Supporting law students in the transition to higher education: an intervention

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Thesis submitted to the University of Nottingham for the degree of Professional Doctorate in Education

March 2023

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Professor Sarah Speight and Dr Joanna Al-Youssef for their support and guidance through the development, implementation and writing-up of this research. You kept me going! I also thank all the academic staff in the School of Education who delivered and supported me through the taught stage of the Professional Doctorate, helping develop my skills and confidence to complete this thesis.

My fellow students have inspired me to carry on and complete this work, witnessing their successful completions in recent years. Thanks also go to the students and staff who participated in this study, for their willingness to be involved and their vital contributions.

And finally, I would also like to thank my wife, Sue, and my children, Harry, George and Felix, for their patience and support over the many years I have been at this!

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Abstract

The transition from further education to higher education is a process that can involve a number of significant and interconnected challenges and barriers for students from a variety of backgrounds to overcome. Not knowing what to expect, being uncertain as to what is expected of them and trying to 'fit-in' and develop a sense of belonging are challenges that all students will face to varying degrees. Becoming integrated into an academic and supportive environment can provide a positive foundation to support this transition.

The purpose of this research is to review the current issues and debates in the relevant literature with a view to exploring opportunities for practical support to be given to new students experiencing this transition. Framed within the concepts of cultural capital, institutional habitus and communities of practice, the research explores the views and perceptions of current law students in a research-intensive university, the University of Nottingham, to inform the development and implementation of an intervention aimed at supporting future law students through the transition process. The intervention was subsequently evaluated through analysis of engagement, questionnaires and interviews to determine the level of success and review any shortcomings to inform future interventions and research.

The findings of the research provided a valuable insight into the design and implementation of how practical support could be delivered to first-year law students, highlighting several key themes that are integral to the successful provision of a pre-arrival engagement opportunity: timeliness, relevance, engagement, communication and a sense of belonging.

Chapter 1
Introducing the research context and environment

1.1   Introduction

The student experience in higher education has long been and remains an important issue for policy and higher education institutions alike, as demonstrated by studies by the Department for Business, Innovation & Skills (2014) and the Higher Education Policy Institute/Higher Education Academy (2014). These reports both reflect on a period of change and reform in higher education, including the changes to tuition fees from the 2013/2014 academic year. The focus of these reports was to explore and gain a sector-wide view of the student learning experience against this backdrop of change, and how it can be improved. At an institutional level, the University of Nottingham, the institution in which this research is based, has committed itself to "standing out from our competitors in terms of student experience" (Global Strategy 2020, p.5)

Student experience, in the context of this research, encompasses both the academic and non-academic experiences and opportunities that students are exposed to in higher education, the foundations of which are often constructed during the initial period of studying at university. It is during this crucial transition period that individual students are required to adapt to a new environment, a new way of living and a new way of learning (Christie et al, 2008). This transition period can be challenging for many students as they strive to 'fit-in' with their new peers and their new environment, with students experiencing different challenges at different times during their journey.

However, as this thesis will demonstrate, previous research has identified a number of issues that can be considered applicable to the majority of students during the transition process, albeit to lesser and greater extents.

This research will focus on the exploration of practical support that could be provided to students to assist in this transition process, in the context of supporting first year law students at the University of Nottingham. The rationale for this chosen research location and a discussion of the educational environment will support the development of a set of research questions which will focus the research, together with an appropriate conceptual framework and methodological approach. The overall aim of the proposed research is to investigate how universities can provide practical and appropriate support to their students during their initial transition into higher education.

By exploring a range of sources, these issues will be discussed to provide a wider context for the research, focusing on the background and current debates surrounding the transition of students from further to higher education. Throughout this process, reference will be made to a changing environment which has created both additional challenges and potential opportunities, both at an institutional and sector level.

1.2   Research context and a changing environment

The location for this research was the School of Law, University of Nottingham. This location was selected owing to my position as Undergraduate Programmes Manager in the School of Law at that time, my role being responsible for managing the administrative process of the school's undergraduate degrees and the provision of pastoral support to undergraduate law students.

When designing this research, and in consultation with the School of Law, it was decided that the University of Nottingham would be identified in the thesis. While a pseudonym could have been used, the school was content for open discussion to take place surrounding it current practices, perceived issues, such as first-year academic performance, and the methods planned to address these issues. As the intervention integral to this research would be publicly labelled as a University of Nottingham initiative, it was deemed logical for the full context to be discussed openly.

During the lifecycle of this research project, the University of Nottingham underwent a period of reorganisation which affected how student support was provided across the institution[1]. While this did not impact directly on the purpose of the designed intervention, which aims to encourage the development of a learning community and begin the learning of some core legal educational skills, there was a direct impact on my role within the University and my relationship with students in the School of Law.

During the reorganisation, my role changed from being one based in the School of Law to one based in a new Student Services Centre, although I retained a level of responsibility for Law in addition to two other academic schools. While this change created some distance between me and the school, including the incoming first year students, the Head of School and key academic colleagues provided confirmation that they fully supported the continuation of the research and were happy for the

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[1] Details of this reorganisation, known as Project Transform, can be found at:
http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/project-transform/index.aspx

proposed intervention to take place. Considering these changes, I made the decision that the intervention should take place in September 2016, while I still had some connections with the School of Law as this was not guaranteed to be the case in later academic years.

My role as a member of staff allowed me a proximity to the students that had "implications for the achievement of successful and productive interactions with participants" (Hodkinson, 2005, p. 136). Being known to the students, and staff, who I wished to participate in the research would have affected their willingness, and level of engagement, with the process. This proximity placed me in a position of an 'insider researcher' which, in addition to the benefits stated above, does bring risks to the research such as bias, making assumptions and the participants making assumptions that I already know what they know (Unluer, 2012). While this research would not be classed as 'insider research' according to Wilkinson & Kitzinger (2013), as I am not researching myself, people like me or my community, these risks still apply and will be considered in chapter 3.

A further change to the research environment which I was required to consider as a risk to the proposed research came from the changes to legal education proposed by the legal professional body, the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA). At the time this research was designed, universities were able to offer a Qualifying Law Degree (QLD) which completed the academic stage of training for aspiring lawyers. Current proposals, launched for consultation by the SRA in December 2015, put forward plans to replace the QLD with a new Solicitors Qualifying Examination (SQE).

At the time of this research, it was unknown what the full implications of such a change would be in terms of legal education, what a law degree would look like and how attractive it would be to aspiring lawyers. There was potential this change would affect the purpose and structure of law degrees significantly, the result being between the extremes of law being taught solely as an academic subject to being a training course preparing students for the SQE. These changes, originally planned to come into effect from the 2018/2019 academic year, came into effect for students who commenced their law degrees after December 2021[2]. While these changes did not affect the purpose or structure of the law degree during the research, how these changes, and how the School of Law at the University of Nottingham responded to them, had to be considered with regards to how this could impact on the usefulness of the research.

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[2] https://www.sra.org.uk/become-solicitor/legal-practice-course-route/qualifying-law-degree-common-professional-examination/

Having considered the proposed changes and discussed the likely response of the School of Law with colleagues, I determined that the aims of the intervention that would be introduced as part of this research should remain the same; engaging students with their legal education prior to their arrival and assisting with the transition process. As the changes to legal education come into effect, the design and learning outcomes of the intervention may need to be amended to cater for a degree with a different curriculum and potentially different learning outcomes at the programme level, but the underlying principle of providing this support would remain unchanged.

A further, significant change to the higher education environment occurred after the research had taken place but has had an impact upon the entire landscape; the Covid-19 pandemic and the associated periods of lockdown and remote teaching and learning. As this did not directly affect the research stage of this study, the implications of this change will be considered in more detail in a later chapter, but a move to increased levels of remote, online engagement have implications for the acceptance and delivery of the intervention designed for this research for future cohorts. This period did, however, impact upon the writing-up stage of this study through work pressures, supporting students, and personal circumstances, resulting in the long period between the data collection and the completion of the thesis.

1.3   A rationale for research

Students, coming from a variety of different social and educational backgrounds, arrive with varying levels of preparedness for university. Their previous educational experiences and their choice of institution are important issues in their transition to higher education, but it is perhaps their development as individuals prior to and during the initial stages of their university journey which helps determine their chances of success. In addition, the support they receive from academic staff and from fellow students all play an important role in each individual student's transition process. Transition is a complex issue which "depends on a unique set of relationships between the individual student, their social circumstances and institutional practices" (Christie et al, 2004, p.620).

Complex as it is, universities do have the opportunity to help facilitate the process. In general terms, a supportive environment which welcomes students and facilitates their access to the institutional habitus, in terms of academic and pastoral support, as well as the wider experience is required.

From the literature reviewed as part of this research, many of the issues and barriers students face in the transition process will be discussed and evidenced in a subsequent chapter, but where areas of support have been presented to help address these challenges, they are often theoretically based rather than based in practice. Conclusions that have been drawn have been largely based on assumptions and judgements developed through research interactions with students and staff (Christie et al, 2008; Jacklin & Le Riche, 2009, Mann, 2001). Some of the literature, such as Laing et al (2005) and McChlery & Wilkie (2009), has reported on interventions that have been introduced and reported their findings, but these are in the minority and all have their limitations, which the researchers openly discuss, particularly with regards the limited and specific context in which they have taken place. McChlery & Wilkie (2009), for example, state that in their study there is "no attempt being made to generalise the findings but rather providing a greater understanding through an in-depth study of one particular context" (p.24).

There appears, therefore, to be an opportunity to consider the solutions that have been theorised in the literature and provide some evidence based on practice that demonstrate that these solutions can succeed, albeit within a specific context.

Before exploring the specific context of the proposed research, it should be acknowledged that, at the time this research was designed and implemented, practical solutions had been developed in some universities, demonstrating the need for some form of intervention surrounding the transition process. Some of these are outlined below and have been selected for several reasons.

The courses selected from Nottingham were owing to their location being where this research took place, while the University of East Anglia was highlighted as, from my initial investigation of publicly viewable courses available at that time, they offered support to students to assist transition and had similar aims to those of this research. The courses were also selected owing to their online nature, their focus on key skills development and, in relation to the Nottingham Reading Programme, creating a shared experience.

- Your University Journey: University of Nottingham – an online course for new students covering topics such as "getting to know your fellow students, what to expect at university and how to make a good start on your personal study journey" (University of Nottingham: Moodle[3]).

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[3] Moodle is the University of Nottingham's secure virtual learning environment; login required

- Professional Development in Leadership and Management Programme: Nottingham University Business School – a discipline based, online programme aimed at developing key skills (Nottingham University Business School: Moodle).
- Nottingham Reading Programme: University of Nottingham – providing students with a shared experience and the opportunity to attend reading groups to share the experience further (University of Nottingham[4]).
- Preparing for University: University of East Anglia - a course designed to develop the key skills for a smooth transition to university (Future Learn[5]).
- Study Skills for International Students: University of East Anglia – a course looking at key skills that international students need in order to be successful at a UK university (Future Learn).

Considering 'Your University Journey', in an initial report published by the University of Nottingham in 2016 on the first year of the course being available, feedback from students suggested that half of the participants completed the course to either prepare themselves for coming to university or to feel connected. This feedback, together with the other examples, demonstrate that developing interventions with the aim of supporting students in the transition process do exist and evidence supports that they can be successful. The intervention envisaged for this proposed research differs from these examples as it will be based within the discipline of law and focus on the skills required in legal education, owing to the discipline related rationales outlined below. This is also a reflection on the absence of law as a specific context from the transition literature that has been reviewed. The literature has often focused on a range of disciplines, including law, but only in the context of generic issues rather than highlighting issues relating to specific subject areas.

Basing the research in law, specifically law at the University of Nottingham, provides an ideal context for the proposed intervention, which will be explained in more detail later, owing to its constitution and the educational framework in which it is based in order to satisfy the professional legal bodies.

The School of Law at the University of Nottingham at the time of this research had a relatively diverse student population which does not reflect the traditional identity of the male, middle-class, privately educated lawyer with a family history in the profession (Bibbings, 2006). International students constituted approximately 25% of the cohort while approximately 25% of the 'home' student

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[4] News and details of the reading programme can be found here:
https://exchange.nottingham.ac.uk/blog/tag/nottingham-reading-programme/
[5] Details of all courses available on the Future Learn website can be found here: https://www.futurelearn.com/

population were considered to fall within categories defining widening participation students[6]. Furthermore, the majority of students were female, close to 60%, which had been the case for the previous five years[7]. Such a diverse student population encompasses students from a range of educational and social backgrounds, providing a rich environment for an intervention to be introduced.

The framework of the law degree, driven by the legal recruitment market, is also a rationale for selecting law as the discipline for this proposed research. Unlike many disciplines, the first year of a law degree does count for more than progression to the next stage of the degree as the first-year results are the only evidence that students have of their academic ability when applying for legal placements or vacation schemes (LawCareers.Net). Many law firms offering these work experience opportunities will automatically disregard applications which do not demonstrate an upper second-class average. As with most professional careers, gaining relevant experience is crucial. In addition, the School of Law at the University of Nottingham offers study abroad opportunities with partner law schools around the world, a process which also relies on first year results as part of the application process.

However, the performance of first-year law students at the University of Nottingham does not place them in a good position academically, with over 40% failing to achieve the equivalent of an upper second-class average in 2015. This is in contrast to the final performance of the School of Law's students, with over 80% of the graduating cohort completing their studies with a first class or upper second-class degree. In addition, satisfaction with the quality of education and experience in School of Law is high, with the school was consistently ranked highly in the National Students Survey (Unistats) throughout the period I worked within the school (2006 to 2016).

It appears, therefore, that students are making a successful transition to legal studies in higher education but there is concern that the process is not sufficiently quick to be of the greatest benefit to the students. Academic staff within the School of Law have for some time felt that when students arrive in the school, they do not have sufficient skills to be independent learners and, with the amount of discipline based content to be delivered during the first year, there is not enough scope within the

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[6] Figures reported by the School of Law's Admissions Tutor based on their access to the widening participation data shared with them.

[7] Data has been produced internally in the School of Law as part of my role at the time of this research, including the data below on student performance.

curriculum for these skills to be taught. Generic skills-based sessions have been developed and delivered but as will be highlighted in the literature review, these are often not seen as being relevant by the students (Wingate, 2007). The academic skills required are developed over the duration of the degree, which is reflected in the improving performance as students' progress, which could indicate that they are "expected to be 'independent' too early" (Leathwood & O'Connell, 2003, p.610).

In addition to skills sessions delivered as extra-curricular activities once students commence their studies, the School of Law is also involved in a pre-engagement programme for potential applicants who fall within the non-traditional student definition, similar to the "higher education enrichment programmes" (Trotter & Roberts, 2006, p.382) that will be discussed. The Pathways to Law programme[8] is designed for year 12 and 13 students interested in a legal career, providing support through law-related tuition, information, advice and guidance. However, this programme is only open to a limited number of students, a small number of whom eventually join the School of Law, approximately ten students in 2016.

The issues of a diverse student population, the importance of the first year within the legal education framework and the lack of education preparedness of students for legal study demonstrate a clear rationale for this research: how this research can contribute to the exploration of how support can be provided to students entering legal education; and, why the School of Law at the University of Nottingham is an appropriate context for the proposed intervention. In addition, one further rationale as to the choice of location is my connection with the school, and therefore proximity to the research context, at the time the research was designed and implemented. Being responsible, amongst other things, for the provision of pastoral support and managing the student experience, this personal connection to the location of the proposed intervention would allow for direct insights as to the support required and enable me to directly witness the resulting impact. This personal connection does raise some ethical questions surrounding my role as an 'insider' and these will be discussed further when ethics are considered.

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[8] Details of the Pathways to Law programme can be found at:
https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/schoolsliaison/services/pathways-to-law.aspx

1.4   Structure of the thesis

Chapter 1 has offered an introduction to the research; the context, environment and the rationale for exploring the question of how law students can be supported in the transition to higher education.

The thesis will address this question through the following structure.

Chapter 2 will explore the aims of the research and outline the research questions to be addressed and discuss the theoretical framework in which the research is based. A number of theoretical concepts have been drawn upon in which to explore the issues surrounding the transition of students into higher education, considered by myself as researcher to be influential in designing practical support for these students. This research draws upon the concepts of cultural capital, institutional habitus and communities of practice. This chapter then provides a review of the literature surrounding student transition and induction into higher education. The literature further explores the key theoretical concepts and reviews previous research in the support of students and the barriers they face when starting their student journey. While this literature review provides a picture of the educational environment in which this research is broadly placed, some specific pieces of research have directly inspired the research methods that have been designed for this study, such as Laing et al (2005) advocating 'spiral induction' processes and Crozier & Reay exploring issues of 'cultural capital' (2008).

Chapter 3 discusses my research approach and the research methods used in the study, providing a rationale for the methods selected in relation to the research questions outlined in chapter 2. This will include the design and implementation of an intervention specifically designed for this research, designed with the dual purpose of providing support to new law students entering the University of Nottingham as well as being a tool for providing initial research data and initiating subsequent methods of data collection. This chapter will also discuss the ethical considerations surrounding the research methods employed.

Chapter 4 offers a presentation and analysis of the research findings from the various research methods, including focus group feedback, analysis of data from the implementation of the intervention, survey feedback and interviews with both students and staff.

Chapter 5 continues the discussion of the research findings, exploring the key themes that emerged from the data in the context of the literature review, the learning outcomes of the intervention and research questions.

The final chapter will draw together the conclusions from this piece of research: assessing its successes and shortcomings; reflecting on my personal and professional development; reviewing potential opportunities for the designed intervention to be implemented in the future and in what context; and exploring potential areas for further research.

Chapter 2
Research aims, theoretical framework and key debates in student transition

2.1   Research aims

This research aims to explore potential opportunities to support first year law students in their transition to higher education. The various issues surrounding the transition of students in the wider higher educational environment will be explored in later in this chapter and, in conjunction with the specific context and environment in which the research took place, this knowledge and understanding has enabled the consideration and development of specific aims and defined research questions.

The research aims to investigate the feasibility for academic information to be delivered in a collaborative way, combined with useful information as to sources of available support, to assist students in the transition process. As part of the research, an intervention was designed to be delivered prior to students' arrival at university, with the purpose to assist new students in understanding what is expected of them and also to lay the foundations of a social and academic network which could be further developed once they arrive at university. Through this intervention, students will be given the opportunity to begin learning the skills required to become independent learners.

While these appear to be broad aims, it is recognised that the large and complex issues associated with the transition process will not be wholly addressed within the confines of this research. For example, the intervention itself will not provide participating students with the necessary cultural capital required to attain a complete sense of belonging nor will it give sufficient knowledge or insight into the institutional habitus of the university to allow them to create a new identity. However, these issues are important elements in the theoretical framework and in the concepts used to design this research and, by their inclusion, aim to offer evidence that support can be provided to create opportunities to help the processes of cultural capital development and identity creation to occur.

It should be noted at this stage that the literature explored to define the research aims, theoretical framework and design of the research reflect the available literature at the time, and it is acknowledged that further studies and literature will have become available following the introduction of the intervention at the core of this research. The research methods used, and the

analysis of the data is presented in this context and reference to how further research and the changing higher education environment may impact upon these findings will be explored in the concluding chapter.

2.2   Research questions

As "it is the research questions that give focus, sets boundaries, and provides direction" (O'Leary, 2004, p.28) to a piece of research, careful thought has been given to the research questions that will be explored within the broad area of student transition.

Question 1

What does the literature tell us of the opportunities that exist for support to be provided to first year students when starting university?

Question 2

What support do first year law students perceive is necessary when starting at university at the case study institution?

Question 3

What is the student and staff experience of this support when delivered in a practical way?

As expected, these research questions have evolved through various iterations and been refined during the research design and implementation process (Pryor, 2010), resulting in research questions that contribute to the overarching aim of the research, address the learning outcomes of the intervention and could be considered to be appropriate, answerable and realistic. "Ultimately, a good research question is one that works in the interests of the research" (ibid, p.165)

In addition, during the development of the intervention, current first year students and members of academic staff were asked to review the intervention prior to being implemented. As part of this review process, they were asked to review the stated aims and research questions in order to ensure the purpose of the research was clearly defined (Brown, 2010; Pryor, 2010). This process aided the evolution of the research questions to ensure they were specific and relevant to the overall aims of the intervention and the research.

In order to address these research aims and questions, a theoretical framework was developed to introduce some of the relevant concepts from the literature. This theoretical framework is then further supported through an understanding of the existing debates and issues surrounding the transition process and exploring why students require support in the current higher education environment. This analysis of the literature will provide a basis for investigating how universities can provide support to assist their students in the transition process and provide a framework in which a practical intervention can be developed, implemented and reviewed.

2.3   Framing the research

Cultural capital and institutional habitus

The concepts of cultural capital and institutional habitus play an important role in the research, as will be discussed further in the literature review when considering students attaining a sense of belonging. Cultural capital is defined as the 'social assets' of a person, and in the context of this research particularly refers to a person's educational assets or background. Institutional habitus is defined as the cultures and practices of an institution as informed and influenced by the dominant social group.

Bourdieu & Passeron (1990) argue that academic success, at any level, is dependent upon the cultural capital gained from the earliest educational experiences. Furthermore, they argue that this education experience is determined by their "social origin" (ibid, p.80), creating barriers for people to move between social groups and therefore barriers to non-traditional students integrating into higher education long before they become a student. The reproduction of cultural capital takes place in education institutions, and, by virtue of their functions, these institutions are in a "position … to impose the norms of its self-perpetuation" (ibid, p.197). In higher education, the dominant cultural capital remains in the hands of those who fit the definition of the 'traditional student' and this contributes to the institutional habitus of individual universities. Thomas (2002) comments that students without the correct cultural capital, the non-traditional students, can feel undervalued and not attain that required sense of belonging, and they hold no power over the cultures and practices of the institution they have joined.

These views convey an environment that has formed barriers to any student who does not conform to the 'typical' student type of that particular institution, an environment created by the institution, reproduced and reinforced by the 'typical' student.

The reproduction of cultural capital, however, is not perceived universally as a fixed concept. Thomas (2002) suggests that it is "possible to create an institutional habitus that does not reinforce the habitus of the dominant groups in society and education, but which is inclusive of difference" (p.433-434). Thomas' (2002) research argued that teaching, learning and assessment methods had an important role in either "changing or reproducing social and cultural inequalities" (P.433), with her study demonstrating students could receive an experience that was inclusive or one that could alienate them if they did not possess the correct cultural capital. Furthermore, a number of researchers have also focused on the opportunities for, and abilities of, non-traditional students to accumulate the cultural capital required to be successful in the existing habitus of higher education institutions (Crozier & Reay, 2011; Leese, 2010; Reay et al, 2010). As the literature review will explore, a student can overcome these barriers and become accepted into, and be accepting of, their new environment, albeit partially in some instances (Crozier & Reay, 2008).

The understanding that students do not have an "irreversible disposition, i.e. a disposition which cannot itself be repressed or transformed" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p.42) is important to this research as the aim is to demonstrate that opportunities do exist for students to develop the necessary cultural capital, to transform their disposition in order to accommodate the institutional habitus they have become a member of.

The acquirement of new cultural capital does not necessarily mean that existing cultural capital needs to be "repressed or transformed" (ibid) but should be seen as more of a developmental process. This process is linked to the idea of identity, sometimes referred to as learning identity (Palmer et al, 2009; Christie et al, 2008), with students developing a new identity during the transition process which involves them understanding and accepting their role in a new educational environment. Through an understanding of the new academic language they are exposed to and gaining the relevant knowledge about the practices and procedures of the university, students can bridge the gap between their previous and current educational experiences and acquire the necessary cultural capital.

The development of new cultural capital and creation of a new identity is not wholly based on the new educational environment in which students are entering. This development is also influenced by all of the communities in which the individual is based, such as their new course, new accommodation, new social networks in addition to existing family and social networks established prior to going to university (Hodgen & Askew, 2007). Students are "compelled to negotiate and reconcile" (p.473) their membership of these various communities, to go through a "process of identity reconciliation" (ibid).

An important community in the development of cultural capital, however, is the academic, discipline-based community students have entered, often referred to as a 'community of practice' (Christie et al, 2008; Montgomery & McDowell, 2009).

Communities of practice

The concept of communities of practice was developed by Wenger in the context of apprenticeships but the concept is now widely used in businesses, government and education. Wenger (2000) holds that "participating in these 'communities of practice' is essential to our learning" and they are "the building blocks of a social learning system" (p.229).

Peer support, both within and outside the classroom, can be considered a community of practice and is important to students during and after the transition process. It can help students create their new identity and develop their sense of belonging (Cousin & Deepwell, 2005; Wenger, 2000). Furthermore, communities of practice are "important for student retention, success and personal development" (Zhao & Kuh, 2004, p.116) as when students actively participate within that community it can encourage "such positive behaviours as increased academic effort and outcomes" (ibid) as well as creating an environment in which students can create connections with their peers.

Building on the findings of Zhao & Kuh (2004), the existence of a community of practice offers the opportunity for students to learn from one another as they develop a "responsibility for teaching and learning" (Carnell, 2007, p.30) and the interactions between members of the community, who share a common goal and are undergoing the same experience, promote collective learning. Within a community, members will approach tasks and problems from different angles or perspectives and the sharing of these will enhance the learning experience of all members (Wenger, 2000). In addition, working together and engaging with each other encourages the development of skills, knowledge and understanding amongst the members of the community (Falchikov, 2002; Wesley & Buysse, 2001).

The transition process into higher education is an individual process which will be different for each student. However, it is the support that exists around this process that can assist students, and the development of relationships encouraged through communities of practice plays a crucial role. Such communities require an appropriate environment in which to develop successfully, based on "mutual engagement; joint enterprise; and a shared repertoire" "Cousin & Deepwell, 2005, p.59). This relies on the engagement of both learners and teachers, having the opportunity to become involved in

discussions and having a shared and clear purpose (Avis et al, 2002; Cousin & Deepwell, 2005). Importantly for the proposed research, it has been demonstrated that an appropriate environment can exist on an online basis, with technology providing the opportunity for "extending the boundaries of a learning experience … beyond the limits of lecture halls and … across distance and social spaces" (Hodgkinson-Williams et al, 2008, p.436). Students engaged in common tasks with shared objectives can create communities of practice through online engagement.

When exploring the concept of communities of practice there are two important issues that need to be considered. First, a community cannot be imposed on members although "the conditions for its growth may be cultivated" (Cousin & Deepwell, 2005, p.62), be that through the provision of opportunities for discussion to take place or simply through the encouragement of students with a shared purpose to engage with each other. For example, it is common for international students to form communities of practice to provide mutual support and replace the social capital they have lost in the process of moving to another country to study (Montgomery & McDowell, 2009). Or non-traditional students fearing social exclusion may engage in a community of practice to help develop their sense of belonging (Thomas, 2002). While these communities can be beneficial to their members by providing a support network and a space for them to create that sense of belonging, with members from similar backgrounds helping each other feel as though they 'fit-in' with their environment, there is potential for these communities to restrict engagement with other communities, which is linked to the second issue.

The second issue is that there is a risk that communities of practice can play a role in reproducing cultural capital (Cousin & Deepwell, 2005), both within individual communities as mentioned above as well as in maintaining existing institutional habitus, restricting the development of inclusivity and the opportunities for students to develop a new identity. While this can be seen as necessary to an extent, as the aim is to induct students into the disciplinary practices of the institution as well as supporting students create that sense of belonging, further consideration is required. Care needs to be taken to ensure that communities of practice do not inhibit members from discussion and the exploration of new ideas and knowledge, by creating wider communities of practice through engagement in learning opportunities, the development of shared objectives and exposure to other communities, even if this is initially through the concept of "peripheral participation" (ibid, p.62). Peripheral participation provides the opportunity to become acquainted with and accustomed to the tasks, vocabulary and principles of that community. Such participation allows members of non-dominant communities to learn, adopt and accept the practices of members of the dominant

communities, with the cultural capital and knowledge to navigate the environment. Conversely, new practices can be learnt, adopted and accepted by the members of the dominant communities, creating an environment of mutual support and opportunities to challenge non-inclusive aspects of the institutional habitus.

The framework and the literature

Having identified these core theoretical concepts to create a framework for this research, how these have influenced the design of the research will be addressed in chapter 3. In addition, the following image (Figure 1) represents the interconnection between these concepts and their importance in the student transition journey.

