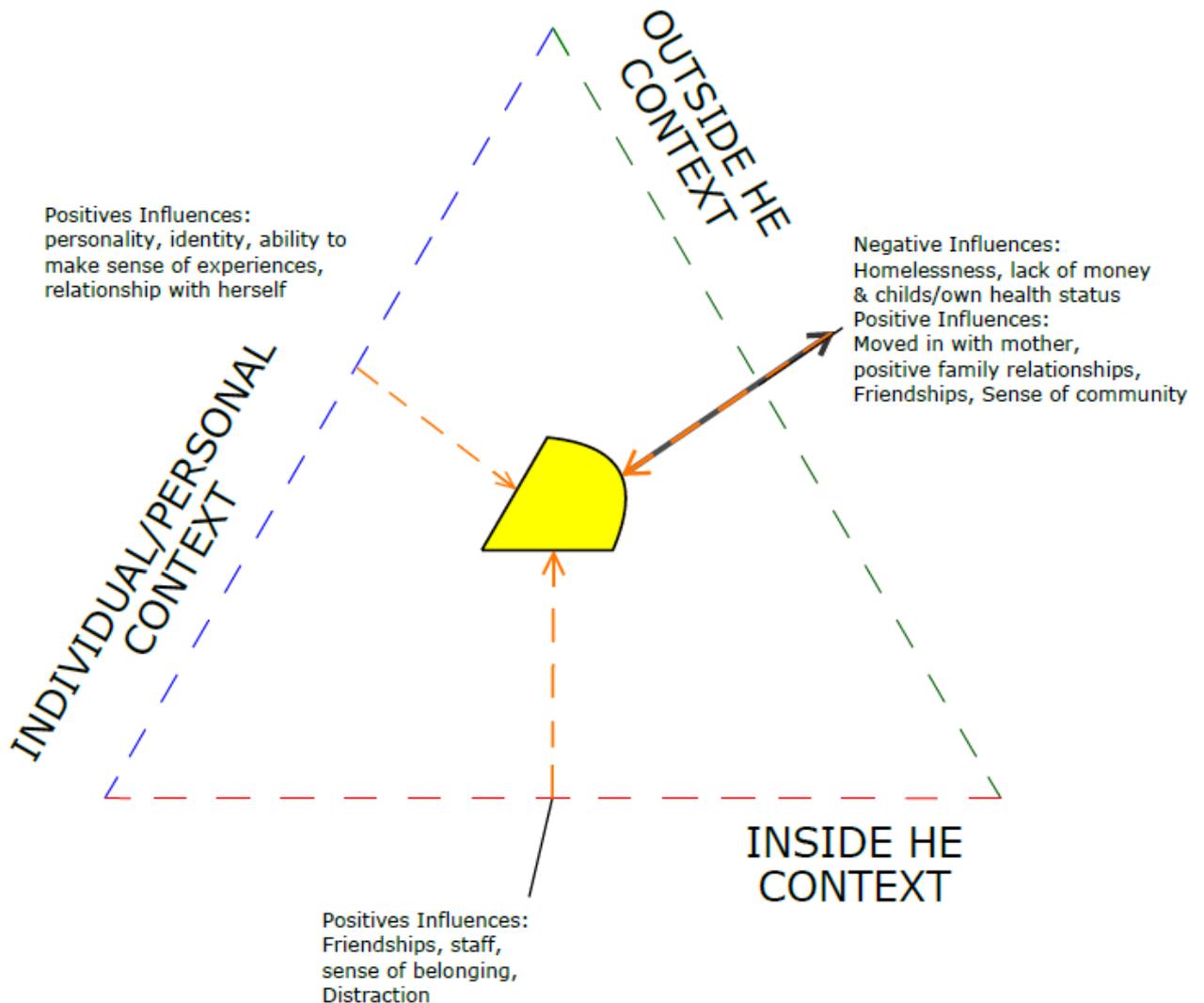


Figure 4 illustrates Jean’s particular experience and how influences interact and

counter each other, shifting the construct of wellbeing back and forth as her particular experiences unfolded over time and at certain points. Jean's experiences included significant negative experiences, such as being made homeless but simultaneously positive experiences, such as moving in with her Mum. Within HE, Jean's ability to distract herself with her attending University and her studies became a way to step out of her negative experiences. Equally, her friendships and a sense of belonging to HE was positive influences which also enabled her to access advice, information and support; facilitating her to develop the capacity to alter her circumstances; and reconstruct her lifeworld and wellbeing. Jean's experience allows insight into the power and influence of the individual and their personal skills, knowledge, actions and behaviours. Underpinning their role in supported her to make sense of events and to change her circumstances; towards a more positive outcome so she could reconstruct her wellbeing. Schon (1994) suggests that reflection, analysis and personal traits, help individual's make sense of events, either within the moment or over time. The role of time and the importance of the individual's perception of themselves (personal construct) are illustrated in making sense of experiences, as is how the individual might be facilitated to construct their wellbeing positively. The matrix allows insight into how HE might fulfil its role as an educator of the whole person (Keeling, 2014; Carr, 2005) and how it might undertake its unique role in promoting the health and wellbeing of students' (Dooris *et al.*, 2017).

