

Promotional approaches to undergraduate recruitment for marginalised  
courses and marginalised students

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## Abstract

This research challenges the norms of undergraduate recruitment promotion practice responding to political, economic, social and technological drivers in a competitive environment. The practical problem is defined from a marketing practitioner standpoint working with core approaches which do not represent nuanced subject and audience needs, instead leaving them on the margins of the institutional recruitment offer. Marginalised students are represented by those who did not attend private or high-achieving state schools, including, but not restricted to, those identified by widening participation policy. Marginalised subjects are represented by selected arts and humanities courses without overt links to specific professions. These aspects of marginalisation triangulated from an elite institution perspective create a framework for investigating the problems created by core promotional practice, and for developing solutions. The use of a case study supported by design-based research methods allows for practical research outputs in a live environment. Mixed methods are employed to gather data from a small sample of insider sources (nine students and seven tutors) and general public sources (1,923 online reader responses to 31 news articles and forum posts). The insider and public accounts provide an alternative marketing intelligence corpus to normative large-scale quantitative data. This is used to inform design principles incorporated into a prototype package of three promotional resources and a sustainable strategy. The success of the challenge to promotional practice norms materialises not simply through public-facing practical solutions as initially anticipated, but also through the collaborative processes of the enquiry, improving professional relations between marketing administrative and academic staff. The alternative approaches realised through this research can be summarised as a move towards small-scale market intelligence gathering and resource production to meet the nuanced needs of marginalised subjects and audiences, and an alteration to professional practice which acknowledges academics as marketing partners. These outputs are now employed within routine practice within the boundaries of the original study, and have the potential to be generalisable through wider discussions among HE marketing practitioners.

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## Contents

List of Figures .....	vi
List of Tables .....	vi
List of Appendices .....	vii
List of Abbreviations .....	vii
1 Introduction .....	1
1.1 Motivations and contexts.....	1
1.2 Theoretical development of new approaches to promotion .....	5
1.3 A new practice and design proposal.....	10
1.4 Thesis structure.....	13
1.5 Summary .....	16
2 Influential factors in the construction of HE promotional messages .....	18
2.1 Political and economic factors .....	18
2.2 Social and technological factors.....	37
2.3 Democratising access to promotional messages .....	48
2.4 Research questions .....	52
2.5 Summary of literatures .....	54
3 Process and resource solutions to promotional message problems.....	57
3.1 Pragmatism and practical research outputs .....	57
3.2 Bounded case study approach .....	59
3.3 Defining the practical problem.....	64
3.4 Working with empirical data.....	74
3.5 Working with resource .....	82
3.6 The new approach .....	84
3.7 Ethical conduct of the research .....	85
3.8 Summary .....	88
4 Student and tutor voices as market intelligence .....	90
4.1 Heterogeneous stories.....	91
4.2 UK-domiciled diversity in the classroom: group dynamics and divisions.....	95
4.3 Subject visibility and employability.....	102
4.4 Reception of marketing intervention.....	110
4.5 Implications for a new approaches to promotional marketing.....	116
4.6 Summary .....	120

5	Online responder voices as market intelligence .....	123
5.1	An exploratory approach to analysing online reader responses .....	124
5.2	Public perceptions of marginalised courses .....	134
5.3	Power and influence based on authority attributes .....	144
5.4	Developing marketing solutions from empirical data .....	148
5.5	Summary .....	149
6	Resource development and testing .....	151
6.1	The consolidation of market intelligence derived from the empirical data.....	151
6.2	Marketing resource development .....	152
6.3	Resource sustainability .....	186
6.4	Summary .....	190
7	New collaborative approaches to HE promotional marketing .....	193
7.1	Contribution to knowledge .....	193
7.2	Achievement of research aims and objectives .....	200
7.3	Reflections on methodology.....	210
7.4	Concluding discussion.....	214
	Bibliography.....	218
	Appendices.....	234

## List of Figures

Figure 1:1: The triangle of marginalisation .....	5
Figure 3:1: Sequence of data collection and resource testing .....	63
Figure 3:2: Subjects offered by core/marginalised segmentation – percentage of whole .....	68
Figure 3:3: Subjects offered by core/marginalised segmentation – absolute numbers.....	68
Figure 3:4: Data source complexities for marketing practitioners and potential students.....	73
Figure 5:1: Voting and reader response mechanisms of online platforms.....	129
Figure 5:2: The power of ‘assumed’ and ‘experiential ’authorities.....	147
Figure 6:1: Linking to the national curriculum - Shakespeare.....	157
Figure 6:2: Marginalised subjects demystified for marginalised students.....	165
Figure 6:3: Connotations derived from <i>Beginners’ Russian Resource</i> .....	175

## List of Tables

Table 3.1: Field note records.....	65
Table 3.3: Student interview participants .....	78
Table 3.4:Tutor interview participants.....	81
Table 3.5: Ethics of analysing online content .....	87
Table 5.1: Online platforms selected for reader response analysis.....	128
Table 5.2: Assumed authorities of responders to authored content .....	133
Table 5.3: Experiential authorities of responders to authored content .....	133
Table.5.4: Exemplar of shared understandings in an online forum .....	141
Table 5.5: Refined data selection of reader responses .....	145
Table 6.1: DBR outcomes mapped to the triangle of marginalisation attributes.....	150
Table 6.2: Resource testing groups .....	169
Table 6.3: Resource testing - subject keyword recognition .....	173
Table 6.4: Strategy development iterations.....	182
Table 6.5: Resource sustainability: new approaches to promotional practice .....	187

## List of Appendices

Appendix 1: Readings of undergraduate recruitment imagery .....	235
Appendix 2: Promotional assets and channels of distribution .....	236
Appendix 3: Field note opportunities.....	237
Appendix 4: Data source categorisation available to institutions and potential students .....	238
Appendix 5: Research process table .....	239
Appendix 6: Ethics documents .....	241
Appendix 7: Interview schedule and questions.....	250
Appendix 8: Biographical sketches of student research participants.....	253
Appendix 9: Online social media article sources and references.....	255

## List of Abbreviations

BIS	Department for Innovation and Skills
CE	Continuing Education
DBR	Design-based research
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DMO	Daily Mail Online
EDL	European Day of Languages
ELQ	Equivalent or Lower Qualifications
GO	Guardian Online
GPA	Grade Point Average
HE	Higher education
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
KIS	Key Information Sets
KS	Key Stage

NSS	National Student Survey
RRC	Reader Response Criticism
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SES	Socio-economic status
SMCPC	Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission
TEF	Teaching Excellence Framework
TSR	The Student Room
UCAS	Universities and Colleges Admissions Service
WP	Widening Participation

## **1 Introduction**

I have introduced this thesis through a biographical account of my experience as a marketing practitioner, first in the travel industry and then in higher education. I draw on similarities of visual representation with each, before defining why a more cautious approach must be taken with HE recruitment owing to the student/institution relationship within an undergraduate contract. In identifying cautions in approaches to promotion, I have also observed and recorded dissatisfaction between academic staff and corporately imposed marketing decisions. This has occurred when it has been perceived that core marketing strategies have not met the recruitment needs of subjects, through misunderstanding of the nuanced subject and target audience needs. The tensions have led me to theorise about new approaches to promotional marketing that allow for specialised needs to be represented without detracting from the core. I have introduced this theorisation through a triangulated framework of marginalised courses and marginalised students as defined from an elite university perspective, followed by research aims and objectives to consider alternative complementary practice and promotional resource design. This chapter concludes with the thesis structure, including a literature review, the research design, empirical data collection, resource design, and concluding discussions.

### **1.1 Motivations and contexts**

This research was motivated by my professional experiences of marketing within a Russell Group university, which for the purposes of this thesis I have called *Lorem*. I came to higher education (HE) administration from a commercial background of up-market tour operations. I have since worked in two distinct recruitment areas: continuing education (CE), dominated by mature and part-time students, and mainstream recruitment marketing aimed at school leavers. For the first two years in HE, I worked in the specialised area of marketing CE accredited field trips, which required the selection, packaging, pricing, presentation and ‘selling’ of short educational breaks. The

promotion of the field trips had obvious connections with tour operations, and I was inclined to present the educational components with the same type of messages. Indeed, in the initial stages of this research, I conducted a small study of undergraduate recruitment images where study was portrayed as relaxed and social thus demonstrating the common ground between travel and tourism and university. My summary results were recorded in poster format (see Appendix 1). However, in practice the teaching and learning components of HE added points of difference to the ‘purchase transaction’, and it was not enough to apply the principles of travel marketing to secure sufficient numbers of students to make a course viable. The tutors desire that the students are academically capable, well prepared and committed to study and that they will make a positive contribution to the classroom dynamic, where mutual teaching and learning goals can be achieved through a sustained and effective work ethic, in independent and collaborative situations. Taking a longer term view tutors also desire the sustainability and expansion of their subject knowledge bases aided by the continued and refreshed teaching and research. The institution seeks reputation maintenance and enhancement through high achieving graduates as judged by their degree award levels and career destinations, and prestigious alumni, as well as the financial security through successful recruitment of sufficient numbers. Therefore, the institutional recruitment offer and student application process includes the possibility that the applicant may be rejected on academic grounds, irrespective of availability of places and demand from the ‘purchaser’ of the service. This rejection would not occur in the travel industry, and therefore I reflected that the nature of an HE recruitment transaction placed an additional responsibility on higher education institutions (HEIs) to be transparent in the requirements of entering into a contractual relationship, necessitating caution in promotional approaches.

### **1.1.1 Promotional message construction**

The research reported here used *Lorem*'s core promotional practices as the unit of analysis in a case study. I focused on the creation of promotional messages (language, image, themes and so on), where promotional assets (brochures, prospectuses, web content, social media and so on) can have multiple channels of distribution (open days, internet, careers fairs and so on). The principles, assets

and channels of promotional message construction can be seen in Appendix 2. I have placed messages in the position of facilitating both a recruitment transaction, and the initial stages of longer-term relationship building, but have particularly concentrated on the early stages of student information-seeking for this research. *Lorem*'s practice norms require a whole institutional approach to all marketing material and messages, irrespective of the nuanced needs of courses. In addition, the core target audience is determined by strategic institutional positioning as a provider of top quality research-led teaching. Message construction and dissemination is set around core audience preferences, but is limited by time and resource allocated to marketing administration.

In the UK the 'top' universities, as conceived through reputational measures including mission group<sup>1</sup> membership and league table position, target and compete for the highest achieving students using high A-level entry tariffs as a proxy for quality of teaching and learning, and graduate employability. The core UK-domiciled undergraduate audience for the top UK HEIs are typically middle-class students from private and high-achieving state schools, who routinely attain the top A-level grades. This audience is also more likely to have access to familial experience and strategic school support in applying for a university place. Thus defined, this core audience is easy to target with homogenised content themed around commonalities of expectations, which are increasingly career and salary focused. However, the production of homogenised content for a core audience is at the root of creating challenges for recruiting students from non-core audiences, for example students from low income backgrounds, average to low achieving schools, and some black and ethnic minority groups, who become what I refer to as 'marginalised' from core target audiences. In addition, a human capital approach to marketing attaches each course to career prospects so it may be inferred by the information-seeker that some courses, such as arts and humanities, are of less value than others such as medicine and business. My interest is in alternative promotional

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<sup>1</sup> Mission group is taken here to be UK universities formally grouped together by provenance, ethos and aspiration, of which the Russell Group is considered to be the most prestigious. In addition 'post-1992' is used to refer to institutions given university status through the Further and Higher Education Act 1992.

approaches where subjects are not able to sustain a selecting market position or are otherwise de-valued through perception, and where diverse student information needs are not met.

### **1.1.2 Academic dissatisfaction with promotional approaches**

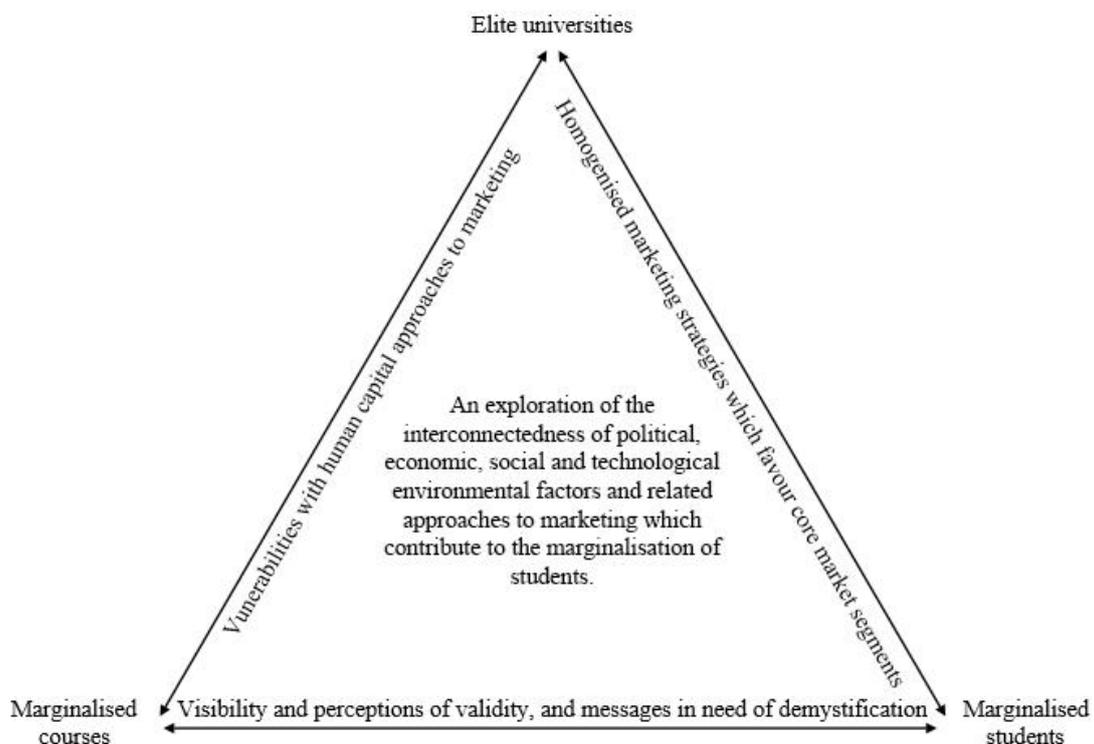
My travel industry experience brought to bear on HE promotion initially caused tensions with the academic staff I worked with because they objected to the co-dependency of the student, tutor and institutional requirements being overshadowed by a commercial attitude. However, the commercial approach was supported by core institutional marketing practice, so tensions existed when centrally imposed strategies did not meet academic needs in the portrayal of their subjects and the defining of their audiences. To understand these tensions, from 2007 I began collecting field notes from marketing and recruitment forums, committees, workshops, seminars and other routine encounters (see Appendix 3). The notes were based on academic-led tangential discussions to the core agenda which exposed inequalities in resources, frustrations with systems and policies, and possible solutions to pertinent problems which were not allocated specific action points. I noted academic staff dissent caused by the unilateral application of marketing strategies to focus on popular courses and high-achieving students irrespective of the discipline, popularity, and target audience of the course, and the global competition that encourages recruitment practice. Staff responsible for courses pressed for strategies to be developed appropriate for selecting subjects, defined as those able to choose from the highest-achieving applicants, which married with institutional positioning strategy. However, there were recruiting subjects for which there was an academic appetite to preserve and extend the knowledge bases through continuous teaching and research, and institutional requirements to enact widening participation (WP) policy, which were united through the solution of offering less stringent entry tariffs. The staff reaction to centrally imposed strategies suggested that a core approach to recruitment could not satisfy all course and students' requirements for an institution offering a broad range of subjects. As with academically capable students not targeted through core messages, I have similarly framed those subjects which fall outside core approaches to promotional message constructions as 'marginalised'. A joint notion of marginalised

students and marginalised courses informed my ideas about why and how new approaches to promotion should be accommodated into core messaging practice.

## 1.2 Theoretical development of new approaches to promotion

I have created a simple conceptual framework to assist in visualising and examining the relationship between marginalised students and marginalised courses, which I have triangulated by taking an elite institution perspective (see Figure 2.1).

**Figure 1:1: The triangle of marginalisation**



This figure shows an exploration of the interconnectedness of aspects of subject and student marginalisation. This research focuses on arts and humanities as marginalised subjects (see Section 2.3.2) and students of middle to low achieving state schools as marginalised students (see Section 2.3.1) when placed in relation to elite universities (taken here to belong to the Russell Group). NB An alternative triangle may exist where traditional-route students seeking vocational courses are marginalised through the recruitment messages of universities belonging to mission groups other than the Russell Group, but this research uses the former triad within its design.

The triangle facilitates the exploration and understanding of the promotional marketing challenges faced by an institution where marginalised subjects (represented by arts and humanities subjects) and students (represented by those who are academically capable of attending a university but whose background and situation sits outside of core audience designation) can be said to be

overlooked in attempts to recruit through a core audience strategy. At the centre are the political, economic, social and technological factors which drive the environment in which HE recruitment takes place, and effect message content. I will now elaborate on how students and subjects are marginalised.

### **1.2.1 Marginalised students**

Within its simplest form, the term ‘marginalised students’ has been used here to define ‘non-traditional’ including but not restricted to student audiences known as ‘widening participation’ (WP) who are academically capable of entering HE, but who are not specifically identified within the core audience of HE recruitment messages. In real terms, students from backgrounds designated WP are those from lower socio-economic groups, living in deprived areas, from schools and colleges with low participation in HE, and/or those whose families have no experience of HE, sometimes termed ‘first in the family’ or ‘first generation’. Also covered by WP policy are some black and ethnic minority groups, and students with disabilities, children who have been brought up in the care system, and young carers. By virtue of missing the earliest opportunity to enter HE, definitions of WP have been extended to include mature students irrespective of their backgrounds. The various labels for these groups of students will be used throughout this thesis according to the most appropriate nuance. The term WP will continue to be used when specifically discussing government and institutional policy.

I am concerned that in defining a target audience based on the deficit position of WP criteria, the opportunity to normalise students identified for WP initiatives within mainstream promotional materials is ignored. This creates an unnecessarily stratified marketing approach, when, instead, the recruitment transaction and subsequent relationship building with the institution should be the same for all students. Viewed from the perspective of an elite institution (see Section 1.3.3), students identified here as marginalised, are more likely to come from state schools and/or low-income backgrounds. Irrespective of the variance in specific attributes, such students are considered an important target group for UK HEIs, through policy obligations as well as institutional appetite.

There are complexities of the positioning of marginalised students within HE recruitment materials where they are not automatically considered to be a core audience by elite institutions. While I am differentiating marginalised students from those who are not academically capable of studying at HE, their educational background will categorise them as more likely to be entering HE with lower grades and aspirations than their more privileged counterparts. Additionally, they are more likely to seek out non-elite institutions (Milburn, 2012) if they choose to go to university at all.

I have considered how WP policy established to assist with socially disadvantaged sectors of society who nevertheless are capable of participating in HE, can be viewed as problematic. That WP students, extended here by the term ‘marginalised students’ are approached with different marketing strategies and messages might become part of the problem if their expectations of university life are not met to the same level as those who are party to core targeting. Careful consideration of the unintended consequences of recruiting marginalised students is required to avoid the mismatching student perceptions and expectations with actual experience. Information that allows these students to consider the institution on their own terms needs to be presented transparently. While HEIs take great care to project positive messages, homogenised approaches to core audiences may not be embraced in the same way by marginalised audiences. For marginalised students the key premise is that, presented with accounts of student experiences in non-idealised circumstances, *i.e.* those which acknowledge ‘struggles’ (Leathwood & Connell, 2003) in a positive and empowering way, informs them honestly at the decision-making stage and prepares them better for productive participation in HE. In problematising the core audience approach as being undermining to the spirit of diversity as expressed through WP policy, I consider how marginalised messages can be accommodated as a norm without being detrimental to the core.

Furthermore, technological changes have disrupted corporate control of messages, in terms of content and dissemination; and, democratic access to information on the internet in defiance of intentions to ‘segment’ might be beneficial in reaching students inadvertently missing from existing targeting approaches. However, there would remain the possibility of reader interpretation of

content differing to author intent, especially where shared-understandings generated from interactions within online social spaces can alter perceptions. While potentially problematic, the existing corporate and social information sources also offer opportunities to present alternative messages to reflect marginalised student needs as well as those of the core market.

The new approach proposed by this research requires knowledge of the appropriateness of messages (text, images and video) which can be used to project specific brand values with qualities sought by defined target audiences.

### **1.2.2 Marginalised courses**

Among the environmental drivers of marginalisation is the government placing a human capital motivation on participation for economic gain (Collini, 2010; Holmwood, 2011). For the purpose of promotional practices, I have used the term ‘human capital approach’ to indicate the marketing response to government and HE initiatives, such as from the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS), the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission (SMCPC), and the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), to promote undergraduate degree-level education for the purpose of a positive economic contribution to the UK workforce, and the associated society benefits of healthy employment. The human capital approach takes its cues from commercial businesses, and in response to pervading political, economic, social and technological factors in the external environment. Such an approach allows HEIs to compete in and respond to an increasingly competitive global marketplace. The use of human capital messages in HE might be acceptable to achieve specific recruitment goals and to keep institutional offers relevant to some parts of today’s society. However, the human capital approach is viewed as a risk for introducing subject bias towards vocationally-linked courses, especially among students without prior academic and social understanding of the values of the arts and humanities and their employment potential. A possible response for arts and humanities courses in a recruiting position is to lower the entry requirements, but as with reducing tuition fees, the general public perception is of an inferior ‘product’, where price is an indicator of prestige

(Nedbalová *et al*, 2014). Therefore this approach is counter-intuitive to institutional positioning policy where seeking to become a selecting institution. It is certain that a strengthening of the bond between these subjects and employability is required to fit in with politically-led human capital pressure, and that promotional messages need to be demystified to be accessible to all target audiences (see Section 1.3.1).

### **1.2.3 Promotional messages of elite institutions**

In my scenario where non-traditional students and non-vocational courses are both positioned as marginalised, the triangle is completed by the recruitment messages of elite institutions, where reports suggest there are recruitment concerns (Milburn, 2012; SMCPC, 2013; BIS, 2016). There are various ways of categorising UK universities, by research, teaching, urban, rural, or mission group (see Appendix 4). Distinctions can also be made between ‘selecting’ and ‘recruiting’ universities determined by the success in securing applicants in sufficient quantity and quality without being seen as ‘competing’. Although McCaig (2015) suggested that these categorisations are outmoded, and that the reality is more fluid, there is nonetheless a distinct hierarchy entrenched by league tables. Within this hierarchy, HEIs deemed to have the best reputations in specific subjects are more likely to ‘select’ their applicants (see Section 2.1.3), leaving others to compete for recruitment, and adopt strategies to become themselves selecting institutions.

A problem exists with business-based marketing practice within elite HE institutions which can effectively complicate their government remit to recruit from WP audiences. Information is presented within the frame of the audience’s cultural understanding and ability to assimilate promotional messages. These can portray security, enjoyment, and quality of learning and social experiences, mirroring expectations of confident students, but not necessarily meeting the information needs of all who are eligible and academically capable of attending. There is little space within mainstream promotional material to address anxieties, presented as barriers to participation in WP literatures (see Section 2.1.1), which might disrupt the messages for the core audience.

Institutions may choose to demystify subjects in terms of value both to students and society to promote the benefits beyond those who already have the inherent cultural capital to understand this. Messages might include pursuing the role of HE study for transformative purposes as well as for personal economic gain, and as a contributor to the creative economy. However, this may prove problematic to HEIs which aim to present a cohesive image across the whole of their portfolios, and in the interests of brand management deviation from core messages would have to be treated with extreme caution. Furthermore, technological changes have disrupted corporate control of messages, in terms of content and dissemination; and, democratic access to information on the internet in defiance of intentions to ‘segment’ might be beneficial in reaching students inadvertently missing from existing targeting approaches. However, there would remain the possibility of reader interpretation of content differing to author intent, especially where shared-understandings generated from interactions within online social spaces can alter perceptions. While potentially problematic, the existing corporate and social information sources also offer opportunities to present alternative messages to reflect marginalised student needs as well as those of the core market.

Nevertheless, there remains an opportunity to look towards marginalised students as a valuable audience for marginalised courses, where the benefits of elite HE education are a good match to student potential and aspiration (see Section 1). My motivations for conducting research into marginalised aspects of HE promotion, and the initial ideas of their interconnectedness, has led me to propose new approaches to message construction, with a set of underpinning aims and objectives, which I will discuss next.

### **1.3 A new practice and design proposal**

My professional experience of HE recruitment marketing revealed a situation whereby certain subjects and students on the margins of centrally organised marketing strategies were not accommodated in core recruitment messages. Having identified tensions between academic staff and dominant corporate practice brought about by a core ‘blanket’ approach to message

construction, I chose to focus on new approaches which better met nuanced recruitment needs. The messages aim to service the initial information-seeking period of students, with a view that they would facilitate the relationship-building framework adopted by *Lorem* as a whole. I took a pragmatic approach in conducting an exploration into alternative promotional provisions for aspects of marginalisation within *Lorem* seeded by the original field notes (see Section 1.2), and an examination of the political, economic, social and technological environmental factors in which HEIs operate (see Chapter 2).

The advancement of my ideas about joint problems has been realised through empirical research to attempt common solutions involving the development and dissemination of responsible marketing messages for a holistic audience of all students capable of participation irrespective of existing segmentation. To serve my pragmatic requirements for a practical output, I selected methods suggested by design-based research (DBR) to conduct a small-scale case study in a live environment. To advance the initial ideas of the interconnected problems (see Section 1.3), and with the view to seeking a joint solution, *Lorem*'s core marketing practice for generating promotional recruitment messages became the unit of analysis in a bounded case study, discussed in detail in Section 3.3. Additional qualitative and quantitative methods were used to acquire new market intelligence<sup>2</sup> missing from core practice to inform the construction of new messages, and strategies for their dissemination. In advancing thinking about practice through the creation of new messages, careful consideration was given to ensure that demystification for one audience was not of detriment to the original core audiences.

### **1.3.1 Key aims and objectives**

The aim of this research was to reconsider marketing promotional practice in relation to marginalised aspects of HE recruitment, focussing on messaging which encourages a recruitment transaction, belonging to a broader set of marketing activities which service relationship building

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<sup>2</sup> Market intelligence is defined here as the data which is collected and analysed to inform HE marketing decisions including the development of promotional messages and channels of distribution.

and maintenance. The new approaches were conceived through the generation of new design principles for marketing resources viewed from the perspective of an elite UK HEI, where marginalisation was a factor in student background or recruiting subject. There was an implicit understanding that this recruitment transaction would be of benefit for the institution, the subject tutors through pedagogical enrichment, and for the personal transformation and the future career prospects of the students. Any new promotion would not seek to recruit those who would not benefit or who would not be well served in the post recruitment relationship.