Student Transition

Cultural Capital

Development of cultural capital relevant to new educational context

Institutional Habitus

Adapting and aligning educational environment to accommodate diverse student population

Communities of Practice

Creation of support through academic and peer communities

Figure 1: Theoretical Framework
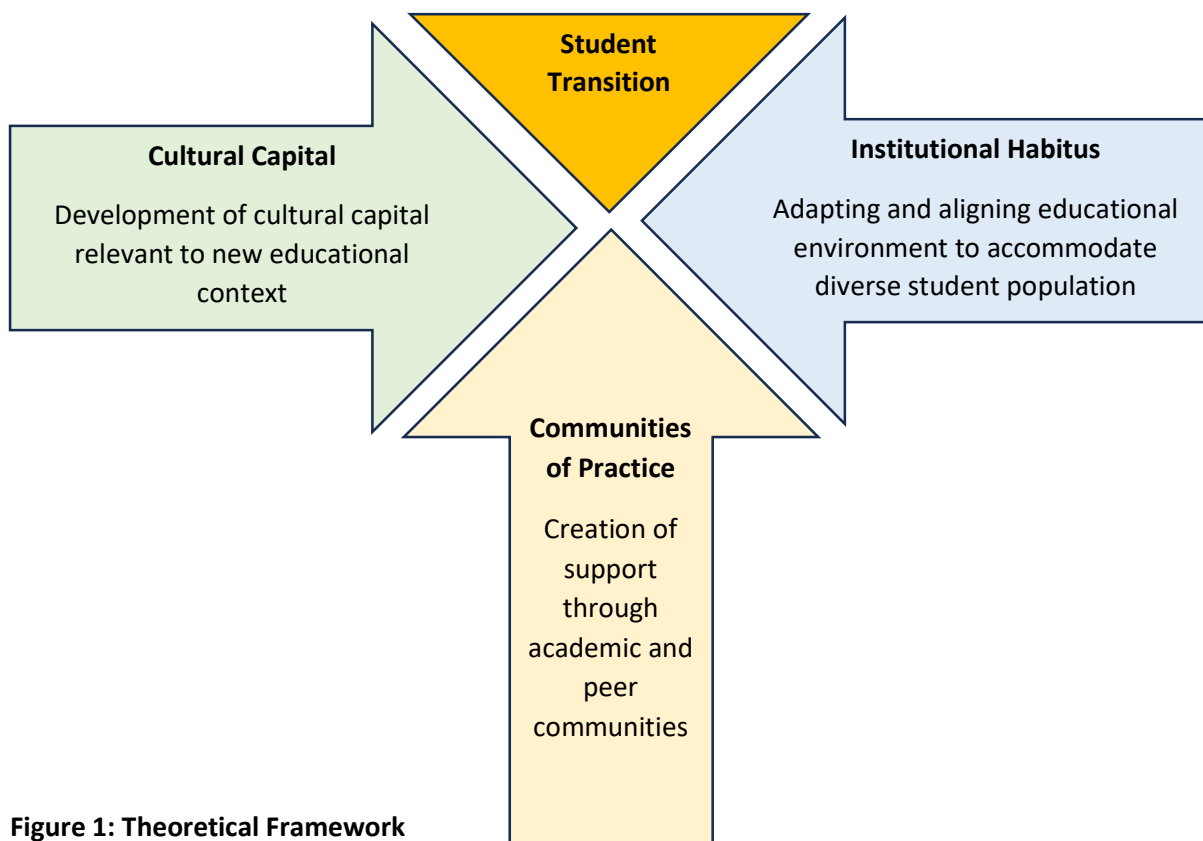
Figure 1 represents how the theoretical concepts can align to support student transition into higher education: through creating opportunities and removing barriers for students to obtain and develop the relevant cultural capital to adapt to the new environment; by adapting this environment to meet the needs and expectation of a diverse and evolving student population; and by creating a welcoming and supportive community to create and develop these opportunities.

Prior to discussing the approach to the research, the wider literature surrounding student transition will be reviewed. The theoretical concepts outlined above have arisen from this literature review and the wider discussion below is framed within this context, with cultural capital, institutional habitus and communities of practice being highlighted throughout in the relevant themes.

The exploration of existing literature will primarily focus on undergraduate students' preparedness when commencing their university studies and the internal and external barriers which exist and must be overcome in order to successfully complete the transition process. A successful or complete transition is difficult to define within the confines of this research and definitions of what a successful transition means can vary. Definitions can be in quantifiable terms such as retention or completion rates, but a successful transition will vary between individual students based on their previous education experiences. Broadly speaking, by the end of the transition process it is hoped a student will feel engaged in their studies, their learning community and in the wider higher education environment.

2.4   A diverse population

To provide some context to the literature review it is necessary to outline the landscape of the UK higher education system at the time this research was undertaken, which, through a succession of policies aimed at widening participation and internationalisation, has resulted in a mass system with a diverse student population.

From the early 2000's the widening participation agenda has aimed to increase the diversity of the student population, encouraging applications and engagement from groups not traditionally associated with higher education (Edward, 2003; Reay et al, 2002). The 'traditional' student has been defined as "white, male, middle class, able bodied" (Thomas, 2002, p.433) with anyone falling outside this definition being seen as 'non-traditional'. The overarching aim of widening participation, as defined by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), is "to promote and provide the opportunity of successful participation in higher education to everyone who can benefit from it" (HEFCE, 2017).

In reviewing the literature, however, non-traditional most commonly applies to students from working class or minority backgrounds, those who are first in their family to participate in higher education and mature students (Holton, 2018). Working class broadly applies to students from lower income families and those who are not perceived to have a high level of education. Mature students are

typically those over the age of 21. When referring to non-traditional students in this research it will be these groups that are being discussed, with any additional groups of students being identified separately.

In addition to widening participation across the social, economic and ethnic groups of the UK population, the increase in the number of international (including European Union) students has also contributed to the expansion and diversity of higher education, with international students accounting for a significant proportion of the student body in some universities[9]. International students may face additional challenges to 'home' students in the transition process, including language barriers and adapting to a new culture and social norms, but many of the challenges in terms of being prepared and experiencing a new education environment and culture will be similar.

Widening participation policies aimed at the diversification of the student population have been combined with and contributed to the expansion of the UK higher education system. In recent decades, overall participation in higher education has increased, from around 5% in the 1960s[10] to 41.8% in 2006/2007 and 50.2% in 2017/2018 (Department for Education, 2019).

While students have always faced challenges in the transition to higher education, the traditional student is more likely to have had the educational, economic and social background, the cultural capital, to help support them in this process, as will be explained throughout this literature review. The combined effect of an expanding and diversifying student population has contributed to the challenges many students face in the transition process, both individually and collectively. The diversification of the student population has resulted in institutions recruiting an increasing number of students from wider and more non-traditional backgrounds. However, this has been done without adapting their processes or systems of support to accommodate them, relying on the processes and systems originally designed for the traditional student, recruited in lower numbers, maintaining the institutional habitus. This expansion has created a system that does not allow sufficient contact between academic staff and students to provide the support students need, regardless of background (Mann, 2008).

These issues will be discussed in greater depth in the following sections but before doing so it should be acknowledged that a number of researchers (Blanden & Machin, 2004; Crozier & Reay, 2008; Reay,

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[9] For example, at the University of Nottingham in 2016/2017, 26% of all students based at the UK campus were EU and international, with 16% of all undergraduate students falling into this category.
[10] Figure from BBC News article, 13 March 2010

2002) contest the success of widening participation policies and the extent of diversification, noting "concerns remain about the social class gap in entry to higher education" (Crozier & Gill, 2008, p.15). However, while it could be argued that these policies have not met their full potential, they have contributed to an expanded and more diverse student population and have increased the number of non-traditional students in higher education even if the gap between social classes has not changed significantly (Christie et al, 2005).

Throughout the literature there is a significant focus on the non-traditional student when exploring issues surrounding transition and retention, with research aimed at trying to establish how these students can be supported. This research is based in a research-intensive and high-tariff entry law school, so in this context, while relying on this literature and referring to this distinction between student groups, the focus of this research is to demonstrate that all students require support in this process and that an intervention can be developed to assist in the provision of this support to all students. In effect, as stated by Jacklin & Le Riche (2009), all students are "in the same boat" (p.743). The support will vary in the extent it is required depending on the needs of student groups and of the individual, but support to varying degrees can be required by all students to support them in social inclusion, academic development and induction into academic language and culture.   It should be acknowledged that while some students will face additional challenges, for example a single black student in a cohort of white students, addressing the barriers to transition should be designed to be as inclusive to all students as possible.

2.5   Being prepared

When reviewing literature regarding student transition to higher education or the retention of students, a common theme is that in the current mass higher education system students are not fully prepared with regards what to expect or what is expected of them (Edward, 2003; Ozga & Sukhnandan, 1998). When entering higher education for the first time, students are commencing a journey into a new environment with unfamiliar customs and language that they have limited knowledge of, an experience similar to that of people "crossing the borders of a new country" (Mann, 2001, p.11).

This absence of knowledge, or cultural capital, combined with a disparity between students' expectations and the actual experience of studying at university are considered a significant, although not exclusive, factor in students not completing their studies (Edward, 2003; Haggis & Pouget, 2002).

Gamache (2002) commented that "traditionalists see student failure as, ultimately, the students' 'fault'" (p.277), a view that has been repeated through much of the literature, with failure referring to both academic failure and students not continuing on their course. This view can be seen as a reaction to the widening diversity in the increasing population of students, moving away from the more selective and elite higher education of previous generations. With more students from a less traditional background, there was concern that these students would be less prepared than their traditional counterparts (Trotter & Roberts, 2006) and would not possess the required ability or aspiration to succeed (Leathwood & O'Connell, 2003). It is possible to see how this perception would have developed and still be seen as valid today when differences in educational and family backgrounds between traditional and non-traditional students are considered, as discussed below. However, as will be explored in more detail, this is a generalisation of the differing groups of students; their background is only one small element influencing an individual student's potential to successfully make the transition into higher education and complete their studies.

Moving away from Gamache's view it is now acknowledged, by Mann, Wingate and others that rather than the challenges students face being associated with the individual, there is a view that they are a result of how institutions have responded, or failed to respond, to the changing higher education environment (Mann, 2001), maintaining traditional expectations of their students despite the increased and diversified population (Wingate, 2007), perpetuating existing institutional habitus. In essence, many of the barriers that students may face when entering higher education are not the result of individual deficits but deficits in the environment. It may be deemed appropriate for institutions to maintain high expectations in terms of their students being prepared for their studies and possessing the right cultural capital, a concept that will be explored further below, without requiring any particular support. Traditionally, where support was available, this could be provided on a more focused and personal level. However, with high student numbers from a diverse range of backgrounds this is no longer possible. This shift has contributed to a disparity between staff expectations and the performance of their students (Edward, 2003) and highlights the need for universities to evolve their support services for the current higher education environment. Drew (2001) commented that students "felt it was important for allowances to be made for their individual (educational) need but considered that lecturers often assumed their needs were identical" (p.314), demonstrating the need for personal and focused support.

As has been mentioned, with the expansion of higher education there has been a diversification of the student population (Edward, 2003), with increasing numbers of students from non-traditional

backgrounds having the opportunity to go to university. This increase has "brought about a student population with diverse entry qualifications, abilities and learning experiences" (Wingate, 2007, p.392). A significant proportion of the literature reviewed which discusses students' lack of preparedness does focus on the non-traditional students, often reporting that this group of students are more likely to be ill-prepared or ill-equipped to cope with the demands of higher education. While there is evidence which supports students from differing social and academic backgrounds facing different challenges in the transition process, this does not necessarily demonstrate that any one group is "any more adequately prepared" (Wingate, 2007, p.393) than another.

The best way to explore this issue is to examine some of the core challenges that students face in being adequately prepared for the transition to higher education. For the majority of students there is a "gap between the knowledge of higher education and the experiences of students once there" (Christie et al, 2004, p.624), reflecting their lack of the right cultural capital. Prior to starting university, potential students have various sources of information available to them, including access to friends and family who have previously attended university or from schools and colleges who have the resources to help prepare their pupils for the transition. These sources of information are arguably more readily available to the traditional student as they are more likely to belong to families with a history of higher education and attend a school or college that has a tradition of sending its pupils to university (Crozier et al, 2008).

However, it has been argued that even with these resources, traditional students can still experience difficulties when entering higher education. While family and friends are able to provide details of their experience, they are offering potentially outdated, biased, or inaccurate views (Ozga & Sukhnandan, 1998). That being said, some information may be considered better than none and those non-traditional students who do not have access to the experiences or coaching of others may be expected to experience 'culture shock' more than their traditional counterparts when they first enter university (Christie et al, 2008; Mann, 2001).

To help address the gap between expectations and reality, universities publish resources to provide information on the institution and the individual programmes to help potential students make an informed choice as to where to apply and ultimately attend. All potential students have access to these resources in theory; however, marketing materials typically speak to mainstream applicants and there is an assumption that potential students are aware of how to access these (Frost, 2017). There are shortcomings to the effectiveness of these resources, and they do not offer any real insight into

what it is like to be a student. Ozga & Sukhnandan (1998) also commented that, in a highly competitive higher education market, institutions are actively trying to recruit students and the information provided may not always be truly representative.

Trotter & Roberts (2006) have argued that further pre-entry engagement would be beneficial for all potential students. Following research into a range of disciplines, they found that programmes which ran "higher education enrichment programmes in order to … help shape students' expectations of HE" (p.382) in local schools and colleges enjoyed higher retention rates. Through exposure to academic content and higher education staff, these enrichment programmes provide an actual experience of what it is like to study as a higher education student, although in a limited capacity. While they are largely aimed at non-traditional students through widening participation initiatives, all students could benefit from such interaction as the majority of students experience a difference in style from their previous educational experiences when entering higher education (Drew, 2001).

For all students, traditional and non-traditional alike, the choice of institution and choice of programme is likely to be influenced by the pre-entry information, including the National Student Survey, and experiences they encounter. Making the wrong selection, based on poor or limited information and experience, is one of the most common reasons why students do not complete the transition process and withdraw (Christie et al, 2004). Making a proactive choice is also important, and this issue may affect the traditional student to a greater extent as they may be entering higher education as it is expected of them, or it seems the natural path to follow when finishing school or college. Making a proactive choice has increased in significance following the introduction of tuition fees in 1998, with students seeking to maximise the "return on investment" by seeking programmes or institutions on the expected graduate employment potential (Frost, 2017, p.75). Students making a proactive choice to enter higher education are more likely to successfully complete the transition and complete their studies (Ozga & Sukhnandan, 1998). Ozga & Sukhnandan (1998) use mature students as an example of this, demonstrating that they are generally making a proactive and informed choice to enter higher education and undertake a significant level of research into the institution and programme they wish to study. Mature students are more likely to fail to complete owing to external factors, which will be discussed in a later section, rather than on insufficient preparation.

Helping students prepare for the university experience also continues as soon as they arrive, through induction programmes. These programmes offer the opportunity for most students to gain their first

insight into what it is like to be studying at university, but owing to limited time and the amount of information that is provided, they often fail to offer any true insight or prepare them for the actual educational experience. Laing et al (2005) advocates an induction process rather than an induction event, supporting students in an online environment over an extended period of time and identifying students who are not engaging with the activities in order to target additional support. An induction process may assist students in understanding discipline conventions, which can be a barrier to students making a successful transition (Wingate, 2007).

There are a number of issues faced by all students in becoming prepared for entering higher education, varying in degree based on their educational and social background. There is one issue, however, that can be seen to be more likely to affect the traditional student and their engagement with their studies. Students considered exceptional at school or college and achieving high entry qualifications may feel disenchanted when they arrive at university as they are no longer seen as exceptional or receive the attention or praise previously given (Edward, 2003). In the context of this research, this could affect new law students as the majority have not studied Law A Level, so are engaging with a new discipline, or if they have, it can be a very different experience at university. These students do not have the background of previous success in their new subject. This can have an effect on their engagement and motivation, impacting upon their studies. Psychological aspects of the transition process will be discussed in a later section.

As can be seen, there is evidence and some agreement in the literature that students are not fully or adequately prepared for higher education when they first enter university, despite the resources that may be available to them. The literature is supported by withdrawal and failure rates amongst students, with data collected from the University of Nottingham Law School recording 12 withdrawals and 10 failing students in the first year from the 2015/2016 academic year[11]. There are opportunities to help prepare students for their university experience and aid their transition to higher education but, even with some knowledge of what to expect, they still have limited or no experience of the "culture …, the structure and organisation of the university" (Crozier & Reay, 2011, p.147) and this shortfall of 'cultural capital' can contribute to the culture shock and loss of identity that many of them experience.

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[11] Data collected as part of my role in the School of Law, University of Nottingham, for Annual Monitoring reporting. Sector-wide data is available from the Office for Students (https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/)

2.6   Finding a place

When entering a new environment, it is usual that most people will need to take some time to establish their bearings and become comfortable with their new surroundings, new people and new expectations and this is no different for students entering higher education for the first time. This process can be made easier or more difficult depending upon previous experiences and how different these are from the new environment that is being entered. In an educational context, Bourdieu developed the concept of 'cultural capital' in the 1970's which encompassed this issue, later stating that "the success of all school education … depends fundamentally on the education previously accomplished in the earliest years of life" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p.43). Originally a sociological concept, cultural capital has subsequently been associated, either explicitly or implicitly, with research on non-traditional students entering higher education.

The concept of cultural capital implies that to be successful in higher education, a student's previous educational experience, from their primary years, would have to be considered successful and positive. These experiences and the associated cultural capital would have been maintained and developed throughout their formal education up to the point they enter higher education. This view, in its simplest form, suggests that success in higher education is limited to those considered to have good educational, and by implication good social and economic, backgrounds and allows for little or no social mobility. According to Bourdieu & Passeron (1990), "social origin predetermines educational destiny" (p.80). Although an extreme and static view, this has become a foundation concept in non-traditional student retention and performance literature (Leese, 2010; Reay et al, 2010), echoing the idea that a student's failure is inherently owing to their own deficit in educational experience (Gamache, 2002).

In reality, opportunities for social mobility do exist and recent literature does attempt to address issues surrounding the opportunities for students to develop or change their cultural capital in order to be successful in higher education, facilitating social mobility. However, all students will experience 'culture shock' when they first arrive at university. Culture shock can be defined as "the anxiety resulting from the loss of familiar signs and symbols when a person enters a new culture" (Kelly & Moogan, 2012, p.27), similar to people travelling to a new country for the first time. Culture shock can be experienced by students to a greater or lesser extent depending upon their educational background and the cultural capital they have developed by this time. Many students are "shocked initially by the reality of university structures and expectations" (Haggis & Pouget, 2002, p.329).

The level of culture shock experienced by students can be linked to the university they have selected to enter or the course of study they have chosen to follow and making the right choice can assist in the transition process. Making a choice which aligns their cultural capital with the course and university environment and ethos can have a significant impact upon a student being in a position to make a successful transition. For example, if a working-class student who is first in their family to attend university selects a university that has a high proportion of students from a similar background, they are more likely to feel like they 'fit-in.' Ozga & Sukhnandan (1998) reported in their research that "the majority of non-completers…made poor choices of institution/course in terms of their levels of compatibility" (p.329). Their research argued that the main factors in non-completion were "student preparedness and compatibility of choice" (ibid, p.316), emphasising the issue as a complex social process, linking back to cultural capital and previous educational experience.

To further emphasise this issue, research into student retention (Christie et al, 2004; Ozga & Sukhnandan, 1998) has shown that a significant number of students who had withdrawn from a course had, or intended to, return to higher education, usually at another university, demonstrating that the students valued the benefits of higher education as well as the importance of choosing the right place to study for them as an individual. Christie et al (2004) reported that of the students in their study who had withdrawn claimed to have done so owing to "problems with the social and institutional environment" (p.623). Furthermore, Ozga & Sukhnandan (1998) reported that the timing of a student's withdrawal could evidence a positive choice and recognition of this incompatibility, although it is acknowledged that are many reasons why a student may choose to withdraw from their studies.

Individual institutions each have their own distinct character and culture, having evolved over many years. Referred to as 'institutional habitus,' Thomas (2002) defines this concept as the cultures and practices of an institution as informed and influenced by the dominant social group. Thomas expands further stating that, by holding power over the cultures and practices, institutions can maintain their 'habitus' which contributes "towards reproducing the class distribution of cultural capital" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p.199), creating barriers for people to move between social groups. In the context of students finding their place in higher education, it is these existing cultures and practices which can make it difficult for non-traditional students to "fit-in,…their social and cultural practices are inappropriate and that their tacit knowledge is undervalued" (Thomas, 2002, p.431). It could be argued, however, that this would apply to all students as even for those considered traditional as defined earlier, selecting the correct institution is of equal importance.

For students to develop the correct cultural capital to help them succeed in the transition to higher education, the institutional habitus of the university they attend must also be considered and a corresponding change take place, potentially through teaching, learning and assessment methods as outlined by Thomas (2002) in the discussion of the theoretical framework of this research.

Returning to the issue of cultural capital, for all students being at a university with fellow students from a similar background and having similar cultural capital in terms of previous educational experience, can assist them in the transition process by giving them the sense that they 'fit-in' with their peers. The literature argues, however, that in this instance finding a sense of belonging can be less straightforward for non-traditional students. Reay et al (2010) reported that these students often "lacked a sense of entitlement" (p.109) to be studying at university, and entitlement that could easily be taken for granted by students with a family history of higher education or coming from schools which send a high proportion of their pupils to university. Furthermore, it is recognised that some students face additional barriers in the transition process than those considered traditional students, such as family and financial commitments. These additional barriers will be explored further when considering the role of peers and the support they can provide in the transition process.

When considering additional barriers, further consideration also needs to be given to international students who, in their transition into UK higher education, experience issues associated with cultural capital and institutional habitus. In addition to the need to become accustomed to a new educational experience there is also the need to make the transition to a new country, a new culture and in many cases doing so without English being their first language (Robotham & Julian, 2006). Furthermore, regardless of their educational, social, or economic background in their home country, international students may find that whatever cultural capital they have developed during their previous educational experiences offers little advantage when entering a UK university. The cultures and practices, the habitus, of that university are likely to differ significantly to their previous education establishments.

It is widely acknowledged in higher education literature that students are able to develop or change their cultural capital in order to "cope with a new context" (Drew, 2001, p.312) of the institution they have chosen. This development is a part of the transition process and can assist students in obtaining a sense of belonging. To make a successful transition and succeed in their studies, students must become "accustomed to the university culture and feel part of the university community" (Edward, 2003, p.226) and part of this process is creating a new identity which is accepting of their new role

and aligns with the institutional habitus of the university they are attending. Students are required to reconcile their previous knowledge and experience with those they encounter in the higher education context (Hodgen & Askew, 2007).

While creating a new identity is inherently a personal and individual process, the environment in which the new identity is created plays an important role in its development. As Christie et al (2008) commented, coming to university with little or no knowledge and understanding of the higher education system of learning, students "had to learn the rules of the university" (p.570). The teaching and assessment methods students are exposed to throughout their studies are the most direct way in which these rules can be taught but of equal importance are the relationships that develop between the students and academic staff, in both academic and pastoral contexts, as well as between students and their peers. These issues were introduced in the discussion of the theoretical framework of this research and will be further considered when the roles of institutions and peers are reviewed.

For many students, the creation of a new identity can often be triggered or facilitated by a key turning point or 'critical incident' (Palmer et al, 2009) which is unique to them. There are a wide variety of factors associated with key turning points, including significant educational experiences such as preparing a presentation, sitting a first formal examination, or receiving a significant piece of assessment feedback. Outside classroom experiences, evolving relationships with friends, family or staff can provide the trigger for the development of a new identity. In addition, the impact of massification in higher education can influence a student's critical incident owing to the need to do more to stand out from their peers, with the associated increase in pressures and impact on mental health that comes from navigating a more complex and competitive environment, particularly for those with limited cultural capital (ibid). The variety of factors contributing to this process highlights "the role of both human agency and social structure in the construction of identity" (Hodgen & Askew, 2007, p.472).

By creating a new identity and accepting their new role, students increase the likelihood of making a successful transition into higher education. However, not all students will achieve this sense of belonging and "membership of the student community could only be partial and incomplete" (Christie et al 2008, p.577) as they may not have the ability or opportunity to develop the cultural capital required for the transition. For these students, there is a risk that they will become disengaged from their course or with the university, further reducing the opportunities and interactions necessary to successfully create a new identity and develop the relevant cultural capital necessary to learn

"effective strategies for dealing with formal learning" (Haggis & Pouget, 2002, p.327) in their chosen institution. Disengagement can be caused by several factors, such as social conditions, identity and teaching and assessment practices (Mann, 2001) and can be linked to the concept of 'alienation'. Alienation is defined as being isolated from a group or activity in which you should be involved[12], and the concept can be framed as "inescapably part of the human condition" or "as a function of social-historical processes" (ibid, p.8). Mann questioned whether these factors "are inevitable or are changeable, and our power to influence them" (p.17) and offered a number of responses which focused on developing this required sense of belonging. These responses included solidarity, hospitality, safety, redistribution of power and criticality. The initial four of these responses are concerned with the environment, the institutional habitus, in which the student is located; peer support, a welcoming and supportive environment and an opportunity for them navigate and control their educational journey. The final response, criticality, reflects that students require the "awareness, and the capacity to act on that awareness" (p.17) to be aware of how to adapt to their new environment.

Having discussed issues surrounding students finding their place and a sense of belonging at university, the following sections will explore some of the ways in which universities and the higher education environment can offer support to students to assist them in the process of creating a new identity and successfully completing the transition process. The roles of academic staff and of fellow students, and the communities of practice they create, will be the focus as theories and suggestions of practical solutions are explored, with cultural capital and institutional habitus having formed a framework in which to discuss these issues. Throughout, the knowledge that, even when support is provided, the issues related to these concepts can still create a barrier to full transition into higher education.

2.7   How universities can help and hinder the transition process

Having introduced and discussed the theoretical concepts of cultural capital and institutional habitus, which focus on the individual nature of the transition to higher education and the internal journey students undertake, the focus will now move to the practical solutions, and their limitations, which can be developed to support them, exploring the challenges of addressing institutional habitus.

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[12] Oxford English Dictionary

When making the transition to university, students are entering a new educational environment where they have yet to gain the knowledge of what is expected of them and do not have an understanding of the academic standards required of them (Christie et al, 2008). Students will be exposed to these expectations and standards through the teaching, learning and assessment methods employed on their course but it is crucial that they have contact with academic staff in order to facilitate this learning process (Crozier & Reay, 2011). It is through this relationship and interaction that a clear understanding of what is expected is developed in students and the "relationship between students and teaching staff seem to be fundamental to attitudes towards learning and coping with academic difficulties" (Thomas, 2002, p.432). The relationship between academic staff and students, where it exists successfully, can also encourage engagement with the course and increase the likelihood of students seeking support when needed, helping them to integrate and feel accepted (Thomas, 2002; Wilcox et al, 2005).

However, while the importance of this relationship is recognised (Yorke & Longden, 2008) the opportunity for it to develop does not always exist in the current, expanded higher education system. Increased pressure on university resources, particularly academic staff time, as a result of an increasing and diversifying student population, has created a barrier making it difficult for these interactions to take place (Owen, 2002). In addition, the academic staff population has not diversified to the same extent as the student population in the context of cultural capital, with academic staff typically having successfully navigated the higher education environment. This expansion and diversification of the student population has also resulted in a deliberate, but well-intentioned strategy to limit contact with academic staff, as reported by Crozier & Reay (2011), highlighting the complex nature of the higher education environment. Universities have had to respond to the massification of higher education using various methods, including the adaptation of teaching and assessment policies and practices. Crozier & Reay reported that students, predominantly from a working-class background, were given a high level of independence and autonomy, with flexible attendance and assessment policies, to ensure that they were not overburdened in light of their non-academic commitments. While the aim was to be supportive to the students, it gave them "little idea of how they were progressing" (ibid, p.151) and hindered their engagement with the course.

While this example may appear to be at the extreme end of student autonomy, it does act to highlight the need to ensure that the balance between supporting students and providing them with the opportunity and skills to develop as independent learners is appropriate (Jacklin & Le Riche, 2009). An essential part of the process of becoming an independent learner is through developing "students'

awareness of conceptions of learning and knowledge, and the expectations placed on then" (Wingate, 2007, p.397). Through their teaching and assessment methods, academic staff are ideally placed to support students in this process and enable them to understand and accept their new role. Understanding what is expected of them can engender a sense of belonging to the academic community in which they are now based (McChlery & Wilkie, 2009; Wilcox et al, 2005).

Students need to develop the necessary skills in order to become independent learners who are self-disciplined and self-regulating (Earwaker, 1992). Black et al (2006) stressed that for students, in an age of rapidly advancing knowledge, it was crucial to "develop those capacities and habits that will enable them to continue learning" (p.120). In order to do so they require the support and direction of peers and academic staff, with academic staff having a clear understanding of their role in this developmental process. These skills will be developed throughout a student's time at university, but it is during the transition process that the foundations of these skills need to be conveyed, as students need to go through the process of "learning to learn" (Wingate, 2007, p.391) in their new educational environment. It is through their interactions with academic staff that this can be done as students can "observe how experts deal with knowledge" (ibid, p.398). In addition, assessment, and feedback opportunities, both formative and summative, provide a structure in which students can learn to gauge their own progress if provided with sufficient guidance to understand the purpose of the assessment and sufficient support to interpret and apply learning from the feedback.