The prism and matrix as a theoretical framework illustrate how some influences become moderators, drivers or tools and resources, as they interplay within the matrix, reshaping how and whether the individual's lifeworld and wellbeing are shifted or not and how it might be constructed. Unfortunately, the two-dimensional characteristics within the drawings cannot illustrate the interchange, dependence and connections of the contexts or influences effectively or with ease; although the points and lines of influence may give some indication of the potential.

Moreover, the prism and matrix align with Dodge *et al.*'s (2012) conclusion that objective-based measures alone are of little reliability in measuring or defining wellbeing. They also provide evidence to refute notions that wellbeing is a process with a beginning and end, in contrast to some literature (Diener, 2012; Andrews *et al.*, 2014). Overall, the theoretical framework allows in-depth insight into student's experiences of their wellbeing because it provides the evidence to inform

the development of practice, policies and services within my own practice, institution and wider HE community as it is disseminated (Long *et al.*; La Placa *et al.*, 2013).

Moreover, the matrix allows the understanding gained from this research to be considered in respect of supporting and facilitating students, to develop tools, resources, knowledge, skills and attitudes, that will enable their holistic development as a human being and experience HE more positively. The unique understanding of wellbeing uncovered here reiterates that the students' perspectives of their wellbeing as subjective, individualistic and related to their everyday contexts, including HE; reiterating the importance of proactive and contextual based approaches, to facilitating their wellbeing.

#### 6.4.3. Evaluating the Framework

An evaluative exercise was undertaken with several groups of postgraduate students to critically evaluate the theoretical framework and afford another perspective of its form, points of influence and matrix. The evaluative exercise was also designed to add a layer of reliability and robustness to the framework as a whole and go beyond the findings or my interpretation of the materials (Holliday, 2008) while adding contextual confirmation of the framework (Yardley, 2000).

The exercise was undertaken using four groups of 4-5 postgraduate students, each group comprising of male and female candidates. In all, 20 post-graduate students and two senior doctoral supervisors participated. The participants self-selected their group as they took seats within the room before the session. Each group was given a sheet of flip chart with the contexts and points of influence labelled on it. Participants were then asked to place the elements of influence on to the contexts which they felt most appropriate as a group.

Participants were then asked to talk around their finished framework, highlighting any particular challenges or observations from the exercise. Four of the groups highlighted the continued influence of the individual's personality, self and identity, as problematic, given they felt it applied to each point of reference; reiterating the interdependence and individual nature of wellbeing. Over the four groups, most elements of influence were placed within the correct sphere of influence compared to the research findings. Interestingly, within the feedback the reflective and critical discussion about the shifting of wellbeing, the structure and contexts of the framework

and how influences and contexts might need to be linked reified the overall prism shape and the roles of the lines of nexus between contexts or spheres.

The findings from the exercise were then used to check and confirm or refute the design and overall operationalisation of the matrix within the framework, using reflection and critical analysis (Holliday, 2008). Silverman (2014) argues this double-blind approach would have added a level of critical evaluation, reliability and robustness to the theoretical framework and this research. Overall, the exercise enabled an alternate perspective that allowed the application of the theory into a broader HE context and a level of critical evaluation (Newby, 2010; Silverman, 2014).

Engestrom (2001; 1987) and Engestrom and Sannino (2010) argue that the development of this framework would enable the findings of this research to be represented giving a voice to student's ensuring the explanation and communication of the research findings are coherent and transparent (Yardley, 2000). Any potential loss or assumptions about particular aspects of the findings were avoided as suggested by Merrill and West (2009). Moreover, Lincoln and Denzin (2005) highlighted that theoretical frameworks allow interpretations of research and that they contain an implicit level of authority. While Newby (2010) and Silverman (2014) highlighted the importance of theoretical frameworks as a tool to support the further evaluation, analysis and adjustment of the theory and that it can be used as a basis for future research.