The overarching aim was underpinned by three key objectives. Firstly, to understand the interconnectedness of course and student marginalisation, considered in relation to an elite institution. Secondly to investigate voices missing from routine market intelligence gathering which may be considered for their potential to create new messages, satisfying the information requirements of the identified aspects of marginalisation. These voices included tutors and students with practical experience of marginalisation, and the general public. Finally, to produce a package of tailored recruitment marketing resources based on the key findings of empirical research. These objectives allowed me to move from understanding the research problem, through articulating new voices, to developing new resources, design principles and strategy. The execution of the objectives has allowed for ongoing conversations in my professional practice, and for the sustainable growth of resources which will assist with normalising aspects of marginalisation within mainstream messages.

The shift in approach to accommodate nuanced messaging is immediately generalisable within my own institution for subject areas which fit the triangle of marginalisation model. However, there is potential for the approach to be considered more widely, through the adaptation of the model, the use of DBR methodology, and the acknowledgement of academics as marketing partners. In this respect the research outcomes have the potential to reconceptualise promotional marketing practice if adopted as routine and more widely within the HE community.

## 1.4 Thesis structure

The following is an outline of the thesis organised by chapters, progressing from a literature review, through methodology, methods and findings, to concluding discussions.

### **Chapter 2: Influential factors in the construction of HE marketing messages**

This chapter covers my review of literatures which helped advance the theoretical development introduced in section 1.3. They come from a variety of sources including marketing discourses, widening participation, and semiotics, framed by the interconnected political, economic, social and technological environmental factors. They address influential factors external to institutional policy and strategy which can affect marketing practice and add context to the content of promotional messages. These factors include commercial pressures placed upon universities to compete in a global marketplace which have contributed to the introduction and development of mass marketing techniques such as market segmentation, and government pressures to seek out non-traditional students irrespective of institutional decisions of their core target market. I conclude with my research questions, which emerge from the contexts in Chapter 1, and from the literatures of this chapter.

### **Chapter 3: Process and resource solutions to marketing message problems**

I commence this chapter with a discussion about my ontological and epistemological position of pragmatism. I present *Lorem's* core promotional practice as a case, bounded by arts and humanities subjects, and insider students and tutors with experience of marginalisation. I then discuss the methods suggested by DBR, and their compatibility with both my research and professional practice needs, including the ability to respond rapidly to the changing HE environment, and to be economically and operationally sustainable to warrant a continued allocation of resources. The research design is then introduced through four key phases; defining the practical problem; working with empirical data; working with resources; and, the new approach. I include details of research participant selection and methods. While I use a variety of data collection and analysis methods in

iterative and overlapping cycles, the design is accounted for in a linear fashion to maintain clarity and continuity.

#### **Chapter 4: Student and tutor voices as market intelligence**

This is the first of two data chapters addressing the ‘working with empirical data’ phase of DBR, where I expand upon my data selection, collection and analysis methods of insider voices in relation to aspects of student and course marginalisation. I give details of my choice of research participants, selected for their closeness to issues of diversity within *Lorem*; these were nine students from a single arts course which has successfully recruited from diverse backgrounds, and seven tutors selected from a range of arts disciplines all of whom had first-hand experience of undergraduate admissions and/or outreach work. I also detail the interview and analysis methods. The participants provided rich ‘insider’ information by articulating their personal experiences of marginalisation. The analysis of this data allowed me to understand diversity from experiential perspectives where pedagogical enrichment is foregrounded as motivation for pursuing UK-domiciled diversity as a target audience. I also address how the initial tutor involvement helped me to gain access to a longer and more involved academic engagement with the research process.

#### **Chapter 5: Online responder voices as market intelligence**

In this second empirical data chapter I seek general public perspectives of marginalised courses. Influenced by Reader Response Criticism (RRC), I examined 1923 online reader responses to 31 authored online articles and forum posts, to determine differences between author intent and reader interpretation. I provide a detailed account of the methods of analysis of the texts and I establish online ‘authorities’ as providers of surrogate personal knowledge, where there is no or limited access to traditional providers such as friends, family and trusted acquaintances. The findings position online reader responses as an important alternative source of market intelligence that does not routinely feature within market research, and exposes gaps between public opinion of marginalised courses and HE-authored marketing messages which seek positive engagement.

## **Chapter 6: Resource development and testing**

In this third phase of DBR I discuss ‘working with resource’, both development and testing. The resource development was an iterative process that wove through the interview and online data collection and analysis, and was conducted in collaboration with academic and administrative colleagues. The process consolidated the marketing problem defined in Chapter 3 with new market intelligence gathered from Chapters 4 and 5 to create a package of resources to aid potential student meaning-making within the framework of the triangle of marginalisation. Through the ideas generation and development of the resources it became apparent that some ideas were subject to institutional constraints, which restricted their public use. However, the collaborative process commenced in the empirical data phase (Chapter 4) suggested new ways of working with academic staff, and I present an account of negotiations which resulted in a marketing prototype package of resources entitled *Help with Homework* developing into the *Curriculum Enrichment Strategy*. I also cover the substantive longer-term developments based on outcomes that came after the conclusion of the fieldwork, which provided a relationship building opportunity beyond the original transactional focus of promotional resource creation.

## **Chapter 7: New collaborative approaches to HE promotional marketing**

In my concluding discussions I present the achievement of my aim and objectives and answers to the research questions. I consolidate my account of how HE promotional marketing can be approached to address aspects of marginalisation as seen from an elite institution perspective. I discuss how the findings add to existing HE marketing practice, and identify the need for closer relationships between marketing and outreach activities, and academic and marketing personnel. In turn, this leads to my reflections on how this research has affected my own professional practice. I also consider the methodological approach, and the practical implications of applying DBR to market intelligence gathering and HE recruitment marketing, and the limitations in practice and the research methodology, particularly in relation to the overwhelmingly large amount of data available to potential students. In conclusion, I present a package of scalable and sustainable resources which

can be adapted for use by HE personnel to stimulate a spiral of promotional marketing, recruitment and evaluation, and which can be applied beyond the restrictive recruitment cycles and core market segments. While the field work concludes with outputs generalisable within the boundings of the original case study, I consider how the methodological approach, outputs, and dissemination channels can be adapted to alternative HE settings, and thus have the potential to reconceptualise HE marketing practice beyond *Lorem*.

## 1.5 Summary

In this chapter I have described my initial motivation and development of ideas for this research, coming from my position as a marketing professional who has transitioned from a commercial travel to the HE sector. I have discussed tensions I have encountered between enacting upon corporately directed universal approaches to the creation of promotional messages, which causes tensions with academic staff who see their subject and messaging needs as different from core practice. I have also considered how the dominant practice of segmentation can unintentionally miss academically capable audiences. I have presented a theorisation of alternative approaches to servicing these promotional requirements, using a conceptual framework which triangulates marginalised subjects, students in an elite institution, named here as *Lorem*. In this framework, marginalised subjects are represented by arts and humanities subjects, and marginalised students are represented by students whose education was provided outside of high-achieving private and state schools, and /or are not immediate school leavers. While it is possible to consider the course and student needs separately, in defining the research problem through this triangulation, the interconnected political, economic, social and technological drivers of HE recruitment promotion has led me to theorise about how core practice can create marginalisation. In considering that the same drivers affect both subjects and students, I have also theorised about the possibility of there being a joint solution through alternative approaches to promotion. I have outlined the possibilities for a new approach to practice and promotional resource design, and the key aims and objectives in

seeking this. I have concluded this chapter with a brief outline of the thesis structure, aligned with the core phases of DBR.

## **2 Influential factors in the construction of HE promotional messages**

I have provided my motivations for this research based on my experience as a marketing practitioner in HE, and I have also presented a theorisation of new undergraduate promotional practices where a joint solution is sought for the interconnected recruitment problems of marginalised students and marginalised subjects. For the purposes of this thesis, subject and student marginalisation is triangulated from an elite university perspective. My aims and objectives focus on the provision of practical solutions to the promotional representation of marginalisation in the pre-applicant phase, and the facilitating of an extended institution-student relationship. Through a review of literatures, I identify key political, economic, social and technological environmental factors which help contribute to my framing of marginalisation. These factors advance my initial theorisation and generate ideas for alternative approaches to responsible promotion, particularly in relation to demystifying promotional texts and democratising access to content. I conclude this chapter with my research questions.

### **2.1 Political and economic factors**

The first set of literatures under this broad heading consider commercial pressures placed upon universities to compete in a global marketplace. These factors are influential in HE use of mass marketing techniques, including promotional packaging and market segmentation to target specific audiences. They also look at how the UK government influences HE recruitment strategy, and as a consequence promotional messaging, through its long-term social and economic policy. Policy influence includes a drive to improve UK-domiciled diversity within the undergraduate student body through fair access schemes, which raises issues for market segmentation and message construction in relation to institutional core strategy. I conclude this group of literatures with commentary on the requirements for responsible recruitment providing a balance between commercial pressures and strong student/institution relationships.

### 2.1.1 Commercial pressures

Marketing practice within HE can be a contentious issue (Çetin, 2003; Maringe & Gibbs, 2009; Nedbalová, Greenacre & Schulz, 2014 ), seen as moving universities towards a mass market commercial world (Molesworth, Nixon & Scullion, 2009; Khanna, Jacob & Yadav, 2014; Guilbault, 2016) where education is for sale (Gill, 2007) and institutions increasingly compete for students. Recruitment activities include the production of printed and online promotional materials, and recruitment events such as HE fairs and open days. Nevertheless, marketing is acknowledged to be a necessary recruitment activity within HE in the face of an encroaching globally commercial environment (Gyure & Arnold, 2008; Vander Schee, 2010). Universities may consider their marketing requirements as distanced from tactics employed by commercial enterprises owing to the nature of the student/institution relationship, but massification of HE places pressure on institutions to adopt a competitive stance (Ng & Forbes, 2009). Tensions persist between economic drivers, government policy, and the desire to maintain academic integrity (Ashcroft & Foreman-Peck, 1995; Gibbs, 2001a; Brown, 2006; Giroux, 2007; Molesworth *et al*, 2009). These can cause an imbalance between the articulation of the transformative benefits of a good quality education, such as well educated citizens aiding democracy and inclusion in society (Small, 2013; Williams, 2016) and the more instrumental orientation towards a vocational advantage and personal wealth (Shankar & Fitchett, 2002; Bok, 2003; Giroux, 2007). There is market pressure to foreground instrumental goals through promoting the potential for ‘social mobility in the form of individual employability, increased earnings and job security’ (Williams, 2016, p.620), without necessarily encouraging students to understand how they are also making a contribution to the public good (Giroux, 2007; Maringe & Gibbs, 2009; Molesworth *et al*, 2009). In promotional messaging terms there is concern that the public good ‘seems to have lost its primary appeal, to be replaced by individual personal benefit’ (Maringe & Gibbs, 2009, p.9), and human capital is prioritised as a motivator of study (Gibbs, 2001; Shankar & Fitchett, 2002; Carù & Cova, 2003; Ball, 2004), without a broader understanding that ‘objective knowledge outcomes which can be used to reap a national economic

return' (Williams, 2016, p.619). The commoditisation of HE in this manner risks shifting the emphasis of student purchase decisions on to time-limited quantifiable value-for-money equations, rather than the intrinsic value of learning and personal transformation beyond the degree period. However, although the transformative powers of HE may be challenged by mass market approaches (Bok, 2003; Molesworth *et al*, 2009), Gibbs (2001a) suggest that this in itself does not have to be considered a real threat as 'surely the mere use of the word "mass" indicates it is a public good' (*ibid*, p.89).

When the language of marketing is adopted by HE, universities become 'suppliers' or 'service providers', students become 'customers' or 'consumers' within segmented 'target audiences', and courses become 'products' within an extended 'service encounter'. While there are concerns over whether these are appropriate attributions within an HE context, Guilbault (2016) believes that instead of continuing to debate whether students are indeed customers, it is now more appropriate to consider how best to treat them as such 'and not lose academic integrity' (p. 137). Marketing aids the fulfilment of student recruitment requirements as established within university policy and planning and promotes HE products to the collective target audience via a package of promotional activities within the 'service marketing mix'. A common explanation for the contents of this mix is the 'seven Ps' mnemonic; product, price, promotion, place, people, process and physical evidence (Kotler & Armstrong, 2007; Kotler & Keller, 2008, Nedbalová *et al*, 2014). While contrived, this device is useful to illustrate the scope of marketing to touch all aspects of a university, including how the institution is presented, what is being 'sold', and by whom. Although I am primarily focused on 'promotion' and its role in brokering a relationship and servicing a recruitment transaction, this is not without recognition of the role of 'people' who aid the dissemination and understanding of the promotional messages. When seen through the concept of 'touchpoints' (Kotler & Armstrong, 2007; Chaffey, 2006; Kotler & Keller, 2008, Khanna *et al*, 2014) promotional methods and channels of distribution include not only specifically created promotional

material, as commonly demonstrated by prospectuses and websites (*ibid*, 2014), but also personal interactions with the organisation and its people. Gyure & Arnold (2001) state that ‘In more sophisticated circumstances the student recruitment campaign is an integrated part of a holistic enrolment management effort’ and that there should be an ‘institution-wide proactive attitude towards service’ (p.36). Khanna *et al* (2014) suggest that students encounter touchpoints in three stages; pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase. It is feasible for tutors and non-marketing administrative staff to be fore-grounded in each of these stages even if they do not consider themselves part of the marketing remit, as once promotion has facilitated an interaction, the formation of a student/institution relationship can commence (Gyure & Arnold, 2001). Interactions on a more personal level, between students and university personnel, can be used to assess suitability of a contractual arrangement for both parties, including academic merit, and the likely value to be derived from on-campus service attributes (Woodall, Hiller & Resnick, 2014). In principle this spreads the responsibility of marketing to all employees (Çetin, 2003, Guilbault, 2016), as everyone has contact with, or some duty of care towards, the students (Ashcroft & Foreman-Peck, 1995) to provide ‘accurate information and meaningful counsel’ (Gyure & Arnold, 2001, p.40). In reality, institutional expectation of shared responsibilities is unlikely to elicit such a response unless it is embedded within the organisational culture (Vander Schee, 2010). By participating in promotional activities within the service marketing mix, and being responsible for a student interaction at a touchpoint, irrespective of institutional or academic distancing from the concept (Nedbalová *et al*, 2014, Guilbault, 2016), it is impossible for universities and its people not to be engaged in marketing.

### **2.1.2 Market segmentation**

Undergraduate entry requirements serve as an audience filter to ensure only students who are academically capable of studying at HE are able to participate (McCaig, 2015). Further identification of specific groups of students as target audiences at institutional and subject level

allows for the application of more sophisticated market segmentation techniques (Kotler & Keller, 2008; Maringe & Gibbs, 2009). Prevalent in elite institutions, there is underlying competition for the best students, which allows them to focus on a market segment dominated by privileged students, taking a 'selective' stance for routinely oversubscribed courses. Selection permits universities to adopt market positioning strategies to ensure consumers are aware of quality and prestige (Nedbalová *et al*, 2014), targeting only the highest achieving students. Universities and courses with lesser demand, compete for recruitment. Bennett and Kane (2014) suggest that the selecting or recruiting demarcation may be outmoded, and that the situation is now more fluid. However, they also recognise that over time the positioning of institutional types via temporal markers such as league tables has not shifted significantly in relation to each other (*ibid*, 2014) and so for the most part the binary concept of selecting or recruiting remains useful in conceiving the effects of supply and demand, and determining approaches to audience segmentation.

Frequently seen amongst the subsets of subjects classified as 'recruiting' are non-vocational courses e.g. arts and humanities, in competition with their vocational, professional and technical counterparts, which can affect how they are perceived when messages are moderated to foreground instrumental objectives for HE study. The need for a return on student investment in relation to graduate salary places additional pressure on arts and humanities subjects to justify the employment worth. In defending the arts as a broad public good, the Arts Council England in their 2014 evidence review acknowledged the difficulties of moving beyond the economic impact and towards the positive societal impact claimed through social wellbeing, health and education. Small (2013) mounted a pluralistic defence of the humanities citing that their critical and philosophical reflection are indispensable to intellectual understanding of the field beyond technical competence, as well as having intrinsic value for democracy, shifting away from the need for an instrumental purpose. Nevertheless, arts and humanities courses are placed in a comparative situation alongside subjects with more overtly obvious career paths and perceived or real higher graduate salaries. This situation

raises implications for segmentation in identifying where demand exists, or could exist if promotional messages were crafted and targeted effectively. Although it may be considered that the adoption of this commercially influenced approach to segmentation supersedes goals and values embedded within the traditions of intellectual transformation, arts and humanities promotion must be adapted to suit students motivated by the opportunity to realise significant long term financial gain through attaining a degree.

Within the widest possible pool of potential students, there will be multiple personas, each with differing needs and understandings. However, in market segmentation practice, assumptions are made about the receptiveness of homogeneous groups of students for whom promotional messages are tailored, albeit based on market research. In their discussions on the nature of identity Cribb (1998), Gewirtz & Cribb (2009) and Bauman & Vecchi (2004) bring to our attention issues of complexity and fluidity, and the problems which are caused by society's tendency to group by stereotype, a necessity in marketing segmentation. Bauman & Vecchi (2004) tells us that identity comes from the two main communities, of external life influences and internal ideas, while Cribb (1998) places the emphasis on an individual's experience. Gewirtz and Cribb (2009) urge us to distinguish between roles and identities; a role is what we are and what we want to become whereas identity is who we think we are and who we want to become. Gerwtiz & Cribb's versions of 'roles' and 'identities' resonate with Archer *et al* (2003), who cite identity as an integral part of the decision-making process to participate in HE. All contributors to this discussion agree that individual agency in constructing identities is constrained by society structures (of which market segmentation is one) which impose ordered hierarchies or categories.

For HEIs operating with a quasi-business model (Çetin, 2003; Khanna *et al*, 2014, Nedbalová, *et al*, 2014; Woodall *et al*, 2014), restricting promotion to the core market segment can be largely a matter of financial and operational feasibility. Economies of scale make it difficult to accommodate individual preferences, and so heterogeneous identities are grouped by trait, such as high-achieving

students. It is common practice for HEIs to create homogenised messages (for example prospectuses and websites) and controlled meetings (for example open days and offer-holder events) to give a holistic overview of the institution. This institutional homogenisation of subject presentation ignores the different audiences, and so all constituents are potentially left to make personalised decisions on information created for one core segment. However, promotional messages made democratically accessible online, present interesting challenges for market segmentation. If mass marketing is for the public good (Gibbs, 2001a), then it becomes conceivable that messages tailored for one audience may be of wider benefit when made democratically available to other audiences such as WP students.

The identification of WP students is a form of market segmentation, where the audience is determined by socio-economic status, prior academic under-achievement, ethnicity and age. The terminology and defining characteristics encompass students who in other literatures and media resources might also be termed as 'non-traditional' or 'under-represented'. This defining and labelling of categories permitted me to form an understanding of the targets of WP interventions in relation to 'elite' institutions. However, it is also possible to view the labelling process as stigmatising the individual and a section of society judged to be less than normal. As Leathwood and Connell (2003) discuss, WP exists because there is a 'normal'. They argue that the ideal situation of normalising entry to HE for WP students is derived from a 'fantasy of classlessness.' (*ibid* p.599) which in marketing terms would challenge the need for market segmentation. The process of market segmentation reinforces a stratified system as it identifies the likely beneficiaries of the policy and permits alternative entry arrangements such as flexible admissions. My position on the current WP initiatives is to consider the implications in the context of market segmentation, without devaluing them.

By their very nature WP students would be under-represented or missing in the promotional messages of selecting institutions and courses as they are not considered the core audience based on

A-level tariff. However, in accord with a holistic approach (McKinlay *et al*, 1996; Jones & Thomas, 2005; Gill, 2007) such demarcation should not exist within HE marketing, as diversity of student population should be embedded within core university operations. Nevertheless, traditional route students are persuaded to participate in HE by the inherent knowledge of their socio-cultural backgrounds, whereas WP students are targeted with special measures such as outreach programmes. Aspiration-raising interventions are predominantly aimed at school leavers who fill ‘gifted and talented’ and ‘first in the family’ criteria, and who are within the traditional market’s own age group, though in representing a broad definition of diversity, other groups need to be given space.

The challenge of segmentation and the problem of marketing imposed structures (Archer *et al*, 2003; Bauman & Vecchi, 2004; Gewirtz & Cribb, 2009) can be exemplified by using mature students as a target audience. Although the primary defining factor for this group might be age, it may be considered that the choices faced by mature learners can transcend all others segmented by socio-economic group, disability, ethnicity and prior-academic attainment. Mature students may fill one or more of these other criteria but, by definition, only physical age will permit the attribution of ‘mature student’. For mature students the fundamental choice of whether or not to attend university is still as pertinent as for other groups, but shifts in personal circumstances, for example career, family or mortgage, may also signify a change in capability (Thomas, 2001; Reay *et al*, 2002; Bradwell, 2009). Their delayed entry to university is just one of the criteria that earn them the non-traditional label, but narratives of the diversity of life-experience gained between school and HE is lacking within recruitment texts. In pursuing recommended market segmentation techniques (Kotler & Keller, 2008; Maringe & Gibbs, 2009) it would be necessary to provide markedly different messages for mature students, but this in turn becomes problematic in terms of marketing personnel resource limitations within institutions (Vander Schee, 2010). Nevertheless, by exemplifying typical profiles of mature students, whose personal circumstances may well resonate with school leavers’

own backgrounds, it is possible to see recruitment messages that start to present diversity as a norm. This approach could equally be applied to other diversity sub-groups which would help de-homogenise core messages for traditional markets with a view to widening-access in line with UK government policy.

### **2.1.3 The need for UK-domiciled diversity**

The government interest in undergraduate recruitment in HE includes the health and wealth of the nation's workforce and, by extension, the economy. Over a number of years, successive governments have sought to provide fair access to HE for all who are capable of study at this level, promoting social justice through increasing social mobility (Williams, 2016). Policies and reports include *Strategies for Widening Participation in Higher Education: A Guide to Good Practice* (HEFCE, 2001), *The Future of Higher Education* (DfES, 2003), *The Missing 3000: State School Students Under-Represented at Leading Universities* (Sutton Trust, 2004), *Higher Education: the Fair Access Challenge* (SMCPC, 2013); and *National Strategy for Access and Student Success in Higher Education* (BIS, 2014). The policies which govern fair access come under the HE policy umbrella term 'widening participation' (WP), encompassing the terms 'non-traditional route' and 'under-represented'. WP policy seeks to widen the diversity of backgrounds of students who attend university so that they are more broadly representative of the home population than currently exists within the student body. The typical 'under-represented' student is defined as any combination of non-white, working-class, low-achieving, state school student, with or without normal entry level grades and/or mature (Tett, 2000; Bowl, 2001; Thomas, 2001, 2002; Reay, Ball & David, 2002; Reay, David & Ball, 2005; Jones & Thomas, 2005; Archer, 2007; Layer, 2009), though Gorard's analysis of statistical data (2008) suggests that scrutinising these parameters might in fact reveal the 'traditional' student as being in the minority. This idea has been perpetuated in the HE press more recently such as depicted in the Telegraph's headline '*White males now classed as a "minority group" at university*' (Henry, 2012).

In their strategic plan 2006-2011, HEFCE stated that WP is ‘vital for both social justice and economic competitiveness’ (HEFCE, 2008, p.19). The government stance on widening access in the UK has led to the requirement, though not necessarily an overt declaration of desire, for elite universities to actively seek out non-traditional students with a view to improving recruitment from diverse student audiences (DfES, 2003; HEFCE, 2008; Milburn, 2012; SMCPC, 2013). This in effect has created a distinct, but non-core, market segment of undergraduate recruitment in the UK. The *UCAS demand report 2013* states that ‘Demand for higher education from young people is at or near record levels’ and that ‘Application rates for young, disadvantaged groups have increased to new highs in England’. This suggests that either there is no particular problem within HE recruitment and therefore marketing must be working, or that recruitment is working irrespective of marketing activities. However, there continue to be concerns about the lack of diversity of the UK-domiciled student body (Milburn, 2012; SMCPC, 2013) which will affect the UK’s future as a knowledge-based economy where fair access to HE is required to aid economic growth. In this way WP is an integral part of a wider human capital strategy (Collini, 2010; Holmwood, 2011, Williams, 2016) to increase participation from a cross-section of the national population with the potential to contribute positively to society and the economy.

The human capital theme has continued in subsequent policy, review and strategy documents, (Browne, 2010; Milburn, 2012; BIS, 2014). The economic drivers encourage institutions to tailor promotional messages for students choosing HE for the ‘graduate premium’ (Davies, Qiu, & Davies; 2014) of increased employment potential, with a subtext of future personal wealth greater than can be achieved by not attending. Critics of this human capital approach suggest that WP policy is being used, at least in part, as a tool to replace the welfare state (Lauder, Brown & Dillabough, 2006), and comes at the expense of ‘intellectual development, equal democratic citizenship and broader social goods’ (Walker, 2009, p.233). Nevertheless, WP policy has helped to define new target audiences and growth markets, with a consistent message of the improved

chances of employability worthy of graduate status as gauged by employer needs and specifications, viewed from a position of ‘social mobility.’

However, there are still lingering concerns as revealed in Milburn (2012), showing that capable students from WP backgrounds are not choosing elite universities. Within this ‘diverse’ group are the ‘missing 3000’ as termed by The Sutton Trust (2004) and referred to within *University Challenge: How Higher Education Can Advance Social Mobility and Child Poverty* (Milburn 2012) and *Higher Education: the Fair Access Challenge* (SMCPC, 2013). The missing 3000 refers to the approximate number of students, predominantly from state schools, who are deemed each year to be over-qualified for their choice of course and institution. For reasons beyond the remit of the SMCPC report, these students did not seek places in elite institutions for which they had acquired the necessary grades but instead gravitated towards post-1992 institutions. Furthermore, critical discourse analysis conducted by McCaig (2015) showed a shift in the recruitment language used by post-1992 institutions away from the accessibility traditions of vocation and inclusivity, and towards employability and the professions. This raises the possibility that both pre- and post-1992 institutions are targeting the same core audience, further alienating those identified within WP policy. Choice and the resulting student experience are common themes within WP literatures (Bowl, 2001; Thomas, 2001; Reay *et al*, 2002). They speak of barriers to participation for cultural, social and economic reasons, though happily they include many accounts of success, epitomised by *‘It’s taking me a long time but I’ll get there in the end’* (Reay *et al*, 2002).

In considering WP students as a target audience for elite institutions where the highest achieving students are the core audience, the impact in the classroom must be considered. Different levels of prior attainment upon entry to HE can cause disparities in the ability to engage with academic discourse (Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1991; Northedge, 2003a, 2003b; Otten, 2003). These negative attributes may be overcome by assimilation into the new environment and the process of acculturation, (O’Neill & Cullingford, 2005; Gill, 2007; Gu, Schweisfurth & Day, 2010). To assist

with acculturation, universities generally provide a suite of ‘problem specific’ services covering such issues as academic support, financial hardship and mental health, a provision in part supported by Mckinlay, Pattinson & Gross (1996), who see them as improving the student experience, but raise concerns over inter-agency communication and structure. While supporting services are promoted as part of the ‘student package’, by nature they are utilised to resolve issues rather than to establish preventative measures (Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1991).