However, it can be the case that academic staff are unaware that many students, particularly at the beginning of their university experience, do not share or have the same understanding of the academic discourse that is used (Burke, 2009; Carless, 2006). Using feedback as an example, if a student is unable to understand their feedback, they are not in a position to gauge their progress and apply what they have learnt to future assessments, or there is potential for feedback to be misinterpreted (Mutch, 2003). This may be the result of students not having the correct cultural capital and, with an increasingly diverse student population, it is likely that there are more students without the pre-learnt ability to access feedback in the way that academic staff assume they can. To make the provision of feedback successful, as well as any other skills academic staff are trying to develop, the message being conveyed to students needs to be clear and signposted in the early stages of the transition process.

Linked to this concept is the idea of co-creation of assessment, which would provide the opportunity for students to engage with the aims and purpose of an assessment, enabling them to have a greater understanding of how to approach and self-reflect on their work. "Student generation of content has

been advocated as a means of fostering deep learning and high levels of students engagement" (Doyle et al, 2019, p.739). "Students need to feel responsible for their learning" (Carnell, 2007, p.30) and co-creation with students enables this perception and can be applied to any stage of the student journey, including the transition process as this research is designed to explore.

One further barrier to academic staff helping students develop as independent learners and supporting their transition to higher education is their inability and lack of willingness to engage in the process of facilitating skills acquisition. Issues such as staff time and limited resources can hinder this engagement and interaction and there can be a "reluctance of university teachers to teach more than subject knowledge" (Wingate, 2007, p.396). This can affect non-traditional students to a greater extent owing to their mismatched or limited cultural capital, with traditional students having had an increased opportunity to develop these skills through their previous educational experiences. In addition, academic staff may feel that through their delivery of subject knowledge they are implicitly teaching and developing these skills. However, as previously highlighted, not all students may share or have the same understanding of the academic discourse and therefore not be aware of this hidden curriculum. One solution to this issue is to offer generic skills-based sessions or, in some cases modules, but these are not always well received by students, being perceived as "irrelevant to their subject" (ibid, p.393).

While academic staff are ideally placed to help engage students with their studies and teach them the skills they need to become independent learners, helping them learn how to learn, barriers have been identified that can prevent this interaction from being successful. The same barriers that have been discussed also apply to another role undertaken by academic staff, that being the provision of pastoral support. As personal tutors, academic staff are in a position to welcome students to the university community, helping create a sense of belonging and support students' ongoing development as individuals (Earwaker, 1992). As with support in the academic transition to higher education, interaction with personal tutors can provide much needed guidance for students entering a new educational environment.

However, the implications of a mass higher education system (Trotter &Roberts, 2006) and varying provision of pastoral support depending upon the individual personal tutors understanding and commitment to the role (McChlery & Wilkie, 2009; Owen, 2002) can undermine the effectiveness of personal tutor systems. Even when there is effective and consistent personal tutor provision, students

are not always aware of the support or believe it not relevant or accessible to them (Christie et al, 2004).

In response to these issues, a case could be made for moving away from reactive pastoral support provision, which relies on personal tutors dealing with students who are already in difficulty, to "support that is largely proactive, providing a culture and context that aims to be supportive" (Jacklin & Le Riche, 2009, p.746-7). This change in focus could create a more inclusive environment and provide support to students without individual students needing to identify themselves and actively seek support. These developments are taking place across higher education, with the University of Nottingham, for example, introducing a Student Engagement Dashboard[13] to monitor students' engagement levels with in-person teaching and online learning support and identify students who have disengaged and may require support.

As with the provision of academic support, a balance must be found between providing excessive support and encouraging students to engage with the support that is available. Supporting students through the transition process to becoming successful and independent learners is less likely to be successful if a "dependency culture" (McChlery & Wilkie, 2009, p.24) is created, obstructing the development of the skills required to be an independent learner.

2.8   The importance of peer support

In addition to support that can be provided by academic staff, the support provided by peers and the relationships students develop with each other can be just as beneficial, if not more so, in both the academic transition and the wider student experience (Wilcox et al, 2005). Starting university is a "major life transition that can be both daunting and stressful" (Christie et al, 2004, p.630) and the development of social networks with other students going through the same process can provide invaluable support.

Students require support beyond the academic staff and inevitably turn to their fellow students who are in the same position and going through the same educational experience as them (Hill et al, 2003). It is therefore important that universities provide opportunities which facilitate and encourage their students "to meet each other and integrate as a cohort" (Trotter & Roberts, 2006, p.379). Providing

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[13] https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/currentstudents/student-engagement-dashboard/student-engagement-dashboard.aspx

an opportunity as soon as students arrive, during induction, can help reduce the "social trauma" (ibid, p.373) that they experience when entering a new environment.

Opportunities also exist through teaching and learning interactions, with pedagogies such as collaborative teaching promoting social interaction and engagement between students through academic based activities (Thomas, 2002). Falchikov (2002) comments that "co-operation between peers is likely to encourage real exchange of thought and discussion" (p.3). In addition, peer dialogue can also contribute to the development of other relevant skills, such as "social, communication and problem-solving skills" (Black et al, 2006, p.125). Collaborative involvement in assessments, through peer feedback for example, also provides opportunities for students to engage with academic processes and share a common experience (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Nicol, 2010). Nicol advocates peer dialogue in assessments as being supportive, provides an opportunity for feedback to be provided in a familiar language from the perspective of someone who has also completed that assessment and it allows students to play the role of the assessor, providing insights into design and purpose of the assessment.

Peer involvement in social interaction beyond the classroom experience is also beneficial as students can develop a 'community of practice,' a social network which provides support to its members in their learning (Christie et al, 2008; Montgomery & McDowell, 2009). The concept of communities of practice has supported the development of the theoretical framework of the research and forms an integral part of the intervention designed to support students.

Social networks are also important in the student transition into the wider student experience, with peers replacing the social and family support networks that students relied upon prior to entering university. Friendship groups are sometimes referred to as surrogate families, providing support and guidance to each other throughout their university experience (Thomas, 2002; Wilcox et al, 2005). Universities are not in a position to create these social networks, but they are in a position to create opportunities and the facilities in which these relationships can be created and developed and providing suitable social spaces for this to occur is crucial (Douglas et al, 2008).

Student accommodation provision is acknowledged as being the area over which universities have the most direct control and therefore the greatest opportunity to assist in the fostering of social networks, an area which also of significant importance to students (Palmer et al, 2009; Thomas, 2002). However, it is the case that some students who live in student accommodation and have that residential

experience do not benefit from the development of social networks and can find the experience alienating. Based on a University Nottingham Accommodation Services report, there is evidence to suggest that "every hall attracts a certain type of people" (p.14) despite the apparent random allocation of accommodation to applicants. Students with more cultural capital, for example, may have received guidance from family or friends on the accommodation to apply for. This can have an impact on those students who may be allocated accommodation alongside students who are not their "type of people," leaving them isolated and without a sense of belonging. Based on their data, the Accommodation Services report highlights that "students who do not feel they belong are less likely to have confidence in their academic abilities" (p.43) demonstrating the importance of social networks.

The importance of student accommodation in the development of social networks is also illustrated when focusing on barriers faced by students who have not engaged in this aspect of the university experience, typically non-traditional students.

Students who did not live in student accommodation with their peers are reported to feel marginalised and not gain that sense of belonging previously discussed (Wilcox et al, 2005). The reasons students choose not to live in student accommodation, often remaining at home, range from financial constraints to family and other personal circumstances, and some students simply wish to maintain their existing support networks (Christie et al, 2005). Whatever the reason, students who choose not to live in student accommodation lose this important opportunity to interact with their fellow students or share the same experiences as them, reducing the scope of the support that can be offered by their peers.

In addition to the barriers that not living in student accommodation can create to a successful transition into higher education, many of these issues can also hinder the integration of non-traditional students into all aspects of university life, particularly with regards social inclusion. Many students, for example, are required to work in order to finance their studies or support their families, resulting in "little time or opportunity for socialising" (Crozier & Reay, 2011, p.148). The same applies to some mature students who have caring or other family responsibilities (Bowl, 2001)

For some students, going to university is only one aspect of their lives and they concentrate on the academic commitments of their course of study rather than immersing themselves into the entire student experience. While the absence of peer support or the benefits of being in a social network

may create some difficulties for these students, they may consider this acceptable and see higher education as a means to an end (Crozier & Reay, 2008; Reay et all, 2002). It should therefore be acknowledged that, while not all students successfully complete the transition into higher education, this may be of little concern to some of these students as their focus is simply on "getting through" (Crozier & Reay, 2008, p.150).

2.9   Concluding remarks on the literature

This chapter has been designed to review the existing literature surrounding the transition of students into higher education, exploring the challenges and barriers that exist and reviewing research which offers insight as to how students could be supported in this process. Through this process, the theoretical concepts identified in the literature have been developed into a framework that will support the design of this research.

An expanding and diversifying student population has changed the higher education environment from one designed for the educational elite to a much-expanded environment with a student body from a wide and diverse range of education, social and economic backgrounds. This has resulted in many students not being as prepared for studying in this environment owing to their educational backgrounds, created by a mismatch between a changing student population and of institutions not responding to this change in terms of their practices and cultures.

Students are required to become accustomed to their new educational surroundings and face challenges in this process, based on previous educational experience, social and educational circumstances and on their choices in terms of institution. Students need to adapt to their new cultural context, adapting their identity to do so.

Support for students in this process has been discussed and there are opportunities for this support to be delivered in a practical way, through institutional practices and introducing students to their new environment, new role and new educational context. In addition, supporting the creation of communities of practice is important to enable students to support each other.

Based on the literature reviewed, an intervention to support students in this transition process was designed and implemented, and the following chapter will explore the approach and methods used to deliver this research.

Chapter 3
Research approach, methods, and ethical considerations

3.1   Research approach

Reflecting on the theoretical framework outlined in the previous chapter, the theoretical concepts will be approached in the belief that there will be many differing views amongst students about the challenges they will face in making the transition into higher education. In addition, student perceptions as to the support they may require, what is available to them and their ability and confidence to access this support will also vary. An individual student's view will have been influenced by numerous factors, social and educational, prior to coming to university and during their early experiences of higher education. Furthermore, the acquiring of cultural capital and development of their individual identity will be unique to them. However, when these individual views are combined, there will be an insight into the collective or commonly held views, which will inform the development of practical support which may be offered to students during the transition process. Equally as important in the development of support will be highlighting the difference in views that may exist between students from different backgrounds and contexts, be they from groups commonly represented or underrepresented in higher education.

For this research, qualitative data has been collected to ensure that individual students' ideas and perceptions are identified and explored (Cohen et al, 2007; Silverman, 2010), which involved the need for relationships to be built and interaction take place with the students. For this reason, the research was based on a single, exploratory case study (Baxter & Jack, 2008) situated in the School of Law at the University of Nottingham.

Cousin (2005) remarked that "higher education development is full of case study reports but few of these are research based" (p.421) which presents the opportunity for this study to contribute to this educational research through practical research activities rather than simply reporting on educational developments. There are some similarities to action research, with the introduction of an intervention, but as the research is confined to a specific context, activity and group of students, the case study concept is more appropriate.

While this methodology is deemed the most appropriate for this research, it is important to highlight some key considerations and negative perceptions associated with it. First, while the case study

approach "allows the researcher to 'go deep,' to learn what works and what does not" (Corcoran et al, 2004, p.10) it is important to create and maintain alignment with the defined research questions to ensure the research remains focussed.

Relying on the data gathered as part of a case study can be perceived as being too vague or too general to provide any useful insights which, when combined with potential researcher bias and the lack of connection with other, comparable case studies, does not provide "a platform for broader conclusions" (Hammersley, 2012, appendix 4). This concern can be addressed through the design of the data collection methods and analysis with, in the case of this research, the intervention being designed collaboratively with student input. The research questions ensure there is that focus to draw conclusions together in these predefined areas of interest. In addition, the analysis of qualitative data, being organised into themes, allows "the researcher [to] see whether they throw light on the questions/issues being addressed" (Cousin, 2005, p.425). While further research may be required to draw these broader conclusions, a case study is focused on a defined context and seeks to explore answers and conclusion in that specific context.

As with any research, considerations of the appropriate methodology are important. For this research, the case study was felt to be the best suited with the positive aspects being most compelling; the facilitation of understanding complex situations; being applicable to real human situations; and allowing the examination of the phenomenon in context (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

Philosophical approach

Prior to outlining the research methods, some consideration on my philosophical approach is required. My ontological assumption, as defined by Cohen et al (2007) as "assumptions which concern the very nature or essence of the social phenomena being investigated" (p.7), is that it is possible to create an opportunity for practical support to be provided to all new first year students. My epistemological position, my view on how this assumption can be demonstrated, and my approach to this research can be described as interpretivist, in that my data will be largely qualitative and generated from an individual perspective, influenced by their personal social, cultural, and historical context.

With interpretivist approach and the generation of qualitative data, "validity is an important key to effective research. If a piece of research is invalid then it is worthless" (ibid, p.133). For the purpose of this research, two concepts of validity will be considered: internal validity and external validity.

These will be discussed below following an outline of the research methods used to create the research data.

3.2   Research methods

The purpose of this research is to explore potential opportunities to support first year law students in their transition to higher education. The following sections describe the research methods used, how the data collection methods were designed, implemented and finally how the data was analysed. Reference to the validity and limitations of the data will be made, alongside the ethical consideration.

Prior to commencing this description of the research methods, the research questions are re-stated below to provide the context for the data collection methods.

Question 1

What does the literature tell us of the opportunities that exist for support to be provided to first year students when starting university?

Question 2

What support do first year law students perceive is necessary when starting at university at the case study institution?

Question 3

What is the student and staff experience of this support when delivered in a practical way?

3.3   Data collection

Using the case study methodology requires accessing multiple data sources (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Tellis, 1997). In addition, using multiple sources provided data that supported the various stages of the research and contributed to answering the individual research questions and this chapter is structured to reflect this. The main focus of this research was to introduce an intervention aimed at supporting students in the transition to studying law at the university. As such, the intervention itself and the review of its success, or failings, are the primary sources of data but additional sources provided the data that inspired and informed the design of the intervention.

As the research takes place in the School of Law at the University of Nottingham, consent and support was given by the Head of School for me to access the students and promote the intervention at the appropriate time, in addition to supporting my approach to academic staff for both their involvement and feedback.

Literature Review

Reviewing the relevant literature surrounding student transition into higher education was important in providing background and context for the research, highlighting the issues and opportunities that had been addressed in previous studies. The literature also provided the theoretical framework for this research, as represented in Figure 1 in the previous chapter.

In addition, the literature has provided the data that contributes to answering the first research question, exploring the opportunities that exist to support first year students when they are starting university. Furthermore, this exploration of the opportunities within the literature was essential in providing a theoretical backdrop to the intervention being designed, providing inspiration for both the design of the intervention and the design of the focus group that was held to collect the views and feedback of current students. In particular, Laing et al (2005) and her advocacy for an induction process rather than an induction event, supporting students in an online environment over an extended period of time, helped me consolidate my design of the proposed intervention.

My selection of literature was partly based on previous study, at MA level and for the taught element of the Professional Doctorate. Building on this foundation of knowledge, further literature was in part identified by using a systematic search of key words such as 'transition into higher education,' 'cultural capital' and 'institutional habitus,' the latter two being concepts I had touched upon in previous study. Additional literature was then identified from reference within the literature reviewed from the systematic search, exploring the references from the literature I had found most useful and engaging. While no set range of dates was used in the search for literature, the focus was on studies and articles after the introduction of tuitions fees, reflecting the higher education environment in which this research was to take place. In reviewing the literature, I identified key themes that would become the headings within the literature review as well as the concepts that would define the theoretical framework and the design of the intervention.

Focus Group

To build upon the knowledge gained from the literature review, and to begin addressing the second research question, a focus group of current first year law students, who had recently been through the transition process, was designed. The aim of the focus group was to obtain their views and perceptions on their recent experience of starting university and what they believed would have been beneficial to them. Their input would inform the design of the intervention.

A focus group was selected as the appropriate method as "members comment on each other's point of view, often challenging … agreements and disagreements are fundamental processes that influence the nature and content of responses" (Kidd & Parshall, 2000, p.294). Having a range of students express their views and opinions in a structured environment allows for individuals to share their experiences and compare these with other members of the group, providing qualitative data that can highlight both consistency and differences within these experiences.

After obtaining ethical approval, all first-year students were invited to contribute to the focus groups in December 2015, prior to the end of their first term. The timing was considered appropriate as the students had been at the university and studying law for around 10 weeks, but not too much time had passed since their arrival and induction. However, the response to the invitation was limited to one student so the decision was made to postpone the focus group until the students had returned in January and completed their first assessments. In reviewing the timing, the invitation coincided with a period when the first-year students were preparing for their first summative assessment.

A second invitation was circulated at the end of January 2016 and four responses were received. Of the four, three attended the focus group: two male home students (Students A and B) and one female international student (Student C). The focus group was conducted following a schedule of questions (Appendix 1) which was used to ensure specific issues were covered but the students were encouraged to be as free and open as they wished in their discussions (Silverman, 2010). The fourth student, a female home student (Student D) was unable to attend but agreed to answer the questions from the schedule electronically. While this provided some additional data to that gathered at the focus group, caution was used in the analysis as this student did not benefit from any group discussion.

The focus group was audio recorded and, although not fully transcribed, detailed notes from the recording have been made, coded to highlight themes, along with the responses from student D, and an analysis of these can be found in chapter 4.

Intervention design and implementation

The next stage of the research was the design and implementation of an intervention, the design of which was informed by the literature and the data from the focus group. Design considerations for the intervention included timing, the platform for delivery, content, and engagement.

The decisions on timing and platform were partly based on practical reasons, as well as on the data. Timing being aligned with the confirmation of student places following the release of A level results in August, which would provide the student data for advertising the intervention. The platform used was the standard virtual learning environment used by the University of Nottingham and one in which I had some knowledge and expertise. Consideration was given to using alternate platforms, such as social media, but issues such as how to ensure that the engagement and content was appropriate for a more open access resource, influenced the decision towards the more practical choice of the virtual learning environment. Further considerations will be discussed in chapter 4.

Based on the data, an outline of the structure was devised, and Table 1 outlines the type of content that the intervention included, including the rationale for inclusion of each component and where this can be mapped onto the theoretical framework, as outlined in Figure 1. In addition, learning outcomes for each component are attached to ensure the activities remain focused and are measurable. The intervention was designed to be completed in sections over a two-to-three-week period, prior to the students' arrival at university, requiring approximately three hours of engagement overall.

Component	Intervention Component (Theoretical Framework)	Learning Outcome of Component (Supporting Literature)
1	An introduction to the school and how it is structured (Cultural Capital)	Reduce uncertainty surrounding the environment (Mann, 2001)

2	An introduction to the personal tutor system and details of the allocated personal tutor (Communities of Practice)	Reduce uncertainty surrounding the environment and signposting that support is available (Christie et al, 2004)
3	Details of the modules that will be taken in the first semester, including contact hours and forms of assessment (Cultural Capital)	Provide information on what is expected of students taking these modules (Christie et al, 2008)
4	A task requiring the reading of a legal case and answering questions (Cultural Capital)	Provide information on what is expected of students and begin the development of legal academic skills (Black et al, 2006)
5	The provision of feedback on the legal case reading task (Cultural Capital)	Introduce students to the role and importance of feedback in higher education assessments (Carless, 2007; Crisp, 2007)
6	A task that requires students to reflect on their answers in light of feedback (Cultural Capital)	Help development of legal academic skills and introduce the concept of reflection and awareness of their own understanding (Black et al, 2006)
7	Throughout, there will be opportunities to engage with other students through discussion boards (Communities of Practice)	Enhance learning opportunities and encourage collaborative learning (Wenger, 2000)
8	Throughout, there will opportunities to engage with staff (Communities of Practice)	Demonstrate to students that they are entering a supportive environment (Jacklin & Le Riche, 2009)

Table 1: Intervention Mapping Table

Appendix 2 provides an image of the first iteration of the intervention from the 2016/2017 academic year. The intervention was repeated for new first-year students in the 2017/2018, 2018/2019 and 2019/2020 academic years with the support of the School of Law.

The intervention was not to provide students with the cultural capital that is required to be successful in the transition process but to provide practical information and knowledge that would, to an extent, address issues of isolation and culture shock. The aim was to begin the student transition journey and commence the process of developing cultural capital and identity creation, and this represented a development in the institutional habitus of the school in providing a new platform for engagement and welcome into their new educational environment. The online nature and the fixed period of engagement with the intervention was designed to appeal to all students, including those non-traditional students who may have other commitments beyond preparing to commence their studies (Crozier & Reay, 2011; Bowl, 2001).

Intervention engagement data collection

The engagement with, and the impact of the intervention was measured through two data collection methods. The first of these was an analysis of the level of engagement with the intervention both quantitatively, through the analytics data collected by the platform, and qualitatively, through a review of the nature and depth of the students' interactions with the intervention and with each other.

The second method was the distribution of an online questionnaire (Appendix 3) sent to all first-year students for them to complete once they had been studying for several weeks, giving them the opportunity to reflect on the benefits of, or the gaps in, the intervention. The data provided by their responses would help determine whether the learning outcomes of the intervention had been achieved and it is the students' perception that will enable its success to be measured (Zhao & Kuh, 2004).

The questionnaire was sent to all students to gain feedback from those who had fully engaged with the intervention, had engaged with some but not all components and those who had not engaged at all. It was important to gain feedback on the motivations for students engaging or otherwise as well as nature of the engagement.

The analysis of the engagement data and the responses to the questionnaire, while providing useful data on the intervention itself, allowing for review and development between iterations, were also utilised in designing the final method of data collection.

Student and staff interviews

To provide more qualitative, rich data, the final data collection method was the use of interview with both students, to explore their experiences and perceptions of the intervention, and staff, to gain their feedback on its design and implementation. These interviews were conducted following the final iteration of the intervention in the 2019/2020 academic year rather than following previous iterations owing, in part, to my changing role and capacity as discussed in chapter 1, contributing to an inability to recruit students to participate in the research. In relation to my changing role, this initially meant I did not have the capacity to engage with the students and complete the design of the questions owing to changing responsibilities, learning my new role and increased demand of supporting three academic schools. When I was in the position to re-engage with this stage of the research, my role had created some distance between myself and the students in the School of Law, losing the proximity that could support my recruitment of participants (Hodkinson, 2005).

In the original design of this research, the data collection method considered for student feedback was through focus groups, to allow me to engage with a wider range of views (Kidd & Parshall, 2000). Unfortunately, when the call for participants was made in the 2018/2019 academic year the response was limited and ultimately those who expressed an interest did not maintain their engagement. There are various reasons why this may be the case: prioritisation of other commitments; students seeing this opportunity as extra-curricular and not of direct benefit to them (Wingate, 2007). The reasons for non-engagement with research studies can be varied and open to a separate piece of research on this issue.

Having been unable to complete my data collection in 2018/2019, I adjusted my approach for 2019/2020 and amended the data collection method to interviews, using the opportunity to explore the feedback and impact of the intervention on a deeper level with fewer participants. This approach was designed to produce rich, qualitative data to review alongside the 'thick' data collected through the engagement analysis and questionnaire (Fusch and Ness, 2015).

Having decided on this approach, an invitation for participants was circulated to all first-year students from the 2019/2020 cohort who had participated to some extent with the intervention, approximately 135 students. This resulted in two participants, both female with one being an international student (Student 1) and one being a home student (Student 2). Coincidentally, both students had been elected to the role of student representatives in the School of Law on the Undergraduate Learning Community Forum (the University of Nottingham's staff/student consultative committee). When scheduling the

interviews with these two participants, both agreed to engage with their network of contacts within the cohort to obtain some wider feedback, enabling them to participate in the interviews expressing their own individual experience and consolidating their input with that of their peers.

For the staff interviews, the engagement of academic staff was more readily obtained and was scheduled to take place in 2018/2019. However, owing to the need to delay the student interviews until 2019/2020, the decision was taken to also delay the academic staff interviews to ensure the data collection from these two sources was taken following the same iteration of the intervention and therefore in the same context.

The staff approached to participate in the interviews were all known to me from my work within the School of Law and were selected owing to their roles within the school, connected to the teaching and learning of first year students. Their roles were an academic skills advisor (Staff 1), a co-convenor of Understanding Law, a compulsory first-year module (Staff 2) and a co-director of undergraduate studies (Staff 3). All had prior knowledge of the intervention from previous iterations and as staff involved in supporting first-year students were viewed as being "especially knowledgeable" and could "provide valuable insights" (Patton, 2018, p.648).

The interviews for both students and staff were designed to be semi-structured, using a schedule of prompt questions (Appendix 4 and Appendix 5) to ensure that key areas and issues were explored but allowing the participants to focus on the areas of particular interest to them, within the boundaries of the research (Silverman, 2010).

The interviews were audio recorded, transcribed and coded to identify relevant themes, the analysis of which can be found in chapter 4. And example, coded transcript can be found in Appendix 6.

Research timeline

The research methods were designed to build upon each other and create a narrative for the thesis. The Figure 2 below provides a visual representation of how the various methods interact and timeframe in which they took place.

During the research process there were a number of occasions which necessitated adjustments to the timeline, through changes in my role and responsibilities as outlined in chapter 1 and through

challenges in engaging students in the devised research data collection methods as discussed in this chapter. In particular, the collection of data following the intervention was impacted by these issues which delayed the opportunity for any significant data analysis. However, these delays were taken as an opportunity to review, develop and implement the intervention for additional cohorts of students, providing additional engagement data, an opportunity to schedule a second iteration of the questionnaire and also provide the opportunity for more students to benefit from the intervention.
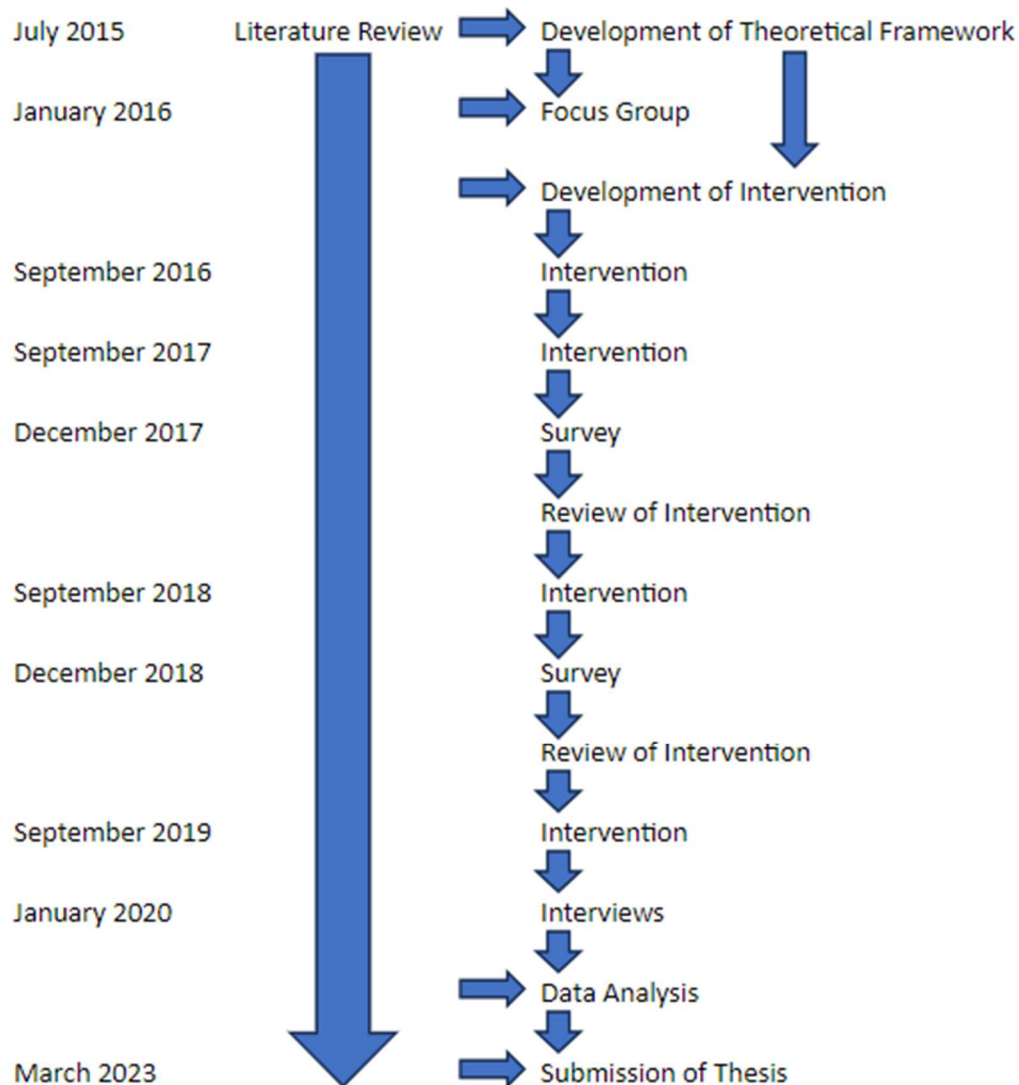
Figure 2: Research timeline

3.4   Data validity

As discussed, with an interpretivist approach, two concepts of validity will be considered in this research: internal validity and external validity.