Moreover, this framework is not designed to be used as a tool to generalise the findings but does shed light onto the particular and common elements of students experiences of their wellbeing in HE.

## 6.5. Assessing the Quality of this Research

This section offers a critical reflective analysis of this research using Yardley's (2000) four evaluative principles for qualitative research. Each principle will be analysed and linked to the particular actions or decisions that ensured the principles are illustrated, enabling the reader insight into its validity as evidence and overall significance (Yardley, 2000; Smith *et al.*, 2009).

### 6.5.1. Sensitivity to the Research Context

Yardley (2000) highlighted the need to ensure that any research considered the

context in which it was undertaken, sensitivity to and significant engagement with, the participants, their materials, and the findings. Throughout this research, the students' perspectives, their voice and representation, have shaped every element of the research design, and process as it unfolded. Smith *et al.*, (2009) highlighted that a good piece of IPA research uses purposive sampling, to ensure the sample share the lived experience, and the findings can represent a valid insight into the phenomenon. Within this research, a purposive sample was identified from a self-referring group of students, which represented their student community (Van Manen, 2014; Dahlberg, 2015). Furthermore, the need to demonstrate a sensitivity to the participants and their materials, shaped the methods used, the approaches to collect, analyse and present, the findings. These measures together with the extensive use of each student's materials, to illustrate the breadth, depth and the flow of the findings, alongside the adaptation of the prism and matrix of wellbeing, illustrate how this research has applied Yardley's (2000) first principle. Furthermore, continued critical, reflexive analysis has enabled the student's perspectives to be given a level of attentive consideration, (Holliday, 2008) underpinning the value of their participation and materials, according to both Yardley (2000) and Smith, *et al.*, (2009). Moreover, the relevance of this research links directly to the principle that the students should be part of how wellbeing might be considered in HE, given that they are the ones experiencing any changes to practice, policy or services that evolve as a result (Burgess *et al.*, 2018).

#### 6.5.2. Commitment and Rigour

Yardley (2000) suggests that notions of continued commitment and rigour should underpin research that is of high quality and likely to be adopted as evidence. Holliday (2008) and Newby (2010) both suggested that the researcher is also responsible for the open and critical interpretation of the research, to ensure the clear communication of how the research was really done. Throughout the research, my interpretations and how the student's findings are presented have been carefully considered and been part of my commitment to ensure continue sensitivity and representation of students, their materials and their other contexts (Yardley, 2000; Smith *et al.*, 2009). Throughout the research process, the quality and design of the process has been subject to critically reflection and stepping back to evaluate the rigour of the research and commitment to ensuring its ability to be used as evidence (Holliday, 2008).

### 6.5.3. Transparency and Coherence

Throughout this thesis, I have tried to ensure the clarity and coherence of how the research was actually done; arguing for the approaches used. This thesis has been written and rewritten, proofread, adjusted and checked and rechecked a process has enabled me to be critical but also transparent; enabling me to provide an in-depth description of the research and how it has been drawn together, over time. Van Manen's (1990; 2014) recommendation of uncovering the nature of the research and ensuring its phenomenological stance, have also aided this transparency and coherence in presenting this thesis. Holliday (2008) identifies that this will enable the reader to gain an insight into the research and to be able to step into the research and its findings. Allowing them to gain a glimpse of how the research was done and an understanding of wellbeing from a particular perspective (Holliday, 2009). Simultaneously, Yardley's (2000) idea of a coherent fit of the methodology, design and research processes and the overall findings illustrated within this thesis link to the coherence of this research. This fit has also been supported by the continuous critical analysis, argument and evaluation that unfolded and was part of the research process. These measures enabled the coherence and transparency, which underpin the research and ensure it is valid and reliable as evidence (Newby 2010).

### 6.5.1. Significance of this Research

Lastly, Yardley (2000) highlights the need for awareness of the impact and importance of the research. This research was undertaken as a result of the current emphasis on student experience and satisfaction rather than wellbeing within HE. Equally, the lack of a clear understanding of wellbeing from the students' perspective underpinned the need to represent the student's voices within HE, given their current underrepresentation in the evidence (Batchelor, 2012; Boorman, Darwent and Pinar, 2014). As has the dominance of objective medical notions of student health and health promotion interventions (Dodge *et al.*, 2012). Equally the importance of wellbeing more widely is beginning to be realised. Although the emphasis is on defining and measuring wellbeing rather than understanding it as a lived experience, or from individual or groups perspectives in different contexts (Dodge *et al.*, 2012). This research addresses the lack of theoretical frameworks to underpin and inform contexts, policies, services and professional practice across different disciplines. Correspondingly, this research enables a theoretical framework that illustrates how student's experience their wellbeing.