#### **2.1.4 Moderation of messages**

Commercial pressures and UK government HE policy inevitably have an impact on promotional messages. Aspects affected include pricing<sup>3</sup>, fair access to modest income students, A-level tariff sanctions and transparent provision of mandatory comparative data, for example KIS (see Section 2.2.4). Global competition has led to the presentation of degrees as discrete time-limited packages, typically three years, with the end benefits of learning realised through lucrative careers. This is at odds with notions of lifelong learning (Maringe & Gibbs, 2009) and HE as a personal and transformational experience (Booth, McLean & Walker, 2009) whereby long-term citizenship values are granted more space than a simplistic alignment with graduate career goals. The commercial contexts in which the dominant promotional practices have been allowed to develop may have unintended consequences for how students make their course and institutional decisions, choosing a financially rewarding career pathway over one which may provide deeper personal satisfaction. Alternative messages could be crafted to convey an open-ended learning opportunity, with the acquisition of a degree as a temporal marker in the acquisition of skills and knowledge required to progress along chosen career pathways. It remains important that promotional messages

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<sup>3</sup> As of 2015 the UK government are considering lifting the £9,000 fee cap, linking it instead to inflation for institutions that can demonstrate that they offer high-quality teaching via the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), allowing them further freedom to exercise strategies in respect of premium pricing. This situation is currently fluid.

‘make only promises that can be kept, and discourage claims that are inaccurate or unrealistic (Gyure & Arnold, 2001, p.42).

Within the literatures I have identified two key factors affecting modern marketing of HE which moderate the public account HEIs can make of themselves through their features and benefits. The first is demonstrated through the concept of ‘value-for-money’ whereby a consumer considering an investment makes a personal assessment of risk (Archer & Hutchings, 2000; Archer *et al* 2003) of what it is to sacrifice time and money, or loss of potential earnings, against the expectation of derived value and private return on investment in a course of education (Williams, 2016). There is an encroaching consumer trend to quantify the taught components of a degree programme (Coughlan, 2009a, 2009b, 2010) by deriving a price per contact hour using a simplistic formula of tuition fees divided by official contact hours. This may be influenced by government-enforced Key Information Sets (KIS), informed in part by student satisfaction as recorded in the NSS, requiring that universities be statistically accountable across a range of comparative measures, for example contact hours by subject and institution, tuition fees and average alumni salary six months after graduation. The addition of salary expectation allows the initial value-for-money formula to be extended to a return-on-investment calculation based on expectations of earnings while offsetting the cost of tuition fees and the discharging of student debt. These simplistic equations take no account of the quality of teaching<sup>4</sup>, different modes of delivery between subjects or the importance of autonomous learning. Contact hours when considered as a ‘feature’ of a university course belie the benefits of HE’s transformative properties, and the graduates’ increased abilities to achieve lifelong goals as a result of their tuition and their self-guided learning.

While there are many other benefits to employment, KIS data and other comparative tables present graduate salary as a key benefit and set up the application to study transaction to be considered in

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<sup>4</sup> The Department for Business Innovation and Skills has proposed the implementation of the TEF in a phased approach commencing 2016/17 which will provide students with additional comparative data on the quality of HE teaching.

personal financial terms. In turn, the presentation of information encourages students to have consumer-orientated levels of expectations (Hazelcorn, 2008) in exchange for their time and tuition fees, which can be quantifiable in terms of increased earning potential. Although this human capital approach is undoubtedly a feature of government investment in HE, it is not the only desirable outcome. However, other intrinsic purposes such as social capital or democratic citizenship (Walker, 2003; Maringe & Gibbs, 2009; Williams, 2016) and extension of knowledge bases somehow get lost amidst messages of more individually focused benefits, even though there is evidence that some students have an interest in this outcome (Ahier, Beck & Moore, 2003; McLean, Abbas & Ashwin, 2013; McLean, 2015).

The second factor which I consider moderates the marketing message is the inability to guarantee that students will successfully complete an award or secure compatible graduate level employment in exchange for the 'rare purchase' and 'expensive decision' (Dill & Soo, 2005) that correlates to students' investment of time and fees. In effect this limits what a university can say about itself and its degrees, and directs its marketing messages towards elements more within its control such as its staff and campuses. Academic quality is closely regulated, but attainment of learning outcomes is subject to the variables of academic preparedness and sustained scholarly commitment of individual students (Thomas, 2002; Yorke & Longdon, 2008), and indeed changes to personal circumstances during the period of study. As Maringe & Gibbs (2009) state, students may make an HE purchase decision as they would a tangible good, but their rights are not equivalent to those within the normal purchase process, particularly as so much effort is required on the part of the purchaser.

The two moderating factors of 'value-for-money' and 'no guaranteed outcome' combined require institutions to construct cautious messages about academic attainment. This risks distraction from their core educational offer by the portrayal of the wider social and environmental experiences as showcased by extra-curricular activities and the physical environment. This is not to say that these extras are not capable of delivering transformative properties but they are peripheral to the core

product of study. Seen in this light it becomes more logical to consider easier to guarantee features and benefits of university life through promoting the ‘student experience’.

### **2.1.5 Promoting the student experience**

Complementary to universities’ core learning and teaching activity, and an intrinsic part of the greater student experience, is the student lifestyle, derived from campuses, accommodation and a social scene (Harvey, 2006; Watson, 2006), which may or may not be connected to curricular activities. In broad terms, student choice can be considered a personal rationalisation of competing demands which individuals will have identified in the decision-making process. The choice involves not only which course and institution, but also whether to choose university at all (Milburn, 2012). The term ‘student experience’ resulting from the decision to attend university can encompass physical attributes such as the campus and accommodation (Mehdizadeh & Scott, 2005) teaching and learning (Otten, 2003; Northedge, 2003a; Watson, 2006), peripheral services such as financial support (Bowl, 2001), psychological adjustment (Furnham & Bochner, 1986; Furnham, 2004; Cullingford & Gunn, 2004) engagement with academic discourse (Sandhu and Asrabadi, 1991; Northedge, 2003a, 2003b; Otten, 2003) and social life (Bochner *et al*, 1977; Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1991). The student experience becomes packaged and presented in an experiential style, where the routine of structured teaching and learning, and discipline and solitude of personal study is masked by a showcase of campus, facilities and social possibilities. Carù and Cova (2003) are particularly troubled by the idea of marketing an experience where even the ordinary act of study is made to appear extraordinary, which sees information peppered with superlatives set to excite and heighten anticipation. Such strategies have the potential to detract from more routine encounters. Idealistic portrayals of social life without the counterbalance of realistic periods of self-guided study, and possibly isolation and hardship (Furnham & Bochner, 1986; Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1991, Bowl, 2001; Reay *et al*, 2002), can have an artificial influence on student choice to attend HE. With an institutional homogeneous approach to marketing, courses are likely to be promoted in ways

optimised for dominant subjects and audiences. With differing attributes and audiences, courses might be better served with a heterogeneous approach to build relationships where they can support nuanced student needs.

I believe that in promoting these aspects, university recruitment campaigns share attributes with destination marketing practice and the images used to ‘sell’ the student experience are carefully chosen and framed to depict perfect campuses, happy, confident students, modern facilities and safe environments. Crook and Light (2002) identify that prospectuses employ ‘accessible representations’ of universally ‘reassuring’ images (p.157-159), and that learning is depicted as social and active, and students as ‘decidedly upbeat’ (*ibid.* p.159). Study as a solitary and challenging activity is seldom, if ever, visually represented, perhaps risking the implication that successful graduation is easily attained through a range of social and fun encounters. It is feasible to consider that, from a student perspective, the pursuit of a university degree adopts the form of an extended sojourn, where the single act of study is enhanced by many other more leisurely pursuits and social encounters. It is in this way that prospectuses mirror aspects of holiday brochures allowing university life to be portrayed as relaxing and social, belying the need for long hours of independent study.

The student as ‘sojourner’ is a theme explored within international student literatures (Bochner *et al*, 1977; Furnham & Bochner, 1986) applied to students who choose to study away from home, or step outside their regular lives for a finite period of time. In describing students as sojourners, Bochner *et al* (1997) lead us to a parallel between HE and travel that has its roots in the Grand Tour when nobility and landed gentry travelled in Europe for a cultural and social education. I find it helpful to consider this term for students in general as they insert a finite period of HE study between compulsory education and careers to live a temporary packaged lifestyle. The parallels of an educational sojourn and packaging prove useful in analysing university promotional messages and institutional employment of the service marketing mix (see Section 2.1.1). The purchase of

travel, like HE, is part of the service sector where goods are experiential and intangible.

Anticipation of the experience is mediated by ‘sales pitch’ which includes imagery, verbal and written communication, ranking and reputation. The meeting of expectations is dependent on purchaser needs and wants, as understood by suppliers. The decision-making process shares common factors with travel including the choice of destination (overseas or domestic), ranking and reputation (league tables and student surveys), value-added components (facilities and non-core opportunities) and choosing something familiar or unknown. Extending the parallel, there are exclusive destinations for the wealthy and social elite, and there are destinations with less prestigious reputations which are more accessible in terms of affordability.

Literatures identifying the student experience as an educational sojourn (Bochner *et al*, 1977; Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1991; Otten, 2003;) identified why travel industry tactics might be an unhelpful approach to some markets within HE. As the core feature of the sojourn is an extended period of study, it is essential for students to consider the non-core products which add to the physical and emotional comfort, sociability and safety in accordance with their personal value systems. Without doubt these additional aspects can be appealing, but it is necessary to provide an appropriate balance given the pressures on students to become successful graduates. There will always be a contingent of students who are perfectly comfortable with all aspects of university life and who are academically capable and confident and can study hard and play hard; yet marketing the social aspects and visually juxtaposing messages of leisure, sociability, tranquillity and enjoyment against written texts of curriculum content may inadvertently be sending out the wrong message. That is not to say that the social aspects of university are not important, only that they should not overshadow the academic side. The glamorous packaging borrowed from destination marketing (see Appendix 1) might allow potential students to become distracted from the core activity of study as there is a danger that it might deter those who are not able to identify themselves in such marketing constructs, and adversely affect their decision-making process.

### **2.1.6 Responsible promotion to marginalised audiences**

The Government states there must be ‘... more flexible ways of learning that attract people with different demands and commitments’, and that ‘As more people from non-traditional backgrounds go into HE we must make sure that they are well-served when they get there’ (DfES, 2003a, p.63). Thus universities are charged with breaking down the barriers to participation in pursuit of non-traditional/WP or the ‘new’ students (Leathwood & O’Connell, 2003), who become a segmented target audience for recruitment initiatives. Courses can be packaged with a range of peripheral services to enhance the core proposition. Visual depictions of diversity are readily identified through ethnic mix, although socio-economic differences are more difficult to depict. Mature and disabled student representation is more frequently reserved for specific targeted services separate from the general population.

Barriers identified within WP research to which responsible promotional messages need to respond, include lack of information about opportunities (Archer, Hutchings & Ross, 2003), gaps in funding knowledge and potential personal economic benefits (DfES, 2003a), low prior academic attainment, work and family commitments (Bowl, 2001), a disinclination to travel outside the immediate locality (Gates, Coward, & Byrom, 2007), and a sense of feeling out of place (Reay, Crozier & Clayton, 2009a, 2009b). WP policies are intended to provide support mechanisms to overcome these barriers. The associated recruitment initiatives include the general awareness-raising of outreach work, provision of access and foundation courses, and flexible admissions policies with adjusted entry requirements to take account of future potential in addition to or *in lieu* of prior attainment. Criticisms exist for many of these strategies, not least because they make students the problem (Thomas, 2001, 2002), and take little account of the need for change within the university (Coles & Fraser, 2002; Leathwood & O’Connell, 2003; Jones and Thomas, 2005 Shaw, Brain, Bridger, Foreman & Reid, 2007). Initiatives which bend the rules, for example flexible admissions which permit lower than publicised entry qualifications, allow non-traditional students a taste of

what it is to live in a privileged world, without necessarily having the cultural, economic or social capital to assimilate the lifestyle or indeed enjoy the experience to the full. It remains that systematic under-representation needs to be addressed in recruitment marketing.

Some of the student services include the facilitation of the ubiquitous social aspects that a 'dynamic' and 'thriving' campus might afford. However, the social side of the student experience does not automatically become accessible on account of participation in the educational components of HE (Bowl, 2001; Reay *et al*, 2005). Gill (2007) describes a set of coping strategies and adaptation based on the institutional potential to facilitate networks and support, including cultural orientation, collaborative learning, and developing networking skills and competence. Gill views this process of adaptation as 'intercultural learning', but stresses that the institution must provide a 'facilitative environment' for this to occur (*ibid*). Jones and Thomas (2003) 'transformative model' encourages universities to take a holistic view of non-traditional participation and to embed WP within their core operations. This model is comparable to those used within adult education, emphasising the maxim that non-traditional students have non-traditional learning needs (Thomas, 2001). The marketing challenge for WP becomes to provide messages which speak credibly to individuals who have no particular sense of their identity as framed by WP policy or by the homogenised marketing content aimed at the core market. Bennett & Kane (2014) identified that the reading of texts by students preparing for a career 'may have quite different interpretations than a student whose primary reason for being at university is based on intellectual curiosity' (*ibid*, p.136). In reality, the social provision may be given over by the institution to the Student's Union (SU), which although invoked in corporate marketing messages, provides semi-autonomous and entirely optional social activities. It may be considered that the SU also has responsibility to ensure that social activities and support are representative of the student body.

It must be accepted that HE is not for everybody and the minimum entry requirements can be viewed as both a barrier to participation and a gatekeeper of academic capability. Griffiths (1998)

suggests that true equity may not in fact be the most sensible goal for student diversity and instead we should strive for ‘distributive justice’ which takes needs and incremental benefits of recipients into account; put into practice, recruiting those who would not thrive in an HE environment for the sake of equity of representation may result in unintended negative consequences of participation. Gyure & Arnold (2001) state that honesty and sincerity is significant in promotional accounts to ensure a healthy student/institution relationship, and that a ‘contrived relationship is potentially as dangerous as the use of misinformation to pressure a commitment’ (p. 46). Yet despite the presentation of opportunities for everyone who is academically capable, it remains that those people who are eliminated in a personal response to barriers, perceived or real, are more likely to come from those segments of society labelled as ‘WP’ (Milburn, 2012), and that flexibility in entry policy is likely to be greatest in universities unable to declare ‘elite’ status.

## **2.2 Social and technological factors**

My next set of literatures helps to frame how students access and interpret promotional messages. I first turned to material in art history and semiotics literatures relating to the reception of advertising and persuasive messaging, starting with Berger’s seminal work ‘*Ways of Seeing*’ (1972) and Barthes’ ‘*Mythologies*’ (1957), read in translation through Lavers (1972). However, as attitudes to the reception of information are shifting in response to technology-enabled information-seeking, I also consider the reception of online content and its potential influential on how students can come to shared understandings of content through interaction with fellow information-seekers.

### **2.2.1 Towards a shared understanding of promotional texts.**

Art critic Berger (1972) tells us that advertising is to make people envious, and literary theorist and semiotician Barthes (1972) that advertising is only as effective as an individual’s reading of the message being aligned with the author intent. Both of these positions cause problems for HE marketing. The end result of having a degree may be a prestigious career, possibly creating ‘envy’ (Berger, 1972) either directly or indirectly through the opportunities made possible by the career,

but the acquisition of a degree or a career is not guaranteed (see Section 2.1.4). Furthermore, the misreading of messages may result in non-participation of those who are capable and would benefit, or in a dissatisfactory contract where an alternative choice may have been preferable for one or both parties. Berger says ‘The way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe...we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves’ (*ibid*, 1972, p.8-9). Although he focuses on the messages within images, the idea of filtering new information according to personal context works for other sensory stimuli, including audio and textual narrative. If our understanding of image, narrative or speech is shaped by our own beliefs, experiences, perception, socio-linguistic structures and value systems, it follows that this understanding is subject to multiple nuances and may differ, from person to person (Bakhtin, 1998; Morgan, 2007, Bennett & Kane, 2014). We contextualise, store, use and develop received information, making it our own. We also choose whether or not to pass it on. Each time knowledge is communicated, it is subject to alteration, memory recall and therefore distortion and corruption by the receiver of the information, irrespective of the communicator’s intended meaning. In this way what constitutes knowledge exists internally in the individual in a fluid state, and is unique to the individual owing to the subtle variations brought on by contextualisation and knowledge transfer.

That knowledge is individual could be presented as problematic to marketing in its needs to create homogenised messages of collective appeal. Berger (1972) believes we live in a state of flux between who we are and who we want to be, and we either strive to improve our position or remain envious of others. He argues that the function of publicity ‘...is to propose to each one of us that we are not yet enviable – yet could be.’ (*ibid* p.149). Berger offers a strongly instrumental response to publicity, one which assumes that we are motivated by the acquisition of items of value and that envy of others can be overcome through consumerism. In HE terms this consumerist approach contrasts with social justice and citizenship roles of education whereby personal transformation for the benefit of many is offered alongside the opportunity for greater personal wealth and symbolic

capital. Berger therefore offers a lens through which to view university brands and marketing messages, with 'having a degree' (Molesworth et al, 2009) as a product to be envied.

Placed simplistically in an HE context, envy is framed in two ways; the social aspect of being a student, and the perceived and real empowerment of knowledge acquisition. Students are to be envied for their acceptance into a competitive and discerning institution, and a community which strives for greater employability potential than their non-HE counterparts. Graduates are envied for the assumption that they go on to be successful in their life choices, with the contemporary emphasis being on career and salary as evidenced through human capital approaches (see Section 2.1.3). Yet while Berger's framing assumes a collective understanding of the purpose of HE, and a collective motivation to participate, prospective student communities from diverse backgrounds may not have a uniform response to brands and publicity messages, on account of differing experiences and personal frames of reference through which to filter new information.

The negotiation spaces for construction of meaning can be with the universities, social and family networks or influential others who are willing to share their version of knowledge (see Appendix 4) including through user-generated content in social networks. Considering the vast array of components which go to make up a single institutional student 'package', many of which are peripheral to study, the recruitment information can be complex to navigate even when simply considering what each institution says about itself. This complexity can be exacerbated for students without access to 'grapevine' or 'hot knowledge' generated from trusted and experienced sources including family and friends (Ball & Vincent, 1998). These word-of-mouth messages can temper the coded messages presented by 'cold knowledge' information providers, including the corporately controlled information of HEIs. Knowledge is externalised via the notion of 'shared understanding' co-constructed from individual contributions (Ruth & Houghton, 2009), or as Pace (2008) declares, 'Meaning cannot be totally individualistic, but is shared and created in the daily social agora' (p.214).

HE marketing relies upon the shared understanding and collective response of its largest target audience to whom the core messages are presented, and is not transparently sensitive to those whose identities sit on the margins of Bauman & Vecchi's 'communities' (2004) or Craib's 'experiences' (1998), yet it is here where those who have the ability to participate in HE but lack an appropriately tailored provision are most likely to sit. Shared understanding becomes the mutual externalised 'knowledge', but the knowledge remains fluid as new contexts are applied. Therefore, appealing to all individuals through a marketing strategy tailored for homogenised market segments is an improbability. However, there is the possibility of shared understanding provided that messages are tailored to the needs of discrete market segments, allowing heterogeneous needs to be met in part through homogeneous marketing responses. Thus a new perspective emerges whereby, while it is not possible to directly appeal simultaneously to everyone's nuanced needs, a shared understanding can be gained through presenting information to appeal to smaller market segments. This provides an opportunity to meet marginalised audiences, and the author can better appeal to the shared understanding of the readers. Consideration still needs to be given to the alternative interpretations that individual or shared understandings may bring about, and how reader interpretations can misinterpret the author intent, which I will now consider through the literatures of Reader Response Criticism (RRC).

### **2.2.2 Critical analysis of 'myths' within 'texts'**

Just as Berger's framework allows us to shift our interpretation of images from art to publicity, RRC, pioneered by Barthes, extends the definition of text beyond mere words to images, videos, advertisements, correspondence and situations which can be 'read' (Barthes, 1972). Similarly, in the context of social media, narrative is used to denote not only structured text, but also images, video and user-generated opinion and correspondence (DiMaggio, Hargittai, Neuman & Robinson, 2001; Alexander and Levine, 2008). For the purposes of this research, 'texts' will henceforth be used to

denote all content accessed in the pursuit of information gathering as part of the decision-making process to attend HE.

Barthes believed that texts when viewed as neutral, or at ‘face-value’, could obscure some social, cultural or historical meaning as illustrated in his *Mythologies* essays, and through RRC he encouraged us to penetrate the myths and extract meaning from the practices and ‘trivia’ of everyday life. I find this argument particularly helpful in decoding traditional promotional messages. For example, when applied to Crook and Light’s (2002) research, the images of students captured laughing and socialising becomes a myth constructed by universities to portray relaxed and happy environments, showing an idealised HE environment (see Appendix 1). Marketing convention requires that this position is upheld to be attractive to potential students; there is no intention of deceit, but the bigger picture may be hidden. However, Barthes believed in exposing artificial constructs introduced by those in power, to uncover the primary intent of the author. A simplistic analogy would be to consider whether universities encourage non-traditional students because of a genuine belief in the value of diversity in the student body, or because they are concerned about losing a funding stream and league table ranking points if they do not. This speculation does not form part of the likely student interpretation of marketing-authored recruitment texts, but it could feasibly make a difference to how a university approached attracting non-traditional students through its messages.

Barthes’s *Mythologies* invites us to look critically at promotional texts, including prospectuses, websites, and open days, which are in effect carefully stage-managed events. I have also included user-generated content within social media as a subset of texts to be interpreted, which outside of corporate control, has the opportunity to provide insight of reader interpretation in addition to author intent. Each text has an author with a purpose and an intended meaning, and an audience at liberty to interpret and possibly alter that meaning. Indeed, these platforms encourage personal contextualisation of content which can be interrogated or decoded either individually, or

collectively as part of an online community. The concept of myth can be used as an analytical tool to consider the marketing intent, political motivation and possible alternative demystified texts which could be presented. Atkinson and Coffey's (2004) work on documentary analysis add to Barthes ideas of myth. They record that documents may reflect organisational culture in how they are written, in their content, and what they omit. They also state that documents written for a particular audience or 'subculture' assume an inherent understanding of the text which may inhibit outsider understanding. This leaves HE promotional texts in an awkward position. The entry requirements to become a student assume a certain level of language and meaning-making, but not necessarily the specialist vocabulary of the subject to be studied (Northedge, 2003a). Written texts require a delicate balance; they need to appear academically challenging yet accessible, without negating the discipline of study and undermining the academic rigour of the learning and teaching. Under pressure to have broad market appeal, and with limited resources and the need to work with economies of scale, publicity is positioned for the dominant segment. The texts are mass-produced for the largest sub-segment of the intended audience, resulting in homogenised messages, and clouded meanings for those not yet conversant with the organisational culture.

As McNeill (2010) discusses, in Barthes' eyes each text becomes a sign, which could prompt a philosophical and/or physical response. In marketing terms this equates to the attempt to provoke a 'call to action' or 'event' that signals a positive response to the marketing message by the information seeker. For example, in stating that diversity in the classroom is important, institutions signify that students from all backgrounds are welcome, thus hoping to prompt applications from varied sectors of society. It is socially just to accept all who are academically capable and willing to study hard, but it is questionable whether students are given persuasive messages about why diversity in the classroom might be important and what role they personally have to play. Instead 'diversity' is loaded with meanings expected to be understood by readers; as a mere marketing device the notion of diversity is artificially constructed and in Barthes' eyes it is therefore a 'myth'.

Derived from Barthes' initial work, two conceptual approaches within RRC are of particular interest to this research, and mirror my concerns about never being absolutely certain how marketing messages are interpreted, compromising instead for shared understandings. The 'individualist' approach (Holland, 1975) places the emphasis of meaning-making entirely in the minds of the reader; it does not matter what the author meant, only what the reader infers, which potentially undermines the power of marketing messages. The 'uniformist' approach (Iser, 1972) attempts to balance author meaning with reader inference into a mean interpretation of a text. Applied to HE recruitment texts, until the reader has been identified by engaging in communication with a university, the reader's interpretation of the message can only be assumed (Bakhtin, 1998; Morgan, 2007). The evidence is, eventually, seen in the recruitment and successful progression of the student on the chosen course. Where there is no communication or identifiable interaction, for example through an enquiry or attendance at an open day, the reader remains anonymous and the inference untested. Therefore, in creating promotional messages the uniformist approach, taking the stance that shared meaning can be constructed through negotiated communication, is more useful as it can have a 'mass market' appeal. However, it is not enough to expose myths, as the construction of existing ones has proved successful in recruiting the core target audience for elite HEIs. The process of breaking down myths and reconstructing the exposed messages for marginalised audiences may assist with decoded access to the author intent.

Social media technologies add another dimension to the interpretative process. Social media platforms permit remote readers to engage in an anonymous interrogation process with authors and challenge intent in order to extract further meaning. Groupings within social media can parallel 'interpretive communities' (Fish, 1980) and virtual communities of practice (Wenger 1998, Kimble, Hildreth & White, 2001; Pachler & Daly 2009). RRC applied to social media exchanges can open up the possibility of examining previously anonymous individuals' understandings of marketing material in collaboration with their online communities.

### 2.2.3 Meaning-making within social media

The importance of the internet as an information resource is widely acknowledged (Holmes, Tangey, FitzGibbon, Savage and Mehan, 2001; Pountney, Parr and Whittaker, 2002; Siemens, 2005; Adamic *et al*, 2008). The internet has provided a technological platform on which to extend our curiosity beyond the boundaries of our self- or society-imposed identity, both as passive observers and active contributors, within closed user groups or globally and openly. It offers the opportunity to dabble in other cultures or subcultures, anonymously if we choose, 'So we undergo constant reassessment of who we are and who we want to be' (Gewirtz & Cribb, 2009, p.141). To some degree the internet, in facilitating anonymity, may give individuals the confidence to breach perceived barriers and enter other communities where corporately defined hierarchies would not have placed them. Elitist consumer brands do not prevent non-target audience visits to their websites, though their messaging may serve as a deterrent to taking action.

'Social media' entered our vocabulary *circa* 1999 heralding a significant step change in the way internet users could generate content, share files and contribute to online knowledge generation.

DiMaggio *et al* (2001) consider the internet unique in media terms as it

'Integrates both different modalities of communication (reciprocal interaction, broadcasting, individual reference-searching, group discussion, person/machine interaction) and different kinds of content (text, video, visual images, audio) in a single medium.' (*ibid*, p.308)

Social media technologies, which include blogs, micro blogs, wikis, forums, networking and bookmarking sites, and social news, occupy two broad positions in the body of literatures that inform this research. Literatures of student choice, decision-making, consumer behaviour and teaching and learning written prior to the advent of social media now require re-evaluation. This is both in the context of relatively easy access to globally distributed information, and the possibility that people exposed to these technologies at an early age develop the ability to filter and process information from more than one source at any one time (Prensky 2001b; Pedró, 2007; Bennett, 2007; Hargittai, 2007, Bradwell, 2009). Various terms have been applied to this demographic

including the 'Net Generation' (Oblinger & Oblinger, 2003, Oblinger 2008), 'Digital Natives', (Prensky, 2001a), 'New Millennium Learners' (Pedró, 2007; Pietraß, 2007). Prensky also gives us 'Digital Immigrants' applied to non-native adopters of the internet, which some say is a useful distinction in considering the diverse student audiences in terms of both age and background. More research is required into the impact of social media as touchpoints for applicants and their engagement with brands (Khanna *et al*, 2014), how students are making use of word-of-mouth information (Herold, Sipilä, Tarkiainen & Sundqvist, 2016). Nevertheless, there is an acknowledgement that online content plays an important role in the promotion of HE to students (Gyure & Arnold, 2001; Kittle & Ciba, 2008), which adds a new dimension to consultation and word-of-mouth recommendations (Herold *et al*, 2016), and that it is recommended that institutions should invest in social media as part of their relationship-building initiatives (Clark, Fine & Scheuer, 2016).