If this research achieves the aim of supporting first-year law students in their transition to higher education through the introduction of an intervention and "can plausibly demonstrate this causal relationship between treatment and outcome, it is referred to as having internal validity" (Robson, 2011, p.88). In other words, the data analysis produced needs to provide the evidence on which to draw conclusions on the outcome of the learning outcomes of the intervention. In order to ensure internal validity, each data collection method of this research must be designed to align with each other to ensure a clear narrative of the evidence is presented and to limit potential risks to that validity.

A key risk in qualitative research is the selection of participants and the need to ensure engagement with them enables the collection of data from various viewpoints rather than being skewed by a dominant voice. This was possible within the focus group as having several students discuss their experiences in this setting allowed for the students to challenge or confirm the views of each other (Kidd & Parshall, 2000). With the student interviews, while more difficult to obtain this range of viewpoints with the limited number of participants, having two participants who were willing and able to engage with their cohort provided an additional context to their individual views. Furthermore, while using a schedule of questions, the semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed for the use of open-ended questions which "enables respondents to demonstrate their unique way of looking at the world – their definition of the situations" (Cohen et al. 2007).

A further risk associated with the student interview stage of this research is maturation, which refers to the "growth, change or development in participants unrelated to the treatment in the enquiry" (Robson, 2011, p.89). It is inevitable that the participants will have developed academically and have moved along the transition process in the time between the intervention and when the interviews were held, and this increases the risk that the impact of the intervention may become intertwined with the impact of other teaching and learning activities once they commenced their studies. To alleviate this risk, the careful design of the schedule of questions aimed to focus the participants on the key elements of the intervention rather than overall experience up to the point of the interview.

This careful design was also applied to the questionnaire, incorporating questions to elicit responses based on pre-defined categories, enabling the analysis to identify if and where any common themes can be drawn from the data. These were delivered alongside more open questions which allowed for answers to put these responses in more context. In addition, with the questionnaires being anonymous, "it encourages greater honesty" (Cohen et al, 2007).

External validity "refers to the degree to which the results can be generalized to the wider population, cases or situations" (Robson, 2011, p.136). Should the analysis of the data collected for this research demonstrate that the intervention does provide support to students in the transition process, could it be argued that this could be replicated for future cohorts, for other disciplines or other institutions. If the lessons learnt and presented in the conclusion of this research have the potential for wider dissemination or replication, or if the methodology provides enough clarity for transferability to a different context (Cohen et al, 2007), it can be argued to have achieved external validity.

In summary, it is important to reflect that all of the data sources used in this study are only one piece of the overall picture and it is through the use of appropriate research questions, careful design and appropriate analysis of all of the data collected that any valid and reliable conclusions can be drawn (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Cohen et al, 2007).

3.5   Ethical Considerations

Research ethics are "concerned with respecting research participants" (Plowright, 2011, p.151) and there are a number of standard ethical aspects that were considered when seeking ethical approval from the School of Education, University of Nottingham. As part of the approval process, a participation information sheet and participation consent form were devised for each stage of the data collection process (Appendix 7). As such, all participants were required to provide informed consent, which "involves explaining the nature of the research to the participants so that they are in a position to make a decision about whether or not to take part" (ibid). Students and staff were provided with the opportunity to ask any questions about the research and, in addition to the written information were assured of their anonymity and of their right to withdraw their participation at any time without penalty.

In addition to following the School of Education's guidelines, the British Educational Research Association (BERA) 'Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research' (2011) were consulted.

The access to participants was an important consideration in this research. This had been granted by the Head of School of Law, with permission being given to contact students and to implement the proposed intervention. This was possible partly owing to my position initially within the school and, in the later stages of the research, working with the school in a different role. This position, while enabling access, did create the need to consider the ethical implications of being an 'insider'

researcher. While not classed as 'insider research', as I am not researching myself, people like me or my community (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2013), being linked to the individuals and the community being researched had the potential to create similar issues. As a researcher I needed to "understand the current research subject without intervening except through data collection" (Unluer, 2012, p.8)

To address these issues, my personal knowledge was utilised to help guide the purpose and aims of the research while at the same time my assumptions were regulated to ensure my bias was not imposed on the design or analysis (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2013). This was done through careful design of the research methods, as outlined in the discussion regarding validity, and relying on the research data to tell the story, with any assumptions made by me as the researcher being clearly highlighted in the discussion of this analysis. In addition, during the research, my position as an insider was made clear to all participants and in the presentation of the data (Cohen et al, 2007).

A further consideration for this research was the potential deprivation of the intervention for some of the new first-year students (Robson, 2011). As discussed, the timing and delivery method of the intervention were carefully considered but it is acknowledged that the opportunity may not have reached all intended participants owing to the applicant data that was available, such as incorrect or expired e-mail addresses and students whose places were confirmed late. Furthermore, some of the students for whom the intervention may have been most beneficial, based on the literature, may not have had the opportunity to engage with the intervention owing to their commitments or circumstances. However, in the context of the ethical considerations, it can only be stated that the opportunity has been made available to all on the data available at that time and that there is no detriment to any student who did not participate in the engagement for whatever reason. The other considerations will be discussed in the analysis of the data, which follow in the next chapter.

Chapter 4
Research findings and analysis

Based on the methods used to obtain and analyse the data, as outlined in the previous chapter, the findings from this data will be discussed here together with an analysis of the implications of these finding.

To provide structure to the discussion and analysis, the sources of data used can be mapped to the research questions as follows:

Question 1: what does the literature tell us of the opportunities that exist for support to be provided to first year students when starting university?

- Literature Review (addressed in chapter 2)

Question 2: what support do first year law students perceive is necessary when starting at university at the case study institution?

- Focus Group

Question 3: what is the student and staff experience of this support when delivered in a practical way?

- Moodle Interventions
- Surveys
- Student Interviews
- Staff Interviews

This chapter will focus on Question 2 and Question 3 but will be informed by the conclusions drawn from addressing Question 1 in Chapter 2, with some key elements referenced in the following section.

4.1 Question 1: what does the literature tell us of the opportunities that exist for support to be provided to first year students when starting university?

In addition to exploring the higher education environment and the wider context in which this research is based, the literature did highlight some relevant theories and examples of support opportunities that existed, based on the barriers that had been identified within the literature.

Jacklin & Le Riche (2009) stated that all students required support in the transition process, referring to them being "in the same boat" (p.743) and this supported the design of this research in that an

intervention was being designed to provide an opportunity for all students to engage with their new learning environment prior to their arrival, acknowledging that all students will be required to develop the relevant cultural capital to varying extents.

The literature reviewed explored research on how students were prepared, or not prepared, to make the transition to studying in higher education, discussing how they were arrived not knowing what to expect or what was expected of them (Edward, 2003), with students experiencing 'culture shock' (Christie et al, 2008). Practical support in terms of pre-application and pre-arrival information and induction programmes once the students commenced their studies were explored but found to be largely ineffective, with more sustained pre-entry engagement such as "higher education enrichment programmes" (Trotter & Roberts, 2006, p.382) being more successful. This conclusion, combined with Laing et al (2005) and their discussions of an extended induction process, highlighted the opportunity to design a pre-arrival intervention for this research.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the literature review provided the theoretical framework for this research, focusing on cultural capital, as defined by Bourdieu & Passeron (1990) and institutional habitus, as defined by Thomas (2002). These concepts have produced a body of research exploring their impact upon the successful transition of students into higher education and solutions to the perceived barriers they create. Theories on students being able to change their cultural capital to "cope with a new context" (Drew, 2001, p.312) and 'critical incidents', or turning points, that facilitate the creation of a new identity (Palmer et al, 2009) suggested that there was potential for individuals and institutions to develop to create an environment for new students to gain "membership of the student community" (Christie et al, 2008, p.577).

The literature review provided insight into how institutions could play a role in supporting students through the transition process, particularly with reference to the role of academic staff and the development of a learning community. The importance of this relationship is emphasised in terms of staff being the ideal people to welcome students into the academic community and shaping their "attitudes towards learning and coping with academic difficulties" (Thomas, 2002, p.432). However, barriers to the building of this relationship are also discussed, such as lack of time and availability owing to the expansion and diversification of the higher education population (Owen, 2002), a lack of awareness that students do not possess an understanding of the academic discourse used (Burke, 2009) or their inability or unwillingness to engage with students outside their specific "subject

knowledge" (Wingate, 2007, p.396). An understanding of the importance of this relationship and the barriers that exist provided an important contribution to the design of the intervention.

As did the importance of peer support, another key theme identified in the literature. The relationship between students can support both the academic and social transition process so the opportunity for these relationships to develop as part of pre-arrival engagement was essential, allowing them "to meet each other and integrate as a cohort" (Trotter & Roberts, 2006, p.379). The benefits from peer engagement in academic based activities (Thomas, 2002), through social interaction in a community of practice (Christie et al, 2008) and social interaction within the wider student experience (Wilcox et al, 2005) all support the journey through transition into higher education.

As stated above, Chapter 2 provides a full analysis of the literature and a more complete discussion around the first research question, but this summary provides some context around the following two research questions.

4.2   Question 2: what support do first year law students perceive is necessary when starting at university at the case study institution?

Based on the literature review and taking inspiration from Laing et al (2005) and the discussion surrounding an induction process rather than an induction event, a focus group was devised to explore the potential and requirements of a remote, interactive engagement activity which could be targeted at new students prior to their arrival. Consisting of three students, with additional input from one further student, as detailed in Chapter 3, the following key themes emerged from the responses to a number of structured, open questions.

Transition into Higher Education

All of the students indicated some initial problems settling into their studies and university life, with student A indicating it took the "whole of the first semester". Student B initially felt they had settled well academically but once tutorials had commenced, which takes place three weeks into term, they realised, in their perception, that they were not doing as well as the anticipated workload and expectations had increased. Student C also felt they had settled well academically and attributed this to their pre-university education overseas having been in a lecture-based environment, although they had struggled socially. Student D again reported struggling with maintaining the balance between their academic work and being involved in the wider university experience.

As can be seen, the experience has been different for each student, reflecting the individual nature of the transition process and the impact previous experiences can have. Student C, for example, faced less of a culture shock in terms of the lecture-based teaching style of the school owing to their previous educational experience while Student A had previously experienced "very small classes on 10 to 12 people so lots of interaction with the teacher". Student B also highlighted a difference in experience with the smaller, seminar group teaching, commenting that they now had to "prepare and know all the stuff beforehand, ready to discuss" rather than being a purely teacher-led experience. However, although Student C appears to have had little difficulty adapting to the educational environment, they had more difficulty adapting socially to their new environment, perhaps reflecting that they had become removed from their social networks and previously accumulated cultural capital.

While the implication of this data will be discussed in the following chapter, this initial feedback from the students was important in providing an indication of initial areas an intervention could focus on to address perceived difficulties when commencing their studies, such as the approach to reading legal texts.

What would have helped?

While the students were generally appreciative of the welcome pack provided to all new law students in induction, which included the course handbook, there was a consensus that this did not prepare them sufficiently for their studies. Student A, for example, indicated that it would have been helpful to have an indication or "warning about the volume of reading" that was expected of them. There was a consensus between the four students that getting used to reading legal cases and statutes was a challenge, with student D indicating it was difficult to see how to apply the law based on these initially.

These responses support the notion of engaging students with information prior to them arriving at university, helping prepare them and provide some basic knowledge of what is expected of them once they commence their studies, to "help shape students' expectations of HE" (Trotter & Roberts, 2006, p.382). Student A noted that they got "used to reading cases and statutes" and it would be beneficial to "become familiar with things you are not used to beforehand", supporting an approach that provided an opportunity for students to develop relevant cultural capital at an early stage of the transition process.

Development of friendship groups

When asked about developing friendships with course mates and the support that they provided each other, this had been more successful for some students than others. Student D had made some good friends on the course and reported that they go back over lectures with each other and help each other learn. Conversely, Student B referred to only making "one friend on the course but made a lot of acquaintances" and felt they had less opportunity to study with course mates, reflecting that study groups would be potentially useful. Student B did clarify that they had successfully developed friendships but not with fellow law students which they believed was due to living off campus, reflecting the potential impact accommodation can have on transition.

While friendship groups are important in the transition process, supporting social inclusion and becoming a part of a new environment, friendship groups do not have to be the same groups who provide support academically, although they do not have to be mutually exclusive.

When asked, the students agreed that the development of a community of learners would be beneficial and assist them in their studies, and establishing contact with fellow students' pre-arrival may facilitate this process when they had the opportunity to meet. Student C even referred to how everyone has "different ways of learning so one person may think of something others don't", an important requirement in a community of practice. "Co-operation between peers is likely to encourage real exchange of thought and discussion" (Falchikov, 2002, p.3).

Support within the school

The support provided by the school, from academic staff through to the peer mentoring scheme, was received favourably by the four students, and staff were seen as generally approachable. While this is positive, any generalisation on this issue should be made with caution as the students involved in the focus group were confident individuals, unlikely to have volunteered to participate otherwise. Therefore, they will be confident enough to approach staff but there may be many other students who do not have this confidence or find the staff approachable.

Support provided by students in previous cohorts was highlighted a couple of times, both through the formal mentoring scheme and also through connections with "people in second and third year through societies; have been able to help quite a bit" (Student C). This supports the view that a community of

practice can span year groups, with established members of the community being in a position to welcome new members.

An intervention

When questioned about the potential benefits of an intervention to help prepare and support students pre-arrival, there was general approval of the concept and suggestions made as to what it could incorporate and aim to achieve. There was a particular emphasis on "actual skills-based stuff" (Student A) and "how to read and understand cases; some general reading to get you used to how to read" (Student B).

The ideal platform for the intervention was debated upon, with the benefits of social media and university systems such as Moodle being compared. Student A supported the use of Moodle as it would help people "getting used to Moodle" if they had not used it before. There was also a positive response to the opportunity for students to engage with each other prior to their arrival, with all participants stating they would have felt confident doing so. Student B did acknowledge that not everyone may feel confident or inclined to engage and felt "a substantial amount of people would get involved".

The feedback and input from the student focus group, combined with conclusions drawn from the literature review, enabled the creation of the planned intervention, with individual components designed to support students in the challenges and barriers that had been identified. Through exploring the first two research questions, insight was gained that provided the basis for the development of a suitable tool to commence the research for Question 3.

4.3   Question 3: what is the student and staff experience of this support when delivered in a practical way?

As detailed in Chapter 3, a number of data collection methods were used to explore the student experience of support via a Moodle intervention, from engagement with the intervention to feedback following its introduction. Staff feedback on the intervention was also sought to obtain additional views on the experience and, as will be discussed in Chapter 5, areas for future development.

While the data from all of these sources can be drawn together to highlight key points of the intervention, an evaluation of its success and recommendations for the future, the presentation and

analysis of the findings are presented in a chronological order as each element of the research has built upon an earlier element.

Moodle Intervention (2016-2020)

The intervention was designed following feedback from the initial focus group and structured to incorporate key aims identified from the literature review, as previously outlined in Chapter 2. This intervention was designed to deliver practical support through a platform where engagement could be monitored, providing an initial overview of the student experience.

Intervention structure and delivery

The key aims of the intervention drew upon specific concepts from the literature to provide a reference point for what each component was designed to achieve. These aims, which are outlined in Table 1: Intervention Mapping Table in Chapter 3, will be referred to throughout the analysis of all sources of data.

While the questionnaires and interviews following the intervention provided the substantial findings of the research, the level of engagement with the intervention over the years it ran within the School of Law provide encouraging evidence of initial engagement. While engagement was not compulsory and does not directly address any of the research questions, it suggested that the initial level of engagement highlights a perception that the aims of the intervention were important to the students in terms of early engagement with their studies and meeting fellow students.

The delivery platform of the intervention did have a potential impact upon the level of engagement, as will be discussed further in the interview analysis and in chapter 5. The considerations around the platform discussed in the design of the data collection methods remain valid and present opportunities for increased engagement in any future iterations of the intervention.

Intervention engagement statistics

The overall level of engagement in terms of posting in the forums across the cohorts shows some consistency in the first three years of the intervention (Table 2: Intervention engagement statistics), with around 50% of the cohort engaging, with the final year falling to 35% of the cohort. However, despite the fall in the proportion of students actively engaging, the overall engagement of these

students has increased, with more posts per student on average across the majority of the components.

	2016/2017	2017/2018	2018/2019	2019/2020
Student Cohort Size	306	250	359	395
Between September and December (total interactions):				
Overall Student Views	11,779	9,917	12,254	15,229
Overall Student Posts	860	1,581	1,637	2,737
Interactions with individual components (posts by individual users):				
Introduce yourself	144	132	190	135
Why study Law	42	62	45	57
Questions about modules	2	1	2	2
Teaching methods	7	6	6	8
Legal terms	27	45	28	44
Case analysis questions	23	60	32	53
Reflection on case analysis	4	10	3	0
Feedback (section 4)	2	8	1	0
Feedback (section 5)	1	0	0	0
Further Research	0	0	0	0

Table 2: Intervention engagement statistics

The statistics detailing the level of engagement with the individual components will assist in analysing those areas which the students perceived to be most beneficial, in conjunction with the survey results and interviews. The raw figures indicate that the introductory components, aimed at facilitating the development of a learning community, and those aimed at the more practical elements of studying law could be considered to be more beneficial than others. However, there are additional considerations as to why students may engage with some components and not others, such as: confidence in posting comments online; fear of asking what they may perceive as 'stupid' questions, assuming others know the answer; and the timing of when the component was introduced in relation to their other commitments and priorities.

The quality of the engagement also needs to be considered, alongside the quantity of posts submitted. Taking the 'introduce yourself' component as an example, there are instances (2019/2020) where there has been true engagement between participants, discussing their hobbies, travels, which hall of residence they have been allocated and so on, whereas in 2018/2019, there is a continuing list of students posting their name and home town/city, showing they have engaged with the intervention but not with each other. The level of engagement with each other appears to be directed by the length and tone of the first post, acting as a template for the following posts, as discussed by Meskill & Sadykova (2007). Future iterations of any intervention would benefit from a higher level of engagement from staff at this initial stage, setting the tone that they wish to be replicated.

Conversely, when reviewing the posts in response to the case analysis, there are examples of participants providing full and detailed answers, even when opening posts have been brief. This could be explained by the difference in the nature of the posts, with the former being designed to allow students to engage and the potential desire to conform to the perceived norm from the initial post and the latter being designed for more independent thought and interaction. In addition, the latter posts are fewer in number, which could suggest that it is the more confident students who are engaging at this stage of the intervention.

While the level of engagement of students within each of these components is important in terms of their interaction with the content and with each other, the actual content is less important for the purposes of this study. The exception to this is the two forums which provided an opportunity for students to feedback on their experience of taking part. Unfortunately, the level of engagement with these was low; 12 students across all four cohorts. While the data from this component is small, the responses have provided some useful information on which the intervention could be developed in the future.

> *"Doing this module introduced me to unfamiliar law terms and their meaning which was very helpful, and I found the case interesting to read. It was a nice, fairly simple task to start off the course."*
>
> *"This module is a good introduction to the study of law as it familiarises you with common legal terminologies and includes an exercise that will enhance your critical thinking and*

analytical skills, both of which are crucial for a lawyer. The module is not too daunting or too simple, it is just right."

These are two examples from the 2017/2018 cohort and are indicative of the other responses: positive responses on the content and level of the tasks. This feedback supports the statistics in terms of which components were deemed most beneficial: the legal terms and the case analysis.

While there is no specific feedback on the other components of the intervention, the number of views each component received provides a limited indication that this information was deemed useful by the students even if not explicitly mentioned. Providing some background information on the school, the staff and how the degree is designed was intended to provide some familiarity for the students' pre-arrival and commence the process of helping them find their place at university (Thomas, 2002).

It is acknowledged that the implications of the data from the intervention engagement should be reviewed within the limitations of the data available. However, the data available can support the findings from the other data collection methods where consistency and alignment can be found in the conclusions drawn.

Surveys

Following the 2017/2018 and 2018/2019 interventions, surveys were circulated to all students within the relevant cohort seeking additional feedback on the content, timing and delivery of the intervention.

Overall engagement with the surveys was low so it is difficult to draw any compelling findings from the data: 31 respondents from 2017/2018 (12% of the cohort) and 10 respondents from 2018/2019 (3% of the cohort). The timing of the survey release potentially contributed to the low response rate, being delivered in December at a time when the students are coming to the end of their first term and preparing to return home. The initial design of the timeline for this activity was intended to obtain feedback after the students had had an opportunity to complete a full term of study, so they could reflect on whether the intervention had provided a positive impact or otherwise. In retrospect, this would be delivered earlier at a time the intervention was still fresh in their minds and any benefit could be directly related to their participation, rather than after 10 weeks of studying and meeting their fellow students in person.

The data from the surveys is presented below in a number of formats to account for the range of questions asked. The survey questions are available in Appendix 3.

Biographical information

The gender balance of respondents was similar across both surveys, with approximately 60% of respondents being female and 40% male (Table 3.1: Survey Responses (Biographical)). This reflects the gender balance of the degree programme at the time these interventions took place. The proportion of home students compared to international students on the degree programme is also reflected in the responses from 2017/2018, with approximately three-quarters of the students being classed as home. The proportion is more even in 2018/2019 but with the small number of respondents that year, this is not statistically significant.

The surveys also explored the respondents' responsibilities outside their studies, with over one-fifth reporting they had external responsibilities outside their studies, which may impact their participation in their studies and higher education experience (Crozier & Reay, 2011; Bowl, 2001). The 16% 'other responsibility' all related to students' work commitments.

	2017/2018	2018/2019
Gender Balance	61% Female / 32% Male 7% prefer not to say	60% Female / 40% Male
Home/Overseas	77% Home / 23% International	50% Home / 50% International
Mature	3% Mature	0% Mature
Parental Responsibility	6%	0%
Other Responsibility	16%	0%

Table 3.1: Survey Responses (Biographical)

Prior experience/exposure

For the majority of students, over 80% in both years (Table 3.2: Survey Responses (Prior experience/exposure)), they were studying Law for the first time having not taken an A Level in the

discipline, supporting the design of the intervention to include components introducing legal terms and skills.

In addition, a significant minority of respondents reported being the first in the family to attend university, so may feel unprepared for commencing studies in higher education (Trotter & Roberts, 2006). However, the majority of respondents did report a level of anxiety when starting university. The aim of the intervention was to address this expected anxiety by providing some familiarity with the school and key staff.

	2017/2018	2018/2019
Law A Level	84% Not taken A Level	80% Not taken A Level
First in family at Uni	45% First in family	30% First in family
Anxiety	80% anxious or very anxious	100% anxious

Table 3.2: Survey Responses (Prior experience/exposure)

Engagement with intervention

The final table (3.3: Survey Responses (Engagement)) details the level of engagement and the respondents' perceptions on how beneficial some of the key components were. All students were invited to complete the survey whether they had participated or not, with the aim of exploring reasons for non-engagement. While there were some respondents who indicated they had not participated, few further details were provided beyond lack of awareness, raising issues around advertising the intervention to be discussed later.

The introduction of legal terminology was perceived to be useful by slightly more respondents than not useful in 2017/2018 and unanimously useful in 2018/2019. For the initial year, the feedback from the intervention was more positive but this data provides an opportunity to reflect on the best delivery methods of some content, for example presenting the introduction of terms via a glossary that could be translated into a useful guide during the first weeks of study.

While the participation in the legal case task was low amongst respondents, those who did participate thought the task was useful, reflecting the feedback from the intervention, indicating a positive reaction to the aim of providing guidance on what is expected of students prior to them commencing their studies, developing the relevant cultural capital.

The aim of supporting students develop a sense of community with their peers and staff is integral to the intervention and the survey respondents reported a mixed response to the success of this opportunity, and this is explored in greater detail in the student interviews.

	2017/2018	2018/2019
Participate (initial)	74%	80%
Participate (full)	48%	75%
Was Introduction useful	76% found useful (from those who completed this component)	88% found useful (from those who completed this component)
Were Legal terms useful	57% found useful (from those who completed this component)	100% found useful (from those who completed this component)
Was the Task useful	62% found useful (from those who completed this component)	86% found useful (from those who completed this component)
Opportunity to engage with students	63% Yes	100% Yes
Opportunity to engage with staff	50% Yes	100% Yes

Table 3.3: Survey Responses (Engagement)

The data from these surveys was useful in developing the semi-structured interviews for both staff and students. While limited, the responses highlighted the key areas in which I was interested in seeking further input, particularly in terms of reasons for engagement/non-engagement, the delivery of the intervention, and ensuring the content and opportunities met the needs of the students.

Interviews

The student and staff interviews have provided detailed feedback on how the intervention was received, and the perceived benefits and shortcomings of the individual components and as a whole. As highlighted in Chapter 3, these interviews took place after the final iteration of the intervention in the 2019/2020 academic year.

The findings of the interview data have identified a number of key issues which can be loosely mapped onto the Intervention Mapping Table (Table 1) on which the Moodle intervention was framed. By referring to the mapping table, this will help explore the level of success in achieving the learning

outcomes of the intervention and the student and staff experience of support following its practical delivery. In addition to discussing the individual components of the intervention, there were wider discussions surrounding the delivery and concept of the intervention as a whole, which will be reflected below.

Delivery of the intervention
[Component 1: An introduction to the school and how it is structured]

As an introduction to the school, the delivery of the module was seen as an important element of the intervention.

> *"It was pretty useful in terms of giving me … a general overview of what studying Law's going to be like" (Student 1)*

The module was seen as beneficial, allowing students to see details of how the different courses were structured and delivered, the support available, and so on. However, both students expressed their view that, while being a positive experience, opening the module at an earlier stage would have been preferred. Their rationale was based on practical issues in that for many students, including Student 2, the module was delivered at a time when they were preparing to leave for and travelling to University for the start of term, particularly with regards to international students. These practical issues meant some students did not have time to fully participate in the module, evidenced by the decreasing participation in each section as they were released (as demonstrated in Table 3.3: Intervention Engagement Statistics).

> *"Because it kind of fell within that time frame where everyone is kind of moving or like spending time with their friends and family before leaving" (Student 1)*

> *"It was one single point where I was joining the university and I ran out of time with all the new information that was coming at me" (Student 2)*

With refence to engagement with the module, Student 2 also highlighted the assumption that *"a lot of people won't start things early, and they'll leave it to the last minute"*, reducing the time available for them to engage further.

Extending the time available for students to complete this module was also raised by the academic staff interviewed, with Staff 1 suggesting *"take it back to the day they get their results. At that point, they're super keen"*. However, as discussed with the students and staff, there were limitations to the timing of the delivery also linked to the method of delivery, which will be discussed below.

Staff also discussed extending the module in a slightly different context. They again agreed that the module gave a good introduction to the school but felt there was further opportunity to introduce additional aspects of the school if time permitted, more academic based and legal skills content in particular. The additional time, therefore, is something that would be envisaged to happen following the students' arrival in Nottingham and the content being linked more directly with taught module content.

> *"Two weeks before they start, and now we say perhaps that two weeks after that would be-, because it able to cover also their experience as pre-students, and the experience as students" (Staff 3)*

Student 1 agreed that *"if it was … spread out, then people would be more willing to participate"*. Linking the module to other module-based teaching was also explored by staff and students as they discussed development opportunities, detailed below, but Staff 1 did believe that the students had the capacity at the start of the academic year to continue with the module, prior to their workload increasing.

> *"Once the lectures have really got going and the tutorials start, they're probably not going to be very interested. You do have almost a fortnight with a bit of dead space where you could quite easily do something with them" (Staff 1)*

In both cases, a desire for a prolonged induction process was evident, supporting the literature reviewed concerning a spiral induction (Laing, 2005) and the literature negatively reflecting on the all too common short, information overloaded induction sessions at the start of students' university journey, the latter offering little opportunity for the development of any cultural capital. Student 2 referred to the first week of term as *"an overflow of information"*.