## 6.6. Limitations of This Research

Newby (2010) identifies the necessity of identifying the limitation of research for its reliability and trustworthiness to be evident. Yardley (2000) equally identifies that the limitations of the research are linked to the transparency of the research process, and the rigour with which the process has been developed and reported. Certainly, IPA research does not lend itself to being generalisable across other contexts or groups, especially given the emphasis on the individual's everyday lives (Smith *et al.*, 2009). Throughout the research, it has been clear that generalisability is not sought but that the emphasis is to represent the students' voices in a coherent, and transparent way. To ensure this, I have stepped back and critically reflected upon, analysed and evaluated my research practice, and the process as it unfolded (Newby, 2010). These principles have enabled the openness and transparency of this thesis and have been supported by the same practice in writing this document, as has writing, rewriting and reading and re-reading it. As highlighted within sections of this thesis, proactive planning and actions have prevented some issues that might have otherwise have influenced its trustworthiness and reliability. These included using inclusion criteria, visual methods and interviews to capture in-depth understanding and the IPA analysis of the findings alongside the representation of the students in their materials and the final theoretical framework designed to explain their experiences of their wellbeing.

Moreover, the number of participants, or sample size, within this research was six. In other forms of research, such a small sample might be considered a limitation given the link to establishing reliability through replication of the research process, and the generalisability of findings (Silverman, 2014). However, six participants are a good sample size within IPA (Van Manen, 2014) given the emphasis is upon understanding the individual's lived experiences of a phenomenon, rather than repetition of process or generalisability of findings (Smith *et al.*, 2009; Van Manen 2014). Moreover, I undertook to ensure the sample was representative of the broader student body to enable the findings to be accepted as evidence to inform my practice and future policy and services delivery.

## **7.0 Chapter 7 Conclusions and Recommendations**

This chapter provides a summary of the conclusions drawn from this research for each research question, before highlighting the significance of this research for HE and future recommendations.

### **7.1. What influences Student Wellbeing inside HE?**

All the students identified influences from across their individual personal, outside and inside of HE contexts, consistently identifying both particular and common influences. The different levels and kinds of influence from different people and relationships, including family, friends, peers and staff in HE was highlighted alongside other influences such as a sense of belonging and community. All the students highlighted the lack of money and income as resulting in certain pressures and choices, or restrictions, given the economic hardships they experienced. All the students identified the importance of their journey in HE, including their future goals and objectives, their roles and responsibilities, and the division of their time and work as either positive or negative influences. Students continually illustrated that the range of influences experienced was complex, interconnected, and often interplayed, across their contexts; confirmed the individual, their contexts and wellbeing, as inseparable.

The students also identified that space, resources and places to study were linked to their ability to engage with their studies, alongside their programme of study, workload, deadlines and assessments. The division of their time, roles and responsibilities, and work, both inside and outside of HE, equally influenced their ability to engage with their studies and were linked to negative emotions, such as their coping but also, their motivation for studying. Students linked teaching and learning activities and their own learning behaviours and actions to their ability to engage with their studies, as did relationships with their peers and staff. All the students recognised the importance of their own journey and their future degree, career and economic future as a goal; identifying these as both motivators and barrier at different times.

All the students identified the continued influence of their personal roles and responsibilities, including their roles as parents, friends and family members; with some identified the influence of children, partners and other people according to their

circumstances. All the students identified that people influenced them across their different contexts, and that different relationships had different levels and types of influence. Emotions were highlighted by all the students as associated with either reacting to experiences, and as part of making sense of them. All the students identified that wellbeing was not always positive but shifted as it was pushed and pulled by influences, and constructed as an individual made sense of experiences; or not. These findings illustrated that the wellbeing of an individual could be negative rather than positive, or that they might not be able to construct the meaning of experiences at times. All the students linked this to their capacity and circumstances at the time of the particular experience. Which uncovered the potential for HE to facilitate and support their personal capacity, by proactive health promoting strategies that facilitate higher learning and personal development.

### 7.2. How do Students Describe their Wellbeing?

All students also described their wellbeing as personal, contextually based and separate but connected to health given the influence of their physical, mental and emotional, social and environmental dimensions of health upon their wellbeing. Moreover, some students identified that wellbeing was a holistic notion and linked to their general health and health of others, including children and friends. The students consistently recognised the role of their personality, self and identity, including their ownership, roles and responsibilities for their health. Particular students highlighted the importance and influence of their own chronic health issues and disability as influencing their wellbeing. These elements of description are at odds with the literature and highlight the importance of this research and the subjective perspective, established here. These elements of description are at odds with the literature and highlight the importance of this research and its subjective perspective of wellbeing; while uncovering the need for further research to explore how HE might support students via personal development and their HE education as well as health promotion initiatives.