The architecture, navigational and interactive processes, and meaning-making within social media are frequently allied to the principles of social constructivism (Holmes, Tangey, FitzGibbon, Savage & Mehan, 2001; Pountney, Parr & Whitaker, 2002; Siemens, 2005) whereby knowledge creation is based on individual interpretation and interaction with the extended environment. Emerging social media-oriented theories and frameworks consider the iterative process of 'meaning-making' (Stivers, 1993; Doyle & Carter, 2003; McMahon, 1997; Hendry, Fromer & Walker, 1999; Pace, 2008; Yilmaz, 2008; Dettori & Pavia, 2009). Internet technologies can provide an interface between information givers and seekers and the body of knowledge from which meaning must be made. Constructivist principles acknowledge the complexity of knowledge acquisition, interpretation and decision-making (Siemens, 2005; Reay *et al* 2005). Siemens' (2005) 'connectivism' model defined as 'the integration of principles explored by chaos, network, and complexity and self-organization theories.' (*ibid*, p.4), depicts how learning can be based on the connections people make with each other, and that the development of these connections should be

employed as part of a learning trajectory. This description resonates with literatures on narrative trails (Mott, Callaway, Zettlemyer, Lee & Lester, 1999; Bolton 2006; Walker, 2006) and hypertext navigation (Hill, Huthcings, James, Loades, Halé & Hatzopulous, 1997; Last, O'Donnell & Kelly 2001, Ruth & Houghton, 2009), terms used to describe personal journeys and meaning-making within interactive environments. The convoluted nature of these journeys allows us to consider that, while information is provided with specific audiences in mind, the likelihood of them finding the information in a persuasive order and without intervention, is subject to variables beyond the control of the information provider.

If the internet aids the socially-distributed nature of disciplinary understanding, it is also possible that it facilitates the socially-distributed understanding of institutional provision. However, attracting non-traditional students with core audience mass communications is a marketing paradox (Caruana, Crane & Fitchett, 2008). Conventional marketing practice recommends that material is tailored to appeal to a defined market audience via segmentation techniques (Kotler & Keller, 2008; Maringe & Gibbs, 2009). Given the current high demand for university places within the UK, it may be considered that the production of publicity for the mass market is justified through economies of scale. Yet the resulting material, particularly in respect of research-intensive universities, typically caters for the largest segment of the market: traditional-route students (middle-class, full-time, newly graduated from A-levels). Widening the appeal of mass-produced publicity to smaller market segments may risk diluting core messages and losing clarity.

The content of social media spaces can be tailored to an individual's requirements through interaction with the author. Through social media, publicity can be reduced to a one-to-one interaction which defies marketing conventions. It must not be ignored that the legitimacy of shared information cannot always be verified (Bakhtin, 1998; Morgan, 2007), and much will depend upon the recipient's personal value systems as to what is accepted as truthful and helpful. Nevertheless, targeted social media platforms such as The Student Room can deliver seemingly tailored content

through its user-generated question and answer facility, using ‘authentic’ voices free from corporate marketing constraints. These online communities might be seen to provide a source of surrogate personal knowledge derived from interactions with those perceived to have a credible insider perspective, particularly where this service cannot be provided by trusted friends and family. This relatively new way of information acquisition and meaning-making within the student decision-making process is likely to pose challenges to an institution’s execution of its service marketing mix (see Section 2.1.1) particularly in respect of promotional representation and trust-building in relationship formation (Clark *et al*, 2016).

#### **2.2.4 Decoding statistical data**

Seemingly less open to interpretation are the predominantly statistical compulsory comparative data e.g. NSS and KIS, and institutional behaviour towards third party league tables e.g. The Guardian and the Times. This publically available data has a dual purpose. Firstly, it serves as intelligence for HEIs, particularly in considering their market position against the competitors. Secondly, it can be utilised for decision making, where a complex set of metrics compiled by third parties is provided by a simplified interface for public consumption, although Brown (2011) argues that student data was not collected for the purposes of being using in this simplistic manner. There are debates about the usefulness of such evaluative devices (Tight, 2000; Dill & Soo; 2005, Usher & Savino 2006; Attwood, 2008, Brown, 2011, Bennett & Kane, 2014), including the use of algorithms which favour research-intensive institutions, tables which do not take account of specific subjects, and the equating of quantity with quality (Nedbalová *et al*, 2014. Dill & Soo (2005) compared league table compilation across four countries and determined that, while different data sets and complex metrics were used, the definitions of quality converged as demonstrated by similar ranking results. Employing a larger data set across six countries, Usher & Savino (2006) found the opposite to be true. Both agreed that the light shone on universities as a result of rankings had a positive effect on institutional efforts to improve quality, though they also revealed efforts to manipulate the results

and filter the truth. Dill & Soo (2005) asked if there were important public interests that were not reflected in the rankings and in particular questioned the comprehensibility of the surveys, and even if the data were in fact geared towards the students' needs at all.

Survey providers do go to great lengths to explain their datasets, but there are reservations about student ability to understand the nuanced implications and those without inherent decoding skills in particular may struggle with their interpretation (Maguire, Ball & Macrae, 1999). Bennett & Kane (2014) observed that:

‘Efforts by university managements to increase the number of students participating in the NSS and in related satisfaction surveys often have the effect of bringing in more students with low engagement ...and that these students may interpret the meaning of the factors that lead to satisfaction in ways that differ from other groups.’ (ibid, p.150)

In addition, they demonstrated that students' interpretations of NSS data were matched to their already established personal learning orientation and motivation for study from which different values and meanings could be derived. It must also be questioned how far beyond the headline scores a potential student is prepared to go to interrogate the validity of the data they are viewing (Nedbalová, *et al*, 2014). The reception of this data is a particularly important consideration in the context of online readers skimming headlines at ‘twitch speed’ (Prensky, 2001a). For such an internet audience the overall ranking alone may be enough to make the crucial first impressions, circumventing explanatory data, and indeed institutional interpretation. Nevertheless, league tables and surveys have become an important tool in the promotional portfolio with data representing the quality and perceived value of a course in the minds of students, parents and other key stakeholders (Hazelkorn, 2008).

### **2.3 Democratising access to promotional messages**

As marketing is going through a process of legitimisation within universities (Ng & Forbes 2009; Çetin, 2003, Khanna *et al*, 2014, Nedbalová, *et al*, 2014), it needs to be wary of a ‘one-size fits all’ approach to its recruitment messages (Archer, 2003). The value derived from participation in HE

can be conceptualised in terms of an assessment of risks, costs and benefits, though these are differently structured across social classes (Archer & Hutchings, 2000; Archer, 2003). Institutional messages might employ the rhetoric of diversity but, despite a policy-driven need to recruit from a non-traditional market (DfES, 2003; Milburn, 2012; SMCPC, 2013), strategic, resource and temporal restrictions can affect the ability to consider marginalised audiences within frontline initiatives. In addition to public accounts of themselves within marketing texts, university reputations can be enhanced or undermined by individuals' own experiences through word-of-mouth, surveys and league tables, and increasingly online user-generated content as a critical challenge to the perceived authority of mass communications (DiMaggio *et al*, 2001). However, online socially-generated content provides an interesting new resource which can be accessed democratically by information seekers (Gyure & Arnold, 2001), providing accounts of student experiences which may be perceived as credible without also being considered pure marketing constructs. Accessing the accounts of others via these sources might answer the personal questions of those who lack the confidence or who have not recognised themselves in the corporately portrayed picture. In this respect social media platforms might be sought to provide credible knowledge that does not require prior acquaintance between information-seeker and provider, and might also prevent 'easy sell' images from masking realistic expectations of study.

Through the process of identifying for whom the products are to be promoted HE can miss some of its audience by focusing on the largest group or 'core' student body. However, there is also the opportunity for marketing to fulfil a very important function in respect of non-traditional student recruitment by making information democratically available. With the research interest of marketing to diverse student audiences, the practice of homogenising heterogeneous identities through the process of segmentation for core audiences needs to be reconsidered in light of the ability of internet users to access all public content. This allows information seekers to make their own decisions as to whether they were the target audience, rather than this being predetermined by

authors writing for discrete markets and using selective distribution channels. The democratising effect of easy access to online content can skew the targeting intentions of marketing authors, which may require more encompassing messages to accommodate diverse audiences.

In essence, universities should embrace democratic distribution of information, adding transparency and clarity to appeal to diverse audiences. This should be done while bearing in mind the need to accommodate Prensky's digital natives and digital immigrants (2001a) to ensure that access to information is provided equitably. This might include reconfiguring internet content to allow a more basic understanding of the HE student transaction, applicable to those who do not have ready access to the language and knowledge (Northedge, 2003a, 2003b) that is required to demystify Barthes' author intent (see Section 2.2.2). This would be a particularly useful strategy to employ in addressing the human capital potential of non-vocational courses.

There is an increasingly large number of sources of information available to potential students to aid their decision-making process; equally there is an increasing number of sources from which organisations can draw to tailor messages for their target audiences. Sometimes the sources are the same, and at other times they are confined to insider information (see Appendix 4). The volume of data available to students with the advent of social media can be problematic in several ways, including applying reasoning to conflicting information, and highlighting specific messages for specific people amidst the noise of the aggregated information. In addition, the ease of access to information, where anonymity can override psychological barriers to participation, makes online content an interesting yet problematic proposition for promotional messages. The internet supports global access to content, and social media technologies permit, more readily than in print, the mass dissemination of both original and re-articulated content. This in turn allows for considerable interpretations of messages where the author intent can be corrupted, intentionally or accidentally, and presented to unsegmented self-selecting audiences who are not necessarily part of a specific online community.

Traditionally, personal word-of-mouth knowledge comes from friends, family and trusted acquaintances. However, social media platforms allow students to observe and participate in online conversations providing experiential anecdotes outside corporate control which have the potential to serve as a proxy for personal acquaintance sources. Seen from a corporate position, this lack of control may interfere with the intended interpretation of the recruitment messages (see Section 2.2.2) and affect successful student recruitment. Indeed, the notion of control is another way of considering the data categories. While HEIs have direct control over the corporate messages accessible by students, they have only indirect control over data contained in league tables (see Section 2.2.4), which is open to interpretation by students (Maguide, Ball & Macrae, 1999, Bennet & Kane, 2014). For personal and word-of-mouth recommendations, HEIs rely on positive perceptions and influence, and corporate control is largely relinquished within the public domain. In pursuit of data which can be used to inform my understanding of marginalised content within marketing messages, I was particularly interested in pursuing social media commentary as surrogate personal sources of information.

There is a business assumption that marketing practitioners can, through market intelligence (see Appendix 4), determine the optimum portrayal of a product to suit the needs of the target audience. However, if the products are portrayed homogeneously, and the audiences are diverse, then this approach appears flawed. For marketing messages to be heterogeneous they would need to be tailored and presented on a one-to-one basis. This does not present a practical solution for globally distributed messages, although internet technologies are increasingly sophisticated in aligning products to online behaviours and stored personal data. Internet tracking aside, it is necessary to understand how like-minded people can be identified and reached with messages which are likely to be interpreted in a manner to prompt shared behaviour in a way intended by the message author. It may not be possible to truly understand an individual's interpretation, but a level of shared-understanding can be assumed where they come together as a group having performed a common

action (see Section 2.2.1). For example, a single cohort of students will have come to a shared understanding of the pre-applicant information available to make the common investment in study.

The segmentation process which identifies the core audience(s) for an institution's courses could be revised to be more encompassing and allow self-selection of appropriateness rather than have the authors dictate the audience. The process of segmentation that requires tailoring and targeting messages to core audiences, excludes non-core audiences who might also benefit from the information. Nevertheless, promotional messages still have to accommodate the needs of specific targets and care must be taken to portray accounts of student life that present a broad spectrum of experiences from varying backgrounds. This must be accomplished in a way that does not in itself serve as a barrier for those who are academically capable of participating but who would feel excluded from the cultural values embedded within the messages. A focus of promotional messages remains to provide potential students with realistic helpful orientation material in the spirit of assisting them with making the right choices, and initiates the first phase of building a relationship with their chosen institution.

## **2.4 Research questions**

The literatures allowed me to develop my theorisation of interconnected problems in student and subject marginalisation (see Section 1.2), through an exploration of the political, economic, social and technological environmental factors in which undergraduate promotional messages are created and recruitment takes place. The political and economic factors typically restrict developmental opportunities outside of core promotional practice, although they suggest that shifts in market segmentation and promotional message content could be attempted to support the undergraduate recruitment from a marginalised perspective (see Figure 1.1). The social and technological factors offered more facilitative opportunities to develop new messages and channels of distribution, requiring an exploration of shared understandings derived from public online content. In combination with the initial theorisation of the research problem identified in Section 1.2, the

environmental contexts provided by the literatures led me to the development of research questions. I focused these questions on the generation of practical outputs relating to the process and production of promotional messages from the perspective of an elite institution wishing both to protect its marginalised subjects and to recruit UK-domiciled marginalised students. From this practice consideration, my core research question became:

How can traditional approaches to mainstream undergraduate recruitment promotion be altered to aid the needs of marginalised students and marginalised courses?

My professional practice emphasised strategic reactions to large-scale quantitative market intelligence as a contributing factor to marginalisation. To extract the nuanced needs of marginalised students and subjects bypassed by this dominant approach, I needed to collect and analyse rich qualitative data representative of insider voices, and those outside of corporate control, to reflect the opinions of those not routinely captured in routine data collection. This was undertaken from an elite university perspective, identified as the triangulating factor in Section 1.2. My first sub-question guiding the collection and analysis of this data was:

How can existing experiences of marginalisation be used to develop new promotional practice?

The insider voices, collected using semi-structured interviews, provided opinions on what it is like to be studying or teaching a marginalised subject, and what it is like to teach or study as a socially diverse group. The students of this group were also representative of those who have overcome the perceptive barriers of subject validity and fitting in. More detail on participant selection, interview methods, and analysis is provided in Chapter 4.

To provide a balance to insider voices, I looked to corresponding public perception, providing the second sub-question:

How can shared understandings of marginalisation be captured and add value to the existing market intelligence corpus?

Through analysing public commentary on issues of marginalisation, I established an account constructed outside of corporate control. This required exploratory qualitative and quantitative methods, informed by the semiotics literatures, detailed in Chapter 5.

The insider and public data detailed in Chapters 4 and 5 combined established an alternative market intelligence corpus. This is used to consider new promotional approaches using demystified messages tailored to the needs of audiences and subjects where core practice has been identified as problematic. The third sub-question became:

How can marginalised aspects of HE recruitment marketing be accommodated within mainstream practices without jeopardising the needs of core target audiences?

This signals a shift from data collection and analysis to using the findings so far to develop and test resources, as detailed in Chapter 6. This phase included considerations of resource distribution, long-term sustainability of any new approaches, and internal stakeholder reception of these recommendations to changes of practice.

In combination my research questions sought to advance the theorisation that subject and student marginalisation shared interconnected promotional problems for which there was a joint solution. The research output provided a practical response to a bounded scenario of data collection and resource development. However, the generalisability of the empirical findings can be deliberated with fellow HE marketing practitioners based on the extrapolation of the findings beyond these boundaries; in this respect any further advancement of the theorisation has the potential to allow these research findings to aid a reconceptualisation of marketing practice.

## **2.5 Summary of literatures**

My literature review was influenced by aspects of the political, economic, social and technological environmental factors which directly affect the marketing accounts HEIs make of themselves to their potential student audience. They have helped me to define the area covered by this research, and have also served as a source of market intelligence for illuminating a set of challenges in

promoting HE to undergraduate audiences expressed through aspects of marginalisation.

Government policy and subsequent interventions exposed the need for alternative approaches to the norms of HE promotional practice where marginalised students were sought, and where the sustainability of marginalised courses was under threat (See Section 2.1.4). The semiotics and social media literatures raised questions over how the integrity of promotional messages could be maintained in an online environment where author intent could be publically interpreted and challenged through reader responses.

Challenges observed through the literatures point to a practical problem which I sought to solve, articulated in the first instance via the triangle of marginalisation model (see Figure 1.1), which in turn informed my research questions (see Section 2.4). Traditional HE promotional practice and segmentation techniques, which identify and deliver interventions tailored for groups with particular traits, are subject to operational and economic limitations. They also face challenges from the internet which can disseminate both supportive and detrimental information about the key messages. While core market approaches help to keep HE recruitment buoyant, there are some notable areas for concern, particularly marginalised students recruited to elite institutions, and to subject areas which are not well perceived in terms of human capital. This triangulation of concerns provided a framework for analysing the problem further, and moving towards a practical solution. One might conclude that if student numbers are being maintained within HEIs, then no problem exists. However, literatures reveal concerns for the principles of diversity (see Section 2.1.3) and the protection of subject bases (see Section 2.1.4).

While it may appear at first to be paradoxical in seeking to represent both marginalised and core aspects of HE without one being detrimental to the other, this research sought to demystify aspects of HE coded for privileged audiences with the intention of being of benefit to all. The desire for heterogeneity of messages posed problems as it assumed the position of treating everyone individually, whereas market research and the resulting market intelligence was more typically aggregated to formulate a collective homogenised marketing response. I did not wish to suggest that

a core marketing approach was wrong; rather I considered how corporate publicity material might better reflect marginalisation through more holistic approaches to recruitment message creation and presentation.

I have provided a summary of the background contexts in which this research took place; these were dominated by the commercial orientation of HE marketing in the face of global competition, and in response to government pressures and a rapidly developing technical world revolutionising democratic access to information. I will now address my methodology and research design used to answer the questions outlined in Section 2.4, where the triangle of marginalisation attributes are represented in a bounded case study of arts and humanities courses and non-core audience students, at a single Russell Group university.

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### **3 Process and resource solutions to promotional message problems**

In this chapter I provide an account of my pragmatist approach to research design, and choice of methodology and methods. This includes my rationale for choosing a case study approach, where *Lorem's* core promotional practice is the unit of analysis. The case is bounded by its arts and humanities undergraduate courses and the voices of students and tutor of these courses who also have some experience with marginalisation as originally defined in Section 1.2. I proceed with the case study using methods suggested by design based research (DBR) (having discussed alternatives) to answer the research questions posed in Chapter 2. I have adapted Reeves' (2006, p.109) model of DBR to present the four phases of my research design; defining the research problem; working with empirical data; resource development; and, the new approach. Each phase is outlined within the context of the case, attributing the research methods, participant selection, data collection, analysis, resource production, testing and iterative development used within them. A map of the research process and how each phase relates to the research questions established in Chapter 2 can be seen in Appendix 5. As part of the empirical research, I consider the interconnectedness of recruitment marketing challenges presented by the external environmental factors identified in Chapter 2 and framed by the triangle of marginalisation (see Figure 1.1), and the operational issues of unilateral branding, resource allocation and temporality. This is followed by the process through which I came to select 16 research participants (nine students and seven tutors), and 31 online articles to provide a corpus of voices covering aspects of marginalisation and not ordinarily captured for market intelligence purposes at *Lorem*. This chapter is concluded with a discussion of ethics, including those relating to insider research.

#### **3.1 Pragmatism and practical research outputs**

When considering the nature of reality and how we explore knowledge, it mattered less to me that reality was objective or constructed, and more that it had a positive and sustainable impact on

practice. In this light I have come to this research from a pragmatic perspective. I have adopted the pragmatist maxim of clarifying aspects of theorisation by tracing the ‘practical consequences’ (Hookway, 2008). It is my belief that these practical consequences are important in truth and meaning, but that we can never be absolutely sure of the truth. For example, in pursuing the construction of promotional messages to appeal to marginalised audiences, I do not believe that it is possible to fully understand the exact nature of an individual's thoughts, but that a state of shared-understanding can be assumed through the observations of common actions in response to stimuli.

Morgan (2007) says:

'It would be foolhardy to claim that every person on earth could eventually arrive at a perfect understanding of every other person on earth, but for pragmatism the key issues are, first, how much shared understanding can be accomplished, and then, what kinds of shared lines of behaviour are possible from those mutual understandings' (Morgan, 2007, p. 67).

In Morgan's eyes a pragmatic approach directs our attention to investigating the factors that have the most impact on what we choose to study and how we choose to do so, by first converting observations into theories, and then assessing those theories through action (*Ibid*, 2007). By theorising the problems (see Section 1.2) and then, through empirical research, tailoring promotional messages to meet the shared needs of stakeholders, I will be able to gauge if an understanding has been attained through such assessment. For this to occur I needed to adopt a methodology which allowed for fragmentary data, of relevance to the intended beneficiaries of my research outcomes, to be shaped into meaningful and practical resources that would stimulate shared understandings and common behaviour, aiming for a positive student interaction with *Lorem*. The notion of shared-understandings was therefore important to me in my practical desire to create promotional resources whose messages will resonate with marginalised audiences.

Furthermore, I intend for my practical outputs to be measured by their usefulness to the defined audience rather than claims of being true or false. I accept that that the results could be fallible, yet would remain useful in explaining and predicting phenomena.

Pragmatism was also influential in my choice to work with seemingly disparate data sets emanating from my theorisation that student meaning-making is based on a the acquisition of information from

various sources, not all of which is in the control of marketing authors (see Section 2.2.4). Dewey, one of the key early contributors to the pragmatist movement, positioned data as the ‘raw material of reflection’. He said that

‘Their [data] lack of coherence perplexes and stimulates to reflection. There follows the suggestion of some meaning which, if it can be substantiated, will give a whole in which various fragmentary and seemingly incompatible data find their proper place. The meaning suggested supplies a mental platform, an intellectual point of view, from which to note and define the data more carefully, to seek for additional observations, and to institute, experimentally, changed conditions. (Dewey, 1933, p 79).

My criteria for a research methodology was the ability to use mixed and exploratory methods to collect data from the research participants and public texts, to work with this data to form new promotional resources and processes in consultation with participants. The data would be ‘fragmentary’, reflective of the multiple sources which could be used by students as information-seekers and institutions for market intelligence gathering (see Appendix 3). I wanted the opportunity to explore the changing conditions of the information landscape (see Section 2.2) and seek a common solution to the interconnected problems (see Figure 1.1) that I have found inhibitive in my corporate practice norms. This would take place in a live setting, and as such would also permitted me a personal reflection on professional practice. In this respect I would be following Dewey's instrumental philosophy by wanting to learn and reflect critically on my experience and by ‘training thought’ (*ibid*, 1933). From this pragmatist stance it followed that my methodology must advance the initial theorisation through a practical exploration, without assuming the position of providing the only solution to the identified problems, and that it would assist with future thinking to inform the provision of solutions for relatable problems in the wider HE community. I will now briefly cover my methodology and methods selection.

### **3.2 Bounded case study approach**

Pivotal to defining the research problem was my decision to use my professional experience at *Lorem* within a case study approach. I have modelled my design on Yin's definition of a case study which he considers to be ‘an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident;

and in which multiple sources of evidence are used (*Ibid*, 1984, p.23). This fits with my pragmatist approach, allowing me to draw directly on the initial theorisation from my practitioner standpoint, and also permitting me ease of access to research participants. The unit of analysis and bounding (Swanson & Holton, 2005; Bryman, 2008) under scrutiny for this case study are drawn from the triangle of marginalisation conceptual framework which first highlighted the interconnectedness of subject and student marginalisation from an elite institution perspective (see Figure 1.1). The unit of analysis is *Lorem*'s core marketing practice for the production of promotional messages. This is bounded by its arts and humanities courses to represent subject marginalisation, and UK-domiciled students and tutors participating in teaching and learning within the same subject portfolio, also connected through their experience of student marginalisation from a study or teaching perspective. I also use public opinion related to the investigations of the bounded experiences to further enrich the data collection. I will discuss the ethics of insider research in Section 3.6.

### **3.2.1 Supporting methods**

To support the bounded case-study I considered methods suggested by bricolage and participative action research (PAR) before settling on design-based research (DBR). The immediate appeal of bricolage was the potential to overcome time and resource limitations by 'making do with what is at hand' (Lévi-Strauss, 1966, p. 17), by 'applying combinations of the resources at hand to new problems and opportunities' (Baker & Nelson, 2005, p.353). This qualitative approach would satisfy the production of resources, but would have limitations in the analysis of social media content requiring an element of quantitative analysis, and would risk a spiral of recycling and repurposing existing content without generating opportunities to permanently alter practice. Instead I turned to PAR and DBR for more robust problem solving potential.

PAR and DBR shared qualities which would, through iterative cycles of data collection, analysis, implementation and evaluation, result in new processes. PAR is broadly defined as 'an approach in which the action researcher and members of a social setting collaborate in the diagnosis of a problem and in a development of a solution based on the diagnosis' (Bryman, 2008, p.382). The

research goals of DBR are to solve real world problems where the emerging theoretical understanding can be descriptive, explanatory or predictive in nature, or can provide guidance for future design efforts using existing quantitative and qualitative research methods (McKenney & Reeves 2013).

Both PAR and DBR permitted me to work collaboratively in a live environment to create deliberate interventions in the identified problems and with the opportunity to have a positive effect on practice. In addition, both acknowledged the existence of complex data sources and the use of mixed methods, missing in bricolage, to collect and analyse them, and allowed for fluidity in research design as discoveries were made and thinking advanced. However, whereas PAR required the development of the solution to build capacity for independent action by the participants, I had not positioned this research as a personal liberation from existing marketing practice or to enable the transfer of responsibility beyond the control of marketing practitioners. As such it would be myself adopting an extended advisory capacity as well as intervening directly in new practice. Furthermore, I sought a resource design solution for the normalisation of marginalisation into core practices, developed within the existing boundaries of institutional workload structure. In DBR this design element was central whereas in PAR it was peripheral to the success of the research. Therefore, while there are several overlaps between the two methodologies, the outcome of DBR which placed greater focus on the practical development of marketing resources, and the advancement of my ideas, was more appropriate to the interventions and capacity building for independence of others of PAR.

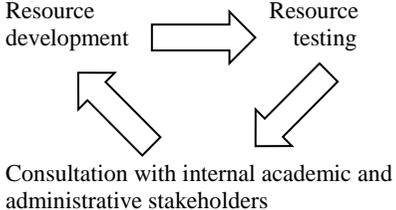
Though DBR is more commonly associated with the naturalistic setting of the classroom (Brown, 1992, Barab & Squire, 2004, Bell, 2004), this research examines a part of the journey which enables students to get there; I have transferred the principles to the interface between HE marketing messages and information seekers, framed by issues of marginalisation, and examines part of the journey which enables the students to get there. The flexibility that DBR permits was useful to me in dealing with the complexities of constantly changing and expanding online information sources

for students, and the ability to use mixed methods was appropriate to my requirement to collect and analyse varied data sources (see Appendix 4).