The timing of the intervention had been dictated by both the platform of delivery, Moodle, and the university admissions timescales. With the latter, student information is not confirmed until late

August each academic year, providing a limited window in which to deliver information prior to arrival and during welcome week prior to formal teaching commencing. In addition, having selected Moodle as the delivery platform, this required students to commence registration with the University prior to gaining access, further limiting this window. While these limitations exist in the design of the intervention used in this research, alternate methods of delivery were discussed with the students which would also have implications on the timing of delivery, introduced below with further discussion in the following chapter.

Before considering alternative methods of delivery, it should be reported that the students confirmed that using Moodle was a positive aspect of the module. A significant proportion of student, both home and international, commented that they had previously used a version of Moodle or a similar online platform at their school or college, so it was a familiar concept to them. In addition to delivering the intervention through a familiar platform, it allowed them the opportunity to view how the School of Law operated its Moodle pages and demonstrate what functionality was available and they would be exposed to. The intervention was developed to mirror the school's taught modules to create this familiarity and opportunity for development in navigating the platform.

> *"I actually liked that it was delivered by Moodle … we used it in A Level". "I liked getting used to Moodle because that's where everything is delivered … exposure to that in the introduction course is valuable because, otherwise, it can be quite overwhelming" (Student 2)*

The suggestion of delivering the intervention via an open access platform, such as social media was discussed but when the practical issues were explained to the students, they understood the rationale for selecting Moodle; issues such as GDPR in using prospective student data rather than confirmed student data and aligning the content to the platform used. However, the development of a *"social media page for new students" (Student 2)* to support the intervention requires further discussion.

Student 2 highlighted that, while the use of Moodle was positive, the method of communicating the opportunity to participate in the intervention was less effective and this would be an opportunity to use social media to communicate the opportunity to complete the module more widely, suggesting that e-mail alone was not the best way to advertise the module.

"If you had that, that would be an excellent, kind of, medium to raise awareness of this module, and then introduce students to each other as well" (Student 2)

Content of the intervention
[Components 2-6]

Having discussed the timing and delivery of the module, the interviews focussed on the individual components of the intervention seeking feedback on the specific content.

Introducing the personal tutor system was discussed with the students and, on reflection this content of the intervention was not deemed to have had any significant impact. Student 2 reported that they were aware of *"some people not knowing who their tutor was"*. While it was recognised that the provision of a personal tutor, plus some guidance on what that relationship was designed to look like, was useful information to have, there was no significant benefit to receiving this as part of the intervention as opposed to being given the information during the face-to-face induction session.

This part of the module simply provided some high-level information followed by a list of names, resulting in little value to new students. It was recognised by the students, however, part of the issue rested on the personal tutor system in place at that time and the engagement of staff with the intervention.

"Some people not knowing who their tutor was ... I think that falls down to some tutors not reaching out and making contact" (Student 2)

As an area of the intervention, significant opportunities for improvement were identified and discussed through the interviews with students and staff, focusing on greater engagement and interaction from staff during the intervention. These suggestions will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 5.

"I think that might be good if they kind of engage with tutees, especially before they arrive or something, it would give it kind of more personal touch because you only really have the law school contact" (Student 2)

Student 1 agreed, commenting that engagement from staff would assist in *"giving students courage"* in their own engagement with the module and with their contact with personal tutors when they arrived.

Similarly, with details of the modules taken in the first semester, the student found it mildly useful to have an idea of the course structure and an idea of what each module may be about; the concept of Tort Law, for example, being new to many students.

As with the details of the personal tutor system, the information provided was too high level and more granular detail could be introduced. However, the balance between too little and too much information being provided at this stage of the students' pre-induction needs to be considered carefully and set appropriately. One suggestion included the provision of module information in video form, something that at the time was only being explored as a medium for module selection events in the school.

> *"Do videos of it, short little clips because that's something I find a lot of people are very receptive to is just if they can watch a little clip"* (Student 2)

Student feedback suggested that the development of the module to continue into teaching and be linked with a taught module would make the module more attractive and help link the induction process into the wider school provision. This was seen as more beneficial than the current overview that the induction programme delivered to them in their first week. Student 2 agreed that this connection would support what they were introduced to in the intervention as it would be "extended and ... included some of the same materials". A long-term aim of this research is to create an extended induction to help students settle into academic life over a period of time; this will be explored further in the following chapter.

Feedback from the academic staff interviews agreed that this component could be enhanced, also suggesting that first year module convenors could provide a *"video, an audio presentation of the modules that they're teaching"* (Staff 3) to give a taste of what is to come and potentially experience a 'mini-lecture'. As first year, at the time of this research, was compulsory for 95% of law students, with the other 5% taking 3 of the 4 compulsory modules, these would be of interest and benefit to all new students.

Several components of the intervention were related to a task requiring students to read and answer questions on a legal case, receive feedback and reflect on that feedback; all skills required of a law student.

The task set requiring students to read, analyse and provide answers to questions was seen as the most beneficial element of the intervention by the students and staff, Staff 3 commenting that *"having this case analysis there, it was extremely helpful"*. For most students entering the school, having not previously studied Law, this was their first opportunity to see a real piece of legal text and their first exposure to what tasks they may be expected to complete when reviewing them.

From the questionnaire, the level of the questions set seems to have been appropriate, with only a minority of students finding the task either too easy or too difficult. With the case provided being one that had previously been used in teaching, this element of the intervention gave students a genuine and authentic introduction to the legal skills they would need to employ throughout their studies. This was noted and appreciated by the students interviewed as the introduction of these skills and the experience of analysing a legal text was seen as a clear, concrete benefit to their journey of becoming a Law student, with Student 2 also reflecting on linking content to taught modules.

> *"When it comes to actually what we're trying to be prepared for when coming into learning law, I think things like the case analysis were more helpful" (Student 1)*

> *"I think it was good to get exposed to the case format early on. I would maybe suggest that it could be a case that we need to read anyway or something like that from one of the other courses" (Student 2)*

From the perspective of the academic staff interviewed, particularly the module convenor from whose module the case analysis task was based, this section of the intervention was also seen as one of the most positive aspects, although they were *"actually quite surprised how many of them attempted the case analysis"* (Staff 1), indicating that the students were aware of the benefits of participation. This is supported by Wingate (2007), who advocates for skills teaching to be relevant to the discipline to engage students. Both students and staff identified areas for development around exposure to legal study and specific skills teaching as part of the intervention, which will be discussed in more detail later.

"If we also had statute analysis, for example. If we had an example of that, that would have been helpful as well" (Student 1)

"Preparing for lectures and tutorials ... Yes, you will be given lecture handouts, you'll want to make your own notes at the lecture. You'll get the most out of tutorials by actually doing the work in advance" (Staff 1)

Using this initial period of engagement as a starting point for developing new students' legal skills in terms of analysis and presentation of findings, the potential benefits of the task are clear to see.

"I found those very useful to, kind of, ease me into the legal way of thinking. The legal way of thinking was very different to the way that I was taught to think" (Student 2)

In addition to the task itself, being informed of the correct answers to the questions was also seen as positive by the students as they had the opportunity to see if they were correct in their first attempt at analysing a legal case. In addition to providing the facts, the answers were also designed to provide encouragement and confidence to the students who answered the questions. If a student had answered correctly then, as would be expected, they would be pleased with their performance but if their answer was not correct, or only partially correct, the answers provide the guidance on how they could get to the correct answer. Student feedback on the task evidenced that they found this aspect beneficial, being able to see where they had either gone right or gone wrong in their analysis.

"So if you give feedback on the legal case, it kind of tests your knowledge, which I find valuable" (Student 2)

This ability, for students to be able to review their own performance in light of feedback, is something the academic staff interviewed believed was an essential area for development. With the issue of feedback being so important to students while they are at university, and the discrepancy existing between what is perceived as 'good' feedback between academic staff and students, introducing new students to the concept of feedback and reflection from the outset of their studies can only be welcomed.

As this element of the intervention was deemed the most beneficial by both students and academic staff, further thought must be given to its weighting and placement as part of the module. While

many students participated in this section of the module, the participation levels had already dropped from the opening sections which provided more general level information (see Table 2: Intervention Engagement Statistics).   Further consideration of the timing and delivery of this perceived important component of the intervention is required, alongside a further consideration of the overall content to ensure students receive what is most beneficial to their transition to studying law at university.

In addition to the components listed in the Table 1: Intervention Mapping Table, some additional content was included in the intervention aimed at introducing students to the study of law, one of these being the introduction of some key legal terminology and the associated task of defining these. As already identified from the survey, this was not perceived to be a particularly helpful element to the same extent as the case analysis task.

"The part where we had to … go through and try to define terms by ourselves, legal terms by ourselves, it was helpful in a sense, but, I think, when it comes to actually what we're trying to be prepared for when coming into learning law, I think things like the case analysis was more helpful" (Student 1)

The content of future iterations should be reviewed and suggestions for moving forward will be considered and presented in the following chapter. This will not only include a review of what has been incorporated previously, but also suggestions for additional content proposed in the interviews.

One suggestion for additional content was the inclusion of an indicative reading list, not so students could start buying books or start preparing for taught sessions, but to give students some guidance on introductory reading they could do to introduce them to academic legal writing and provide an opportunity for them to begin developing relevant cultural capital for legal study. As most students have never studied Law, with a minority of students having taken 'A' level, this is something that could prove beneficial to some students. An alternative suggestion was that some academic content and/or extracts from textbooks were posted to be viewed, giving students a real idea of what they will be doing, embedding relevant content and skills into the intervention.

"Give a suggested reading list of the textbooks that we buy anyway, just because when I arrived the reason I was unable to complete the introduction module was because of the new material that was kind of coming at me for tutorials and things like that. So, it kind

of would relieve the semester time pressure if I could read the material before I came"

(Student 2)

The concept of new students being able to meet virtually prior to arriving at university was initially seen as one of the most beneficial elements of the intervention, providing students with the opportunity to engage with fellow students 'in the same boat' (Jacklin & Le Riche, 2009). Staff 2 supported this element seeing how it *"can operate as a sort of ice breaker"*.

This opportunity was recognised by the students who did appreciate being able to communicate with fellow new students as they could share their expectations, concerns and motivations with others. It was noted, however, that following the sharing of information and experiences in discussion boards, no lasting relationships were built through this communication. It was noted by Student 2 that, once they had arrived at university, there was little or no acknowledgement or conversation of having participated in the module.

> *"I remember speaking to a couple of other students about it. I'm not sure if they had completed it" (Student 2)*

While this statement may appear to be disheartening, there are still positives from this type of intervention. Despite not continuing acquaintances or conversations started in discussion boards, the students had had the opportunity to share their questions, fears, excitement and anticipation in a semi-anonymous way and be encouraged that others shared the same feelings. Managing these discussion boards to set the correct tone and level of engagement is a consideration for the future to enhance the level of interaction and potential community building.

The students did put forward some interesting and useful suggestions as to how this engagement with other students could be enhanced, commenting that *"this was something I thought was missing"* with regards building a community (Student 2).

> *"Maybe if we could get … second-years or third-years who are already in uni to maybe get on the group chat" (Student 1)*

"Maybe have some sort of a debate going on from a point in the introduction. If there was, kind of, a debate going on, people would be more inclined to get involved with that. It would be more interesting to be engaged with, I think, or just, like, different topics going on maybe relating to the introduction module" (Student 2)

The participation of students who had been through the transition process, and the Introduction to Law module, were repeated several times by the students. Student 1 suggested involving the Law Society President, which could be expanded to other representatives from the law specific societies (there were six law-based student societies during the 2019/2020 academic year) contributing to the discussions and providing new students with exposure to the wider school environment and not just the study of law. Student 2, based on her experience from other areas of student life, felt that previous student experience has a lot to offer.

"Having a student create … a short few video blogs just to run through the introduction to law module … explaining something specific to the introduction to law module, what they found helpful about the module, things to notice about it, just because I was looking at a lot of YouTube videos as well about halls and things like that, and student life, and vlogs and things like that, I found them very useful" (Student 2)

On the issue of peer engagement, the students did feel that the engagement with staff would help facilitate the student engagement, creating an environment *"like a community"* (Student 2).

Engagement opportunities
[Component 8: opportunities to engage with staff]

The student interviews highlighted that the opportunities to engage with staff were limited but certainly something they would like to have seen more of.

"I didn't really engage with staff … so maybe that might be helped in the discussion board if the staff member is kind of interjected, introduced themselves" (Student 2)

As discussed earlier, engagement form personal tutors would have been appreciated and could have assisted in the creation and development of this relationship, which in most cases would be designed to last throughout the duration of their studies. This was echoed in the interviews with staff, confirming the benefits of building a strong relationship from the outset were clear in the minds of

the interviewees, creating a sense of belonging and supporting students' ongoing development (Earwaker, 1992). Although important, the personal tutor relationship is only one relationship that students would need to form in order to create that sense of community, and initial engagement through this module can help in *"breaking the ice"* (Staff 2) and starting this process.

> *"I would say that, perhaps, you know, it might be an idea to have an engagement with the staff who's going to teach them in the first year" (Staff 3)*

> *"I think it's worth making the point of don't be scared of talking to tutors and lecturers because they don't approach some, they're scared of them" (Staff 1)*

The latter point highlights the importance of this initial engagement, providing the opportunity for staff to be introduced as people who the students can approach with questions or for support, building an inclusive and welcoming environment.

Feedback from academic staff did acknowledge that a greater awareness and visibility of the intervention amongst academic colleagues was required to improve engagement outside key members of staff involved in the welcome and induction process. The suggestions for actively involving personal tutors and first year module convenors would provide an improved and more varied pool of staff for students to engage with.

Areas for expansion

While areas for improvement and expansion will form the basis of the following chapter, a number of points were raised in the interviews that went beyond feedback and analysis of the intervention in its current form. Some of these have been referred to when discussing particular components of the intervention, but additional areas discussed are detailed below.

Staff 2 commented that while they deemed the content of the intervention appropriate it could be made clear to students how participation in each section would be beneficial to their studies. Having this awareness may help increase participation as students are more likely to participate if they can see it will benefit them (Wingate, 2007).

> *"I think there are things that we could do there to more specifically pinpoint its benefits to the students, and I think it's about incentivising students to engage with it. If students think*

there's going to be a benefit to them in engaging in their study, then I would imagine that you would get greater take up and greater level of engagement, different depth of engagement as well as part of that" (Staff 2)

Staff 1 suggested that the module be made compulsory but acknowledged that this would be difficult to enforce or monitor. However, directly linking the content from the intervention to teaching could provide that encouragement to students to engage, so it could be viewed as a requisite prior to commencing their studies and create a *"seamless transition … into the school's activities"* (Staff 2). However, if not compulsory, care must be taken not to disadvantage students who choose not to, or do not have the opportunity to, engage with the intervention.

4.4   Concluding remarks on the research findings

The data gathered through the various data collection methods has provided a valuable insight and information that can be used to address the research questions set out in Chapter 2. The literature review has described the educational landscape in which this research is based and contributed to the theoretical framework on which the intervention could be designed. Similarly, the focus group has helped define the design, development and delivery of the intervention, providing context specific data to support the finding from the literature.

The intervention itself has produced useful data, both directly and through the follow-up data collection methods through a questionnaire and interviews. This data can be used to assess to what extent the leaning outcomes of the intervention, built around the key theoretical concepts of the framework have been met, and provide useful information and guidance on how the intervention can be developed for future iterations.

The findings that have been presented and analysed in this chapter will now be discussed in greater depth, together with recommendations for future developments.

Chapter 5
Discussion of research findings

Where the previous chapter focused on presenting and analysing the data supporting this research, this chapter will further develop this analysis to highlight and discuss the significant findings following the implementation of the intervention, focusing on several of the themes identified.

Following a similar structure to Chapter 4, based on the research questions and broad themes that emerged from the sources of data, the key positive and negative aspects of the intervention will be explored. Recommendations for improvements in any future iterations of this or similar interventions will be made.

The recommendations proposed below are based primarily on conclusions drawn from further interpretations of the literature, the feedback and suggestions from the student and staff interviews and also from personal observations of the intervention. These recommendations will be guided by how and to what extent the learning outcomes of the intervention, as outlined in Table 1, have been met. In addition, some recommendations have some grounding in how the sector, and specifically the Law School, responded to the pandemic and the move to online delivery of induction information and processes, as noted in Chapter 1. In each case, the source of data behind each recommendation will be identified.

5.1   Reflecting on the literature

The first research question was designed to explore the literature to highlight the challenges first year students face when starting university and establish what opportunities currently existed, in practice and theoretically, to support them. This question was addressed in the literature review, in Chapter 2, rather than through the analysis of the data produced through the student focus group or the implementation and feedback of the intervention. It is important to reflect on the literature to draw further conclusions and recommendations in light of the outcome of the intervention, which was partially designed on the findings from the literature review.

The literature, at the point the intervention was developed and implemented, provided a clear rationale for the research. In addition, the literature supported my own observations of student needs in terms of induction and support from my role at that that time. The literature reviewed covered

several themes integral to issue of transition: the massification and diversification of higher education as a sector; the increase in non-traditional students entering university; students' preparedness for higher education, including the concepts of cultural capital and institutional habitus which contributed to the theoretical framework of the research; fitting in and identity creation; existing theories and practices designed to support students through institutional approaches and environment; and finally peer support and communities of practice, which again contributed to the theoretical framework.

A broad range of literature was reviewed but all centred on identifying and responding to the challenges students faced. Furthermore, while the literature identified particular groups of students, it is apparent that all students face these challenges and require support, albeit to varying extents. Based on this, the intervention developed for this research was designed to be inclusive and accessible to all new law students, "to ensure the consistent and gradual development of learning for all students" (Wingate, 2007, p.395).

As stated previously, within the literature there was no specific research located in the context of legal education, the environment in which this research would take place. While this indicated a gap in the literature, the findings from the research could be applied across a range of disciplines and environments.

The School of Law at the University of Nottingham had increased in size of cohort during the period I worked there, 2005 to 2016, and during the period in which the intervention ran, approaching 400 students in the 2019/2020 academic year. In addition, the cohort encompassed diversity with one-quarter of the students being international and approximately one in 18 being classed as widening participation students, which would reflect a non-traditional students educational, social or economic background, as defined by Holton (2018).

In terms of preparedness, feedback from students in both the focus group and the interviews all reflected on the time and challenges they faced as they commenced their studies, from being able to integrate socially, adapt to new teaching styles and methods and, most significantly, adapting to studying a discipline, reflecting the importance of the theoretical concepts identified to frame this research. The majority of students had not studied law before; less than one in five from the 2017/2018 cohort, although this only represented 13% of the cohort. Based on this, most students had not had the opportunity to develop the cultural capital to study law at their start of their university journey, having not been exposed to the discipline in their previous educational experience, in

additional to potentially not being prepared for the higher education environment more generally (Edward, 2003).

Reflecting on the literature, when reporting on opportunities for supporting students in their journey into a new environment, and the barriers that exist to the success of these opportunities, many of these are mirrored in this research environment. For example, through my role in co-ordinating the personal tutor system in the School of Law and being a point of contact for students requiring support, I was in a position to see where the support mechanisms to assist students in both their studies and personal transition failed to effectively provide this support. There was a "disparity between the expectations of staff for student performance and students' abilities" (Edward, 2003, p.227), particularly in the first year with a high proportion of students not meeting the 'good degree' standard of a First or Upper Second-Class average. It could be argued that the teaching, learning and assessment methods of the school, the existing institutional habitus, were not supporting these students to be able to meet the required expectations; the "students had limited understanding of the new system, or of the standard expected of them" (Christie et al, 2008, p.571).

The personal tutor support within the school was, to an extent, hindered by the increasing student population creating a greater personal tutor allocation for individual staff and making it more difficult to engage fully with their tutees (Owen, 2002). In addition, the personal tutor system relied on staff being willing to engage with and have an understanding of the role; the "form of pastoral care given by the individual tutors varied in relationship to the tutors' own personality and understanding of pastoring" (McChlery & Wilkie, 2009, p.32). Furthermore. even when staff were willing and engaged, the system relied on students seeking support, creating a reactive rather than a supportive environment (Jacklin & Le Riche, 2009). The observations through my role are reflected in the feedback obtained in the student interviews.

The structure and culture of the school had maintained its habitus, creating a barrier to student successfully transitioning into legal education, at least initially. And students were not supported in their initial introduction to the school, facing a week of intensive lecture-based induction sessions. However, the school was reacting to the changing environment through supportive roles such as mine and the appointment of legal skills advisors to assist with the development of academic legal skills. In addition, a peer mentoring scheme, aimed at creating a collaborative environment and engendering a community of practice, had been introduced, although in a pilot stage when the intervention was introduced.

In summary, the analysis and discussion of the literature has addressed the first research question: 'what does the literature tell us of the opportunities that exist for support to be provided to first year students when starting university?'. By exploring the environment, the barriers and the mechanisms for support, clear foundations for these opportunities have been identified. Furthermore, by reflecting on the literature in the context of the environment for this research, it has affirmed that these opportunities are applicable to this context and leads to the second research question: 'what support do first year law student perceive is necessary when starting at the University of Nottingham?'

5.2   Student perspective on required support

The initial focus group to guide the creation of the intervention was an important link between the literature review and the development of the tool that would provide the relevant data to address the final research question. It should be noted that, while all three research questions are imperative to this study, the final question was designed to be the most informative and provide the necessary evidence to support the overall aim of supporting students in the transition to higher education. However, this would not have been possible without having addressed the initial two questions.

The general transition into higher education and issues surrounding settling into both the academic and wider aspects of university life was a key theme highlighted in the focus group. But while of a theme, the issues raised within this small sample of students were all individual to them and built upon a foundation of both their previous educational experiences and their social and cultural backgrounds. This range of experiences provided evidence of various areas of support that the students perceived as being necessary to help them successfully transition to their new environment and ways of learning. However, given the range of experiences expressed by a small percentage of the student population, it was concluded that to provide the support required to a large cohort of students, the delivery and content of any intervention had to be on a generic level to ensure it was accessible and of potential benefit to all. While this conclusion is based on practical consideration, the opportunity for individualised elements of the intervention, such as individualised feedback on practical tasks, could be explored to incorporate the "idiosyncrasy of students' transitional experiences" (Palmer et al, 2009, p.39).

This conclusion guided the development of the intervention in the form of several components, each created to support students in various aspects of the transition process. The success of each of these components will be discussed below, but overall, this initial data indicates that while this intervention can play a pivotal role in supporting students on their journey, it should only be seen as a gateway to

further areas of support and development that students can navigate through to meet their individual needs and "learning to learn" (Wingate, 2007, p.391) to become independent learners and members of the academic community (McChlery & Wilkie, 2009).

This feedback from the students provided an indication of initial areas an intervention could focus on to address perceived difficulties when commencing their studies, particularly: an introduction to how the teaching is delivered and the creation of a community to develop peer networks to provide both academic and social support between students going through the same experience.

The components of the intervention were designed to deliver some of the practical suggestions made by the focus group, as they were able to articulate solutions to the issues they perceived they faced when then commenced their studies. The consensus of a need for information prior to their arrival, particularly in relation to nature and volume of the reading required for what was a new subject to them, highlighted the need to supplement the existing welcome talks and handbook. Specifically, the technical legal texts such as statutes and case law, and how these were interpreted into the application of the law, were identified as particularly confusing aspects of legal study when they began their studies. As a result, specific components were designed to introduce students to the basics of legal educational knowledge, through defining legal terms and analysing a legal document, providing a tool and an opportunity for direct exposure to what they will be studying. The practical task of reading and analysing legal texts, with the opportunity to receive feedback, would provide an insight that would not be possible in a handbook or verbal overview in an information heavy welcome talk. However, as will be discussed further later, the embedding of this introduction into a longer and more engaging induction process would add further value.

As with all of the devised components, the student feedback was supported by the literature in this area. In this instance, the need for information and engagement with legal texts prior to their arrival allows students to engage with what is expected of them in their studies and "develop those capacities and habits that will enable them to continue learning" (Black et al, 2006, p.120) as well as reflecting the idea of an induction process (Laing et al, 2005) rather than an induction event. Each component of the intervention, as detailed in Table 1, reflects conclusions drawn from the supporting literature.

In addition, the development of a community of practice was highlighted as a perceived need, to support each other academically as well as creating social and supportive networks within the cohort. This was therefore built into the development of the intervention with opportunities for students to

engage with their peers through online discussion boards, with the aim of fostering a sense of community pre-arrival, which Wenger (2000) were "essential to our learning …[and]…the building blocks of a social learning system" (p.229) and maintaining the vision of extending the induction process.

When the focus group was prompted to reflect on the support provided by the school, particularly in relation to academic staff, there was a positive response to this engagement. As discussed in the previous chapter, while generalisations should not be drawn from this small group of self-selected students, the literature supports the conclusion that engendering an academic community can enhance the students' transition experience (Earwaker, 1992). Providing information to students about the support that is available, including the provision of a named contact such as a personal tutor, can engender an "a culture and context that aims to be supportive" and inclusive (Jacklin & Le Riche, 2009, p.746-7). In addition, incorporating a mechanism for personal tutors to contact their students would enhance the impact of this element of the intervention. Providing some familiarity prior to their arrival, for example posting photographs of key members of staff, may assist in this process.

The conclusions drawn from the focus group demonstrated that there were agreed upon areas of support that the students involved perceived were necessary and practical solutions were identifiable. Their views aligned with the literature, identifying the same key themes that had arisen in relation to the first research question, and provided the basis for the intervention to be developed and implemented. It is through the intervention that the majority of conclusions and points of discussion can be drawn, when the support is delivered in a practical way.

5.3   Emerging themes from the practical support

The analysis of the research findings in Chapter 4 in relation to the research question 'what is the student and staff experience of this support when delivered in a practical way?' focussed on the components of the intervention. While being informed by these components and their associated learning outcomes, this chapter will bring together elements from across the components to discuss a number of distinct but interconnected themes that emerged from this analysis, exploring how far these learning outcomes have been met and how these themes can inform future developments.

The themes identified through this analysis are:

- Timeliness and delivery of the intervention

- Relevance

- Engagement

- Communication

- A sense of belonging

Timeliness and delivery of the intervention

The introduction of the intervention was the first instance of an online, pre-arrival engagement with new undergraduate law students to take place in the University of Nottingham, beyond the provision of published induction programme details. The induction programmes themselves were scheduled as three days of intensive, lecture-based activities, formal registration events with limited opportunity to engage with a wide range of staff. As highlighted in the literature, such induction programmes have limitations in the positive impact they can have on supporting students in the initial transition to higher education (Laing et al, 2005).

The overarching aim of the intervention was to support students in this transition and the timing was essential in order to meet the associated learning outcomes, in particular supporting students in finding that sense of belonging and understanding what was expected of them in their new educational environment and "understand what their role as learners in higher education involves" (Wingate, 2007, p.394). By addressing these concepts pre-arrival, the intention was to reduce the 'culture shock' typically experienced by students when they do arrive (Haggis & Pouget, 2002).

In consideration of the timing of the intervention, beyond the practical considerations discussed below, it is important to ensure that students receive access to relevant information or activities at an optimal time to have an impact and be of visible benefit. If perceived as "irrelevant to their subject" (Wingate, 2007, p.393) at that specific time, the engagement and impact can be reduced.

The timing of when the intervention was released and the period in which new students had the opportunity to engage with the content was a key issue raised by both student interview participants. They reported that an earlier release of the intervention would have been preferable to allow them more time to engage with the content prior to their move to Nottingham but appreciated the constraints of timing when these were explained to them, understanding the limitations of access to

Moodle, the selected delivery platform. The implication from their comments, when asked if they had enough time to engage with the intervention, was that they would have welcomed being contacted prior to their places being officially confirmed. Both students, confirmed by admissions data[14], had accepted Nottingham as their Firm choice of institution so anticipated they would be studying in the Law School subject to meeting the admissions requirements. The majority of new Law students would be in the same position, with the school typically recruiting its students from a cohort of Firm applicants with minimal numbers joining though Insurance places and clearing.

Moodle was selected as the most appropriate platform for the intervention for several reasons: feedback from the focus group; my familiarity with the platform, creating a safe space for me to design and deliver the content; and the desire for the delivery method of the intervention to reflect what the students would experience during their studies. The feedback from the student interviews was positive, to an extent, of the platform used for delivery as they reported that many students were used to using Moodle, or a similar virtual learning environment, so that familiarity enabled them to engage with the content if the intervention as well as provide an insight into how Nottingham structured its Moodle pages. However, the limitations of the platform did limit the availability of the intervention owing to the requirement for students to have completed the initial stages of registration with the University. As discussed in Chapter 4, the benefits and challenges between using Moodle or alternate platforms had been considered prior to selecting Moodle, that selection based on the reasons stated above.