### 7.3 How do Students Maintain and Manage their Wellbeing?

All students identified their responsibility of, and ownership in maintaining and managing their wellbeing. They connected this to their beliefs, behaviours, attitudes and actions identifying that they knew how to maintain and manage their wellbeing but did not always have the motivation, capacity or resources, to do so. Some students

went on to identify that they undertook exercise, sports with one going to the gym to maintain their wellbeing alongside taking time, space and walking or interacting with their pets and others, according to their circumstances. All the students identified the importance of food as a balanced diet and to socialise. While two students identified the role of dieting as well as resting and sleeping. All students identified they knew what they should do to be healthy, but did not always do it, which eventually, impacted their wellbeing. Socialising, music, being with friends and having fun helped students maintain and manage their wellbeing. Three students identified the role of university societies or church groups as supportive. This perspective of student's wellbeing is worthy of further study given the lack of research around how students might be supported and facilitated to maintain and manage their wellbeing positively rather than continuing the emphasis upon measuring student satisfaction or experience. Furthermore, this research uncovers evidence that HE could have a significant impact upon the future wellbeing of students and increase their potential to have positive personal and educational outcomes, underpinning the recommendation for further research to consider how HE may prioritise wellbeing accordingly.

#### 7.4. How do Students Make Sense of their Experiences?

All the students' highlighted how they made sense of their experiences as enabling them to construct, their wellbeing or not, identifying the role of time, emotions and previous experiences. All students' personal context alongside their individual beliefs, behaviours, attitudes and actions facilitated them to make sense of experiences. Student's also highlighted the role of reflection, stepping back, taking time, both cognitive and physical, for space to think. The use of narrative, story and retelling experiences to others, to gain alternate perspectives, were identified as means used to make sense of them, and as supporting students in constructing their wellbeing. Equally, the students identified that different experiences affected their wellbeing differently; identifying wellbeing as positive, negative and varying levels in-between. These findings illustrate that wellbeing is a construct that shifts continuously, which contrasts with some literature. However, it also adds the perspective that wellbeing is not always constructible, within the capacity of the individual, at that particular time. Which resulted in a recommendation that more research is needed to understand how the individual might be supported in their everyday contexts, to facilitate positive wellbeing.

### 7.5 Implications of This Research for HE

This research has enabled an in-depth exploration of individual student's experiences of their wellbeing within HE; this has uncovered implications for my own professional practice but also my own HE institution, and HE as a sector. The findings of this research undermine the current preoccupation within the literature around defining and measuring wellbeing in the student populous and linking it to the student experience and satisfaction, (Dodge *et al.*, 2012; Long *et al.*, 2012). The individualistic and contextual nature of student's experiences uncovered within this thesis highlight the middle picture of the current context of wellbeing in HE. Moreover, several findings from this research refute the current literature's stance, that wellbeing is linked to health, and that student's health and wellbeing are best promoted using medical models of health promotion (Hagell, 2017). Equally this research illustrates that wellbeing is not promoted by health initiatives based on health issues rather than proactive principles or social models of health promotion (Scriven and Hodgkins, 2012; Baggott, 2013). In contrast, this research infers that students' wellbeing may be comprised of both hedonistic and eudemonic (Huta and Ryan, 2010) ideas of wellbeing and salutogenic principles of human development, (Dooris *et al.*, 2017). These findings could be linked to the role and responsibility of HE (Carr 2005) and underpins the argument for an emphasis upon wellbeing as separate to health and the prioritisation of wellbeing within HE.

The depth of understanding illustrated by this research has enabled the development of the prism and matrix of wellbeing which enables the findings to be communicated without loss of representation (Merrill and West, 2009; Bainbridge, 2015). This theoretical framework allows the findings to be used as evidence to inform my practice; for example, by using the framework to consider how wellbeing might be facilitated in operational matters such as timetabling, assessment strategies and deadline setting. The framework will enable me to work with others in my own institution to develop student support services, tools, resources and practices, that facilitate student wellbeing in a more holistic way (Dooris *et al.*, 2017).