### **3.2.2 Design phases**

Reeves'(2006) provided a DBR model presenting four key design phases: defining the practical problem, data selection and collection, iterative resource development and testing, and defining new design principles, which I have adapted for this research and embedded in the case study (see Figure 3.1).

**Figure 3:1: Sequence of data collection and resource testing**

DBR phase	1: Defining the practical problem	2: Working with empirical data	3: Working with resource	4: The new approach
	Chapter 3	Chapters 4 and 5	Chapter 6	Chapter 7
Key actions	An analysis of the core promotional practice of <i>Lorem</i> , bounded by its arts and humanities courses, and students and tutors with experiences of marginalisation.	Data selection and collection to provide alternative sources of market intelligence	Iterative development with academic and administrative stakeholders	Representing marginalisation within core practice
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Domination of core approaches to marketing derived from large scale market intelligence</li> <li>• Temporal restrictions of a recruitment timeline</li> <li>• General lack of resource to allocate to market research and development outside core approaches</li> <li>• Institutional tensions concerning the value and practice of marketing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New voices:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Student interviews</li> <li>○ Academic interviews</li> <li>○ Online public forums</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	 <p>Resource development → Resource testing ←←← ←←← Consultation with internal academic and administrative stakeholders</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small-scale market intelligence data collection representative of marginalised voices for shaping into resources for mass market and outreach distribution</li> <li>• Development of new approaches in parallel with core recruitment activity</li> <li>• Collaboration of marketing, academic and outreach practitioners to improve resourcing of promotional effort</li> <li>• Improved understandings of the marketing-academic relationship</li> <li>• Advancements in relationship building opportunities between the institution and students</li> </ul>
Output	An advancement from initial theorisation to a defined problem which can be investigated by empirical research.	Data analysed through the use of thematic coding, to provide a set of marketing 'needs' to be considered in the development of new resources.	Development of prototype resources and design principles discussed amongst a range of HE stakeholders involved with marginalised courses with a responsibility for recruitment, including WP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practical resources demonstrating that marginalised and core marketing practices can co-exist through the development and dissemination of demystified messages.</li> <li>• Sustainable resources and strategy for adaptation across subject areas, which account for resource and time limitations</li> <li>• Potential for reconceptualisation of approaches to undergraduate promotion marketing through the generalisation of research findings outside of bounding parameters of the case study, and determined through discussions and development amongst practitioners.</li> </ul>

This figure is adapted from Reeves 2006 and illustrates the four phases of DBR from initial idea and the end results, supported by working with empirical data collection and analysis and resource development. Although the DBR phases are presented in a largely linear sequence, interventions occurred when working in both the empirical and resource phases to interrupt the linear flow, triggering a return to an earlier part of the cycle, or permitting iterations of previous lines of questioning.

In the first phase I define the practical problem using my case of core undergraduate promotional practice at *Lorem*, and then discuss working with empirical data (Phase 2), including the data selection and collection methods. I introduce working with resources informed by the empirical data (Phase 3) and defining the new approach (Phase 4). I will now map these phases, including an initial discussion on the methods I chose for each.

### 3.3 Defining the practical problem

*Lorem* is a Russell Group university which sits in the mid-table rankings of fellow UK elite institutions. It has maintained a position in the top 30 UK universities in The Complete University Guide, Guardian and Times league tables, and attains high scores in the NSS overall satisfaction ratings. It offers a wide range of subjects across the sciences, social sciences, arts and humanities. *Lorem*'s core recruitment marketing provision is targeted at school-leavers who attended institutions with an A-level grade point average (GPA) of 900 and above<sup>5</sup>, but will consider working with schools down to a lower threshold of 780 GPA, maintaining a high A-level entry tariff. A dedicated WP department works with local schools with a GPA threshold of 720-780. The aggregated mean figures of core bursary recipients for 2008-2010, indicative of WP status as reported to HESA ranged from 32% for arts and humanities to 37% for the sciences. WP schools outside the catchment area are not targeted for promotional or outreach activity. The academic attainments of students from schools below a GPA of 720 are deemed too low to participate at *Lorem*. On first appearances *Lorem* does not appear to have a problem with reputation or recruitment, and is confident of its intake to target high achievers from selected schools, restricting WP activity to benefit local students. The organisational problem from my practitioner perspective emerged from interaction with academic staff. I collected unresolved discussion points (see Table 3.1) from routine meetings and other professional encounters (see Appendix 3).

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<sup>5</sup> This equates to approximately 5.5% of schools in England ([www.compare-school-performance.service.gov.uk](http://www.compare-school-performance.service.gov.uk)).

**Table 3.1: Field note records**

Unresolved discussion point	Summary of discussion point	Implications for data collection	Method
WP recognised as something that should be addressed: outreach resourced as a local academic-controlled activity	Lone operator approach: there is recognition that support is available from <i>Lorem's</i> specialist outreach department, but this can be seen as restrictive, particularly around which schools can be targeted, in conflict with personally acquired contacts and desire to aid irrespective of targeting.	What can recruitment marketing bring to outreach initiatives that will scale-up lone operator approaches and serve to have a positive influence on student decision making?	Tutor interviews
Diversity in the classroom is welcomed in principle but can bring about pedagogical problems.	Increased need for careful classroom management and pastoral support. Particular references made to managing mature students, where arts had been recommended as therapy, and with SEN in the classroom.	What are the stakeholder benefits to diversity in the classroom that can be articulated in recruitment messages?	Student and tutor interviews
Public perception of validity of arts and humanities courses under threat from those with more obvious employment trajectory.	Heartfelt belief in the employability of arts and humanities students, though sometimes seemingly undermined by the visible evidence e.g. KIS data	How are arts and humanities courses discussed by the general public?	Text analysis of public online discussions
The rigid temporality of the recruitment timeline leaves no room for experimentation	The desire to progress new ideas is hampered by pressures to deliver against a fixed recruitment cycle.	How might the academic-marketing relationship be developed to allow for deviation from the recruitment marketing norms?	Tutor interviews
The mass market direction of marketing does not accommodate 'niche' areas	There is neither time nor money to spare for small-scale projects	What if small-scale content was made available on the internet for a global audience?	Tutor interviews User testing

The field notes accumulated between 2007 and 2014 helped serve as a barometer of colleagues' feelings and to shape my motivations and line of questioning. The above table notes the key discussion points which laid the foundations for interview questions and online reader response analysis. Mostly these conversations were tangential to the core meeting purpose, and were noted in minutes without being allocated action points, and as a consequence would remain unresolved within routine practice.

These field notes show a number of recurring issues which were considered problematic by tutors in recruiting to their subject areas, and the recruitment of students in accordance with WP policy. I used tutor issues to consider implications for selecting the corresponding data, and the methods employed for collection and analysis.

### **3.3.1 Homogenisation through corporate branding**

In the last five years *Lorem* has carried out a significant marketing exercise resulting in the consolidation of branding across its academic and central service units, and the application of a universal set of rules to the presentation in text and images of all its courses and recruitment messages. In this respect *Lorem's* approach to marketing leans heavily towards commercial business practice, and it has successfully established a recognisable brand. The exercise created a strong visual identity whereby current students were used in settings to showcase the campus, study and social life. However, two aspects of this visual identity caused problems. The first arose from the use of current students which represented the existing market, but by default did not represent a future targeted audience based on marginalisation (see Appendix 1). Applying the marketing principle of allowing prospective students to be able to see themselves in the picture or positioning established students as being 'enviable' (Berger, 1972, p.132), it is good practice to acquire realistic profiles. To appeal to marginalised audiences this would require students who match the proposed target audience, though as established, these are in the minority and hard to locate.

The second problem was the difficulty in locating subject-nuanced images of essay-based courses where the key motifs for all courses of study were books and computers, rather than specific props as used in science, professional and technical based subjects. Where courses were not distinguished by specialist props, they took on a homogeneous visual representation that could be any student of any subject. The success of implementation of a strong visual identity of *Lorem* created a large pool of generic images, with only limited specialist reference to the arts and humanities portfolio of this research. This situation contributed to the need to seek an alternative approach to recruitment

promotion, which revisited heterogeneity for marginalised subjects, whilst working within the restraints of branding.

### **3.3.2 The impact of entry tariffs used for positioning**

There is institutional pressure to keep the A-level entry tariff high in order to maintain a position amongst elite institutions, where tariff is used as proxy for student, parent and advisor perception of quality, and the acquisition of high achievers is viewed as a way of delivering on that perception.

With the introduction of full tuition fees, the public expectation of greater return on investment through graduate employment is concentrated on connections to premium courses at prestigious institutions, where having a degree is linked to a higher salary than not having one. Amongst *Lorem's* broad base portfolio the key selecting courses denoted by those with the highest possible entry tariffs, centred around areas which have strong links to specific vocations. It is an established *Lorem* practice to keep tariffs high across the whole portfolio, irrespective of selecting or recruiting subjects. To uphold the perception of quality, A-level tariffs are not lowered to reflect lower demand for less competitive courses.

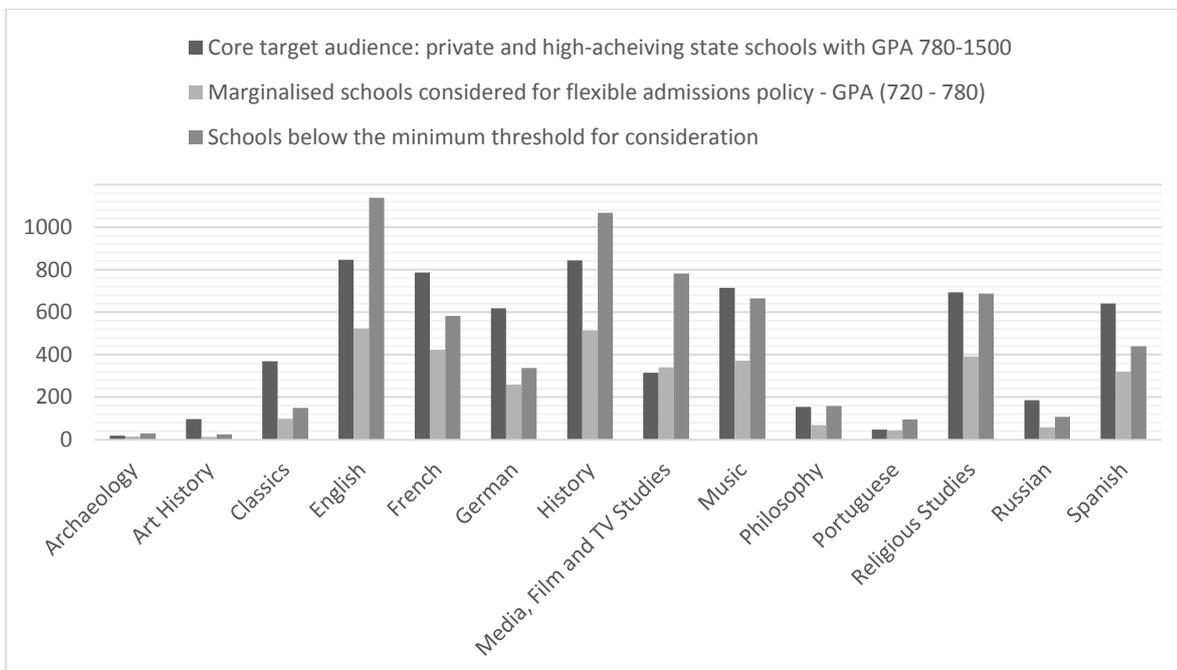
The marginalisation effect of *Lorem's* A-level tariff combined with its core targeting strategy can be seen through an analysis of A-level provision in England's secondary schools. Using data provided by *Lorem's* outreach department to identify the potential size of the schools market for *Lorem's* arts and humanities subjects, the analysis was broken down into three stages. Firstly, I compiled a list of A-level subjects offered in English schools that had a comparable offering in *Lorem's* degree portfolio (n=2507). Secondly I accessed data for the number of schools which offered each subject, categorised by GPA score. Thirdly I established the size of the core, marginalised and below threshold audiences for subjects, based on the number of schools offering the A-level, filtered by the GPA score. The variances of frequency of A-level offer by subject and GPA of school are shown in Figures 3.2 and 3.3:

**Figure 3:2: Subjects offered by core/marginalised segmentation – percentage of whole**



This figure shows the number of secondary schools (n=2507), offering courses directly compatible with *Lorem*'s arts and humanities portfolio, segmented by RPA. The categories represent the portion of those schools that are targeted by *Lorem*'s core marketing messages, the marginalised schools whose students could be targeted but are marginalised by core recruitment practice, and the schools which are deemed to have a GPA too low to participate at all.

**Figure 3:3: Subjects offered by core/marginalised segmentation – absolute numbers**



This figure shows the number of schools offering the subjects in absolute terms, demonstrating the difference between the smallest markets, archaeology (n=63) and art history (n=135) compared to the largest markets, English, n=2507, and history (n=2425). Even with only c35% of the schools market for English and history being in the core target group, the absolute size assists with these courses selecting rather than recruiting.

The analysis of arts and humanities A-level subjects on offer by school type shows that 35% of the possible target audience schools, those with an RPA of 720-780, fall outside *Lorem's* core audience and is therefore marginalised by its core marketing strategy. History provides a clear example of how A-level entry tariff drives marginalisation; taught widely, only 33% of schools fall within *Lorem's* core audience based on GPA.

A further analysis at subject level revealed different drivers of marginalisation. For example, art history has low visibility in marginalised schools, archaeology has a low profile as a dedicated subject, and provision for media studies is dominated by schools below the GPA threshold<sup>6</sup>. The marginalised schools audience is further reduced by the *Lorem's* WP attention and financial assistance being focused on local schools only.

This analysis of school provision of A-levels categorised by GPA still does not give a complete picture. The calculations do not accommodate the number of students taking each A-level subject, just the number of schools which provide the opportunity. In addition, it does not account for those degrees which do not require prerequisite A-level subjects as part of their entry requirements.

Nevertheless, the analysis does show the disparity in school provision raising initial awareness of the corresponding subjects at university. It also demonstrates how *Lorem's* A-level tariff marginalises schools where above-average students may make the required A-level grades, and how *Lorem's* official WP provision limits a larger audience for subjects already under pressure from a low national provision.

### **3.3.3 Representations of diversity: UK-domiciled students at an elite university**

As previously identified, HEIs adhere to diversity policy (see **Error! Reference source not found.**), and work towards equality within pre-defined categories of WP students based on various factors including postcode and household income. In university policy vernacular it has come to

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<sup>6</sup> Since the completion of this analysis the AQA exam provider has announced the withdrawal of Archaeology, Classical Civilisation and History of Art A-levels.

represent a positive way of viewing the backgrounds and attitudes of students, though statistically the breadth of this diversity is not as wide as the HEFCE policy would like. A typical university vision declaring diversity of student body might be interpreted as making a declaration of the desire to recruit individuals from around the globe united by a common goal to become the next generation of intellectual achievers, each offering a valid perspective to a gestalt of learning. Whilst this is an ideal position, diversity can create pedagogical problems through differing opinions and inequalities in academic preparedness, (Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1991; Bowl, 2001; Thomas, 2001; Reay *et al*, 2002). The typical message is therefore likely to contain a culturally-coded caveat, reinforced by entry level tariffs, that diversity is desirable within individual institutional recruitment norms.

### **3.3.4 Segregation of WP and mainstream marketing**

UK-domiciled diversity at *Lorem* targeted by specific recruitment activity can be broadly understood as those who have been identified through a WP policy framework as worthy of interventions such as outreach work, flexible admissions, and means-tested bursaries. While WP measures can be viewed as positive and practical assistance, they also risk being regarded as segregating as they are based on deficit measures of lower standards of compulsory education and income as benchmarked against the norms of *Lorem* recruitment. In line with government policy *Lorem* reinvests a portion of its fee income into providing financial support for students from a means-tested low-income background. Nevertheless, academically capable students from surrounding low participation areas who choose to go to university traditionally prefer to attend the nearest post-1992 university over *Lorem*. Unpublished and privately-commissioned research into the reasons for this suggested that locals thought of *Lorem* as an 'island', for non-local and privileged students.

*Lorem* has a WP policy overseen by a dedicated team, who provide an outreach programme with specifically targeted schools within its locale, itself an area with a history of low participation in

HE. The marketing and WP departments operate independently; while the former governs the branding of the latter, and WP personnel are routinely invited to address marketing personnel at termly forums. Nevertheless, the core strategies of the units are determined independently of each other, and result in outreach work being delivered through three distinct models as:

- part of a discrete co-ordinated effort from specifically assigned outreach workers connecting with strategically identified primary and secondary schools
- part of a value-added skills acquisition project for existing *Lorem* students
- requested from academic staff on an *ad hoc* basis often through personal or professional network contacts

In addition, up to 2015 there had been a small cluster of arts and humanities courses, a legacy of a now obsolete continuing education programme, which attracted a diverse student body without specific WP assistance. Students of the creative writing programme participated in semi-structured interviews and joint conversations, enabling me to capture their experiences of marginalisation (see Chapter 4).

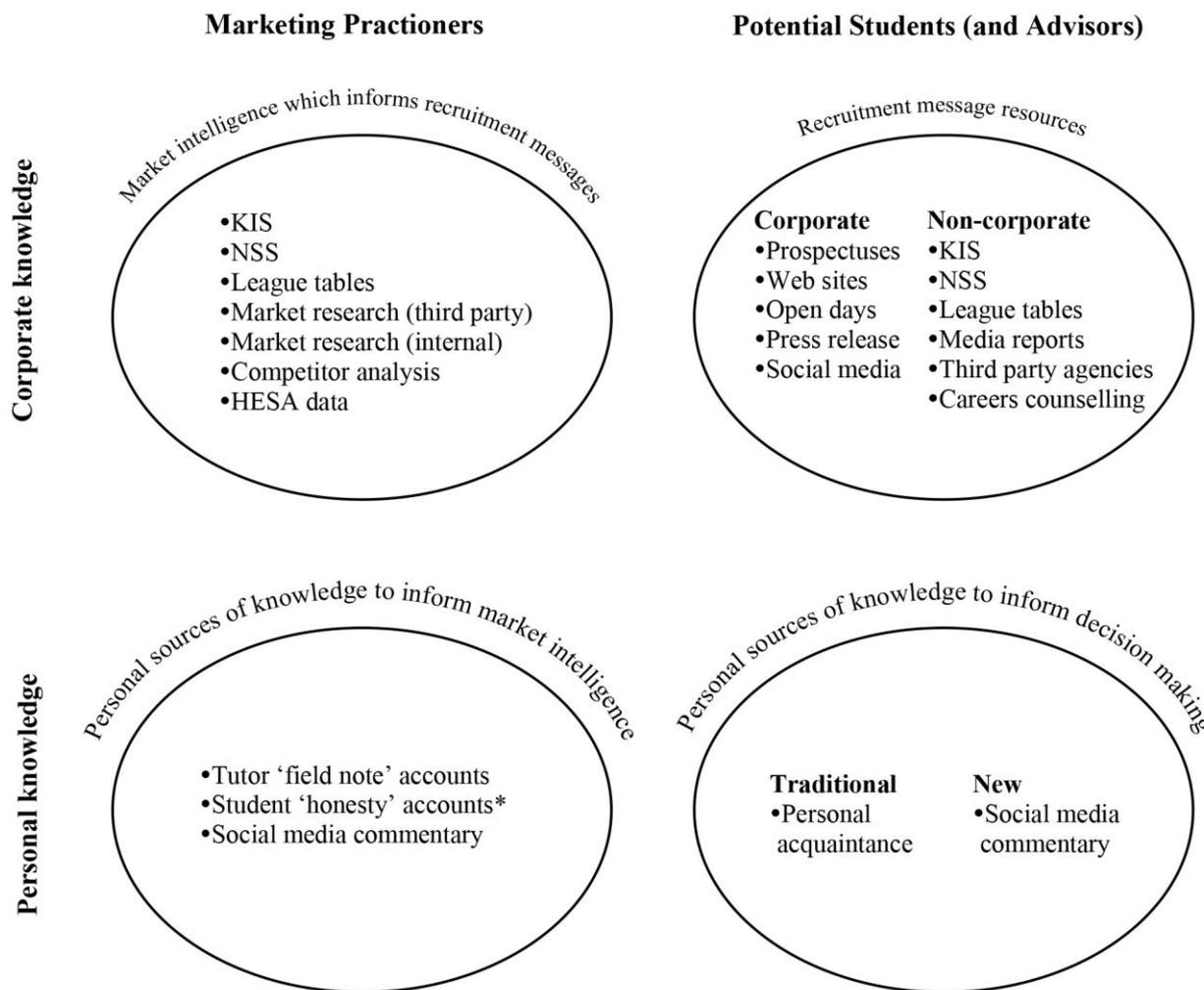
### **3.3.5 Issues of workflow and scale**

The final set of issues which serve to define the practical problem relate to *Lorem*'s core recruitment marketing workflow, which I argue hinder the ability to develop and implement strategy outside of existing arrangements. *Lorem*'s recruitment marketing works on an established cycle of recruitment activity, steered by A-level and UCAS recruitment time frames. In turn, this requires a rigid and resource-intensive workflow allocated to tried and tested promotional marketing methods. This may be considered the HEI industry standard of practice. With a fixed time-frame and limited resource, small-scale projects become untenable, which in turn excludes the possibility of large-scale roll-outs to other areas based on successful evaluation of an activity. Furthermore, the A-level and UCAS timeframe frequently conflicts with academic term time teaching and learning activities, lessening the opportunities for intensive consultation to explore new promotional activities. Therefore, I argue that if the industry standard resource is tied to a routine workflow, the temporal rigidity serves as a barrier to developing new strategies on the margins of recruitment.

The corpus of data to aid strategic decisions is large and complex. As discussed in Section 2.1.3 there are numerous sizeable sources of quantitative data about student participation which can be used to inform recruitment messages, supported by smaller amounts of qualitative data (see Appendix 4). This intelligence aids strategy development by enabling HEIs to understand their market position, but for small cohort subjects, it is more difficult to access comparative data, or statistical or qualitative data of sufficient enough volume to make a deeply informed decision. With this scenario, the small cohort subjects must either accept the institutional strategic decisions for mainstream areas, or hypothesise and test with a smaller data set.

In considering content available on the internet (see Section 2.2.3) I identified that the sheer volume and prominence of data made it improbable that students would be able to access all the information pertaining to their requirements. This is reinforced by the persistence of content which was intended to be ephemeral, but is easily retrievable from a seemingly perpetual archive. Figure 3.4 demonstrates the complexities of the data sources, both in terms of scale and fluidity.

**Figure 3:4: Data source complexities for marketing practitioners and potential students**



\* Taken here to represent student accounts collected to generate corporately controlled representations of the student experience.

This figure places category boundaries around the vast array of possible data sources available to the two key stakeholder groups of marketing practitioners and potential students. The classification of each dataset is complicated by the cross-population of these categories. For instance some market intelligence is positioned within the public domain to be directly influential to students as well as the practitioner stakeholders, such as KIS, and league tables. The complexity is further exacerbated by the fluidity of the available data, especially when accessed online.

The vehicles of dissemination of the messages include printed materials, online content, and both broadcast and social media, which can be consulted by potential students as part of their decision-making process. These resources are subcategorised as corporate (generated by HEIs), government (official channels within the education system), third party agencies (special interest media, agents, compilers of league tables) and personal (unofficial channels based on real or perceived knowledge of own contacts).

The overlapping of official, corporate and social data to be used by both institutions to generate messages and by students to inform decision-making creates a complex map of market intelligence sources. Students can access much of *Lorem's* statistical market intelligence openly where it is presented as compulsory comparative data and in league tables, to compare and contrast with corporate recruitment resources such as prospectuses and websites (see Appendix 4). Students can also access social media commentary generated by *Lorem* and by independent responders within *Lorem's* platforms and elsewhere. *Lorem* uses on-course students for market intelligence gathering via their opinions and accounts of their student experience. This is done anonymously through the NSS survey, in focus groups for internal use, and through interview or request for written opinions. The data can then be used to improve practice, or it can be captured for reproduction in the public domain to reinforce corporate messages with insider endorsements. Like students, tutors can also provide market intelligence for marketing practitioners, as well as providing a corporate slant on personally delivered messages to potential students, though this source is underutilised in *Lorem's* current practice (see Section 1.1.2). These are the factors which I needed to be able to work with wide-ranging and fragmented data from small datasets and mesh them together to make a meaningful corpus of alternative market intelligence.

### **3.4 Working with empirical data**

Having commenced the DBR process with defining the practical problem through my case study university, I progressed to the second phase, 'working with empirical data'. Here I provide an account of selecting research participants and online data to establish a corpus of alternative voices serving as new market intelligence. Students and tutors were selected first to provide insider perspectives, followed by responders within online platforms to represent public opinion outside corporate control.

For both students and tutors I initially conducted semi-structured interviews as the dominant data collection method, but with additional student group work (see Section 3.3.1). The data selection

and methods of online reader responses were influenced by Reader Response Criticism (RRC) in seeking to understand reader inference of authored content which may differ from author intent.

### **3.4.1 Student participant selection and interview methods**

The students were selected from a single arts (creative writing) course at *Lorem* which had a mix higher than the institution norm of student backgrounds measured by WP status. This provided a rich sample from which to gain an understanding of how the students regarded diversity from their own student experience. I selected students from this course in anticipation that they would offer voices outside the range of *Lorem's* typical market intelligence pool, which would prove valuable to courses which had yet to attain this level of diversity. The reason for the higher than normal percentage can be explained through the course's history; it was the legacy of a disbanded continuing education department offering small-class teaching in the evenings and at weekends. The traditional market for the original CE structure was mature and part-time students who were permitted to enter into HE through accreditation of prior experience and/or learning (APE/L) in lieu of formal qualifications. At the introduction of the UK's equivalent and lower qualifications policy (ELQ) in 2009, the course shifted towards full-time mainstream recruitment. However, during the transition phase the A-level entry tariff was kept lower than the *Lorem* norm in acknowledgement of the additional HE skills development teaching which was provided for APE/L-entry students. This was attractive to students from lower-achieving state schools.

I conducted the interviews as the course was transitioning to the full-time mainstream recruitment model; in this respect it presented an excellent opportunity to see how diversity was working in a course where there was a rich mix of backgrounds owing to the CE legacy, coupled with the WP flexible admissions policy. The student mix on this course allowed me to investigate how mainstream student accounts of collaborating with non-traditional students might be supportive or detrimental to the idea of such diversity in the classroom. The course was the only one of its kind in

terms of mode of delivery at *Lorem* and was closed to new applicants prior to the conclusion of this research, but the data remained useful in establishing a mandate for pursuing diversity.

Initially I contacted the course leader to gain access to the students for interview purposes. I was already known to the tutor and some of her cohort having previously been asked to offer marketing advice for a student-led project. She permitted me to contact them directly via email, having first had a discussion of the participant criteria in respect of possible connections to marginalisation.