In addition to student feedback on the timing of the intervention, academic staff also provided feedback on this theme and, in addition to questions regarding starting the intervention at an earlier time, their focus was on the benefits of extending the intervention at the other end and continuing into the academic year. They felt that extending the intervention this way would allow additional time to introduce further aspects of the school and linking it to more academic based content. This development, which supports an extended, spiral induction programme (Laing, 2005), would offer the opportunity for students to progress their initial engagement with studying law in higher education to the practical study of law at Nottingham with the relevant academic staff and specific academic content, embedding the necessary academics skills (Wingate, 2007).

The proposal to extend the intervention into the academic year was also discussed by academic staff in terms of incorporating it into the delivery of the core first year module: Understanding Law. The

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[14] Admissions data confirmed via SATURN, the University of Nottingham's student record system util 2018.

case analysis task designed for the intervention was inspired by an element from the content of this module, which provides a level of consistency in content between the intervention and the module as the design currently stands. Moving beyond consistency, developing the content of the intervention in alignment with the development of the module would provide students with a coherent journey through the pre-arrival engagement, induction and study.

Based on this feedback, releasing the intervention at an earlier time would be a recommended change should the intervention be run for future cohorts. However, as the timing of the intervention is linked to the issue of what platform is the most appropriate to deliver the intervention to the students with the optimal impact, the use of Moodle as the key delivery method also requires reviewing in any future intervention. A choice needs to be made between the benefits of delivering content on a familiar platform and the benefits of receiving the content at the most appropriate time. From the students' comments, the latter seems the most appropriate in this instance, owing to the pressures and commitments they described prior to commencing their studies.

However, my view would be not to preclude Moodle from the intervention completely but introduce an alternate platform for initial, early engagement followed by later content being delivered via Moodle once University registration was complete. This would retain the element of familiarity for many students which has been designed to provide an aspect of the experience similar to their previous educational experience, easing their transition into higher educations (Mann, 2001). In addition, the desired outcome of developing a supportive and beneficial community of practice (Christie et al, 2008) through interaction with peers, and staff, can be achieved across a range of platforms.

Adjusting the delivery method would require some changes to the content of the intervention, as outlined in Chapter 4, and based on feedback and reflection, changes to the content are recommended to improve on the impact, value and success in meeting the learning outcomes. Issues on content will be discussed further below, but further reflection on the timeliness of the intervention is required prior to this.

A further consideration of the timing of the intervention relates to how the opportunity is advertised and released to potential students if this was planned for prior to their places being confirmed. There would need to be some sensitivity surrounding the knowledge that not all students will have their places confirmed and, from an expectation perspective, it would need to explicitly express that receipt

of any engagement with the intervention is not an indication or guarantee of a place being confirmed. Based on current examples from the University of Nottingham[15], the intervention could be designed to provide transition support to all students planning to study Law regardless of institution, becoming more Nottingham specific following the period of confirmation and registration.

Releasing the intervention at an earlier time offers an opportunity to further explore the aims of reducing uncertainty and creating a sense of belonging, "seen by many as paramount in the survival of a student" (Edward, 2003, p228). While a more open access delivery platform would require further consideration of students sharing information, these platforms would allow students the space to begin the process of engagement with their peers and begin the development of a supportive and academic community. The use of a social media platform, for example, will be one that many students will be familiar with and will have an understanding of the norms and appropriate methods of engagement in that space.

The feedback from both students and academic staff provides a compelling case for the timing, and by association the delivery platform, of the intervention to be revised in order to meet the long-term aim of this research: creating a supportive induction process to help students settle into academic life over a period of time. Commencing the intervention earlier would enable students to begin their journey into understanding what is expected of them and creating a sense of community with their peers and with academic staff, providing them with a sense of familiar (Mann, 2001), a theme that will be explored further below. Extending the intervention into the academic year in a coherent and constrictively aligned manner would enable students to build upon this initial engagement and continue their development and transition into members of the student and academic community, allowing greater opportunity "to learn the new rules of the university, so that they could engage in a new community of practice" (Christie et al, 2008, p.570).

An extended and coherent approach supporting students to engage with new people, content, teaching and delivery, and support systems and networks can provide the framework for students in which to aligning "negotiate and reconcile" (Hodgen & Askew, 2007, p.473) their previous knowledge and experience to meet the requirements of their new educational environment, therefore developing their cultural capital to reflect their new educational context. This is not something that can be easily achieved in traditional, short induction events which can be viewed as over-inducting

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[15] Introduction to Studying Veterinary Medicine: https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/vet-school-application-support

students and providing information not time relevant owing to the short window in which the induction event takes place.

This emphasises the need to ensure that the content, as well as the timing of the delivery, is appropriate and relevant, which leads us on to the next theme identified in the research.

Relevance

The content of the intervention intrinsically linked to the timing and delivery of the intervention. When and how the intervention is delivered have an impact on the type, format and extent of the content that will be made available to the students. However, the content has to be guided by its relevance to the students and is guided by the learning outcomes of the intervention as detailed in Table 1. In this section, the feedback on the relevance and usefulness of the content as delivered will be analysed and be extended to incorporate suggestions for amendments and potential content for future iterations of the intervention, including how this is influenced by timing and delivery.

The content of the intervention was designed to enable students to achieve the stated learning outcomes and informed by key issues and perceived barriers as derived from the literature and refined through the initial student focus group. Each of components included in the intervention had a primary aim and based on the level of engagement and the feedback from the interviews, each had a varying level of success. An overview of each component, or group of components, in terms of aims, feedback and recommendations follows, with a concluding summary of the overall relevance of the intervention.

1. An introduction to the school and how it is structured

The purpose of this introduction was to reduce uncertainty for students entering a new environment (Mann, 2001). By providing information to give students an initial awareness of what will be happening when they arrive and presenting a snapshot of the school environment, the aim was to reduce the anxiety associated with entering a new environment and help foster a sense of belonging (Edward, 2003).

This initial introduction provided basic information which included a copy of the week one induction programme, details of key staff, pictures of the primary lecture theatres used by the school and other

general information. The questionnaire results indicated that, amongst those who responded, the majority found this information useful but additional feedback was not provided by the students or staff on its general usefulness. This absence of feedback makes it difficult to determine if the outcomes of this component have been met as there are two interpretations of this.

First, the students may have accepted this introduction at face value and found it to beneficial but not worthy of particular comment, preferring to focus on the more practical elements of the intervention. Or conversely, it could be concluded that students perceived this introduction to be irrelevant and therefore did not make any significant impact. It is possible that the students saw this introduction as repetition of information they had already been exposed to, such as the induction programme having also been e-mailed or having experienced the lecture theatres when visiting on open days, and so on.

The conclusion likely lies between these two interpretations, and it is acknowledged that this introductory information will not in itself be sufficient to reduce uncertainty surrounding the environment. However, the provision of this information is important for those who may not have been exposed to it previously and it is only the first stage of introducing students to the school, with the majority if the interventions components designed to introduce different aspects throughout the module. The content, perhaps, does require review to ensure it contains a 'value-added' element to ensure it is engaging.

2. An introduction to the personal tutor system

Reducing uncertainty (Mann, 2001), signposting that support is available and that students are entering a supportive environment and community (Jacklin & Le Riche, 2009; Earwaker, 1992) were the objectives of this component. This was delivered through a statement providing an explanation of the personal tutor role and how that relation would provide support to students throughout their studies.

This component was not considered to have any meaningful impact, and this was confirmed through the student interviews. They reported that there was no significant benefit to receiving this information as part of the pre-arrival information as it would be available and arguably timelier to receive when they had arrived and were due to meet with their personal tutor. Knowing that they would have a personal tutor and who that was provided no immediate benefit to them as they could not act upon it, a view confirmed by the students when reviewing other aspect of the intervention,

such as the case study. They wanted actionable information and engagement rather than information that would only be useful to them in the future.

The suggestion that this pre-engagement had a "more personal touch" (Student 2) reflected comments throughout the interviews, with both students and staff, regarding the opportunities for engagement. Providing an opportunity to build strong relationships from the outset of a student's journey were seen as particularly beneficial to the staff interviewed and some form of engagement pre-arrival was a "nice way of breaking the ice" (Staff 2) and beginning the formation of this relationship. It is through these relationships that students can feel supported, engaged and help them integrate and feel "accepted by the institutional environment" (Thomas, 2002, p.427).

Potential ways to enhance this opportunity would be creating opportunities for students to meet their personal tutors online prior to their arrival, complete the initial introductions and provide the students with a recognisable person they can approach upon arrival. Alternatively, recognising there may be practical difficulties in the co-ordination of this approach in terms of student numbers (c.400 in the 2019/2020 academic year) and the willingness of personal tutors to engage in this activity (McChlery & Wilkie, 2009), personal tutors could provide a welcome video for their group of tutees or arrange e-mail/Teams conversations with their students. Not all students would take advantage of this opportunity (Christie et al, 2004) but a consistent approach to enable this engagement would be required.

The general issue of staff engagement will be addressed later in this chapter, but engaging with personal tutees would be a positive addition to the intervention if it is at the right time and in the right format.

3. Details of the first-year modules

The provision of information detailing the overall programme structures and details of the first-year modules they would be expected to take was aimed at developing an understanding of what is expected of the students once they began their studies; as Christie et al (2004) commented, they "had to learn the rules of the university" (p.570). This provided information on the content, how they would be taught and assessed and contact hours, designed to also assist with reducing uncertainty alongside the previous components.

As with the initial introduction to the school, limited feedback was provided by the students or staff on benefits or otherwise of this information, making it difficult to determine if the outcomes had been met. This could again be through replication of information, with the details being available in the University's Curriculum Catalogue[16], seen as irrelevant at that particular time as it was information that could not be acted upon, or it was just accepted as useful background information not worthy of comment.

When the intervention was delivered, this delivery of module information replicated the provision for current students when selecting modules for the following academic year during the module pre-enrolment period. The School of Law simply provided written information, although in some cases with additional material beyond the Curriculum Catalogue, but there was no further interaction or engagement from staff beyond answering queries from pro-active students. Since that time, there have been developments within the school to provide additional routes to this information in the form of short introductory videos by the module convenor or access to sample introductory lectures to enable students to make a more informed selection of modules. This has become the norm across many schools and departments across the University[17], particularly since the Pandemic when online engagement came to the forefront. While the information presented as part of the intervention would not be intended to help students select modules, these introductory videos or short sample lectures, as suggested by Student 2, would be beneficial in giving students a taste or what to expect, supporting the aim of reducing uncertainty as well as providing useful information.

Enhanced online resources and engagement opportunities are key development opportunities for this intervention.

4-6. Case Analysis Task and Feedback

The introduction of a real-life legal case, previously used in teaching, and the associated tasks around questions, feedback and reflection, was designed to meet a number or learning outcomes: give students an introduction of what is expected of them in the studies and development of legal academic skills (Black et al, 2006); introduce the role and importance of feedback (Carless, 2007; Crisp, 2007); and help initiate the development of reflection and awareness of understanding in relation to

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[16] University of Nottingham Curriculum catalogue:
https://campus.nottingham.ac.uk/psp/csprd_pub/EMPLOYEE/SA/c/UN_PROG_AND_MOD_EXTRACT.UN_PAM_CRSE_EXTRCT.GBL?
[17] School of Computer Sciences and the School of Politics and International Relations are examples of this provision.

assessments (Black et al, 2006). This task provided an authentic opportunity for students to experience one of the assessment methods they would be exposed to in their studies.

All of the data collected regarding the case analysis task suggested that this was the most positive component of the intervention. The engagement statistics, across all four years of the intervention being run, showed an increase in the number of posts from individual students following a decrease in the preceding components. In addition, the questionnaire responses indicated from those who responded, the majority across the two years that this ran stated that they found this task to be useful. Furthermore, the comments from the student and staff interviews re-enforced this conclusion with their responses being overwhelmingly positive. This positive reaction to this component appears to have been the result of the task being authentic and being an opportunity for students to engage in an activity that reflected what they would be doing and staring to develop their legal thinking and academic approach. As Student 1 commented, it was *"actually what we're trying to be prepared for when coming into learning law"*.

While the task was designed, in collaboration with an academic colleague, to be relatively straightforward and accessible to students who, in the majority, had not studied law before, it required a close reading and interpretation of the text. Providing an opportunity to be exposed to skills relevant to and based within their discipline, "to understand the discipline's conventions of constructing knowledge" (Wingate, 2007, p.394) was appreciated by the students as a positive method of preparing them for their studies and additional content, interlinking with their actual taught modules, was seen as a positive development. Student 2 reflected that *"it was good to get exposed to the case format early on"* as it helped *"ease me into the legal way of thinking"*. The task was an opportunity for students to overcome the first barrier in understanding their new discipline's conventions (Wingate, 2007).

The provision of additional content in this form was clearly supported by both students interviewed and by the staff, who believed that students understood what would be of benefit to them in their studies. As mentioned, this is reflected in the engagement data, and less demanding tasks, such as defining legal terminology, were not seen as beneficial and worthy of their engagement. Student 1 explicitly commented on the terminology task being "*helpful in a sense, but … when it comes to actually what we're trying to be prepared for"* the case analysis task stood out.

In future iterations, while it would be important to include some legal terminology to support students who are new to studying law and, for international students, where English is not their first language, this could be provided in the form of a glossary in place of a task. By making this more of a resource that could be utilised as and when required, this would allow for more time and capacity for students to undertake these more relevant, and perceived beneficial, tasks.

Both students and staff put forward suggestions for additional practical tasks that could be introduced in the future, including the review of statutes, having the opportunity to view and complete some academic legal writing and an introduction to legal research skills. All of these elements are included in the first-year compulsory module, Understanding Law, and an introduction to these in the intervention, as with the case analysis task, would act as a transition to this module, the actual study of law and the development of the skills that would be required for studying law at university (Black et al, 2008).

As previously stated, the case analysis task also provided an opportunity for feedback to be received and reflected upon, in addition to being exposed the legal case itself. The development of being able to understand, interpret and apply feedback is an essential skill in higher education in general and in the context of law would be applicable to formative and summative assessments and well as tutorials and other engagement sessions. Being able to understand feedback provides students with the skills to gauge their progress and apply their learning and development to future assessments and beyond (Mutch, 2003).

With the case analysis task, following a short period to allow participants to answer the questions without access to any answers, detailed feedback on the questions was provided and addressed both the answer and the rationale for how the answer could be derived from the case. In addition, prompt questions were provided to the participants to guide them through how to understand the feedback. Student 2 reflected on this element of the task, finding it *"valuable"* and Staff 1 describing it *"helpful"* and, while appearing understated, expressed their desire for students to begin engagement with understanding and reflecting on feedback at an early stage. Their perception of the importance of feedback was a result of their involvement in addressing this element of National Student Survey responses in which the Law School consistently performed less well in.

As the success of the case analysis task prompted suggestions for further practical tasks to be included in the intervention, this equally applies to feedback opportunities that would be associated with these

tasks. It is assessment and feedback opportunities that provide the structure through which students can learn to gauge their own progress (Wingate, 2007), and the findings from the data collected for this research provides the evidence that these opportunities should be expanded in future iterations of the intervention.

The expansion of these opportunities does face challenges, the most significant of which is the limitations of the intervention in terms of timing and duration. Investigating the feasibility of commencing the intervention earlier, running for longer and the possibility of aligning or integrating with a taught module have all been discussed previously but the benefits that can be achieved through expanding these practical opportunities provide an even clearer rationale for doing so.

Comments on the voices of feedback

Through the discussion of the intended learning outcomes, analysis of the data and consideration of further opportunities, the previous few sections have explored the relevance of the content included in the intervention. However, in this discussion it needs to be remembered that this is only a reflection based on the input of those who engaged with the research, either through participation with the intervention itself or providing feedback through the questionnaire or interviews.

I am conscious that the views of those who chose not to engage or could not engage for whatever reason are not included and the findings of the research must provide some consideration of their voice. For example, some students may have found the introduction to legal terminology task highly instructive and an essential step on their journey into studying law. And conversely, while the feedback suggests that the case analysis task was the highlight of the intervention, some student may find it a difficult task to approach, and the resulting anxiety may lead to disengagement and alienation.

The intervention needs to, as far as possible, support students who have different needs and requirements in terms of commencing university and studying law and are at different starting points in their higher education journey. The intervention needs to be inclusive to all students regardless of background, providing a welcome to "new members of our community and to help them feel at home" (Mann, 2001, p.17) at whatever stage of their journey they have reached.

Engagement

Component 7, opportunities to engage with other students and component 8, opportunities to engage with staff are integral to the design of the intervention and, while they could be discussed under the heading of relevance, as components that run through the entire design they have emerged as an important theme in their own right. Engagement is a key discussion point throughout the research data and encompasses three main elements: engagement between peers; engagement between students and staff; and engagement with the intervention itself.

Opportunities to engage with other students

Throughout the intervention, opportunities were provided for students to engage with each other using various topics as prompts, including initial introductions, reasons for studying law and reflections of the case analysis task. The aim of these opportunities was to enhance learning opportunities and encourage collaborative learning, "the building blocks of a social learning system" (Wenger, 2002, p.229).

The support provided by peers, and the relationships that develop between them, can be beneficial to the transition process and the overall student experience (Wilcox et al, 2005). The development of social networks with fellow students going through the same experience can provide valuable support (Christie et al, 2004) and the intervention was designed to include opportunities for new students "to meet each other and integrate as a cohort" (Trotter & Roberts, 2006, p.379).

The Moodle engagement data shows that students did interact at a high level during the initial introduce yourself opportunity, but the content and level of interaction was varied based on the content of the original post. Where the early posts were limited to basic information such as *"my name is this, I'm from here"*, as stated by Student 2, this created a template for the students who followed and was then perpetuated by the majority of students, creating little value in terms of engagement (Meskill & Sadykova, 2007). Additional engagement on behalf of the school would benefit the quality of these interactions, not only in relation to opening posts to set the tone and expectations but also in responding to and engaging with the posts submitted by the students. I have previously suggested that greater staff engagement is required, and this will be discussed further, but engagement from current students and their interactions with the new students could be more beneficial as they would be interacting as peers rather than within a student/teacher relationship, as advocated by both students interviewed. Opening posts from current students could create an ideal

opportunity for peer engagement. Having the opportunity to interact with current students, could increase engagement with the intervention as new students may appreciate being able to interact with and ask questions of people who have recently been through the same process, studying the same discipline, moving to the same location and so on (Jacklin & Le Riche, 2009).

Student 1 in their interview suggested engagement from law specific student societies would be a positive introduction to the intervention. While this was suggested initially with a view to introducing students to their activities and the wider school environment, their involvement in interacting with new students would provide engagement from students who are active in both the school and university life and would be able to convey their positive attitudes through these interactions, helping to introduce new students into their 'community of practice' (Christie et al, 2008; Montgomery & McDowell, 2009).

In addition, the School of Law at that time operated a Peer Mentoring Scheme which was referred to in the intervention but with no real engagement. As an opt-in scheme this was launched during the week one activities but this launch and engagement with both the academic lead and the mentors could be incorporated into the intervention. As with the student societies, interaction with peers can be beneficial in easing the transition process by providing support and guidance through the university experience (Wilcox et al, 2005).

An integral element of the intervention which provides the structure to support the aim of peer engagement, is its timing and delivery. In particular, the choice of platform could have a significant impact upon new students' engagement, supporting the considerations previously discussed of reviewing the how the intervention was delivered. In terms of encouraging peer engagement, it is important to select the appropriate platform that is familiar, convenient and beneficial for the students at that particular point of engagement, which may necessitate the use of a variety of platforms.

The development of a community of practice has been mentioned several times and this can be developed, in part, through peer engagement. As one of the themes framing this research, being able to develop opportunities to foster such a community is essential to the success of the intervention as this can create a sense of belonging in their new environment, which "can be both daunting and stressful" (Christie et al, 2004, p.630), and is a theme that will be discussed in more detail.

An improved level of engagement between new students and with current students would provide the foundation for the development of such a community of practice, but the evidence suggests that this aim was not achieved to any perceivable extent from the intervention to date. While some of the interactions that did occur could be seen as positive, the building of such a community *"was something I thought was missing"* (Student 2).

Opportunities to engage with staff

Engagement with peers is one part of creating a community of practice and another is engagement with academic staff, which was the final component of the intervention design. As part of developing this community, the learning objective of this component was to demonstrate that students were entering a supportive environment, essential to the development of a sense of belonging, and providing assistance with the "translations and explanations of strange customs and language" (Mann, 2001, p.17).

Academic staff are in an ideal position to welcome students to the university community and in helping them create this sense of belonging (Earwaker, 1992). The student interviews acknowledged that the opportunity to engage with staff was considered important but highlighted that the opportunities to do so were limited in the intervention. Developing a relation with key members of staff, particularly their personal tutor, was seen as something that could have been beneficial as it would have created the foundations of an academic and pastoral supportive community.

The development of the involvement of academic staff in their role as personal tutor has been discussed, as have other potential avenues such the introduction of first year module videos or sample lectures as these would also contribute to the feeling of familiarity for students ahead of their arrival, with both content and the staff who would be teaching them.

While the methods of interaction are built into the intervention, and there are potential opportunities for development, engaging with academic staff to make them are of this opportunity is key. Staff 2 commented that *"some people will have no awareness at all and some people will know or have reasonably good awareness of it"* in terms of staff knowledge of the intervention and therefore awareness of the opportunities to engage. In retrospect, the intervention run as part of this research could have included greater interaction with staff but as researcher, while I liaised closely with key members of staff responsible for delivering induction or the programme as a whole, I did not work with the wider academic community within the school to raise awareness, many of whom could have

provided positive contributions. Future iterations would need to become firmly embedded in the school's welcome and induction processes, as well as the duties and responsibilities of personal tutors, requiring co-ordination and ownership of the intervention in this wider context.

There will always be staff who fail to engage at the level required or expected, in the same way that there will be students who do not engage, but seeking involvement from all staff who are involved in the delivery of the first-year curriculum and supporting first year students as personal tutors should rightly be invited and encourage to participate. This requires clear communication with these key participants and will be discussed in the wider theme concerning communication that will be explored below, following some discussion on engagement with the intervention opportunity.

Engagement with the intervention

While the discussion has focussed on the engagement of students with each other and with staff during the intervention, there does need to be some further discussion around the general engagement of students with the intervention opportunity.

There are a number of reasons why students may not have engaged with the intervention, the majority of which have been discussed to varying degrees throughout this chapter. This section aims to consolidate these reasons and offer suggestions for how engagement could be encouraged in future iterations. As previously stated, the intervention needs to be accessible and inclusive for all students (Mann, 2008) so it is important to have an understanding of the potential barriers and reasons for non-engagement.

The timing of the intervention has been established as a barrier for some through the interviews, with Student 2, someone engaged with the school community through their role as a student representative and engaged in the development of support through participating in this research, commenting that they ran out of time to complete all of the sections prior to coming to Nottingham. In addition, they also reflected that *"people won't start things early, and they'll leave it to the last minute"* reducing the window of opportunity for engagement.

However, even if more time was built into the delivery of the intervention, some students may not be able to commit to engaging owing to family, caring, work or other commitments that needed to take priority. Related to the idea that some students have "little time or opportunity for socialising" (Crozier & Reay, 2011, p.148) while at university, some students may find the same restrictions

prevent them from participating in optional activities prior to their arrival. Furthermore, being optional, the intervention may not be perceived to be important or relevant at that particular time (Wingate, 2007).

The concept of cultural capital may also impact engagement as some students may not feel as though they 'fit-in' with the typical university student preconception and could make them feel less entitled to be entering higher education (Reay et al, 2010), resulting in a reluctance to engage with other students at that stage. The method of delivery may also deter such students if they have not used a similar platform in their previous educational environment.

The relevance of the content could also affect engagement. As the engagement statistics (Table 2) show, participation did drop during the duration of the intervention which could be attributed to timing but also to a lack of engagement with the content. Making the content more relevant, more interactive, delivering in multiple mediums and creating opportunities for meaningful engagement with others could all address this issue.

Finally, lack of engagement could be due to lack of awareness, which is the next theme to emerge from the research data, communication. Before considering communication, however, it should be noted that the full reasons for non-engagement cannot be concluded from this research as the data is largely from those who did engage, at least partially. The assumptions I have drawn are based on the feedback from the students and on conclusions presented in the literature.

There will, however, always be some students who do not engage with any pre-arrival activities for a variety of reasons. For these students, any future intervention must be designed with this in mind to ensure that they have an opportunity to complete essential elements of the intervention once they have commenced their studies or ensure that the same content is delivered and approached in taught modules with an understanding there have been these differing levels of engagement pre-arrival.

Communication

To encourage engagement with the intervention, while all of the issues summarised above could be beneficial, the opportunities and benefits the intervention provides need to be clearly advertised to all new students as concisely and as early as possible. The advertising method used to date was e-mail to each new students' personal e-mail address providing an overview and a link to Moodle. A

wider, more informative advertising method would need to be explored to ensure all students were aware of the opportunity, the benefits to them and how it directly links into their teaching once they commence their studies.

As Frost (2017) reported, information published by universities to encourage applications was not particularly dynamic and was based on the assumptions that students would know how to access and engage with the information sent; pre-arrival information at the time of the intervention could be viewed in the same way. In my changing role within the University of Nottingham, I have seen pre-arrival engagement evolve and become more dynamic and persistent, conveying the same message in different ways across different platforms. Future iterations of the intervention would benefit from this progressive change.

The content of the message is also important to ensure that it has an impact. Staff 2 provided a useful summary of this issue during their interview.

"I think there are things that we could do there to more specifically pinpoint its benefits to the students, and I think it's about incentivising students to engage with it. If students think there's going to be a benefit to them in engaging in their study, then I would imagine that you would get greater take up and greater level of engagement, different depth of engagement as well as part of that."

The purpose and benefits of the intervention need to be clear. Part of that message also needs to ensure students are aware that there in an opportunity to engage with other new students, current students and staff, helping to create that welcoming and supportive environment (Jacklin & Le Riche, 2009) which forms the final theme to be explored, a sense of belonging. However, to create that environment, internal co-ordination of the intervention between key staff, providing teaching and pastoral support, and with current students requires improved communication to create that coherent, inclusive message.

A sense of belonging

This sub-heading has been used to incorporate a number of ideas: integration, inclusion, relationship building, familiarity. These all contribute to that feeling of belonging and are an important element in the development of a community of practice.

The literature explored and the theoretical framework of this research have discussed these issues in some depth, from Bourdieu & Passeron's (1990) concept of cultural capital based on previous educational backgrounds and institutional habitus (Thomas, 2002) reinforcing and replicating the existing cultures that may create barriers to students obtaining this sense of belonging. Conversely, literature points to opportunities for cultural capital to develop of change in order to "cope with a new context" (Drew, 2001, p.312) and students to create new identities in order to transition into their new educational environment (Palmer et al, 2009). These are all issues that have an impact and influence on a student's sense of belonging.

One of the aims of the intervention, through engagement opportunities, was to help facilitate and create an environment where this sense of belonging and communities of practice could be developed. The student and staff interviews provided evidence that this was of value and much of the discussion around this theme has been presented in the theme around engagement, the two being closely linked.

Improved engagement between students and with staff is clearly a consideration for future iterations of the intervention. The opportunity for students "to meet each other and integrate as a cohort" (Trotter & Roberts, 2006, p.379) is important for the transition into a new environment and in building the relationships that can develop into social networks and academic communities or practice. Engagement with staff is also essential in this process as it is through this relationship students develop "attitudes towards learning and coping with academic difficulties" (Thomas, 2002, p.432) and staff are in the ideal position to welcome students to the university community, helping create a sense of belonging (Earwaker, 1992).

A sense of belonging can also be supported, not just by engagement opportunities, but by the image of the environment presented to the students and doing this pre-arrival through the intervention can create a more welcoming image. Highlighting an inclusive and supportive environment can enable students to feel a part of the community, can reduce the anxiety associated with moving to a new environment and ensure students do not perceive their previous educational background to be a barrier.

Staff 1 was particularly interested in conveying this message, ensuring *"the signposting of support ... and the information about what is expected"* was clear and creating an environment where students do not feel *"scared of talking to tutors and lecturers … if you're struggling, talk to somebody".* A

supportive environment can support inclusivity, reduce alienation and help develop the sense of belonging to the community (Mann, 2001).

5.4   Conclusion

Having discussed the research findings and analysis in greater depth, I have been able to present a narrative which has explored the background literature in order to give context to the research data. Framing this discussion of the data within the research questions and the learning outcomes of the data collection methods devised has allowed for conclusions to be drawn on the successes and shortcomings of the research. This in turn has allowed for consideration of future developments

Each step of the research has provided the foundation for the next step, mirroring the progression of the research questions; from an exploration of the environment through the literature review to the development of an intervention based on student feedback in the context of the research environment, resulting in the implementation of the intervention to study its impact.