The findings of research allow the voice of the students to inform the experiences of others coming after them. Although this research is not generalisable, it allows a middle picture to be uncovered, enabling an understanding that allows the interpretation of individual student's experiences of their wellbeing and provides a

sense of the commonalities of their experiences (Van Manen 2014). Moreover, students' gain a voice and ownership of their experiences and an ability to shape the sector as this research is accepted as evidence (Yardley 2000; Smith *et al.*, 2009). Simultaneously, this research may influence the future of HE by enabling students to have a voice that influences future curricula, recruitment and retention systems, welfare activities and the development and evaluation of student-based services and policies.

Within the sector, the influence of this research will extend from it being disseminated through articles, conferences and other opportunities; enabling the findings to influence the discourses and developments within the sector. Equally, the application, evaluation and adjustment of the theoretical framework and recommendations from this research provide opportunities to continue to develop a further understanding of wellbeing from an everyday, lived perspective, provided by the theoretical framework proposed here will also allow wellbeing to be better understood within other disciplines and contexts offering an opportunity to provide future research prospects. The following recommendations are offered from this thesis; at a time when the importance of wellbeing is emerging, but yet to be realised. These recommendations are not exhaustive but offer a taste of future work

#### 7. 6. Recommendations

1. To implement the findings of this research by applying the prism and matrix of wellbeing to inform my own professional practice. For example, using the findings to inform programme planning, teaching and assessment strategies and embed academic support systems.
2. To work with colleagues within HE to develop an app to facilitate students' positive wellbeing by providing them with practical and capacity building skills, knowledge and behaviours using the prism and matrix of wellbeing as a basis to facilitate proactive support.
3. To shape my own institutions operational and strategic activities, services strategies and policies via my own professional roles to support wellbeing and facilitate its prioritisation.
4. Disseminate this research within the wider HE sector and other partners, including healthy universities, the office for students and other special interest

groups. To enable the findings to be critically evaluated and research to be developed to explore wellbeing in other contexts, professional disciplines and within other groups, individuals or communities.

5. To develop research that will enable the implementation, critical analysis, evaluation and adjustment of the prism and matrix of wellbeing. While working with students from other curricula areas, professional disciplines and contexts, to enable them to have a voice and influence the evidence-based.
6. The development of partnerships that enable further research to explore how wellbeing might be moved forward within the broader community outside of HE. To explore how wellbeing might be best supported in people's everyday lives.

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## **Table and Figure List**

### Table List

Table 1 Contexts, Points of Influence and Elements of Influences

### Figure List

Figure 1; Illustrates The Internal Matrix of Wellbeing

Figure 2 Anne's Particular Wellbeing Matrix

Figure 3 Charlotte's Particular Wellbeing Matrix

Figure 4 Jean's Particular Wellbeing Matrix

## **Appendix 1 Ethical Approval Letter**

3rd November, 2015

Ref 15/EDU/007

Dear Tracey,

**Project title: How are students doing; An exploration of student wellbeing in Higher Education (HE) using visual and phenomenological methods**

Members of the Faculty of Education Research Ethics committee have reviewed your application and have agreed to grant approval.

I am therefore writing to confirm formally that you can commence your research. Please notify me (or my replacement as Chair of the committee), of any significant change in the question, design or conduct of the study over its course.

This approval is conditional on you informing me once your research has been completed.

With best wishes for a successful project,

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Viv Wilson', written over a light grey rectangular background.

Dr Viv Wilson  
Acting Chair, Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee.

## **Appendix 2 Inclusion Criteria**

This criterion was designed to support the inclusion of students from a large undergraduate academic HE programme. These criteria were also designed to reduce my bias and that of participants and should be viewed in light of Chapter Three: Methodology.

Participants may be included if they are;

1. Year 2 or 3 students in BA Early Childhood Studies.
2. Representative of the overall student body; female, male, disabled, able bodied, of diverse ethnic backgrounds, of different age groups.

Participants will be excluded if they are;

1. Being taught by me, the researcher.
2. Year one students in BA Early Childhood Studies.
3. Year 2 or 3 students in BSc Early Childhood Studies; studying joint and combined subjects.

These criteria were used to invite students to participate in the online needs assessment survey and within that participants self-selected to participate within the IPA section of the research.

## **Appendix 3 Invitation and Consent Needs Assessment Survey**

### **Welcome to the Needs Assessment Survey About Student's Wellbeing in University**

About the survey

The following needs assessment is designed to enable further understanding of student's wellbeing while studying at University. The main research questions are

1. What influences your wellbeing from inside your studies in University?
2. What influences your wellbeing from outside your studies in University?
3. How would you describe your wellbeing?
4. How do you manage or maintain your wellbeing?
5. How do you make sense of your experiences?