Diversity within the participant group was defined by many traits including age, ethnicity, disability, SEN, background, life experience, and mode of study in various combinations. Although age range was a dominant feature in this group, the selection did not set out to tackle the full range of protected characteristics as set out in the Equality Act 2010. I acknowledge the potential skewing of results owing to the particular diversity mix with the creative writing course. Through brief correspondence (see Appendix 6c) with the students, dates and times were set (see Appendix 7) for the three styles of interview (see Table 3.2).

Of the nine students interviewed, jointly and or individually, five were mature (over the age of 21 at the commencement of the course), three had long-term medical conditions, one of whom required special educational provision, while the other two were motivated to study for health benefits. One student required support for dyslexia. All students were in their second year of the course, although part-time students were in their third or fourth calendar year. Four of the students were ‘first in the family’, having no immediate family members to consult with on their own experiences of HE, though Jane (a triplet) entered at the same time as her siblings. The students, with brief biographical details, and the activities in which they participated, are presented in Table 3.2, and are cited using their assigned pseudonym and the type of interview.

There were three key styles of interview used to capture experiences of diversity in the classroom. Four video interviews were conducted with students who consented to tell their stories publically in video format (see Appendix 6d). Five students participated in single and joint interviews with no

public-facing remit, (see Appendix 6c). All interview questions were structured to capture motivations for study and the rationale for the choices of course and institution. They also sought to capture the positive and negative aspects of study which might differ from those acquired specifically for mainstream marketing purposes. The individual student interviews built on personalised aspects of the joint interview transcripts. All styles of interview were transcribed and analysed as part of the new market intelligence corpus.

**Video interviews with students:** The video interviews were conducted first, three of which were filmed by myself, the other submitted as a self-filmed video blog (vlog) in accordance with the participant's preference. Students were briefed on the nature of the discussion as part of the invitation process (Appendix 6c)<sup>7</sup>, and with the exception of the vlog, again at the start of the interview. This was to calm nerves, stimulate thoughts and encourage conversation. I reiterated the purpose from the original communication, my researcher role within it, and that they were encouraged to speak freely. I reduced the possibility of interviewees answering less candidly than they would do without the publication of video by requiring them to approve the edited version prior to its general release. I commenced filming only when each student had confirmed they were comfortable for me to do so.

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<sup>7</sup> Video participants were given the same briefing as the joint and individual interview participants, but were also asked to sign a consent form (Appendix 6d) to have their contribution made public, subject to their satisfaction of the production

**Table 3.2: Student interview participants**

	Lauren	Denise	Darren	Michael	Patrick	Karen	Tina	Sam	Jane
Age group:	46- 50	U21	U21	36-40	56- 60	61+	46-50	U21	U21
Claim to marginalisation	Mature student Long term medication – affects moods – special educational needs Single mother of teenage children	School leaver Low income BME Dyslexia First in family	Deferred entrant First in family Young carer	Mature student	Mature student Chronic medical condition – enforced early retirement	Mature student	Mature student Long-term health condition – interrupts student’s ability to attend classes – special educational needs Single mother of teenage children	First in the family	Low income First in family (triplet)
Mode of study	P/T	F/T	F/T	P/T	P/T	P/T	P/T	F/T	F/T
Method of interview	Group conversation Post-it note Follow up Individual interview	Talking heads vlog	Talking heads video	Talking heads video	Talking heads video	Group conversation Post-it note Follow up individual interview	Group conversation Post-it note	Group conversation Post-it note Follow up individual interview	Group conversation Post-it note Follow up individual interview
Prior highest attainment	PhD	A-level	GCSE	A-level	O-level	Educated in South Africa	O-level	A- level	A-level
Proximity to <i>Lorem</i> prior to study	Local	150 miles south	50 miles west	Local	50 miles north	Local	50 miles north	150 miles south	200 miles south

This table provides a brief overview of each student’s personal connection to aspects of marginalisation. Being over 21 at the commencement of study is *Lorem*’s official designation of being considered a mature student. Health issues are recorded as a secondary aspect of marginalisation. The precise nature of the health conditions did not form part of the interview, but it is noted where the condition was a motivation for study. The table demonstrates the deviation from the norm of recruitment of high-achieving middle-class school leavers. The students were second year (fourth year part-time), and represented 45% of the 2011/12 second year cohort

In addition to the text analysis from the video transcripts, I was interested in using the interviews to consider how marginalised voices might be used alongside mainstream accounts of success and ‘approved normality’, by presenting unexpected stories. The four participants consented to allow edited content to be used for promoting their course, forming part of the ‘working with resource’ phase of DBR (see Section 3.4).

**Student joint and individual interviews:** Ten students, five mature and five of school-leaver age, were invited to participate in joint and individual interviews. These groups were split along age lines in anticipation that the participants would feel less inhibited to talk about age-related aspects of diversity. Three from each group accepted, but of these one from the school-leaver group failed to attend. The interviews took place in a central campus office location, made as informal as possible and with the provision of refreshments. I followed the same introductory protocol as for the video interviews. The groups consented to being recorded, and they were made aware that this was purely for the purpose of recall, without the need for me to take additional notes (see Appendices 4c and e). This aided the flow of conversation.

Each joint interview was opened with a post-it note exercise where the participants were shown a composite image of logos featuring student information brands (see Appendix 7). They were asked to record the resources they consulted when looking for courses, and to number them in order of importance. This served as an ice-breaker for thinking about information-seeking in general, the influence of particular resources, and ultimately to stimulate the conversation concerning their own experiences with marketing messages and university interactions.

Following the joint conversations, each student was invited back for an individual interview to explore additional lines of questioning identified from the initial transcripts. All participated apart from Tina who was unable to return owing to a relapse in her long-term health condition. These second interviews were also audio-recorded which lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. All nine

student participants from across the three types of interview spoke freely about their backgrounds and educational experiences. Further biographical details revealed through each style of interview appear in Appendix 8.

### **3.4.2 Tutor participant selection and interview methods**

To challenge practice norms of retaining marketing strategy development within an administrative domain, it was critical that I consulted with academic staff to ensure that the integrity of their subject areas was retained after the implementation of practical research outcomes. I wanted to keep the initial collaborative group small to accommodate frequent detailed meetings, and to work with rich data sets with a view to expansion upon successful evaluation (see Section 3.2.5). Much of the groundwork for identifying the seven initial participants was conducted through routine encounters at forums and meetings (see Table 3.1). All had at some stage of their career some responsibility for undergraduate admissions, and I was also able to identify through observation and conversation those who were already engaged with the marketing challenges of their courses, sometimes with resistance to centrally imposed ideas, and those who responded to widening participation discussions. The disciplines of tutors invited for interviews spanned history, art history, classics, music and modern languages, providing a mix of subjects that routinely featured in the Key Stages 4 and 5 (KS4 and KS5) national curriculum, and those that had more restricted presence. The subject areas also differed in terms of A-level entry tariff, including whether or not a prerequisite subject-specific qualification was required. Tutors are cited by pseudonym and subject, as shown in Table 3.3.

Each tutor agreed to take part in an audio-only recorded semi-structured interview. The agreed time allocation for it was 30 minutes, but five of the seven lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. This provided me with an early indication that the nature of my research was of interest to the tutors, and that there was appetite for further collaborations of this nature.

**Table 3.3: Tutor interview participants**

Tutor	Subject	Prerequisite A-level subject requirement	Position and administrative responsibility	Interview length
Derrick	Modern languages	Dependent on level of entry	Lecturer (outreach - unofficial)	1hr
Dean	History	Yes	Senior Lecturer (admissions)	1hr 30
Gerry	Art history	No	Lecturer (admissions)	1hr
Heather	Classics	No	Lecturer (outreach - official)	45 mins
John	History	Yes	Lecturer (outreach - official)	45 mins
Maria	Classics	No	Professor (admissions)	30 mins
Robin	Music	Yes	Professor (admissions)	30 mins

This table lists the tutor participants by core subject area, and position held within *Lorem* at the time of interview. Outreach involvement was split into those with official administrative posts and those who were active without official responsibility. The interview schedule can be seen in Appendix 7.

The tutors were asked about encounters with corporate marketing in relation to their subject areas, and their experiences of teaching marginalised students where successful recruitment had been achieved. The field notes (see Table 3.1) were employed as prompts. These elicited responses about the desirability versus the potential pedagogical problems arising from recruiting students from marginalised audiences, and the perception versus reality of marginalisation. Whereas students were not asked to consider themselves as WP, notions of marginalisation and WP were discussed directly with the tutors.

The same tutors were consulted again throughout the research both as part of routine business, and as ideas were circulated in light of new data and resource development. Follow-up conversations, included seven recorded one-to-one conversations (see Appendix 7), and informal meetings. As I progressed through the phases of the DBR cycle, there were more collaborative opportunities with tutors and administrative staff who were not part of the initial empirical data collection phase, but who contributed to working with resource and developing the new approach.

### **3.4.3 General public commentary**

As the *Lorem* case study revealed, there is a vast information landscape which aids institutions to make informed decisions about recruitment messages, market intelligence, and student access to corporate and non-corporate data (see Figure 3.4). In considering the non-corporate data, I looked towards online platforms which permitted public voices in response to authored content. I selected

articles from The Student Room (TSR), Guardian Online (GO) and Daily Mail Online (DMO), to represent a broad-cross section of HE content beyond corporate control and for their readership demographic corresponding to a diverse range of potential student personas. The rationale for the selection is covered in detail in Chapter 5. I then constructed an exploratory methodology inspired by RRC (see Section 2.2.2) to extract interpretive themes from the reader responses to the authored content, and then to apply a measure of power of reader responses which might be conceived as a proxy to knowledge provided by personal acquaintances.

### **3.5 Working with resource**

In taking an exploratory and small-scale approach to my data collection I considered carefully the practical implications of being able to work with new strategies and resources in the long term and on a larger scale. DBR researchers warn against failing to take account of sustainability and scalability (Bell, 2004; Fishman, Marx, Blumenfeld, Krajcik & Soloway, 2004) when conceiving theory and products in this way. This concern is illustrated by the mature student market; while a distinct subsection of WP students (see Section 2.1.5), this market has seen a decline owing to government interventions such as Equal or Lower Qualifications (ELQ), and the introduction of full tuition fees. Therefore, it is likely that a resource development for mature students alone would be economically unsustainable. Instead, sustainability would more likely be gained from grouping mature students with school leavers from non-traditional backgrounds. Seen collectively under the WP banner, mature students become more prominent in government and institutional policy. The likelihood of scalability of marketing resource proposals, and thus sustainability in the investment of human and financial resource in the medium to long term becomes more feasible as the target group is now larger and the potential return on investment higher.

The ability to collaborate was also important in the choice of DBR, as it offered a different approach from large-scale anonymous surveys and student profile collection, by enabling the co-

construction of messages. I at first considered capturing non-corporatised accounts of the student experience, curated by the students themselves; if successful, successive cohorts could be requested to repeat the exercise in order to refresh material. I also needed to collaborate with tutors to establish whether there was a case to invest further time and resource, based on the initial analysis and design principles. This was on the assumption that commonalities of solutions could be found, and the principles could be applied across a range of marginalised subjects and adapted for specific audience needs.

Having collected and analysed a small but rich sample of data, I used this new market intelligence to inform the prototype development stage of DBR (Figure 3.1). With a view to producing a package of resources tailored to the needs of marginalised audiences I produced four prototypes (see Chapter 6), three of which were subject specific. These prototypes incorporated design principles which could be adapted to the key messages of other marginalised subjects, thus allowing for sustainability and scalability of the research outputs. The first prototype was developed from the student video interviews, and the following two developed in collaboration with tutors who were receptive to marginalised recruitment to their own subject areas. The fourth was a strategy document which evolved over the duration of the resource development, incorporating the ideas and evaluation from the subject specific resources.

All three subject prototypes were made available for live demonstration, with one relating to modern languages also being tested on two groups of KS5 students and one group of tutors (31 students and six tutors from a total of ten schools/colleges) engaged in a European Day of Languages (EDL) programme. Each participant school had an existing outreach programme relationship with *Lorem*; eight schools fell directly within WP categorisation, whilst two were located in a catchment area that attracted mixed-levels of student privilege. All participant students within these groups were identified as likely to have the choice to participate in HE subject to

acquiring the relevant grades, but who were not likely to have had significant access to the subject depicted in the resource during formal education.

### 3.6 The new approach

DBR permitted me to take a flexible approach to my research design, making adjustments in accordance with the empirical evidence and analysis at each phase. The completion of each phase triggered its own reflection and evaluation cycle, which itself became embedded within the new approaches to promotion. At the commencement of this research I saw marginalised students as my key collaborative partners. The early research design sought to extract accounts of their non-mainstream experiences normalised through placement alongside mainstream accounts. Developing video resources with the students was a way of ensuring that their stories were told to their satisfaction, which might include accounts of struggles and doubts pertinent to their student journey. In practice, the predicament raised by the frequent need to change design partners, starting over with new students in each recruitment cycle, raised concerns about sustainability of producing this style of resource. However, beginning at the interview phase, I was persuaded that academic participants were engaged with working with me as a research student and marketing practitioner (see Section 3.6) in ways that had not been explored in my professional experience at *Lorem*. The process enabled them to voice whether such resources would add value to their own recruitment endeavours, and provided me with a more sustainable base for long term collaboration.

With the acceptance of limited generalisation of the design outcomes created by my own bounding parameters, I envisaged the practical outputs could be extended to other subject areas and institutions (see Appendix 5). This included the possibility of working towards a long-term reconceptualisation of existing promotional marketing practice through transferring the findings outside of the case study boundaries and in collaboration with fellow practitioners in other

institutions. Further reflections on the methodology, and the generalisability of the findings can be found in Chapter 7.

### 3.7 Ethical conduct of the research

There were various sensitivities and ethical considerations in working with my research participants, and in working in a live environment. In this next section I will cover data protection and legal aspects in working with the empirical data and resources. I will also discuss the ethics of being an insider of my case study university, and my duty of professional integrity when developing new resources and strategies.

As an employee of *Lorem*, interviewing participants from *Lorem*, I had to consider my position as an insider or ‘native’ (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007), which had implications for my own subjectivity (Pillow, 2003). In designing my research it was important for me to be aware of possible power relations and the influence I might therefore have had over my research sample in asking them about their own experiences at *Lorem* (Pillow, 2003; McNiff & Whitehead, 2006). In requesting assistance from my sample group, I was alerted to my possible influence on the resources I produced. To avoid being either a passive observer or covert agent in the process, I declared my identities as a research student, university administrator and marketing professional, and was transparent in which identity I was adopting when declaring a position. My marketing-self sought a particular story from participants which would, in marketing parlance, be ‘on message’ with institutional guidelines. My student-self was better pleased with stories that validated my own position in relation to my own experiences as a student. My research-self needed to be neutral and work only with the participant accounts of themselves (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Whilst I might have been considered as a fellow student, I also retained a corporate position in a field which is recognised for requiring positive responses. At all times I was conscious of the need to be self-aware, and to reflect upon my possible influence and distorting behaviour (Pillow, 2003) both

within the research methods employed and in articulating my findings. The practices of DBR permitted me to be true to my research student and professional identities, through which I endeavoured to allow genuine empathy with disputes, plights and unease, and also to present matters from an HE marketing perspective to provoke further discussion.

Nevertheless, a tension existed between my research and my professional practice, which affected my identity within the collaborative process, and the resources produced from the collected data. This tension can be illustrated by the concept of 'victory narratives' (Cary, 1999). While these narratives might reproduce words faithfully, these words are considered to be elicited under conditions where the power is recognised as resting with the interviewer and the unwritten rules of engagement are accepted and played. In seeking student narratives to portray a realistic snapshot of academic life, I have considered Cary who asks 'What do we do with unexpected stories?' (*ibid*, p.411). Whilst my researcher-self would accept a 'warts and all' approach, this currently has no business in marketing material, and live resource testing could be damaging. Indeed, the video interviews seeking to portray struggles within HE (see Section 3.4) elicited interesting material markedly different to many mainstream portrayals of student experiences. However, when I came to edit the videos, my professional-self was overly cautious of phrasing which did not meet with institutional marketing constructs. Therefore, this served as a warning that my identity as a marketing professional and 'brand guardian' was pre-disposed to distort the results into a positive narrative, risking the possibility that the student feels reluctant to express negative attributes assuming that they will not be acknowledged. I was also careful to consider the positive responses gained from interviews and resource testing where research participants might have been predisposed to tell me what I wanted to hear, and not what they truly believed (Pillow, 2003).

In interviewing the tutors I also had to consider aspects of the dialogue as 'in confidence' and apply a distinction between comments intended as asides, and those which were furthering the research.

While there was an anchored research timeline from initial enquiry to new approach, it was important for me to maintain my ability to service real marketing enquiries at any point. It was also important that the research led to practical outputs in the form of new resources and models of practice that were of service to the academic participants, in part to justify their time. As such I had to demonstrate a commitment to the relationship. I had to be active in breaking the short-termism established by the recruitment cycle, and the narrow definitions of target audience. I also had to propose a long-term evidenced-based sustainable approach with particular benefit to marginalised courses and students, but not to the detriment of existing audiences.

Access to and use of social media material was also subject to ethical scrutiny, and consideration was given at every stage to identifying content as public or private (Ess & Jones, 2004). I identified that this content could be accessed in one of three broadly categorised ways (see Table 3.4)

**Table 3.4: Ethics of analysing online content**

<b>Researcher status</b>	<b>Access to content</b>	<b>Ethical implications</b>	<b>Type of data</b>
Observer of publically available content	Free	Online content and reader responses are public	Secondary
Observer within a password protected environment	Account holder	Online content and reader responses are private	Secondary
Active participant	Account holder	Researcher intention must be declared	Primary

This table positions my researcher status against my ease of access to social media content, and considers the ethical implications of utilising the content within my research.

At each level of access to content I considered whether participants in online platforms could reasonably assume that their correspondence was public or private (Ess & Jones, 2004) through an examination of the terms and conditions of the service. Whilst I considered categories one and two to be secondary data, category three crossed over into primary data. It is here in particular that a declaration of intentions for soliciting material was required, and the need to offer the same degree of anonymity and confidentiality accorded my face-to-face participants emphasised.

Ethical approval was granted for my research (see Appendix 6g), which included the right to anonymity and confidentiality where research participants had not consented to public presentation of their contributions. When working with KS5 students during the resource testing phase of my methodology (see Chapter 6), Disclosure and Barring Scheme regulations were adhered to by including accompanying tutors in the exercise.

### 3.8 Summary

In this chapter I have discussed how my pragmatic approach to research has led me to identify DBR as my research methodology, following four key phases as adapted from Reeves' model (2006). I defined the practical research problem through a case study of current core promotional marketing practice at *Lorem*. I outlined the selection of my research participants, and the online reader response content which served as a proxy for public voices, and the associated methods for data collection and analysis. I also presented in brief the use of the empirical data for developing resource prototypes and new approaches to marketing, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapters 6 and 7.

The collaborative and flexible nature of DBR allowed me to expand upon my normal working parameters and sources of information by working with additional stakeholders in a time frame beyond the usual temporal constraints of the undergraduate recruitment cycle. It released me from relying on the availability of large-scale quantitative data for strategy formation, given that such data is insufficient to formulate robust responses for marginalised courses. Instead, DBR allowed me to work with small rich samples of data, manageable on limited resources, to use in the creation of marketing prototypes to test in a live environment. The sampling could be achieved by using existing *Lorem* students and tutors to provide insider opinions on their experiences of marginalisation, and in particular to collaborate with them to prototype development based on empirical findings. To enhance the data set I sought to understand general public opinion on

marginalisation expressed within online forums where there was no particular recourse to corporate messages. Through these sample choices I could incorporate voices not normally present within market intelligence to address marginalisation. DBR was a methodology which allowed me freedom to explore possibilities on a small and flexible scale, and to provide practical solutions to real problems in a live environment.

The marketing audit of *Lorem* identified contributing factors to the marginalisation of students and courses, which helped define the practical problem. These included institutional positioning through the use of A-level tariff, focus on core students in recruitment texts, segregation of WP and mainstream marketing, homogeneous and temporally fixed approaches to marketing, and the noise created by the high volume of data available for information seekers. Furthermore, I identified that there were voices missing from the routine market research which should be investigated for the potential for increasing representation of the marginalised portfolio. This methodology deviated from, but was complementary to, standard marketing practice within my professional experience, and it allowed me to consider new approaches based on new design principles and collaborations with academic colleagues.

## 4 Student and tutor voices as market intelligence

This is the first of two chapters covering the ‘working with empirical data’ phase of DBR (see Figure 3.1), and covers the research question ‘*How can existing experiences of marginalisation be used to develop new promotional practice?*’ It includes the research participant selection and interview process in detail, followed by the interview analysis. It also covers the start of a collaborative arrangement with tutors that lasted throughout the research, and which had implications for the practical outcomes discussed in Chapter 6. The participants were nine students and seven tutors who were selected for their closeness to issues of marginalisation within my case study bounding (see Section 3.3). The nine students were selected from a single arts and humanities course (creative writing), which, against the institutional trend, had successfully recruited students from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds including those flagged as WP; this permitted access to a high concentration of students within the broad definition of UK-domiciled diversity. The seven tutors were selected from five arts and humanities disciplines, all of whom had first-hand experience of undergraduate admissions, and four of whom also had experience of outreach work in either a self-nominated or an official capacity. Both student and tutor participants were able to articulate their personal experiences of marginalisation as framed by the triangle of marginalisation model (see Figure 1.1). I conclude this chapter with the implications of valuing the use of voices absent from *Lorem’s* routine market intelligence gathering, but whose contribution opened up the conversation about different approaches to marketing.

As the semi-structured interviews, the questions for which are documented in Appendix 7, and associated data collection methods were geared towards eliciting responses to diversity and to marketing encounters, I approached the analysis with an expectation that findings would be predominantly aligned with these core analytical themes. Nevertheless, the nature of the interactions with participants allowed for tangential thoughts to be articulated, and these have been incorporated where significant to the research. I transcribed each of the 16 interviews from the video and audio

recordings, and read each transcript through three times. On the first read through I annotated the transcripts with a series of keywords indicating the main themes and emotions of each passage. On the second I aggregated these keywords into groups of tensions, benefits, pressures, communication, pedagogy, employability, visibility, policy and practice. Finally, I merged these groups into four overarching themes. Theme one, heterogeneous stories, contains snapshots of diverse student experiences which offer a challenge to homogeneous messaging. Theme two looks at the rationale for UK-domiciled diversity beyond the student experience and human capital motivations as expressed by both students and tutors. Theme three focuses on tutor concerns for the visibility and employment perception of their courses in light of government policy and human capital representation. Theme four addresses tutor attitudes to the opportunities for marketing collaborations proposed to address the challenges posed by marginalisation. Using extracts from both the student and tutor interviews

I now present the interview analysis converging around these themes and subthemes. In some instances I found an overlap in the tutor and student accounts; where this occurred I have united the accounts under the appropriate analytic theme or subtheme.

#### **4.1 Heterogeneous stories**

In this first analytic section I consider the heterogeneity of the student stories. It serves as an introduction to the challenges posed by the dominant use of homogeneous marketing messages when considered from the perspective of marginalised audiences. The students were selected for their range of experiences, including non-mainstream entry into HE. I set out some of the key themes of their recounted stories, and consider the location of these in mainstream messages.

For each of the joint interviews, the post-it note exercise together with the visual aid prompted discussions about deciding which institution and course to attend. For each set of personal

circumstances; mature student; young carer; special educational needs; bursary recipient; my research participants followed the norms of information seeking via UCAS, prospectus and website. Each student described how at some point they were diverted away from the mainstream messages towards specialised support services within the institution in accordance with their nuanced needs. While this diversion is entirely acceptable in terms of organising printed and online material, it creates a distinction between mainstream and marginalised circumstances, whereby marginalised students are directed away from core messages. This is an important point to consider in a strategy which seeks to normalise messages for diverse students.

The motivations for study differed between students and included health, happiness, and career changes. There was no strong evidence to equate the desire to undertake a university degree with a financially rewarding career. The course recruitment messages made no human capital claims but did emphasise embedded employability skills. Michael and Lauren declared their key motivation lying in a career change. Michael said ‘I don’t have the confidence...I want to learn from the professionals’. Lauren said that ‘the course qualifies you for nothing’ though she was aware of this prior to applying, and acknowledged the useful connections between theory and industry applications. However, there was evidence of pressure to ‘do the right thing’ in the students’ information seeking experiences.

“There were universities in London that I liked... but that was only part creative writing and I knew I wanted to do creative writing, it was my mother - she was “hey, you should do partly English Literature again” (Jane, individual interview)

Jane described how both her mother and her school placed her under pressure to choose a course that they understood to have currency for graduate employers, and that they felt safer with a more traditional arts subject. Ultimately Jane compromised this advice, selecting a course with less of an employability record than traditional arts mainstays, and with a lower A-level tariff, a point upon which she felt ‘less pressured’. In so doing Jane demonstrated a resistance to human capital

messaging that formed the thrust of the verbal advice she received. Parental perceptions of such messaging are discussed in Chapter 5.

Sam provided another deviation from the human capital motivation. He discussed health aspects of pressure, compared with a happiness factor.

‘I think my happiness is a lot more important to me than working to get a lot of money because although it would be nice I think I would be content with a job which didn’t pay as much because I can still live comfortably on and not be as worked up about and that kind of thing ... I think it’s important that you don’t get too stressed out because then you can’t work as effectively and that would just cause a cycle, and for me definitely it is something that I want to avoid, and I need to avoid because, otherwise you get drowned out.’ (Sam, individual interview)

There was no suggestion that poor health had already been an issue for him but he intimated that if the pressure to do well at school continued along the same trajectory at university, then the satisfaction of attaining a degree and a prestigious career would come at a price of diminished health and enjoyment, dispersed over a much longer period of time than it takes to journey through formal education. Sam’s decision-making process therefore involved a heavier investment in happiness and welfare than aspirations for capital gain:

Mature student Patrick was motivated by the therapeutic benefits of the creative writing degree. He had undergone rehabilitation after a workplace accident:

‘I couldn’t work anymore and I realised that I needed something to fill in my time and also something that would get me working...I needed to reinvent myself’ (Patrick, video interview).

The therapeutic benefits were also important motivations for Lauren, and Tina; for Tina the pattern of delivery, contact hours and self-study were a prime consideration to managing ongoing health issues.

Denise was animated about the pressures she and her school peers were under in general choosing to go to university

‘When you are this age everyone is like “oh my goodness if you don’t get a job and you don’t get a degree now your life will end,” and it’s not like that it’s not like that at all.’ (Denise, video interview)

Denise did not acquire the necessary grades to go to her first choice university, so chose *Lorem* owing to its lower than the norm entry tariff. Darren was also a beneficiary of this. Coming from a young carer background, the pressures of home life had affected his school achievements. His expectations of non-compulsory education had been lower than a Russell Group institution, and expressed surprise at his eligibility; ‘I never dreamed I could come to this university’.