The following, concluding chapter will draw together my findings from this research, provide an analysis of my approach to the research and highlight the implications of this research for the future.

Chapter 6
Conclusion

The research presented in this thesis has had the primary purpose of exploring the support that can be provided to first year law students entering higher education. An understanding of the educational environment, in addition to the specific context of the location of the research, and the literature surrounding the concepts, barriers and related studies into the transition process has supported the design of a practical intervention with the aim of supporting all first-year law students in this process.

A rationale for the research, and its contribution to the wider research in this area, has been made and the findings from the data collected have provided valuable insights into the support that law students perceive is necessary for them, having been through the transition process, and how that support has been experienced when provided in a structured and managed way.

In this concluding chapter, the research questions presented in Chapter 2 will be reviewed and assessed in light of the research that has taken place, drawing conclusions on the success and shortcomings of the research. I will also offer insights into the implications of the research and how it could have been approached differently, including a reflection on my personal development through the research process. I will then discuss potential opportunities for this research to be advanced in the future and further avenues to explore.

6.1   Review of research questions

The research questions for this study were designed to build upon each other, narrowing the focus of the research as each question was addressed. The questions have been re-stated below for reference, followed by a summary and conclusions of the discussion.

Question 1

What does the literature tell us of the opportunities that exist for support to be provided to first year students when starting university?

In addressing question 1, I developed an understanding of the literature surrounding my research interest. This allowed for the development of my theoretical framework and helped to refine the subsequent questions. The literature built upon my knowledge and experience of supporting law

students throughout their university journey, including welcoming and inducting them into the School of Law. It provided evidence to support my assumptions and expanded my understanding of the concepts and issues that contribute to the creation of the circumstances in which students require support when moving into higher education.

The literature reviewed was deemed relevant and current at the time of this research, prior to and during the development and implementation of the intervention. For future research it would be interesting to review more recent literature to investigate whether there have been any changes to the broad themes and concepts that have been presented here, or whether there have been any significant developments and studies into practical support across the higher education sector that would have influenced my approach to this research. For example, the development of online provision has expanded since the Covid-19 pandemic, potentially opening up new and alternate platforms to deliver the aims of this research. In addition, in responding to the pandemic, new literature has emerged focusing on the support students require in this new environment and based on their impacted educational experience prior to starting university. Collins et al (2022) reported on the response at their institution: "Induction and learner integration: an important pillar for student support remains the orientation programme as students become accustomed to the programme. The format has been reworked to ensure the introduction to programme concepts and academic skills is layered carefully on a just-in-time basis as students face new challenges" (p.44)

Question 2

What support do first year law students perceive is necessary when starting at university at the case study institution?

Having considered the literature reviewed, this was developed into question 2, exploring what first year law students perceived was necessary to support them in this stage of their student journey. The theories and examples of support from the literature were a combination of abstract concepts and reports on research in specific contexts, so exploring these issues with current students within my own specific context allowed me to gather specific data that would enable the development of practical support that could be realistically delivered to future cohorts within this context.

While this was crucial and insightful data, it was limited to an extent in terms of engagement from current students. Feedback and perceptions from a wider group of students would have been more beneficial as, although varying views were expressed by the participants, wider feedback may have

provided more nuanced data to contribute to the design of the intervention. Exploring opportunities for further engagement, through varied methods such as co-creation or interactive sessions with multiple groups of students, would be recommended for the future. The intervention itself, through the analysis of the level of engagement and feedback gathered following its implementation, has provided valuable data to build upon the data obtained through the focus group.

Question 3

What is the student and staff experience of this support when delivered in a practical way?

In addressing question 3, exploring the student and staff experience of support when delivered in a practical way, the research has addressed the overall purpose of the study and as expected, the majority of the learnings and recommendations that can be made come from this stage of the research.

Overall, my conclusion on the intervention is that it was successful in providing support to those students who did engage with the opportunity. This conclusion is based on the survey responses and on the qualitative data provided through the student interviews; the feedback received through the various data collection methods presented a positive experience. However, as demonstrated through the discussion of the research findings, there are improvements and refinements that can be made to enhance this experience and potentially expand to a wider audience. An exploration of the themes identified in the discussion provides a useful structure in which to summarise these suggestions.

The intervention should be made available at the earliest possible opportunity to allow an extended period of time in which students can engage with the content, fitting it in with their existing commitments and prior to their preparation for and travelling to Nottingham to commence their studies. Engaging students prior to receiving their further education results would capture their initial enthusiasm and excitement as soon as places were confirmed, establishing the intervention as one of their initial opportunities to engage with their new institution. The delivery, to accommodate the timing of the intervention as well as facilitating engagement, should be reviewed to incorporate a range of platforms, ranging from those that students are familiar with, such as a variety of social media platforms, to the platforms used by the University to allow for the development of familiarity with these, prior to their arrival.

In addition to making the platforms of delivery relevant to the audience, the relevance of content needs to be refined to ensure that appropriate content is delivered at the appropriate time, a key consideration being to provide content that is perceived to be beneficial and of use to the students at that particular time, avoiding the delivery of information that cannot be acted upon prior to their arrival.

Linking the themes of timing and relevance, extending the intervention into teaching and linking to the content of taught modules would ensure that the information is perceived as relevant, being of direct link into what students will be studying. The limitation of this recommendations is that students who do not engage with the intervention may be disadvantaged by not having been exposed to this content pre-arrival. As with all elements of the intervention, an awareness of the varying levels of preparedness amongst the students is required to ensure inclusivity and avoid any assumptions of previous knowledge or experience.

The timing, delivery and relevance of the intervention can have implications on engagement, with the suggestions above aimed at improving engagement, based on the data. The opportunity to engage with other new students, current students and staff could also encourage engagement with the intervention. The benefits of creating a community of practice prior to arrival can assist students in the transition process, making them feel welcome and supported, and they are "important for student retention, success and personal development" (Zhao & Kuh, 2004, p.116). But these interactions need to be purposeful and provide substance to the engagement. Suggestions to include current students in these interactions provides the opportunity for new students to learn from more experienced peers and be introduced to the community, initially through "peripheral participation" (Cousin & Deepwell, 2005, p.62) and developing into engagement.

In addition, the methods in which these opportunities are presented can also encourage engagement, providing new students to access the platform they are most familiar or comfortable with. Methods could include interaction through social media, chat functions on Moodle or other University platforms, delivering content through video, online chat, or video calling. There is a range of technology available that could be utilised to accommodate various learning styles and inclusivity requirements.

This technology can support the penultimate theme that emerged, that of communication. Increasing the awareness of the intervention, making it more accessible to more students and conveying the

message of the benefits and relevance of the intervention are key to expanding its impact. This can be achieved by using multiple methods of communication and providing a clear, consistent and relevant message about the availability and benefits of the opportunity.

The final theme that emerged from the research findings was a sense of belonging and this encompasses all the previous findings. By providing this opportunity to engage with relevant content, introduce students to key aspects of studying law and encourage engagement with various members of the community they will be joining, new students can begin to feel familiar with the new environment they will be entering, reduce the anxiety and 'culture shock' they may otherwise feel and create a sense that they do belong to that community.

In summary, I believe this research has demonstrated that through an understanding of the issues surrounding transition in the wider higher education sector (through the literature review) and applying these to a specific environment or context (through the intervention), approaches can be developed and adapted to successfully provide support to students going through this process. A single intervention might not accommodate the support needs of all students, but it can be designed to be as inclusive as possible and future developments could explore the opportunity for the personalisation of intervention. Collins et al (2022) advocated a "tailored orientation programme to support students as they socialise and understand the expectations at the tertiary level" (p.44). There would be challenges with such an approach, in terms of workload capacity of staff for example, but opportunities exist such as in the provision of more individualised feedback on the case study task, an element of the intervention found particularly help by the students interviewed. With regards workload capacity of staff, it is not possible to provide those solutions as part of this research, but it could be argued that by creating a population of students who feel engaged with their learning community and have been supported in their preparation for studying in higher education, the time spent in this process will reduce the time required for reactive support later in the student journey.

As demonstrated, the intervention developed for this research has some elements that were more successful that others but it is a design that can be adapted based on the feedback received, as every iteration of any delivered content should be to ensure relevance and best practice.

6.2   Reflection on personal development

While the previous section aims to highlight aspects of the research that I would do differently based on the analysis and discussion of the research findings, my own personal and professional development through the research process also have an influence on how I would adapt my approach in the future.

The research process has developed my awareness and adapted my approach into more of a researcher mindset. When approaching my work, I am more inquisitive, more open to conflicting theories and ideas and more enquiring into the why and how. This approach has influenced and re-enforced the suggestions for improvement outlined above as I can see the opportunity to explore these opportunities in more detail and gain a better understanding of their impact. In particular, exploring the delivery of the intervention in terms of timing and platform; embedding the intervention into the teaching provision of the school rather than it retaining and stand-alone, limited time opportunity; and investigating the area of engagement.

Having completed this research, it has become clear to me that a greater consideration for reasons of non-engagement, beyond the explanations provided by the literature review, is required. I envisage this as including a more detailed analysis of the student population as a whole and amongst those who engaged with the intervention, both partially and in full, which would provide valuable data on ensuring inclusivity and the potential development of more personalised routes through the intervention and transition. In addition, I can see that a greater understanding and consideration of equality, diversity and inclusivity and the introduction of an equality impact assessment could assist this process and help identify potential barriers, and opportunities, to support particular groups of students.

Developments in my own career since conducting this research have also prompted questions I would, now, include in the research design and parameters. The most significant of these is the process of the design of the intervention. While the design was partially informed by the feedback from the current student focus group, alongside the literature review, I would extend this to incorporate co-creation with students. My current role entails a significant element of student co-creation in the development and design of curriculum, and the process and resulting outputs from this engagement can provide positive results. Including students who have recently been through the transition process provides a perspective that cannot be obtained through the literature or from a researcher's

observations; they are the ones who have experienced that journey. Their input could encompass the entire design of the intervention, from establishing the desired learning outcomes, designing the tasks they perceived would provide the most benefit when translated into studying taught modules and incorporating their voice in the communication of and engagement opportunities of the intervention.

The research process has undoubtedly influenced me, arguably developed my cultural capital, allowing me to develop professionally and through my input and engagement within the University, play a part in influencing its habitus. Professionally, throughout the period of this research, the journey has helped me develop knowledge and skills that have enabled me to progress in my career and seek out new challenges and opportunities that I may not have perceived as possible previously. Initially this progression has seen me move away from the discipline focus of Law to apply my knowledge and expertise to areas supporting more varied disciplines within social sciences and then into a new disciplinary context in Computer Science. Most notably, however, is progression to my current role leading a project in curriculum design which not only requires project management skills but also the development of education practitioner knowledge and expertise, a role that I would not have seen as appropriate for me without the research skills and insights I have developed as part of this process.

6.3   Future questions and opportunities

As discussed, this research has taken place over a relatively extended, but defined period of time, with the thesis having been completed a few years after the data collection had been concluded. This has allowed time for some reflection on events that have occurred between these times which could provide opportunities for this research to be taken further.

New literature will have been published in the interim which may have an impact on consolidating the findings of this research or posing new concepts and considerations that would need to be explored. This new literature is likely to, or will in the future, be influenced by the sectors response to Covid-19 pandemic, which impacted on the educational experiences of students prior to university and, for many, their formative university years. The move to online engagement, due to the pandemic, is likely to have had a significant impact on students' ability to build relationships and develop supportive communities of practice. In addition, teaching, learning and assessment methods had to be adapted to deliver remotely, which may have impacted on students' ability to develop key academic skills, such as in-class collaboration which could contribute to the development of a community of practice.

However, it could also be argued that the pandemic experience provided opportunities for enhancements that could benefit student transition in the future. The widespread adoption of online engagement and the tools that made this possible have created an environment where this form of delivery is accepted as part of an overall, diverse package of delivery. Any future interventions can incorporate these opportunities to support students into this new way of learning.

As mentioned, developments in my professional role have also created ideas for future development, specifically in the co-creation of an intervention between students and staff but also in the identification of aspects of the research that would benefit from further analysis, such as the issue of engagement.

One key question from this research is how it can contribute to future developments and create opportunities to support students in different contexts. While this research has been based in a specific discipline at a single institution, the learnings can be taken and applied elsewhere. The literature reviewed is broad and focuses on issues of transition across higher education, as do the concepts used to create the theoretical framework. The aims of the intervention in helping to develop cultural capital and creating a community of practice are universal to all students and the intervention designed to support this process can be adapted to address discipline specific requirements. For example, in place of activities introducing new law students to legal texts through the case analysis task, new history students could be introduced to historiography and the study of original sources.

The impact of this research, in addition to providing an immediate impact to the students who engaged with the intervention, is a contribution to the wider literature on transition into higher education, based on a practical and implemented solution. The solution itself, following the developments outlined above, provides a template for how the transition to legal education could be supported and, more widely, how the transition to higher education could be supported. It demonstrates that there are opportunities for institutions to create opportunities for new students to develop cultural capital and to foster the development of a community of practice, and through the delivery of these opportunities demonstrate a willingness and an ability to adapt their institutional habitus.

One final comment is that, while it is hoped that this research and the intervention designed in the process have been of benefit to some students, and will continue to be so in the future, the challenges

associated with the transition process remain, in terms of cultural capital, the need to create a new identity and finding that sense of belonging. There are examples within the University of Nottingham of studies taking place on how best to support students in transitioning into their specific discipline, such as the School of Humanities. These studies are not focusing on what schools and departments need to do during induction events, but rather on conversations about extending induction into the first semester and linking with taught modules. I find this encouraging as they are perhaps also inspired by Laing et al (2005) and the development of an induction process in place of an induction event, something a pre-arrival intervention could support and something this research has aimed to demonstrate as a positive development.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Focus Group schedule of questions

- Now that we are a semester into your studies, how well do you think you have settled into life as a student in the Law School?

- How prepared did you feel for the first week of term? Was the welcome pack helpful?

- Academically, how have you found the changes in teaching and learning from your previous education? Have there been any particular challenges?

- Did anyone study law at A level? If so, did you find this to be beneficial when starting to study law at degree level?

- With regards studying law in particular, are there any aspects of legal study that you find difficult?

- Have you developed friendship groups with fellow law students? Has this been through class of social media or both?
    - If yes, outside lectures and tutorials, do you go through things together or ask for each other's help if you are struggling with an issue or concept? How do you interact?
    - If no, would you find it helpful to have the opportunity to go through things together or ask fellow students for help?

- How accessible do you find your tutors?

- Have you used any of the academic support provided by the Law School since starting your studies, such as the peer mentoring scheme, the legal skills advisor or discussion boards on Moodle? Are they any forms of academic support you have used?

- Have you had any support from outside the University, such as parents or family members in the legal profession?

- Did anyone have contact with other new students before they started in September, through social media etc.?   Or do you know anyone who did?
    - If yes, how beneficial did you find this?
    - If no, would this be something you could see as being beneficial?
    - Is this something you believe the Law School could or should facilitate?

- Would an introduction to legal study be beneficial prior to starting your studies, such as having a practice at reading a case or statute?

- Would you feel confident to become involved with other new students in online discussion forums prior to your arrival in Nottingham? Is this something that you would prefer to see through Moodle or Facebook?

- Is there anything else you can think of where the Law School may be able to help with the transition into life as a law student?

_An Introduction to the Study of Law (UK) (16-17)

Welcome to the module "An Introduction to the Study of Law"

The purpose of this module is to help introduce you to the School of Law and give you an idea of what to expect when you arrive on Monday 26 September.

The first section of this module is now available and further sections will be available as follows:

- Section 2: Studying Law - available from Friday 16 September
- Section 3: Reading and Understanding a case - available from Tuesday 20 September
- Section 4: Feedback - available from Thursday 22 September
- Section 5: Post-induction - available mid to late October

Do not worry if you join this module late, all of the sections will remain open until after 26 September so please feel free to complete any of the sections at any time.

Section 5 is now open...

Section 1 → Section 2 → Section 3 → Section 4 → Section 5
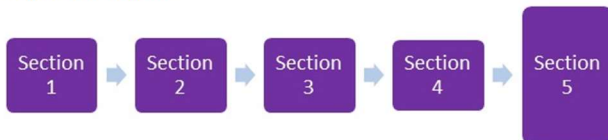
Section 1: Introductions

1.1 Introduction to Induction

To help get you started on your journey through the School of Law there will be a number of induction sessions during the first few days of term. A copy of this programme can be found below:

Induction Programme

You will receive a lot of information during these first few days but don't worry; we won't be expecting you to remember everything. During your first session you will give you a copy of your handbook and all of the information, and more, will be in there.

To give you an idea of what to expect on the first day, these are the lecture theatres you will be using for your induction and for many of your first year lectures:

Law and Social Sciences
B62

Law and Social Sciences
B63

124

And here are some of the key people from the School of Law you will meet:

This section included photographs of key members of staff, together with their names and role of responsibility

1.2 Introduce yourself

Now that we have introduced some of the people you will meet from the School, it would be nice if you introduced yourselves to us and each other.

Click on the icon below labelled "introduce yourself" to begin.

💬 **Introduce yourself**

1.3 Your Personal Tutor

During your time at Nottingham you will be allocated a personal tutor, a member of academic staff from the School of Law who will be one of your main points of contact should you have any queries or problems.

Below is a list that contains the names of all new students we are expecting to arrive together with the name of the personal tutor assigned to each person. You will have the opportunity to meet with your personal tutor during the first week of term.

Please do not worry if you cannot see your name on this list; if you are not listed please e-mail Ian Bainbridge.

📄 **Personal Tutor List**

1.4 Your course

You have most likely read up on the course you will be staring in the University prospectus or on the University website so you will have an overview of the course and the School.

Below is some more detailed information about the different degrees offered by the School to give you an appreciation of the subjects you will be taking, how they are taught and how they are assessed.

📄 **Course Structure**

Everyone will have their own reasons for choosing to study Law and the specific degree to which they have been accepted.

Please use the opportunity below to share your motivations for studying Law or to ask any questions about the degrees offered by the School.

💬 **Why study Law?**

Section 2: Studying Law

2.1 First year modules

During your first year there are a number of modules common to all of the School's degrees while others will only be studied by those on a particular course. Below you find some further information about each of these modules to give you an idea of what to expect once teaching commences.

📄 **First Year Modules**

You will obviously receive much more details when you start attending lectures but in the meantime, if there are specific questions about any of these modules then please do ask.

💬 **Any questions about your first year modules?**

2.2 Your timetable

When you arrive you will be issued with a lecture timetable and most of your lectures have been scheduled in the lectures theatres located by the School, the same as we are using for your induction programme.

Lectures are delivered to large groups of students and are likely to be a different experience from what you are used to at school or college.

Lectures are supported by seminars and tutorials which are delivered to small groups, groups of 7 or 8 students in the case of tutorials. These sessions give you direct access to a tutor to help you clarify the material delivered in the lectures but their main purpose is to promote discussion on pre-prepared answers between you as students.

Please share your experiences of different teaching methods below; have you experienced these teaching methods before? Do you have any worries about them?

💬 **Teachings Methods**

2.3 Support in your learning

As mentioned in section 1, the School has a Legal Skills Advisor whose role is to help students with their academic study skills, through workshops and on an individual basis. You will be introduced to a calendar of sessions once you arrive. They also provide a Moodle module called the Skills Toolkit, the link for which you can find below.

In addition, the University provides a wealth of information through another Moodle course called "Your University Journey". You may have received information on this already or you can go to it directly through the link below.

And of course, your personal tutor and subject tutors will always be willing to offer guidance and support.

🔵 Skills Toolkit

🔵 Your University Journey

2.4 The legal stuff

As well as learning how to study at University many of you will also have the challenge of learning a new subject as most of you will arrive having never studied law before.

This section aims to introduce you to some key terms and concepts that you will come to know as law students. Some definitions and descriptions have been provided below but before you look at these, either privately or through the forum below, try and articulate what each of the following is:

💬 Legal Terms

Some of these may appear straightforward but are you correct? Some definitions may not be as clear as you think; have a look below. These definitions have been taken from the Oxford Dictionary of Law.

📄 Definitions of Legal Terms

Section 3: Reading and understanding a case

As well as understanding all of the different terms and concepts, as a law student you will also need to work with the relevant materials described. For example, you will often be required to read a statute to clarify a particular point of law or study a case and provide an analysis of it.

As way of an introduction to studying law, below is a case that has previously been used as part of the assessment in the Understanding Law module.

📄 Case

In the matter of an application by Brendan Conway for Judicial Review

For this part of the assessment, students were asked the following two questions:

1. How did the Court reach its decision in the case?

2. Do you find the Court's decision to be convincing? Give reasons for your answer.

You will obviously receive teaching and guidance on how to approach such an assessment during your first term but to help prepare you there are a number of questions below to introduce you to the skills you need to obtain the relevant information from such documents.

Please post your answers below and do take the opportunity to share ideas with each other. The next section, which will be released on 22 September, will provide some feedback on these questions, giving you the opportunity to judge how you have done.

💬 Case Analysis Questions

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Section 4: Feedback

4.1 Feedback on the Case Analysis exercise

It is good to see some of you attempting these questions through the forums. If you have not yet had the chance to do so then please do, the forums will remain open. We hope you found, or will find, the exercise useful.

To help you judge how well you have done we have provided some feedback below. This is feedback provided to last years Understanding Law students, who answered the questions:

1. How did the Court reach its decision in the case?

2. Do you find the Court's decision to be convincing? Give reasons for your answer.

This feedback will also provide guidance on the questions we posed you for this exercise.

📄 Case Analysis Feedback

Now that you have this feedback, please take the opportunity to reflect on your answers:

- Did you locate the relevant information?
- If not, can you see where this is?
- How difficult or easy did you find these questions?
- Has this exercise help in your understanding of what a Case is?
- Any other comments on the exercise?

Please add your thoughts to the forum below.

💬 Reflection on the Case Analysis exercise

4.2 Feedback on 'An Introduction to the study of Law'

That is almost the end of the introduction. We look forward to welcoming you all on Monday 26 September at 8.45am in Law and Social Sciences B63.

Before then we would welcome your feedback on this introduction, both positive and negative, to help us improve for next year.

Or if there are any queries or questions that you still have please feel free to post them below and we will either respond here or, if more appropriate, address at the induction sessions.

💬 Feedback on the Introduction to the Study of Law module

Once you have settled in to your studies we will open a final section to this introduction, mid to late October time. We will again be seeking your feedback but at that time in light of you having commenced your studies.

Thank you for participating in this introduction and we look forward to meeting you soon.

Section 5: Post-induction

Now that you have been studying law for a couple of months we would welcome you feedback on how successful, or not, the Introduction to the study of Law helped prepare you for the first few weeks of term and beyond, from the pictures of the lecture theatres and staff to the practice case analysis exercise.

And are there any questions that remain unanswered?

💬 Feedback

In addition to the feedback provided here, further research into this module and how beneficial it may have been to you as new students is being undertaken by Ian Bainbridge as part of a Professional Doctorate in Education. Further details will be circulated to all current first year students prior to the Christmas break with a view to participants being asked to complete a questionnaire and/or take part in some short interviews in the New Year. If anyone would like to express an interest in being involved in the research at this stage then please do either enter your name below or e-mail Ian direct at ian.bainbridge@nottingham.ac.uk.

💬 Further Research

Appendix 3: Intervention Questionnaire

The questionnaire was delivered to all students via SurveyMonkey. Below is an outline of the questions included.

Biographical

Q1. Please indicate if you are:
- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say

Q2. Please indicate if you are a student from:
- The UK
- Overseas

Q3. Have you previously studied law, i.e. at 'A' level or equivalent?
- Yes
- No

Q4. Are you the first in your immediate family to attend university? (i.e. have your parents or any siblings attended or are currently attending university?)
- Yes
- No

Q5. Are you classed as a mature student (i.e. 21 or over when you started your studies)?
- Yes
- No

Q6. Do you have parental/caring responsibilities outside university?
- Yes
- No

Q7. Do you have other responsibilities outside university, e.g. work?
- Yes
- No
- If you have indicated yes please indicate approximately how many hours you work per week.

Participation

Q8. Did you participate in the 'An Introduction to the Study of Law' module on Moodle?
- Yes
- No (will take to Q10/Q11)

Q9. If yes, did you contribute to all sections?
- Yes
- No – if no, how many sections did you complete

Q10. If no, were there any specific reasons you did not participate?
- Free text box

Q11. Now that you have experienced studying law and undertaken your first assessments, on reflection do you think participation would have been any assistance? Please give a brief explanation for your answer
- ▫ Yes
- ▫ No
- ▫ Free text box

The Module

Q12. Thinking back to before you arrived, was the information contained in each of the sections useful?

	Very Useful	Useful	Not useful	Confusing	Did not complete
Section 1 Introductions					
Section 2 Studying Law					
Section 3 Reading and Understanding a Case					
Section 4 feedback					
Section 5 Post-induction					

Looking at the individual sections in more detail, we are interested in your level on engagement, your views on the benefits of the section and feedback on their usefulness. As each section of the module was devised for a different purpose, the questions and statements you are asked to consider and respond to differ from section to section.

Please complete for all sections in which you participated or, if you did not participate in a particular section but still wish to comment you are welcome to do so.

Section 1

Q13. Once your place was confirmed but before you arrived in Nottingham, were you anxious about what to expect?
- ▫ Not at all
- ▫ A little
- ▫ Very

Q14. To what extent did the information about the place, the people and induction programme help relieve any anxiety you had?
- ▫ Free text box

Q15. As many students arrive at university not know anyone, how useful did you find the opportunity to 'introduce' yourself to other new law students and have the opportunity to learn a little about your fellow students?
- ▫ Very useful

- □ Useful
- □ Not useful
- □ Did not participate

Q16. Please describe how useful you found the overview of the subjects you would be learning at Nottingham.
- □ Free text box

Q17. You were given the opportunity to share your motivations on why you wanted to study law. Please describe how important it was to share your motivation and see the motivation of others.
- □ Free text box

Section 2

Q18. This section provided an overview of what you would be studying in your first year, how you would be taught and what support was available to you. Please comment upon how useful you found this information.
- □ Free text box

Q19. Thinking back to before you commenced your studies and how you were taught at school, were the teaching methods something that were new to you and, if so, what were your feelings towards how you would be taught?
- □ Free text box

Q20. This section also provided an opportunity to test your knowledge of some key legal terms. Did you find this task useful? Please include any further comments regarding this task
- □ Yes
- □ No
- □ Did not participate
- □ If you have answered yes or no, please indicated why you have given your answer

Section 3

Q21. As studying law would have been new to the majority of students in September, the opportunity to undertake a key legal skill and attempt a brief example of an assessment was provided. How did you find the task?
- □ Could not complete
- □ Completed with difficulty
- □ Completed relatively easily
- □ Did not participate
- □ Please provide further details to explain your chosen answer: e.g. did you find the legal language difficult to follow; where you worried about posting an incorrect answer; was finding the required information in the text a problem; etc.

Q22. Now that you have completed the Understanding Law module, including completing the assessment, please comment on how beneficial, or otherwise, you feel this task was in preparing you for what to expect in the study of law:
- □ Free text box

Section 4

Q23. Following the completion of the task in section 3, feedback on the questions asked was provided. When reading the feedback, how did you feel you performed in the task?
- ▫ Very well
- ▫ Ok
- ▫ Not too good
- ▫ Did not participate
- ▫ Please provide further details to explain your chosen answer

Q24. Please comment on how useful you found the feedback in answering the questions asked:
- ▫ Free text box

Q25. A key skill for all students, not just law students, is the ability to receive feedback and reflect upon their performance in light of this feedback, learning what has been done well and where there were areas for improvement. Given this opportunity in section 4, once the feedback had been released, please comment on how useful, and successful, you felt the feedback to be and how you could relate it to your answers:
- ▫ Free text box

Q26. The final part of section 4 asked for your feedback on the module so far (thank you for those who gave their feedback). Did you feel you had the right level of opportunity to feedback and make contact with the School of Law during the module and prior to your arrival at Nottingham?
- ▫ Yes
- ▫ No
- ▫ Free text box
- ▫ Please provide further details to explain your chosen answer

Section 5

Q27. This final section was an opportunity to feedback on the module and raise any questions you may have had once you had been studying law for a couple of months. There were no responses to this section so your feedback on its usefulness would be appreciated. For example, was the request for feedback too late; did you not wish to participate once you had actually commenced your studies; did you no longer feel the need for any online support; etc.
- ▫ Free text box

Overall

Q28. Did you find the module easy to navigate?
- ▫ Yes
- ▫ No
- ▫ Please provide further comments

Q29. Did you feel you had enough opportunity to engage with other students?
- ▫ Yes
- ▫ No
- ▫ Please provide further comments

Q30. Did you feel you had enough opportunity to engage with staff?
- ▫ Yes

- No
- Please provide further comments

Q31. When you arrived at Nottingham, did you meet anyone who had also completed the module and is it something you discussed?
- Yes
- No
- Please provide further comments

Final Thoughts

Q32. As you have now completed your first semester, including assessments, and are well into semester two, we would be grateful for your final thoughts on how useful you believe your participation in this module was in preparing you for university learning and assessment.
- Free text box

Q33. Similarly, how useful did you find your participation in preparing you for university life in general?
- Free text box

Q34. Having been a student for over five months, is there anything you believe could be included in the module that would have helped you at the start of term?
- Free text box

Opportunity for further feedback

Q35. To help discuss the results if this questionnaire and explore the issues raised further, I will be holding a focus group after the Easter break for those who are interested in participating. Your participation would be hugely beneficial in developing this module further to help future students and would only take 45-60 minutes of your time. If you are interested, please provide your name below.
- Free text box

Appendix 4: Student interview schedule of questions

- Interview Questions – Students

- Did you complete the module? If no, will come back to that.