The assessment will be carried out using the online programme Bristol Survey, enabling your responses to the questions to be used as feedback to enable me to draw together the findings. Your answers will be used to refine the overall research questions above to support the development of the next phases in this research.

ALL data will be treated with the utmost confidentiality and are anonymised by the online programme used. The data will only be analysed by me as the researcher, although my supervisors will see it as we talk about the data as a whole, as will assessors. Extracts may be used to illustrate the findings in an anonymous way. Your data will be kept safe, stored and later destroyed according to the university policy.

### **Deciding Whether to Participate**

If you have any questions or concerns about the nature, procedures or requirements for participation do not hesitate to contact me. Should you decide to participate, you will be free to withdraw at any time without having to give a reason. Furthermore, you might want to complete the assessment in one go, but can equally take a break and return later should you wish. The assessment will take about 15 minutes to complete.

Should you have further questions or be interested in participating in more elements of the research please do not hesitate to contact me by email [student email given](#)

Yours Tracey Wornast

## Appendix 4 Need Assessment Survey Questionnaire

The questions below were entered into the Bristol on- line survey programme, keeping the format as below as much as possible. The personal details of participants were purposely placed at the end of the survey given the potential to gain data from the outset of the survey.

1	Who do you live with? <i>(Tick one response)</i>	
	Parents Parents and siblings Partner/ husband and children	In University Halls/ housing Friends/Peers in private accommodation
	Other <i>(Please specify)</i> ;	
2	Who or what supports you in your studies? <i>(Please tick all that apply)</i>	
	Partner/ Husband Children Wider family Friends Peers Work colleagues Health- Yours	Health- others Social media Access to study facilities, e.g. computer, Quiet space at home/where you live Social life Pets Your faith
	Is there anything that is not on the list?	
3	Please indicate how important the following things are to you outside the university  <i>Using the scale:</i>  <i>1 Unimportant, 2 Not very important, 3 Neither important nor unimportant 4. Very Important, 5. Extremely Important</i>	

	Partner/ Husband Wider family Children Friends Peers Health of others Your health Pets	Colleagues Work Access to study facilities where you live Social Life Travel Holidays Your Faith Social Media
4	Is there anyone or anything else outside University that impacts your studies?	
	Yes	No
	If so, How do they impact your studies?	
5	How far to do you travel to university ( <i>Tick one response</i> )	
	Less than 5 miles	5-20 miles
		above 21 miles
6	How do you travel to University? ( <i>Tick the usual way you travel to and from University</i> )	
	walk car	bus train
7	How would you describe or define your own wellbeing? ( <i>Open text</i> )	
8	How do you learn best? ( <i>Please tick as many as apply</i> )	
	See it/Visual	Hear it / Audio
		Reading/Writing
		Doing it /Kinaesthetic
9	Are you the first in your family to attend university	
	Yes	No
		Prefer not to say
10	Who and what supports you in your studies? ( <i>Please tick all that apply</i> )  ( <i>Within Bristol Programme these were split into who and what sections</i> )	

	WHO	WHAT
11	Peers Module Tutor Personal academic tutor Library Staff Registry staff Study Support services/Staff	Learning support systems and plans Access to study facilities on campus- small rooms, quiet space Library Systems on/off campus Computer Access on campus Extension and extenuating circumstances systems Stationary/Printing credit/ photocopying services/ binding/ bookshop
	Peers Module Tutor Personal academic tutor Library Staff Registry staff Study Support services/Staff	Learning support systems and plans Access to study facilities on campus- small rooms, quiet space Library Systems on/off campus Computer Access on campus Extension and extenuating circumstances systems Stationary/Printing credit/ photocopying services/ binding/ bookshop
12	Is there anyone or anything else inside University that impacts your studies? ( <i>Please tick</i> )	
	Yes	No
13	How do they support your studies? ( <i>Open Text</i> )	
14	What activities help you maintain and improve your wellbeing inside your university life ( <i>Tick all that apply</i> )	

	Socialising Talking to peers/ friends Keeping a diary/log Reading (For pleasure) Sleeping/ resting			Sports activities Walking Counselling services Smoking cigarettes Drugs Alcohol		
15	Age ( <i>Please tick</i> )					
	18-24	25-35	36-46	47-56	57-65	66-76
16	Gender					
	Male		Female		Prefer not to say	
17	Marital Status ( <i>Please tick</i> )					
	Single Married Partnership			Divorced Prefer not to say		
18	Are you employed?					
	Yes			No		
19	If yes; What is your job title?					
20	How many hours a week do you usually work?					
21	Do you consider yourself to have a disability, impairment or medical condition?					
	Yes			No		
22	If Yes please give a brief description ( <i>Entirely optional</i> )					
23	Is English your first Language? ( <i>Please tick</i> )					
	Yes		No		Prefer not to say	
24	Which CCCU are you Campus attending?					
	Medway		Canterbury		Broadstairs	
25	Which Year of your studies are you currently in?					
	Year 2			Year 3		
26	Ethnic Background ( <i>Please tick</i> )					
	Arab Asian; Asian British; Bangladeshi Asian; Asian British; Pakistani			Mixed White and Black Caribbean Other Asian Background Other black Background		