Karen provided a narrative of becoming a student that bypasses mainstream recruitment understandings of motivation, but does speak to familial pressures. At first she spoke of her regret of being pressured to bypass university as a school leaver in her native South Africa. As a mature student she said that she was ‘told to go’ to university by her college tutor, but she did not imply that she agreed through lack of ability to speak her own mind, rather that she trusted the authority of her FE tutor that this was an appropriate course of action. There was also evidence of familial pressure in her attending FE:

‘Well that was when having been asked to write these memoirs - the children want to know about the family - and you’re all over the place and you want to get some structure into it - I mean I’ve always wanted to write, I’ve always written, so go and learn something about it, and that was it. So that’s why I ended up there.’ (Karen, individual interview)

Karen’s story is particularly worthy of note as it is illustrative of how market research does not capture every story, and that while some students will discover a course almost serendipitously, there are important connections to be made through reaching out to those who might not otherwise hear of HE opportunities in which they can participate and benefit.

The range of motivations for study, and the pressures encountered, in this student participant group demonstrate the limitations of a ‘one message fits all’ approach to recruitment marketing. This creates a marketing challenge between offering a united brand identity and strategy to a responsive

core audience, whilst also being inspirational to a diverse audience who may not relate and respond to core messaging.

#### **4.2 UK-domiciled diversity in the classroom: group dynamics and divisions**

This analytic theme concerns how diverse students experience social and working relationships within the classroom and the lasting implications of the university experience. I present variations in discussions connected to ‘tensions’ in communications, socialising and personal confidence, expressed predominantly by the student participants, but paralleled by tutors. It was anticipated that on-course encounters would be played out to some degree along the lines of age at the expense of attention to other protected characteristics. Nevertheless, as the diversity was obvious amongst the students without them needing to know specifics of background, I also anticipated that this group would elicit rich stories of how classroom diversity was experienced. This was borne out throughout the interviews.

While age was never directly mentioned in the interview and group questions, it was voluntarily referred to by both joint conversation groups as an obvious way to distinguish between peers and justify behaviours and learning styles. This was demonstrated by the terminology employed by participants. The mature students spoke of their school-leaver peers as ‘youngsters’ ‘the young ones’ and ‘kids’ and themselves as ‘old fuddy duddies’ and ‘oldies’. Lauren suggested that specific age was not relevant ‘They don't know the difference between a 25 year-old and a 45 year-old because they are all old.’ By contrast the younger students adopted a more formal language and referred to their older colleagues as ‘the mature students’, which was also the terminology adopted by the tutors. Age was the dominant point of differentiation but students also differentiated themselves in declarations of personality, health and social preferences, and these categories were also used by the tutors.

Thomas (2001) identified that mature students, who are more likely (though not exclusively so) to be part-time, can be further separated from their peers through the reduced opportunity to participate socially. In addition to being a small cohort, the teaching encompassed much group work and peer-to-peer assessments, offering many opportunities for the students to get to know each other well. The students on the whole felt they did know each other and worked together constructively, even if it was not always out of choice. However, socially, there were accounts of diversity causing tension. Karen and Jane provided two quite different accounts, Karen's being based on age differences, and Jane's on her social preferences being different from her mainstream fellows in her halls of residence.

'The mature students unfortunately seem to stick together quite a lot and we go to lunch together. Unfortunately the youngsters - I don't even think they've been invited (which is very bad), to join with us lot - I don't think they would if they were invited - I mean they are not going to sit with us old crones...As I said for me it was absolutely marvellous, but for some people I know they complain all the time about them. You know they eat in class and they do this and they do that.' (Karen, individual interview)

Karen identifies that socially the mature students would separate themselves from the younger students, and that some of her group complain frequently about the younger students' perceived bad habits or attitudes.

Jane's story is one of distancing herself from mainstream students. She is a non-drinker and was protective about her decision to abstain from the rites of passage activity of some of her course and halls of residence colleagues. While she had not given into peer pressure to conform, she was aware that this narrowed her potential social circle, though she had been given breathing room to define her own social scene without compromise to her life values, and particularly not to her studies. Jane distanced herself from what she termed 'elitism', 'laziness', and the 'party scene' choosing instead a pragmatic and studious approach to learning, and extra-curricular activities of a cerebral nature. Both she and Sam had joined the Role Playing Game Society, and were conscious that this was considered 'nerdy' and 'alternative' and kept them on the edge of acceptability amongst mainstream

peers. So whilst Thomas (2001) had identified that mature students might be set aside from the school-leaver age students, with the reduced ability to participate socially, there was evidence with this group that both mature and school-leaver groups could be active participants in social separation, and that this may not be a negative experience.

#### **4.2.1 Group dynamics**

In their joint conversation Karen, Lauren and Tina considered their own attitudes towards communication with the younger students. Karen expressed her own initial lack of confidence; 'You're terrified the first term. You're not going to open your mouth until about the third or fourth lecture'. Lauren agreed with Karen stating: 'Absolutely, especially when you are confronted with the particularly confident youngsters who are used to totally monopolising conversations'. Modern languages tutor Derrick also reflected upon this point based on his own concerns of studying a new language as a mature student amongst lots of 'bright young things,' which initially undermined his confidence in communication and affected his group participation. This was echoed by Jane during her individual interview, 'You could have geniuses who were sitting around a table, but if they don't communicate with each other I don't think it would work.' Lauren reflected that '...on my first degree - I didn't make any effort at all. I was a waste of space. I was one of the youngsters that I swear about now.'

In the group conversation Karen explained the pedagogical benefits in terms of dynamism, and said that her class has achieved this across the age divide:

'You need the dynamic of the young and old - that is essential in the whole thing. If that dynamic is taken out it becomes [indicates flat line with hands] you have to have that high and low.'(Karen, joint conversation)

Tina expressed the dynamism as a balancing act: 'Your experiences actually balance out - you learn a lot'. In his video interview, Darren acknowledged that the group dynamic was '...helping me to know my own strengths and weaknesses' and '...a service we provide each other.'

Alongside the view that differences were pedagogically beneficial, there was also evidence within the transcripts that these differences did not automatically and permanently unite peers. Mature students were singled out for negative aspects of diversity on two occasions, cited as problematic in their inflexible attitudes towards points over which they felt a sense of superiority because they were able to use ‘I remember when’ as a validation of authority technique. Art history tutor Gerry provided an illustration of this:

‘They [mature students] can be intellectually really difficult to deal with as well - along the lines of “I don’t care what you say but I’m right” – there are also issues to do with how the kind of social mix works in a seminar because it is quite crucial that a seminar group clicks and works and mature students at their best are brilliant, mature students at their worst will kill any discussion – two camps – going at each other without any communication...’ (Gerry, art history)

Although this sentiment was not evident in the small student participant group, this might be owing to the more balanced mix of age on the creative writing course, compared to mature students in isolation in the larger class sizes of mainstream courses. While interpersonal communication is highlighted as a possible cause of tension to consider when encouraging diversity of recruitment, it must be acknowledged that such a tension could occur irrespective of classroom mix; the problem is not specific to social diversity and could be attributed to other factors such as personality. As such this would require a further exploration into classroom management strategies and is not part of this research.

There was also evidence of how life experiences aided personal development and intercultural understanding in both directions along the age line. In her individual interview Lauren provided an anecdote about Karen learning the vernacular in common usage with her younger peers which demonstrates the importance of basic confidence in conversation that Karen professed to be lacking when she first attended university:

‘Karen’s quite funny when she talks about the language the youngsters use – “I don’t understand it – that’s alright I ask and I find out and then I know” - and then she starts using it.’ (Lauren, individual interview)

In this respect the student group provides evidence of learning together and from each other based on what they can bring from their life experiences, and from the language they employ.

In her vlog, Denise acknowledged that she had indeed benefited from the age diversity of her class, through the need to express herself and make her own values understood:

‘I think if I was in a class full of 19 year olds and 18 year olds it would be so tempting to just write about love and drugs and I don’t know what, but right now I am learning to write for everyone - I’m trying to make everyone in the room understand where I’ve come from and if a lot of those people were the same age as me a lot of that would be already covered and it would be easier – I’m going against the grain and I think that has helped me grow and develop so much and I’ve matured so much - and also I think that it helps you appreciate education.’  
(Denise, vlog)

The diversity in her class expanded Denise’s ability to communicate to different audiences outside her original comfort zone, and acknowledged the personal transformation benefits of her being made to do so.

The student participant stories presented both positive and negative aspects of diversity within the group but the joint narrative was largely one where diversity was a driver of positive group dynamics. In turn this led to enhanced learning from peer-to-peer interactions as well as from the assumed source of the tutors. This has two implications for marketing messages. Firstly, there is the possibility of conveying the pedagogical benefits of learning from fellow students. Secondly there is the opportunity to create platforms where these voices can be heard amongst mainstream accounts. Jointly such messages could promote diversity amongst students as a classroom norm, aimed at potential new students who do not comply with the traditional core. It is noted that the nature of the course both in subject matter and in structure made peer-to-peer learning a likely outcome, but not a prerequisite.

#### **4.2.2 Benefits beyond the classroom**

Having first looked at aspects of diversity as part of the on-course student experience, I now turn to diversity expressed as an aid to longer-term pedagogical and societal goods. The two concepts are

brought together here in the sense of students learning from each other with benefits continuing beyond university study.

There was a general feeling that society benefits from facilitating a greater understanding of the variety of backgrounds through the medium of HE. One challenge that arises from this desire to improve the social mix of classes is the human capital marketing thrust which places the emphasis on individual remunerative benefits. Mature student Tina offered her perspective on interactions across the age groups:

‘It's very good for them, the young ones, because they're in school - all the same age -they're in college - all the same age - and they're coming to uni on this course, and when they go out to work they're going to have to deal with us [older people], so it's good that on this particular course they are learning to be put together’ (Tina, joint conversation)

Tina felt that interactions between the younger and older students, while enforced by classroom circumstances, equated to life skills in later social and employment situations.

This was echoed by history tutor Dean who firmly believed that diversity in the classroom and interacting with students from socially varied backgrounds with ‘sometimes tough life experiences’, could make a significant and positive impact on students from privileged backgrounds.

‘In its crudest form I think, even if they are going to go off and be captains of industry and maintain their privileged backgrounds, the better they are going to be as managers. This isn't social mobility, this is possibly maintaining the hierarchy, but I still think it is going to be better for them educationally – and when you find people taking their gap year...looking at poor deprived people...well they have never set foot in a council estate...there is a sort of credible ignorance about an increasingly divided Britain – I think it is good if you can break these things down in the classroom too...it's a case of knowing one's own country’ (Dean, history)

Dean compared domestic cultural interactions with ubiquitous gap year opportunities, finding diversity in the class room as more valuable than pre-packaged encounters which ostensibly ‘sell’ transformative experiences. He also felt that there was an argument to be made about the pedagogical benefits of cultural understanding directly related to his subject:

‘Breeding understanding of the historical reasons for differences of opinion – and one of the bigger reasons is because it is often shaped by people's background – and their own experiences – so I think there is an argument to be made that diversity makes you a better historian ... I do

think there is an important point to be made about fostering understanding of difference and respect for difference.’ (Dean, history)

Fellow history tutor John believed that students should consider their position in the local, albeit temporary, community surrounding their chosen institution for the duration of their studies.

However, he feared that selling the idea of community engagement to some would be seen as a ‘noble gesture’ on the part of the institution towards those deemed worthy of its condescension and as such may be regarded as patronising. Nevertheless, John highlighted that community work was a worthy pursuit for his students:

‘Otherwise we just become an extension – a finishing school if you like – for those privileged children – I think there is a recruitment strategy targeted at schools that is a sort of continuum of coming from the same schools and if they continue to come from the same school – well this is just an extension of what we had before just in a different place – actually you never really get students outside of their comfort zone – you never get them working with different people – you have got a very homogeneous student body.’ (John, history)

However, marketing intervention was not necessarily welcome in attempting to convey this message. Both John and Dean suspected that the core student audience, having been already exposed to the idea of working with big name brands through mainstream marketing, and the subsequent career aspirations, would reject the idea of community volunteer work as being ‘deeply unsexy’. In this respect they both felt that the human capital approach was dominant and driving expectations, and an overt attempt to impose a citizenship benefit might be too big a risk.

Music tutor Robin expressed regret for his minimal experience of teaching a diverse student community owing to his specialism in music which he recognises at *Lorem* is marginalised at both school curriculum and wider society level. Nevertheless, he agreed in principle with the importance of diversity across the socio-economic divide:

‘I believe in WP because it is good for the country ...mixing people socially and breaking down prejudices is the only way to create a happy country and I think the smaller the social divisions the happier the country is’. (Robin, music)

As with history tutors John and Dean, Robin had reservations about relying on better messaging and marketing interventions to convey the society benefits of diversity, but did feel that there needed to be changes in *Lorem*'s own curriculum to meet the needs of marginalised students.

To summarise, while tutors and students may look towards the benefits of diversity from different perspectives there is a consensus among students that diversity was advantageous to their own development, and among tutors that it benefits society more broadly. These benefits are not well articulated within *Lorem*'s recruitment messages, but could be readily included in the student endorsement corpus. Echoing the students' beliefs that their work was improved by the differing perspectives brought about by diversity, the tutors also felt that from a socio-economic perspective it added cultural richness to conversations that generated a social good.

### **4.3 Subject visibility and employability**

This next analytic theme which emerged from the interviews addressed the visibility of the arts and humanities in the secondary school curriculum, and perceptions of their validity as a choice at university. It also covered the possible influence that teachers and parents have over the decision-making process based on those perceptions. The tutors were dominant in responding to questions about the marginalisation of subjects, though there were some student comments which also connected to their position.

#### **4.3.1 Perceptions of employability and subject validity**

The tutors offered varying reasons for why their subjects suffered in the perceptions, of students, parents and school teachers. These covered A-level tariff control, visibility and employability. The tutors frequently compared arts and humanities to the sciences and the professions based on the perceived connection between subject and employability. They also expressed concerns over government interventions.

The current emphasis in HE marketing, under pressure from government through the implementation of KIS, is to market courses through obvious career paths with an inference of improved chances of earlier success and gratification than could be achieved by not having a degree. Classics tutor Maria identifies flaws in the way KIS presents salaries as a benchmark for graduate employability, particularly in the cut-off point of six months after graduation:

‘There are a lot of people who may take a badly paid job to begin with, but who will be on the path to a pretty well off job and if you cut off at 6 months picture is not great ...with a general arts degree it’s very often the case that people are doing extremely well after five years – they’ve settled into a profession and are beginning to get established – five years for a more representative picture of what they are likely to earn – compared to something straight out of uni’ (Maria, classics)

Fellow classics tutor Heather was also wary about the human capital approach ignoring other motivational factors; like student Sam (see Section 4.1), she reflected on the personal benefits of happiness and satisfaction in a career that cannot wholly be attained from salary itself.

‘It’s not just about the amount of money that you earn but it’s about having a good life and doing something that you love...some of them [Heather’s students] have gone into international development and they are saving the planet and some will be DJs and running cafes or whatever – they will have lives and their lives will be complicated and rich and enriched by studying something they loved and are often still interested in it – some of them will go off into the city and earn loads of money and then some of them after 10 years will be fed up with earning loads of money and become teachers...what’s important is that the degree is not preventing you from doing any of these things.’ (Heather, classics).

Heather’s experience is one of building up skills for career paths played out over an extended period, not captured by the KIS representation geared towards a quickly earned return on investment. However, happiness does not feature as a measure in routine quantitative surveys.

Art history tutor Gerry identifies a distinction between skills acquisition to enter into the professions and professionalising oneself, and at the same time draws a direct connection between perceptions of employability and a reason why arts subjects have failed to recruit significant numbers of those flagged as WP:

‘There is no perceived direct link between a degree and employment – there’s no perceived value - and the arts also traditionally recruit very badly from Asian backgrounds for example – where the kind of sense of professionalisation is associated with pharmacy and those kind of

things where you have an extremely high proportions of student from that background - it's a direct link understanding of what a degree translates into in terms of employability – perversely, of course, an arts degree makes you much more employable because with pharmacy, well you become a pharmacist whereas, as an arts student you can do anything. I think we are failing in that message — the subject specific skills are often not the ones which are directly relevant to gaining employment – it's the transferrable skills package around it.' (Gerry, Art history)

Gerry suggests that the failure is due in part to the under-representation of transferable skills in arts and humanities subjects which would lead to a richer choice of careers than a subject with a direct connection to a specific career:

'Because it's all implicit but you need to make it more explicit ...when you abstract how you go about finding this information, contextualizing, communicating, packaging, applying, these are skills which are unbelievably valuable.' (Gerry, Art history)

It was felt that this lack of understanding and recognition around the value of transferable skills was in part due to the lack of explicit articulation, both for the potential student and parent audiences, and their cultural leanings towards directly vocational courses.

History tutor Dean expressed a related viewpoint based on the over-supply of subjects with more prominent links to employability. He believed that some of the professions were subject to 'massive over production of students, funnelled into specific and inflexible careers', while his subject allowed for 'broader brush' transferable skills based approach, less limiting in scope for future employability:

'It gives you a broad skill set – none of them particularly honed – it's like bringing you up to a very high level of basic fitness –but that doesn't matter because the labour market is unlikely to be specialist in the future – people are more likely to have several careers – people are very likely to be doing jobs that haven't even been invented now.' (Dean, history)

He also noted that better-informed people were already aware of the high salary potential attached to a history degree through the transferable skills rather than in the subject itself, but this message was more difficult to convey to marginalised audiences:

'Now I think one of the things we have to do is get out a message to people about the value of employability of the subject because I think that does cut ice with WP students who are desperately trying to get into [professions].' (Dean, history)

Both Dean and John expressed concern that this conversation was not going on in schools, and that parents in particular needed to be persuaded of the value of a history degree to employment:

‘It’s clear that the hardest task is convincing their parents that a history degree is worthwhile as it can lead to other things besides thinking great thoughts about historical topics...I think students are often struggling to convince themselves and convince their parents that history is something that can lead to a very good career in another kind of sector – if you are going to pick a degree like this it is not going to limit you in the slightest.’ (John, history)

Dean has regular personal contact with immigrant community parents whose own education, while to a high standard, has not led to aspirational careers in the UK. He advises that their aspirations for their children still tend to lean towards specific highly competitive vocational disciplines ‘Because of all sorts of racial prejudice and glass ceilings these people aren’t going to get jobs in those areas.’ He recounted situations where the students themselves, mostly female, frequently Asian, were simply not permitted to study for an arts degree instead of a professional or science subject.

‘I am sure the more you go into areas of so called WP categories and the more they are thinking there is this big financial millstone tied around your neck, there are these vocational degrees that are going to lead to a job, and there are these other possibly more interesting degrees, and they have to be persuaded that these more interesting degrees are going to lead on to something’ (Dean, history)

So whilst Dean is confident in his subject’s employability credibility within core audiences, he does believe that this message is lacking within marginalised audiences and needs to be made more prominent. Modern languages tutor Derrick offers an example of explicit messaging for transferable skills based on the use of drama in modern language studies:

‘The act of the rehearsal and performance enables you to develop self confidence in terms of presentation skills, and confidence to go in somewhere with limited language skills and act out the scenarios.’ (Derrick, modern languages)

In *Lorem’s* texts, drama is positioned as a social feature most commonly associated with Student Union activities, yet Derrick identifies it as a pedagogical benefit embedded within the curriculum.

The tutor discourse constantly placed arts and humanities courses in a deficit position in relation to the sciences and professions. Derrick quite simply declares that for students contemplating marginalised subjects they should consider the competitive advantage of having an unusual degree:

‘Russian has a rarity value at the moment – you will be one of few rather than one of many... we are not saying that anywhere. If you are a keen linguist you can take the path most travelled or gain an edge by taking a more difficult language – it does not narrow down your choices as you are differentiating yourself’ (Derrick, modern languages).

This prompts the consideration of how to position marginalised subjects as a strategic choice to differentiate oneself from the mainstream subject graduates, balanced against the perceived risk of over specialisation in a subject not directly linked to a vocation.

As to be expected, the academic participants were passionate about their subject areas, and defended the employability value based on their own knowledge of the embedded transferable skills and the career trajectories of their alumni. They also articulated the competitive benefits of broad brush skills and the value in scarcity of graduates of some marginalised subjects. In addition, there was a sense of the personal development and ‘professionalisation’ of oneself (Gerry, art history), offered separately to discussions about careers. These ideas are not prevalent within *Lorem*’s core messages, but could be used to aid an understanding of the value of marginalised subjects when placed in competition with more obviously vocationally-oriented ones.

#### **4.3.2 Visibility and the national curriculum**

In tandem with the concerns over negative perceptions of employability of arts and humanities graduates, the school curriculum itself, heavily influenced by government, was explored as a problem area which affected recruitment. Tutors felt that while *Lorem*’s recruitment from high-achieving schools remained buoyant, they were concerned over the growing gap between their ability to recruit from this core audience and their desire to make the subjects accessible to all. Termed as ‘lack of visibility’, ‘limited footprint’ and ‘anonymity’ by the tutors, it was identified that elements of arts and humanities courses were embedded in other higher profile subjects including history and English, but were not always visible as subjects in their own right. This was exemplified by art history being used as a method of analysis in history, but not a commonly offered at A-level (see Section 3.2.2).

Mature students Lauren and Tina had already expressed the complexities of accessing information about ‘invisible’ subjects without prior knowledge:

‘If you are going to go into something you don’t know anything about you don’t know what questions to ask about it, so you either have to trust that the person giving you the information has worked out exactly what you are going to want to know or need to know, that you don’t even know that you want to know or need to know, or you’re going to have to sort of talk to someone about it.’(Lauren, joint conversation)

Lauren’s dilemma presented the challenge of anticipating questions from potential students who have not yet become acquainted with the language of the subject, and making sure the answers were provided in a visible space. She also addressed the possibility that if subjects were not covered at school, then they were at risk of being invisible at university, unless serendipitous corporate information discoveries or personal advisor interventions occurred. Tina had also highlighted the problem of low visibility of marginalised courses in schools via her own experience of volunteering for outreach work. On attending a secondary school for a book project she recalls:

‘We helped the young ones to start writing their own, so we had no experience and we were learning with the young ones. But it were [*sic*]amazing, how you would talk to some of them afterwards and they were only 18 or 19 and they were ‘so you can do this at Uni?’ (Tina, joint conversation)

This was a situation known to the tutors, who voiced their own concerns and challenges presented by the low visibility of their subjects.

For some of the most marginalised arts and humanities subjects, defined by their limited appearance on the secondary school curriculum (see Figure 3.3), the openness of tutors to the idea of diversity is hampered by the subjects’ confinement to a low number of schools. History tutor John expresses this as ‘the perpetual arts conundrum of the biggest range offered at the most elite schools.’

Maria spoke of her subject, classics, being popular at primary school level, as delivered through Greek and Roman myths and legends, but which all but disappears from the state school curriculum by Key Stage 3 (KS3). She and fellow classics tutor, Heather, both felt that for HE subjects not taught in schools, additional assistance was required for information seekers to recognise the

existing connections between school and university curricula. Heather did not feel this happened: ‘I don’t think schools coach about mapping curriculum content to uni subjects. I think that extra help is indeed required, as university decisions made at school can be daunting’. She articulates the concern about how students who do not know a subject exists at secondary school cannot readily know that it can be studied at university.

Adding to art history tutor Gerry’s employability rationale for low recruitment of WP students to the arts (see Section 4.3.1), Maria points towards visibility in the A-level curriculum. Of the courses in *Lorem’s* humanities portfolio she says:

‘Everyone has a religious knowledge provision at least in a sense of an assembly but they won’t teach the new philosophy and religion A-level in all sorts of places – Art history and classics and even to some extent music A-level are very concentrated in the private sector- so we have issues in encouraging people from certain postcodes.’ (Maria, classics)

Robin echoes Maria’s concerns with the provision of music in the national curriculum, and adds that *Lorem’s* entry requirements exacerbate the problem further:

‘If you want to explain why our WP figures are low, a big part of that is that we are requiring A-level music and we are drawing on what is already a very elite constituency.’ (Robin, Music)

Robin confesses that his department has been ‘absolutely detached’ from the burgeoning technical industry, which must be addressed by a market-driven response in altering *Lorem’s* provision. He recognises that the problem partly originates in GCSE choice where the ability to study his subject can be lost at options stage, but also with curriculum reform where A-levels do not keep up with GCSEs and degree courses do not keep up with market trends; ‘The GCSE changed so you could do a GCSE without even reading music, but I don’t think the A-levels kept up with that.’ *Lorem’s* A-level policy was retained appealing to ‘a very select part of society.’ In this case secondary school curriculum reform was responsible for widening participation in music, divorcing the subject from the need to learn an instrument, but *Lorem* retained a programme for an elitist core market of ‘privileged children’ (Robin, music). Robin demonstrated both the need to change, and the need to retain academic integrity and viability through existing faculty expertise. His department reinforced

the inability of HE to respond to rapid change in a fast-paced business environment, while needing to respond rapidly in order to survive. This was an example where a market-driven response to product development needs to be considered to have a broader appeal, where without doing so the traditional pedagogy and sustainable knowledge base would be at risk. This theme arises again in the public forum analysis (See Section 5.2.2).

Dean claims that history is a popular A-level subject amongst students from high-achieving schools with middle-class parents. Graduates from these schools also form the highest percentage of those going on to university. The fate of the subject in lower-achieving secondary schools is a 'story of decline in quality and size', thus 'creating stratification' of the subject in the school system. John picked up on *Lorem's* A-level entry tariff barriers in relation to the national curriculum as well. As with a standard route through secondary school to university, dropping core subjects at GCSE has a knock on effect as to what can be studied at A-level and at university. He also expressed concern over the loss of history at GCSE in relation to *Lorem's* portfolio of courses which do not routinely appear on the national curriculum:

'It's gone, and it has a knock on effect with other humanities subjects too ... the students that have gone on to do archaeology, art history, ancient history, classics, have gone through the history route as well initially – if they have not done history at 13 or 14 then actually those subjects are lost to them too...' (John, history)

Language tutor Derrick also had concerns about curriculum reform, but unlike the broadening of access as seen with music, he felt that languages were being devalued. He expresses learning a language as 'part of being an educated person' but adds that the lack of visibility on the curriculum of languages in general helps to explain the 'paucity' of students. He is disparaging of the way languages are viewed in the UK, critical of the government in its persistence of 'running down languages', and believes that there needs to be a radical change to the national curriculum to re-engage the life skill of language acquisition with intercultural understanding and global citizenship.

‘You develop skills that permit you to be much more flexible...they will be used to adapting to being in a place where they don’t understand everything that is being said to them...that extra struggle to communicate which is very largely about understanding the culture as well as understanding the language... it makes you better global citizens.’ (Derrick, modern languages)

His thoughts on the benefits of domestic diversity and language acquisition are aligned with those expressed in the public domain (see Section 5.2.3)

Tutors expressed a range of concerns about how their subjects were viewed within schools. The concerns covered low visibility, perceptions of low validity, and the marginalising effect that *Lorem’s* A-level policy might have retrospectively if the specific facilitating subjects were not considered early enough. This raises the possibility of earlier than A-level school interventions to address the visibility and validity questions.

#### **4.4 Reception of marketing intervention**

My line of questioning prompted tutors to respond to the idea of marketing intervening in the recruitment challenges of marginalisation. The tutors’ responses were based on their knowledge of *Lorem’s* central marketing structure, official WP provision, and subject-level outreach work. The interviews also opened up conversations of collaboration on small marketing projects relating directly to their subject areas.