- In general, how beneficial do you believe the module to be to new students?

- In terms of the delivery method of the module, what are your views?

- And what about the timing. Did you have enough time? Would it be something you would like to have seen it progress further into the semester?

- Did you feel the content was appropriate? Any bits you felt where particularly good or anything you feel should have been left out? Anything missing?

- [Show structure] This is what we aimed to achieve from the module; what are your views on this?

- Engagement was encouraging with the current cohort of students; is there anything you believe can be done to increase participation further?

- [If you did not participate, why was this?]

- We have tried to engage key academic staff with the module, responding to student posts etc.; do you believe this to be beneficial?

- When you started back in September, was this module something you ever discussed with your fellow students or, for example, personal tutors?

- Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix 5: Staff interview schedule of questions

- Having reviewed the Moodle module, an Introduction to the Study of Law, how beneficial do you believe this to be for new students?

- Engagement was encouraging with the current cohort of students; is there anything you believe can be done to increase participation further?

- The module is run over a very short period of time; can you see any benefits, or barriers, to such an intervention running for a longer period and continuing one teaching has commenced?

- Looking at the individual sections of the module, do you believe the content to be appropriate?

- Looking at the aims of each section, is there anything else you believe would be beneficial?

- We have tried to engage key academic staff with the module, responding to student posts etc.; do you believe this to be beneficial?

- If so, do you have any ideas on how academic engagement could be increased?

- In your contact with the first-year students, has this module been mentioned at all?

- If so, do you believe they had a positive, negative or neutral experience of the module?

- Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix 6: Sample Coded Transcript

Key to themes:
<mark style="background:yellow">Timeliness and delivery</mark>
<mark style="background:lime">Relevance</mark>
<mark style="background:cyan">Engagement</mark>
<mark style="background:magenta">Communication</mark>
<mark style="background:teal">Sense of belonging</mark>

Researcher: So, I guess, the first question is did you complete the module?

Student 2: I got to reading the case, and, then, it was when I got to the point where I was joining the university and I ran out of time with all of the new information that was coming at me. So, I ran out of time to read the actual case.

Researcher: Yes, okay. That's fine. So, we'll come back to that in a bit because it is a question about timings and, you know, fitting it all in and stuff, but, so, at least you looked at the module. So, you, kind of know what we're talking about.

Student 2: Yes.

Researcher: So, in general, having looked at it, how beneficial do you think it is for new students?

Student 2: I think it's very beneficial in the sense that you can get used to looking at materials relevant to the law course. You can start using, like, Moodle and interfaces in that sense. So, I found that very useful, kind of, exposing me to the resources available. I started to, kind of, read the case and everything like that, and, so, it did expose you to legal aspects in that sense. What I would have found very useful, actually, would have been in, kind of, and I've said this to a few people, put it through as a suggestion for the future, is to give a suggested reading list of the textbooks that we buy anyway, just because, when I arrived, the reason I was unable to complete the introduction module was because of the new material that was coming at me for tutorials and things like that. So, it, kind of, would relieve the semester time pressure if I could read the material before I came to uni, in the summer time and things like that.

Researcher: Okay. So, that's, sort of, good feedback because, as I say, as well as doing a PhD, part of this is the school wants to develop this to make it as useful as it can be. So, yes, any suggestions that you have are really good. So, first of all, we're looking at various aspects of the module. So, in terms of how it is delivered via Moodle, what were your views on that?

Student 2: I actually liked that it was delivered by Moodle just because it had been a bit of time since I'd used Moodle. Obviously, we used it in A Level and everything, but there was, like, a big summer gap, I took a couple of gap years. So, I liked getting used to Moodle because that's where everything is delivered as well. So, it made it so I could access that. Maybe another, kind of, receptive avenue would be to do videos of it, short little clips because that's something I find a lot of people are very receptive to is just if they can watch a little clip of hints and tips.

Researcher: Yes. There's a move towards that for lots of things. Like, virtual guides and stuff for people, just snippets and things. Yes, okay. That's useful. So, you say you used Moodle for your A Levels?
Student 2: Yes.

Researcher: So, you had a bit of exposure to it already?

Student 2: I had a little bit of it, yes. I didn't have it for GCSEs or anything like that, but it was just for A Levels when I went to, like, an external college, and that's where everything was on Moodle as well. It wasn't as expensive as the university's one. So, I think my Moodle one just kept an eye on, probably, attendance and things like that, and messages, but the university one has everything. Every module's very extensive. So, I think this one is a lot more to get used to. So, maybe, the exposure to that in the introduction course is valuable because, otherwise, it can be quite overwhelming.

Researcher: Yes. That's one of the reasons we decided to use that because it would give people exposure, because not everyone does use it in A Levels or, you know, any previous studies.

Student 2: But yes. Even though I did use it, I appreciate it because it was bigger than what I was used to as well. Even though I had one when I was sixth form, it had a lot more material to it as well, yes.

Researcher: Okay, that's good to know. And with the timings of the module, obviously, you said you didn't finish it because you felt that the things were coming in. What's your views on when it's delivered and, well, first of all, the timings?

Student 2: I like things to be made available a bit sooner just because I like to be doing things. So, when it was actually released and I started doing it, it was coming up to the time when I was coming into university and preparing to come to university. So, I was very crunched for time in that period. So, that was one of the reasons why I couldn't really complete the module, but I would say, when it's opened up, it's good for some people because a lot of people won't start things early, and they'll leave it to the last minute, or forget things, and they need reminders, but I would possibly suggest maybe opening it up a little bit sooner, then maybe sending out reminders and things like that just because I would have liked to have completed it a bit earlier in the summer if I had a bit more time.

Researcher: I mean, yes. I mean, we do like to get things out as quickly as we can, but we have to wait to know who's coming because, like, until A Level results come out and we know who's confirmed-,

Student 2: Actually, no, that's probably true because-,

Researcher: So, it does delay us a bit, but, then, yes, we need to reduce that gap. Worth knowing, yes.

Student 2: I took a gap year, so I already had my results. So, that's probably why I was, kind of, sitting on my thumbs a little bit waiting for stuff. That makes sense.

Researcher: Waiting for everything to come through, yes. Is it something you think would be beneficial if it carried out longer into term? I mean, there are some discussions about whether it could be linked to possibly the Understanding Law modules.

Student 2: I was just thinking that, actually. Yes.

Researcher: So, it extends. So, it's more of an extended induction-type tool, rather than just a, like, 'Do this,' and then you go into teaching.

Student 2: No, I was just thinking that as you said if it could be extended because I was thinking, there's already a lot, kind of, going on in the first semester. I remember being very, very, very busy in first

semester with work, and, kind of, getting to grips with everything. You have new clubs, lots of new things. So, I'd be, personally, kind of, wary about doing more modules just because my time was already very crunched, but if you, like you say, attached it to the Understanding Law module, in a sense you just extended it and that included some of the same materials maybe, I think that could relieve some of the pressure on students in the semester because there's times where they're doing three lots of tutorials and a seminar every week. But, if you mix that into introduction, the Understanding Law into the introduction, it might relieve some of the work to do later on if people have the chance to go through the materials a bit earlier and things like that.

Researcher: So, you wouldn't see it as something to do on top of everything else, but if it was, kind of, combined with things. Understanding Law's only one option. There's the other ones that could be. You could make it contract and use cases from copy notes. There's various options.

Student 2: Exactly, yes. You could do, kind of, collaborations with different things. I mean, personally, I just felt very busy in semester one, but that's because I get involved in lots of things, I was going to lots of events. Some people might have time to actually do it alongside another module, but I think you could use it to, kind of, benefit the other modules. Like reading cases, like you say, from contract or extracts from Understanding Law and things like that, definitely. And that could be something that you could be exposed to maybe before the course as well. Some people can do some, kind of, advanced reading before they arrive and things like yes.

Researcher: Yes, okay. Yes because the aim of it is to ease people into the whole subject matter because a lot of people haven't studied law at A Level or in any other way. So, we want to get people used to it as quickly as we can. So, in terms of the content, so, you, kind of, got up to the case study, which was the last main bit, wasn't it? I think, yes.

Student 2: I think it was the last main bit and then you do, like, a finalisation point after they read the case study.

Researcher: Yes. So, in terms of content you did look at, what's your views on that? Did you think anything was particularly good there, anything you thought was a bit of a waste of time, or was anything missing? Obviously, you mentioned a reading list already.

Student 2: Yes. I mean, I actually read the case as well. So, I got up to the very last case and then I just didn't manage to do the final point, but I definitely would say the case is a good point, especially just because I didn't realise how many cases we have to read in full as well because I did psychology at A Level where we just get, like, snippets of cases, principles to remember and things like that. So, I think it was good to get exposed to the case format early on. I would maybe suggest that it could be a case that we need to read anyway or something like that from one of the other courses. Maybe going back to what you were saying about, like, a collaboration just because, if you read an isolated case early on and if it's an important one to the module, you'll remember more of it for the exams then when you're crunched for time. And it also might help with revision as well because people will know more about the one case they read at the start of the semester.

Researcher: Yes. That's useful. That's definitely something I'll take back because the case we were given when we were setting this up, we were using Understanding Law, but it was a previous one so that it didn't interfere with any of the teaching. So, it was, kind of, being kept separate, but bringing them together might be more beneficial.

Student 2: And, then, I'm just remembering back now. So, I believe it was answering questions and things like that. I found those very useful to, kind of, ease me into the legal way of thinking. The legal

way of thinking was very different to the way that I was taught to think, kind of, for English and things like that. So, I would suggest maybe a useful video of, like, a couple of minutes might be beneficial to some that have done English, or done History and some, kind of, other essay writing technique just to try and make them aware of this different way of thinking because that's something that I came unstuck with in my essay writing because I always thought I was very good at writing essays, and then I would write legal essays and it's completely different, yes. So, maybe something like that would be very helpful just to, kind of, make people aware of when they're coming into the course that they'll have to think very differently than what they're used to having done those subjects.

Researcher: Okay. I'm just going to show you this. This is just something that is part of the thesis that I'm writing and it, kind of, outlines the aims of what the project is. So, this column's, like, the components of the module that we created, and then the reasons why we've included those parts, which just explains a little bit about why we did things. And I just wondered what your view was, just have a quick glance of that, of whether we actually met those aims. So, you know, managing to talk to other students, seeing pictures of staff in lecture theatres. Do those kinds of things help?

Student 2: So, I definitely think it was really good for, like, introducing students to the law school and how it's structured, like with the Moodle things, and introducing in that sense. So, I definitely think that one worked. The introduction to the personal tutor system and things like that. I mean, mine was very good. So, I had Professor Bailey, who was a very good personal tutor. I know we had some, kind of, issues with some people not knowing who their tutor was and things like that, but I think that falls down to some tutors not reaching out and making contact themselves.

Researcher: Some are perhaps more engaged than others, shall we say? Yes.

Student 2: Yes. And I know, I think, it's Professor Shucksmith-Wesley is working on that, like, externally to work out what's going on there, I think.

Researcher: Yes. She's a senior tutor. So, yes, they're doing a, kind of, review of the whole personal tutoring.

Student 2: So, I would say that was very good for me just because of who I had. A lot of people don't really know, kind of, who theirs is, who they have. I'm just trying to think back, but I think that's not really to do with the system. I think that's to do with the personal tutors themselves. So, you can't really blame the system if it's not the introduction that's working.

Researcher: We are looking at the personal tutor system and we are exploring whether this module can help, kind of, get people involved, and whether personal tutors can access the content of the modules so they can see what people are saying, and possibly start engaging with their tutees before they even get here is one of the thoughts.

Student 2: Yes. So, I think that might be good if they, kind of, engage with tutees, especially before they arrive or something. It would give it, kind of, a more personal touch because you only really have the law school contact here. You know, like nobody one on one, none of your personal tutors. I know that some feedback that was sent off was asking to possibly extend personal tutor hours and things like that to more than just two ten-minute sessions and things like that per year. So, that might be better. Maybe, kind of, in your face information about who your tutor is. So, maybe, like, the pictures as well because I know, and I'm probably guilty of it as well, because information can just pass you by unless it's in your face because you've got all this information going up. So, sometimes, it just needs to be, like, repeated quite a lot, for me anyway.

Researcher: No. I was the same. The first week of term, everything is thrown at you.

Student 2: It really is.

Researcher: Some of it will stick and a lot of it won't.

Student 2: Gosh, yes. It's an overflow of information. And, then, the details of the modules, I think, was great. We got that big book handout in, like, the first induction week as well.

Researcher: Yes, you get the main handbook when you get here. Yes.

Student 2: Yes. So, I think that's all great and, like, there's fantastic information there, and the legal case I said I thought was very good as well just because of the exposure to reading a case, I thought was very good. Because I wasn't used to reading cases before, and I doubt other people would have been, unless they did Law A Level. And, then, the feedback on the legal case. I mean, I think it's good to do a feedback, kind of, session, but, then, when I always do feedback, I always feel like I don't know what I'm talking about so much. So, I know I've read the case, but I don't know-, like, it's like marking yourself, giving feedback on yourself, in a sense. So, if you give feedback on the legal case, it, kind of, tests your knowledge, which I find valuable, but that relates to the next point, where you're reflecting on your answers and things like that, I find quite challenging just because I don't know if my answers are right or wrong, or things like that.

Researcher: Yes, that's a common thing. Actually. One of the reasons we put something like that in, because we know that the school provides quite a lot of feedback in terms of assessments, but, then, students don't always act upon it because they don't necessarily know how to process it. So, it's, kind of, an introduction to that. It's maybe something we can work on a bit more.

Student 2: Yes. Maybe if there's, like, a model answer, you can compare your answer to or something like that. That was the only reason for me was because I didn't know if I was right or I was wrong. Because I was so new to law, I didn't really know what I was talking about yet, but maybe if there was a model answer there that I could compare mine to, I could pick out points that were different to my own. The discussion boards I find very useful now. To begin with, I didn't find them very useful just because it had a lot of people, because there were about 350 people doing law, and it was just a lot of people saying hi and saying their names, which is very brilliant, but I just didn't know who anyone was yet.

Researcher: Yes. That's one thing we have already reviewed because it's one of those things where the first person sets the tone. so, if somebody just says, 'Hi,' then everybody else says, 'Hi,' but if you get the first person saying, 'Hi, I'm Fred from so and so. I like playing football,' then it, hopefully, prompts other people to be a bit more open. so, we're looking at ways we can do that. Whether we get a member of academic staff to start the ball rolling.

Student 2: Yes, that's what I was thinking. Maybe, kind of, some intervention there where some staff member says something and people can respond to things. Maybe have some sort of a debate going on from a point in the introduction, kind of, module, just because debates get quite interesting, because, otherwise, it gets to, like, a lot of messages and it's hard to keep up with all of these messages of all these people saying, 'My name is this, I'm from here.' And it's just lots of messages like that, but if there was, kind of, a debate going on, people would be more inclined to get involved with that. It would be more interesting to be engaged with, I think, or just, like, different topics going on maybe relating to the introduction module, but I find it very useful now because we have them for asking questions.

Researcher: Yes, we've got the individual module ones that you can use.

Student 2: Yes. So, I find those very helpful in that sense now, but I think, if they were controlled in the particular way, they could be a bit more useful instead of people spamming, but yes. And, then, there would be opportunities to engage staff. So, I didn't really engage with staff so much before I came here. I mean, I engaged a little bit with Professor Sandland just because I had questions about the course, by email, before I came, but, before that, I didn't really engage with staff before that. So, maybe that might be helped in the discussion board if the staff members, kind of, interjected, introduced themselves, and gave points, and things like that.

Researcher: That's one of my later questions as well about we're trying to get key staff involved with it slotting into posts and so on. Whether you'd think that would be beneficial.

Student 2: Yes.

Researcher: Obviously, you've answered that one already.

Student 2: I think, also, because I know there's, like, an email alert that goes out whenever a staff member posts in the announcement section or something on Moodle. Like an update. And, then, maybe, on that discussion board, there could be an email alert that goes out whenever a staff member comments on one of those points just to draw attention to it maybe when a staff member's said something particularly interesting, or something like that.

Researcher: Yes. So, it just highlights it.

Student 2: Yes, it highlights that there's some development going on, so more people are likely to pay attention to it. I think that might be useful. Yes, I didn't really have much engagement with staff before I came. That was more in the introduction, once we arrived and we could actually see them.

Researcher: Yes, and you're actually here. Yes.

Student 2: Yes.

Researcher: I mean, the aim of it was there would be a bit more staff engagement with this module, but it just didn't pan out. So, we're looking at ways we can encourage that a bit more.

Student 2: Yes. I think that would definitely be a way to, kind of, ease in, and then you're not one on one, you don't feel pressured. It's like a community as well. So, you, kind of, share the burden with a bunch of other students as well, yes.

Researcher: Okay. So, you mentioned that one about engaging staff. In terms of engaging students, we were quite pleased with the take-up. I mean, I think, initially, when the first section was released, there was over 200 students who engaged with it. It got less as we went on, which we expected because these things always do. People get excited about something we have early. It peters off. And we know there's issues with the timing, but do you think there's any other ways we could encourage engagement with these students, reaching out to them? Because, obviously, we email them to say it's there, and that's probably all we do at the moment.

Student 2: I think something else that would be quite engaging, if there was some maybe, kind of, social media page for new students, for new law students. That was something I thought was missing quite a bit just because I was very excited about coming and joining the school and I looked for a social

media page, but there was, kind of, just the University of Nottingham page and things like that, but I wanted something to follow just so I could get updates about what's going on. And, like, if I liked another social media page specific to first-years, specific to law, then I could find other people on Facebook that were doing my course as well. So, that's something I thought would be quite helpful just because I didn't realise how to link up with people doing the course before I came, and then I came, and there was a big group chat already, and I was, like, 'How did everybody know about this kind of stuff?' So, I think, if you had that, that would be an excellent, kind of, medium to raise awareness of this module, and, then, introduce students to each other as well. Obviously, through that, you wouldn't be able to mediate any communication between students, but-,

Researcher: No, that's one problem with social media. I mean, that's some, kind of, feedback to the school because, being in student services, we're not allowed to use social media. It's just not something we do, but the school can, but I thought there was a school Facebook page.

Student 2: Maybe there is one.

Researcher: But I think it's general for all students. It's not specifically for, you know, 'You're going to be joining us soon.'

Student 2: Yes. There probably is one for School of Law, but yes. I wanted-,

Researcher: You want one that's open for students to actually engage and discuss?

Student 2: Yes. For, like, first-years to get exposed to all these different things. I think the emails are very good. So, maybe, keeping that avenue just to, kind of, raise awareness of it, and that this module's available, and just keep doing that. Maybe send not too many emails, but maybe, yes, you could afford to do a couple more or something.

Researcher: To keep prompting people.

Student 2: Because, yes, the repetition. I find that you do need to prompt people quite a lot, myself included. That might be quite beneficial, I think.

Researcher: Okay. Thank you. So, we've done that about staff. So, just thinking back to September when you started, was this module something that you discussed with other students about having done it, or did your personal tutor raise it, or did you raise it with your personal tutor, or was it just something you did and then forgot about?

Student 2: I remember speaking to a couple of other students about it. I'm not sure if they had completed it just because I think the timing was the same for them when they started to move in at the end of September. And, so, I think they found, like I say, like, the case study useful. I think they also found the introduction to the law school, to Moodle, and the questions quite useful, but I think, from what I remember being said, they felt it could be a little bit more useful in what material is covered, and I think that comes under, maybe, including some material that is in other modules throughout the year to relieve some of the pressure throughout the year. And maybe, kind of, including some extracts from maybe textbooks or something like that that we're going to need to read anyway might help expose us to legal thinking, some of the material, I think. That was something I was discussing with another student at the time was that we, kind of, wished there was more textbook material, more academic material to read that would help our understanding before we arrived at university.

Researcher: Okay. So, that's all the questions that I had, just to get a view of the module, but was there anything else you wanted to add at all?

Student 2: No. I think that everything. I think, like, just the maybe video idea, I think, is quite useful just because I know Professor Hyde does, like, vodcasts or something like that, and those are very useful. They're very short and things like that. So, coming to university, I think something that would have a lot of uptake in viewing this end being very receptive would be, kind of, a short video. I think another thing would be maybe having a student create maybe, kind of, little video blogs, like a short few video blogs just to run through the introduction to law module because I know they have it for introducing you to your halls and introducing you-,

Researcher: You mean a current student?

Student 2: Yes, something like that.

Researcher: Who's, basically, just been through first-year and then can, sort of, explain that?

Student 2: Yes, and just, kind of, explaining something specific to the introduction to law module, what they found helpful about the module, things to notice about it, just because I was looking at a lot of YouTube videos as well about halls and things like that, and student life, and vlogs and things like that, I found them very useful. And maybe that could get around the-, so you wouldn't be engaged in social media, but you could get a student to be engaged in social media in that sense. So, it wouldn't be directly attached, kind of, to the school of law or student services or anything.

Researcher: Yes, okay. Thank you. That's really useful.

Student 2: Yes, thank you. I hope so. Thank you.

Appendix 7: Sample Participant Information Sheets/Consent Forms

Information Sheet for Participants (Focus Group)

Project title: Supporting law students in the transition from further to higher education

I am currently undertaking a piece of research, as part of a Professional Doctorate in Education, looking at how law students manage the transition into higher education.

I would like to carry out two focus groups, each with five or six first year law students, to obtain your views on a number of issues, including:

- How well you feel you have settled into life as a law student at university;
- What support you have accessed, both within and without the school, to help in this process;
- Whether you believe there are any additional means of support that the school could or should provide.

Each focus group will last approximately one hour and will take place within the School of Law, Law and Social Sciences Building, University of Nottingham.

The responses from these focus groups will help inform a proposed intervention provisionally scheduled to take place in September 2016 for the new intake of law students to the University of Nottingham. As students who have recently made the transition from further to higher education, your views are extremely important to my research and the design of this intervention.

The focus groups will be audio-recorded so that I can review the conversations at a later date and the conversations in each group will be guided by some set questions to ensure that all of the key areas in which I am interested are covered, although there will be flexibility to allow participants to express their views freely and openly.

Any opinions expressed in the focus groups will not be attributed to any individual and the recordings and subsequent notes made of the recordings will remain entirely confidential to me and my supervisors, whose details can be found below.

If you agree to take part in a focus group but subsequently change your mind about participating, or feel uncomfortable in the focus group, you can freely withdraw at any point without risk or prejudice.

This project has received ethical approval from the School of Education (Ethics Co-ordinator Dr Kay Fuller - educationresearchethics@nottingham.ac.uk).

If you would like any further information regarding the project, then please do contact me at ian.bainbridge@nottingham.ac.uk

My supervisors are:

Professor Bernadette Youens: Bernadette.youens@nottingham.ac.uk
Professor Sarah Speight: sarah.speight@nottingham.ac.uk

Ian Bainbridge
Professional Doctorate in Education
School of Education, University of Nottingham   November 2015

Information Sheet for Participants (questionnaire)

I am currently undertaking a piece of research, as part of a Professional Doctorate in Education, looking at how law students manage the transition into higher education.

The following questionnaire is open to all new first year undergraduate students joining the School of Law in September 2017. The questionnaire aims to explore issues relating to your starting your course, including:

- Your previous educational experience
- Your level of engagement with, and feedback on, the 'Introduction to the Study of Law' Moodle course available prior to starting your course
- How well you feel you have settled into life as a law student at university;
- What support you have accessed, both within and without the school, to help in this process;
- Whether you believe there are any additional means of support that the school could or should provide.

The questionnaire should take no longer that 10-15 minutes to complete.

The responses to this questionnaire will help evaluate and develop the 'Introduction to the Study of Law' Moodle course for future cohorts to ensure it provides maximum benefit. As students who have recently made the transition from further to higher education, your views are extremely important to my research and the continued development of this intervention.

At the end of the questionnaire there will be an opportunity to provide your personal details should you wish to be involved in some focus groups that will be run to further explore your experiences of beginning your university studies.

Any opinions expressed in this questionnaire will not be attributed to any individual the responses will remain entirely confidential to me and my supervisors, whose details can be found below.

If you would like any further information regarding the project, then please do contact me at ian.bainbridge@nottingham.ac.uk

My supervisors are:

Professor Sarah Speight: sarah.speight@nottingham.ac.uk
Dr Joanna Al-Youssef: Joanna.al-youssef@nottingham.ac.uk

Ian Bainbridge
Professional Doctorate in Education
School of Education, University of Nottingham   December 2018

Information Sheet for Participants (student interviews)

I am currently undertaking a piece of research, as part of a Professional Doctorate in Education, looking at how law students manage the transition into higher education.

I would like to carry out a range of interviews with first year law students, to obtain your views on a number of issues, including:

- Your level of engagement with, and feedback on, the 'Introduction to the Study of Law' Moodle course available prior to starting your course
- How well you feel you have settled into life as a law student at university;
- What support you have accessed, both within and without the School, to help in this process;
- Whether you believe there are any additional means of support that the School could or should provide.

Each interview will last approximately one hour and will take place within the School of Law, Law and Social Sciences Building, University of Nottingham.

The responses from these interviews will help evaluate and develop the 'Introduction to the Study of Law' Moodle course for future cohorts to ensure it provides maximum benefit. As students who have recently made the transition from further to higher education, your views are extremely important to my research and the continued development of this intervention.

The interviews will be recorded so that I can review the conversations at a later date and the conversations in each interview will be guided by some set questions to ensure that all of the key areas in which I am interested are covered, although there will be flexibility to allow participants to express their views freely and openly.

Any opinions expressed in the interviews will not be attributed to any individual and the recordings and subsequent notes made of the recordings will remain entirely confidential to me and my supervisors, whose details can be found below.

If you agree to take part in an interview but subsequently change your mind about participating, or feel uncomfortable in the interview, you can freely withdraw at any point without risk or prejudice.

If you would like any further information regarding the project then please do contact me at ian.bainbridge@nottingham.ac.uk

My supervisors are:

Professor Sarah Speight: sarah.speight@nottingham.ac.uk
Dr Joanna Al-Youssef: Joanna.al-youssef@nottingham.ac.uk

Ian Bainbridge
Professional Doctorate in Education
School of Education, University of Nottingham   January 2020

Participant Consent Form

Project title: Supporting law students in the transition from further to higher education

Researcher's name: Ian Bainbridge

Supervisor's name: Professor Sarah Speight and Dr Joanna Al-Youssef

- I have read the Information Sheet for Participants and the nature and purpose of the research project has been explained to me. I understand and agree to take part.
- I understand the purpose of the research project and my involvement in it.
- I understand that I may withdraw from the research project at any stage and that this will not affect my status now or in the future.
- I understand that while information gained during the study may be published, I will not be identified, and my personal results will remain confidential.
- I understand that I will be audiotaped during the focus group session.
- I understand that data will be stored securely: electronic recordings and documents will be stored on the researcher's computer on a secure drive owned and managed by the University of Nottingham; hard copy documents will be stored in the researcher's office in a locked cabinet at the University of Nottingham.
- I understand that I may contact the researcher or supervisors if I require further information about the research, and that I may contact the Research Ethics Coordinator of the School of Education, University of Nottingham, if I wish to make a complaint relating to my involvement in the research.

Signed …………………………………………………………………… (Research participant)

Print name ………………………………………………………… **Date** …………………………………

Contact details

Researcher: Ian Bainbridge (ian.bainbridge@nottingham.ac.uk)

Supervisors: Professor Sarah Speight (sarah.speight@nottingham.ac.uk)

                  Dr Joanna Al-Youssef: Joanna.al-youssef@nottingham.ac.uk

School of Education Research Ethics Coordinator:

educationresearchethics@nottingham.ac.uk