	Black; British Black; African Black; Black British; Caribbean Chinese Gypsy Traveller Mixed White and Asian Mixed White and Black African	Other Ethnic Background Other Mixed background Other White background Prefer not to say White British White Irish
27	Would you be interested in taking part in drawings and semi structured interviews?	
	Yes  <i>If so please provide your email address for contact purposes</i>	No

Thank you for your time. Should you have further questions or if you would like to see the survey results please do not hesitate to contact me by email; [student email](#)

Yours Tracey Wornast

## **Appendix 5 Information and Consent: IPA**

An exploration of Student wellbeing;

Dear Participant

You have referred yourself as a potential participant in a research project designed to explore how you, as a student in university, experience your wellbeing. Including what influences it, how you make sense of experiences and maintain your wellbeing. This letter is intended to recap the background information about the research, give you some idea about what is involved in this phase of the study and clarify what you might do and what will happen with the materials once they are collected.

### **Background**

Universities have more recently become part of a wider drive within public health to ensure the health and wellbeing of students within their education and experiences at University. As someone who believes education is important and who works in higher education but comes from a health background, health and wellbeing is of great interest to me. This interest, alongside my passion to support our students and help them to succeed has driven the emphasis within the research and the methodological approaches, to ensure students' voices are represented in the discussions and policies developed in the University about student wellbeing. On an individual professional note, I also hope that my own understanding will be increased and that my own pedagogical practice and professional role as a senior lecturer and programme director will be informed.

### **The Main Elements of this Part of the Research Developing a map/river/graph/drawing**

You will be asked to participate in a session to develop your own visual representation, diagram or drawing that shows what has influenced your wellbeing within your university experiences, both positive and negative. You will be offered a series of tools to develop the same and the questions here will be;

1. What influences your wellbeing from inside your studies in University?
2. What influences your wellbeing from outside your studies in University?
3. How might you describe your wellbeing?
4. How do you manage and maintain your wellbeing?
5. How do you make sense of your experiences?

It is envisaged that this will probably take about 30-40 minutes and you can have a break if you so wish.

### **An Interview**

Using your drawing/ picture/ image as a centre for our interview and discussion about your wellbeing, we will explore the questions below in more depth;

1. What influences your wellbeing from inside your studies in University?
2. What influences your wellbeing from outside your studies in University?
3. How might you describe your wellbeing?

4. How do you manage and maintain your wellbeing?
5. How do you make sense of your experiences?

Prior to the interview we will share a list of subjects we might touch upon taken from the assessment carried out by you and other students earlier. During the processes you may want to use the word “Stop” should you feel at any time you do not wish to share or further explore the subject we are discussing. Equally, I will use the same system should I feel that you might share something that may present me with an ethical issue or conflict between my role as a researcher and my professional role; such as a disclosure of information that is illegal or harmful to you, myself or others. If either party uses the stop word the relevant material can be removed from the research. It is envisaged this phase of the research might take between 45- 60 minutes, but breaks can be taken as you need and this can be arranged with flexibility, to ensure your comfort.

ALL materials will be treated with the utmost confidentiality and anonymised. Materials will only be analysed by me as the researcher, although my supervisors will see the overall materials as will assessors. However, it will be anonymised at this point. Extracts will be used to illustrate the findings in an anonymous way. Your materials will be kept safe, stored and later destroyed according to the University policy.

### **Dissemination of Findings**

The findings will be used to inform the production of my thesis. Some material may also be presented within journal articles or conference papers and the development of my own pedagogical practice, as well as in the shaping of discussions and processes to develop the policies within the programme and institution, where appropriate. A feedback session for interested parties where findings can be shared will be arranged upon request.

### **Deciding Whether to Participate**

If you have any questions or concerns about the nature, procedures or requirements for participation do not hesitate to contact me. Should you decide to participate, you will be free to withdraw at any time without having to give a reason.

Should you have further questions about the research please do not hesitate to contact me by email; [student email](#)

Yours Tracey Wornast

## Appendix 6 Analysis and flow of Participants Materials