As established in Chapter 3, *Lorem* has a preference for partitioning marketing practice, where strategies for mainstream and WP recruitment are developed separately. Robin felt that there was a lack of connection between academic and administrative units: ‘I think one of the problems is when you develop special units ...they don’t talk to academic units, and academic units don’t talk to them.’ He expressed this concern as a lack of cohesion between the different units when working towards the same goals. Responding for his music colleagues, he addressed the issue of corporate marketing messages which were constructed without academic consultation. He felt that the knowledge of how to market should be informed by the intimate subject knowledge and teaching

experience of tutors. In addition, it emerged from the tutor interviews that outreach work was not considered a part of the marketing remit, and that WP did belong to a specialist unit, although there was also a sense that ownership for such work also resided within the subject discipline. Workload then became a problem, and tutors expressed frustration with their inability to reconcile their desire to support requests for outreach owing to existing workloads and incompatibilities with routine teaching and pastoral support duties.

Maria discussed the resource issue through her experience of trying to re-introduce arts subjects to the school curriculum:

‘Normally it takes one member of staff on a mission with a recognition of the value – it’s terribly personal/fragile/one-to-one –it requires a lot of resources.’ (Maria, classics)

Maria’s views return to the gap created by mass market approaches to HE, addressing the needs of the core target audiences, and the tailored approach which is required to address the problems which persist in the triangle of marginalisation. Gerry (art history) felt that when conducted via the specialised units, outreach became a too tightly targeted initiative that ignored schools or segments of the school population which would benefit directly from interventions. This has implications for marketing segmentation practice and the democratic accessibility of messages.

Tutor ambition for targeting WP audiences was not without its drawbacks, such as expressed by Gerry, who claimed her subject attracts a higher than average number of students with SEN:

‘There have been some quite interesting debates there of what’s the value – what’s the benefit – obviously very contentious – but that in many ways is a similar debate – how far do you push this support for that kind of demographic of student who may traditionally perceive universities to be something they shouldn’t go to.’ (Gerry, art history)

For the most part it was clear that *Lorem* tutors who had experience with outreach work and teaching students from marginalised backgrounds were interested in exploring ideas of how to improve their recruitment from this audience. However, Gerry challenged how much support should be given where its long term value may be questioned. She also warned against coaching

individuals to be aware of their differences which might make them feel special and worthy of greater entitlement as a result.

#### **4.4.1 Marketing as an aid to outreach**

It was evident from the tutor interviews that becoming involved in outreach work was a personal choice for them. Where such work was considered desirable and/or necessary it was predominantly conducted on an individual tutor basis or with small subject-specific groups. Occasionally these groups would come together in a semi-formalised meeting. A common frustration of the tutor interviewees was the lack of protected time to participate in activities, and the resulting impact on workload when time was allocated.

John is personally active in outreach programmes but acknowledged that these are not publicised, and there is no 'central clearing house'. He was committed to working in skills to 'build up enthusiasm about university'.

'We haven't really fobbed off schools that have come to us who are by no means WP, if a school comes to us we can't say we can't work with you as it's not in our best interests to do it – we would be happy to take them on – I suppose we have been a bit more selective with taster days in that we have only targeted teachers working at WP target schools and therefore the students who came were from that cohort more broadly conceived as WP – I'd be happy to keep it open to be honest, but in many ways, it depends how WP is classified.' (John, history)

However, he was concerned that specific targeting of WP students could be off-putting:

'I feel some schools and certainly some students...would object to being ghettoised in this WP category – that's the hardest thing about this outreach activity – you're trying to make this universal but in a sense it's not as some students balk at the idea about being a special case or deserving of special treatment and want to complete on their own terms...we don't know what kind of student will respond to being targeted as part of a WP agenda because they may believe that actually that stigmatises them.' (John, history)

This is intertwined with the way that WP schools are specifically targeted in accordance with a specific set of socio-economic status (SES) and postcode criteria, contrasted with tutor preferences to work with all schools with which they can form a productive relationship. This was expressed by

Maria (classics tutor) as ‘We don’t do schools talk just for recruitment – we do it for the subject.’

On the suggestion that marketing could assist with outreach work she said:

‘I suspect it is very sensitive – there will be some teachers in tough comprehensives in deprived parts of the country who will resent people coming in from RGs telling them how wonderful RG universities are and would regard one as a visitor from another planet – but we can’t not do it and there are schools where there are pockets – some people from tough postcode areas and some not so tough – the picture is more mixed than one might imagine. (Maria, classics)

None of the tutor participants expressed any major objections to considering marginalised students as a target audience, and indeed there was much enthusiasm for the cultural enrichment brought about by a diverse study body as evidenced. However, there was an opposing narrative that the additional support required for some WP students placed additional pressure on staff, which would need to be considered in specifically targeting this audience.

John felt that earlier intervention was required ‘I have found that a lot of the outreach we have done, students enjoy our subject but their minds are already made up about what they are going to do.’

However, he does feel that it would be more difficult to persuade some colleagues and that ‘it’s a more conceptual leap’ than working with A-level students. Dean believes that it is necessary to ‘address the temporality of marketing as an issue

‘I think one of the dangers of marketing as such is that marketing seems to be measured on pretty short term – facts and figures over three or four years, but outreach work projects – that might give those kids a love of history.’ (Dean, history)

Acknowledging that a long-term view of marketing was important Dean expressed that ultimately for him it boiled down to maintaining personal contacts and being prepared to ‘play the long game’ by going into schools and talking to the teachers.

Maria said she was prepared to talk to anyone who asked, but identified that those who do ask are already the converted audience. Regarding the unconverted, she queried:

‘Are we up against a general feeling of hopelessness, of negativity of teaching staff in some schools – how can we overcome tendencies on their part that we can’t do something - that is so fundamental I am not sure that anything we can do can change that – on the other hand what can we do to try ... least a feeling that we can demystify some of the things that go on...we do need

to cultivate a sense that we are interesting and important, and actually the community engagement does cultivate a sense of being interesting and important... 'If we can raise the temperature in the way people perceive the arts, that will have a knock on effect in recruitment.'

(Maria, classics)

The tutor desire for marketing involvement can be summarised as something to be approached with caution and sensitivity, in full consultation with academic staff in order to allow them to control the content and relationship. The success of any interventions should be measured over a period of time independent of recruitment cycles, and should involve improving perceptions both of subjects and elite institutions.

#### **4.4.2 Demystification of marketing messages**

A problem identified in the tutor interviews was that while they knew they had important demystifying information, they had a tendency to hold it back from frontline marketing messages for a more personalised revelation at open days. This was said whilst acknowledging that, although open days were the most effective recruitment activity, it was difficult to encourage marginalised students to attend in the first place. Dean addressed the need to 'demystify' aspects of HE which were not apparent to the marginalised constituents of history's target audience. Whilst keenly aware of the common misconceptions of his subject area within marginalised audiences, he was also wary of alienating potential students by selling the value of the arts or positioning universities as the 'guardians of western civilisation'. He acknowledged an awkward relationship between the suggestion of demystifying university to aid WP students, and maintaining a little 'mystique'. He believed there was glamour attached to being cultured, but it was not within the remit of marketing to declare it. He identified that the fee structure itself served as a consumer tool to demonstrate limited supply of a high quality product. 'I think we need to be a tiny bit arrogant because I think they like it – we are not a place that is desperate to get us but we are lucky to be at this place'. Dean did acknowledge that he was much more transparent at open days, discussing topics such as contact hours. Dean tells his potential students that 'You have to realise that if we increase our contact

hours by a third that means we all have significantly less time to see you individually, and you have significantly less time to spend in the library'. He believes this helps to break the myth of contact hours as a value-for-money tool, as represented in KIS data, but arguably an open day event is too late in the information-seeking process to decode such comparative data, if the lack of visibility persists as a problem.

Heather (classics) also declares that some knowledge is withheld for use at open days as it is not 'In your face marketing' such as '...how we handle the transition – approachable and accessible for beginners but take you to a uni level of thinking about it and discuss areas which aren't studied in the school curriculum'. The retention of this information for open days creates a new problem as the message does not reach the potential students who have chosen not to attend or are otherwise unaware.

However, this stance requires potential students to attend the open days, and the tutors acknowledge that barriers to participation begin before these events, and that part of the battle is to encourage marginalised students to attend open days in the first place.

The tutors appeared to be as desirous of the pedagogical advantages of diversity in the classroom that are revealed by the students and from their own experiences, but were not inclined to see marketing as a contributor to the recruitment opportunity. In fact, marketing is more likely to be considered as one of the key detractors from encouraging diversity, with visual imagery most cited as pandering towards the core audience:

'Our core constituency is home counties floppy haired grammar school/private school/ghettoised comprehensive that might as well be a private school because the average house price is half a million quid, and I suppose there is the risk that if one within the standard prospectus pushes for inclusivity it will drive off our core constituency so there is a very careful balance to be struck.' (Dean, history)

Dean highlights the necessity of homogeneity of images to avoid risking an image that would detract from the core audience. However, he felt that it would be patronising to provide a

discretionary prospectus, which connects with Gerry's (art history) concern that separation can raise expectations of being treated as special.

So on the one hand, there is a belief that UK-domiciled diversity in the classroom is a goal critical for the social good of the country, and on the other hand there is a policy and administrative divide at *Lorem* that serves as a barrier to achieving this goal. Furthermore, in pursuit of making a case for alternative approaches to marketing which will address the situation, there were some unintended consequences raised by tutors such as assigning a privileged or stigmatised status through the specific targeting of WP. I will now discuss in more detail the possible marketing implications derived from the interview analysis.

#### **4.5 Implications for a new approaches to promotional marketing**

In acquiring and analysing the data, I have given consideration to the atypical selection and small sample of participants in relation to extrapolation into design principles. However, even with just a small sample it was possible to gain a range of experiences and beliefs about diversity that are not captured within the routine marketing intelligence that is typically used to inform mainstream marketing practice. The analysis so far demonstrates that the tutor participants took a cautious interest in marketing interventions to address aspects of marginalisation affecting both their subject areas and their student audiences. I now look at the implications for developing new resources to aid these interventions allowing for the caveats required from the tutor participants.

In general, the tutors were interested in marketing interventions in their recruitment to attain class-based diversity with pedagogical and citizenship benefits, but were also wanting to retain control over the nature of these interventions. They were desirous of being able to attract more students from official WP backgrounds, but did not necessarily wish to restrict their promotional work to such tightly targeted segments. Instead they were willing to think more broadly in terms of socio-

economic background, to include those who would fit the WP criteria but for the school they were attending. Maria recognised that the definition of WP extended beyond ‘people in certain types of schools from certain types of postcodes’ to ‘a multitude of other’. Neither Gerry, Dean nor John agreed with *Lorem’s* practice of differentiating between WP and non-WP schools, agreeing that WP-defined postcode boundaries were not infallible, and it was not helpful to recruitment relationships in general to be selective. Nevertheless, the student and tutor accounts offered a reason for UK-domiciled diversity to be actively encouraged and promoted as a norm across disciplines, but the marketing approach presented challenges, which I shall present next in three interlinked themes.

#### **4.5.1 Homogenisation of heterogeneous stories**

An important aspect of diversity demonstrated within the creative writing course was that differences in thinking brought about by life experiences which prompted peer-to-peer learning and preparation for interactions beyond HE. The differing biographies suggest that there are many stories to be told of how students arrive at and experience HE. It could be said that the nature and structure of the course facilitated this situation. From just a small sample of students it is clear that there are widely differing stories of background, motivation, and attitude (see Appendix 8). Jane and Sam’s stories were closest to the norm of *Lorem’s* recruitment both being school leavers with some access to guidance through school and parental encouragement, although both were ‘first in the family’ and therefore also fulfilling WP criteria. Denise was the primary intended recipient of WP allowances, being from a low-income background and being admitted on the flexible admissions policy, her dyslexia being cited as a reason for not attaining the required A-levels. Karen’s story is particularly hard to locate in mainstream stories, being a retiree grandparent motivated by family to record her memories, for personal non-financial gain. Tina’s health issues and Patrick’s therapeutic motivation are also difficult to find. As all the students acknowledged they were progressing well on their course, this might be seen as validating all their stories to be

reproduced for future audiences. However, extrapolated out to the larger student population, the sheer scale of telling individual stories would be problematic from a resource production and information seeking perspective. Condensed to a homogeneous notion of diversity, the composite story would need to incorporate atypical qualifications, mental health disability, academic pursuits as therapy and personal enrichment unaligned with human capital motivations. Therefore, there must be provision for gaining a shared understanding of differentiated and alternative recruitment positions through the presentation of representative stories.

The reduction of individual voices to a homogenised typical student profile is difficult to avoid, but I will consider the idea here by identifying the threads of commonality that do appear in the participant biographies, that may still be considered atypical of the core target audience of elite universities. The sample also highlights the need for a more heterogeneous approach which takes into account differing pressures, identities and transparency in why diversity is desirable, and how it works in relation to personal and society values. For this group of students, diversity enabled them to learn about their peers' lives, language, motivations and preferences, and for the tutors it worked in terms of pedagogical enrichment and the teaching and learning of citizenship.

#### **4.5.2 Raising visibility and employment credibility in secondary schools**

The notion of visibility of subjects was first introduced when defining the research problem, and examining the impact of entry tariffs when used for market positioning (see Section 3.2.2). Invisible subjects were defined as those which did not appear overtly at secondary school, but might instead be embedded in another subject e.g. art history taught through history, or those subjects which have a presence primarily restricted to independent and high-achieving schools e.g. classics and music. As a consequence of this invisibility, some subjects require extra intervention to raise awareness of their existence so that potential students can understand the subject through connections within their

curriculum. Tutors had already established this as a goal for outreach initiatives, but were working with limited resources, and geographical restrictions, limiting the scale of the work.

The lack of employment credibility of arts and humanities subjects was raised where subject areas were not perceived to lead to a particular career, and the embedded transferable skills were not understood in a way that would lead to graduate employment. Tutors were concerned with the pervading school dialogues, political interventions, and the invisibility of their courses within narratives of employability. They had also identified parents and communities as audiences who needed to be persuaded. Again, this stance challenged the core marketing approach which targets traditional route students, but does not specifically account for the opinions of their personal advisors, or provide adequate demystification of corporate and official information.

#### **4.5.3 Presenting student diversity as a norm: holistic long-term approaches**

The tutor participants articulated a version of diversity that they would like to work, and have experienced to a small degree in the classroom, but added words of caution. History tutor John admitted that the time frame in which his unit could operate was dictated by school times, and restricted to a small period from late June to early July. He did not want to set limits through offering an advertised service of activities and would rather negotiate when approached by a school. However, he was open to the idea of a central point for information as ‘an open invitation’ irrespective of the status of the school, with the specifics ‘...reasonably open and it would depend on the availability of staff too’. Indeed, the public availability of the resource appeared to be the greatest hindrance to an otherwise desirable project ‘I’m a bit sceptical – I don’t know if we would be inundated, but we would get more requests’ (John, history).

When questioned about raising the visibility of subjects within schools in general, tutors considered this to be part of a long term strategy separate from standard recruitment cycle activity. Their sustained appetite for diversity is critical to support marketing messages and requires a more

collaborative arrangement than currently exists between academic and marketing staff. In addition, I identified a lack of association between marketing's potential to aid recruitment from diverse audiences and outreach work traditionally conducted separately. Tutors felt that WP and outreach work was compartmentalised within specialised HEI administrative structures and separate to marketing. Nevertheless, there was evidence of a desire to embed diversity work into the routine of recruitment through a normalisation process that removed the restrictive barriers around which schools could be targeted for such work. Tutors were willing to take a 'long-game' approach to recruiting to their subject areas from diverse audiences and consider marketing practice as a vehicle for demystifying messages coded for core audiences, which included earlier interventions in schools to affect GCSE and A-level choices.

#### 4.6 Summary

In this chapter I have acquired empirical data on aspects of marginalisation from *Lorem's* existing student and tutor stakeholders, positioned as new marketing intelligence to inform resource and approach development. The methods of collection and analysis and the findings are in contrast to the norms of practice under scrutiny in the case study, providing small-scale nuanced results for marginalised subjects and students. Neither set of participant opinions is routinely incorporated into the market research corpus to inform HE marketing strategy, yet the findings here highlight gaps in marketing knowledge and suggest alternative approaches to HE recruitment messaging which in assisting marginalisation, could be incorporated into mainstream accounts without jeopardising the core.

The interview analysis revealed a narrative of the pedagogical and social value of diversity which does not appear overtly in *Lorem's* recruitment messages. The student participants were particularly attuned to the personal learning benefits of a broad spectrum of age and experience within their class unaligned with employment goals, whereas tutors were more aware of pedagogical enrichment

and diversity as a long-term society good. The findings reinforced the benefits of pursuing marginalised audiences where there is confidence that UK domiciled diversity can enhance the pedagogical experience as well as fulfilling institutional obligations towards WP.

The analysis also revealed that tutors have a close connection to the practical problem identified in Section 3.3, particularly concerning the narrow segmenting of WP, and the lack of control over school and parental influence in decision-making. Tutors had expectations to make personal and occasional interventions at open days or during outreach work, but understood that within *Lorem* it was the responsibility of specialised units to develop strategies for improvements for communication for this particular market segment. There was no expectation of broader interventions taking place through marketing endeavours. This was in part because of the dominant core audience approach, and restrictions placed upon activities by the recruitment cycle operating at resource capacity without scope for exploratory measures. Indeed, while there were genuine concerns for both the marginalisation of their subject areas and a desire to attract WP students, there was no particular evidence of these two ideas being combined and a tendency for individual tutors to take on localised responsibility.

These existing experiences of marginalisation advance the ideas declared in Section 1.3 in two ways. Firstly, the participants add a pedagogical validity to pursuing diversity in the classroom, where backgrounds and experiences can enrich the learning. Secondly, the tutors added a dimension of caution and opportunity to develop a collaborative marketing practice along newly forged relationship lines specific to this research. From a market intelligence perspective, the interviews revealed the benefits of being able to tap into individual knowledge to gain nuanced perspectives of marginalisation and opened up opportunities to take a collaborative approach to strategy development. This was juxtaposed with routine large-scale collection of data which excels at reacting to, though not necessarily predicting trends, and permits the homogeneity of approach via a

centralised majority rule. However, this empirical data was only representative of already engaged stakeholders of *Lorem*. Chapter 5 will look at market intelligence which can be derived from a more dispersed and public perspective, prior to consolidating the findings and moving to the ‘working with resource phase of DBR in Chapter 6.

## 5 Online responder voices as market intelligence

In this chapter I seek to answer the research question '*How can shared understandings of marginalisation be captured and add value to the existing market intelligence corpus?*' I investigate the power of online reader response content to provide a barometer of public feeling towards the aspects of HE recruitment identified in the triangle of marginalisation (see Figure 1.1). The content itself sits outside of the case study bounding, but the key words of the bounding parameters, including 'arts', 'humanities', 'diversity' and 'widening participation' are used to govern data selection parameters. The findings are then fed back in to the case study as a contribution to the market intelligence corpus.

I wanted to determine whether it was possible to conduct a critical reading of online comments to establish reader interpretation of news articles and posts, selected for their themes of WP, university and subject choice, and responses to external environmental factors. My methods were influenced by RRC (see Section 2.2.2) to interrogate reader inference of authored texts. I will explain the process by which I came to select the Daily Mail Online (DMO), Guardian Online (GO), and The Student Room (TSR), as my three online data sources to represent a broad spectrum of HE recruitment audiences. I will also explain my selection process for articles and threads contained within these platforms, to provide a corpus of reader responses to authored online content. Using exploratory methods aided by RRC to critique social media commentary, I will demonstrate through quantitative and qualitative analysis how such platforms and their reader responses can be considered as sources of market intelligence, both for institutions and potential students.

Furthermore, I will show how a quantitative measure of authority can be applied to responder groups based on their declared identities and experiences, which has implications for the authority of corporate texts and commissioned ambassador endorsements. I conclude this chapter with a

discussion on how this new market intelligence can be used in developing marketing solutions for the issues identified through the triangle of marginalisation framework.

### **5.1 An exploratory approach to analysing online reader responses**

Traditionally, literary theorists ask us to consider the true meaning of text as intended by the author; the central theme of RRC shifts the importance of textual interpretation away from author intent, focusing instead on the reader's own interpretation of the text (Barthes, 1972; Berger, 1972; Holland, 1975; Iser, 1972, 1980, 2006; Bathmaker, 2010). Given that knowledge and the ability to articulate one's understanding of knowledge is individual and subject to reinterpretation by others when communicated, the exact interpretation of texts adopted by individual readers is likely to be elusive. This is important to HE recruitment because the author of the source texts imbues meaning into the visual and written representation of the messages. This is conveyed to an audience which is expected to be able to recognise and decode the texts. Placed in the context of recruitment marketing messages, the author requires that potential student readers, and those who serve as their advisors, not only understand the texts, but also respond positively. The ultimate requirement of this interaction is to match the study and social needs of the student with the entry requirements of the course and the pedagogic ethos of the university, resulting in a recruitment transaction. This requires the author to recognise that different readers will draw different inferences, and mitigate for nuanced understandings within the target audiences; this is problematic in homogenised approaches to marketing. Furthermore, the marketing author intent can be interrupted by the 'noise' of alternative authors, including those of the rapidly expanding body of texts available via the internet, in particular user-generated social media content.

Potential students can connect online with like-minded individuals and their on-course peers to discuss anxieties and concerns, and to prepare for their own student experience. Importantly for diversity agenda, the technology is capable of connecting people separated by geographic and time

zones, and supports a variety of communication methods. A small-scale study of friendship patterns within a social network aimed at linking offer-holders with current students revealed that communication occurred across disciplines and nationalities (Frost, 2009). Question and answer exchanges included matters of a physiological and psychological nature not readily apparent within core promotional literature, and each new member was assisted in meaning-making by the contributions of those sharing their 'lived experiences'. The resulting peer-to-peer communication helped to build a picture of the student experience uninhibited by corporate constraints, which could in turn assist students with decision-making. This warrants an investigation of forums where students are an engaged audience, and the contributors are offering advice on a voluntary basis, though not necessarily devoid of myth-creation. My exploratory methodology is based on the premise that online sites talking about HE permit readers to respond and challenge authored content and each other, and therefore has the potential to provide rich material for gauging individual interpretation and shared understanding of key HE messages in the public and global domain.

### **5.1.1 Data selection: online platforms**

The routes by which information seekers select which sites to read and respond to are numerous, and include generalist and specialist content, which can be paid for or provided independently. In order to acquire a representative selection of non-paid for content, I selected three online platforms, DMO, GO and TSR. These have overlapping audiences from teenagers upwards; the demographics of the audiences cover the broad span of UK residents who are academically capable of participation in HE irrespective of background and whether or not they choose to attend. The DMO and GO are affiliates of printed newspapers, while TSR is a dedicated HE online-only platform. In the National Readership Survey 2013 (accessed online at <http://www.nrs.co.uk>), the Guardian and the Daily Mail (and their associated Sunday publications) received the highest national readerships in the monthly print and online readership categories of ages 15-34, and SES groups ABC1 and C2DE, in the quality and mid-range categories of publications. While GO has a larger audience in

the ABC1 SES group, monthly readership from the C2DE group is on a par with DMO. A summary of the platforms, their features, and their target audiences can be seen in Table 5.1, followed by more detail about the significance of the selection and the methods of analysis. DMO claims to provide ‘All the latest news, sport, showbiz, science and health stories from around the world’ aggregated from its print publications; developed for an online audience the DMO features pervasive positioning of ‘celebrity news’ alongside its more serious pieces. Its headlines frequently involve an emotional statement driven by an editorial policy which encourages readers to be dissatisfied with any given state of affairs. This is typified by the article ‘*Scandal of the university students who get fewer than 100 hours’ teaching a year*’ (Petre, 2013), where the readers are already persuaded to be ‘outraged’ prior to a more in-depth reading to provide contextualisation.

TSR is a ‘Forum and wiki’ where authors and responders share academic and social knowledge and experiences. It claims to have the largest global student community, although it focuses on UK providers of HE, with over 1.2 million members, over 2 million threads, and posts in excess of 45 million. Content remains in perpetuity, and membership is not rescinded owing to inactivity of a member. While there are no restrictions to viewing content, it is necessary to subscribe to the site in order to interact with other members and to post comments. TSR has more categories of interaction than the newspaper sites, sorted into forums and articles, all of which can be cross-referenced through the use of keyword ‘tags’. The expectations of TSR forum visitors are managed by brief introductions to the themes e.g. current affairs: ‘Got a breaking news topic or want to post the most recent issues for sensible, on-topic discussion?’ and educational debate: ‘Discuss current events and changes in the education system and ways you’d like to see it improved, from secondary school through to postgraduate study’. In contrast to GO and DMO where all responses are prompted from an editorial decision, in TSR, students can start their own topics within these pre-designated category headings, or by linking to existing web content and prompting discussion.

The GO offers readers ‘Latest news, world news, sports, business, comment, analysis and reviews from *the Guardian*, the world's leading liberal voice’. Within its news menu it offers an education section branded ‘Education Guardian’ and subsection ‘Guardian Students’ and ‘Higher Education Network – Ideas, insight and debate from the global higher education community’. The GO sits in between DMO and TSR appealing to both a generalist population with current affairs, and a specialist targeted HE audience with guest expert content and live chats.

**Table 5.1: Online platforms selected for reader response analysis**

<b>Online platform</b>	<b>Print based parent</b>	<b>Primary audience</b>	<b>HE content</b>	<b>Public interaction and voting mechanisms</b>
<b>The Student Room (TSR)</b> www.thestudentroom.co.uk	N/A	Students	Dedicated to HE	Public is invited to read all posts and comments, but only members can start a thread and posts comments. Members can rate posts positively; the negative ratings have been removed. Members can earn status badges based on frequency of posts, endorsements received, and assistance provided.
<b>Guardian Online (GO)</b> www.theguardian.ac.uk	The Guardian	General public with sections dedicated to HE audience	Dedicated HE section with additional online user engagement devices.	Public can comment and vote on certain articles when opened up by GO. Public is also invited to participate in debates initiated by GO. Readers can recommend comments to others
<b>Daily Mail Online (DMO)</b> www.thedailymail.co.uk	Daily Mail Mail on Sunday	General public	Education section with occasional HE features run in the main news section	Public can comment and vote on certain articles when opened up by DMO Green arrow for endorsement Red arrow for disagreement

This table shows a summary comparison of the online platforms selected for further analysis of general public inference to author-led HE discussion. It includes details of the primary reader audiences, and the mechanisms which enable readers to respond to the authored texts.

In addition to the mechanisms used to encourage reader comments, each platform has a voting mechanism to allow readers of the responses to ‘like’ or ‘dislike’ this additional commentary (see Figure 5.1). DMO uses a green and red arrow system to indicate readers’ agreement or disagreement with individual contributions, while the GO permits readers only to ‘recommend.’ The TSR reader endorsement system has been evolving throughout this research; dependent on the age of the post,

**Figure 5:1: Voting and reader response mechanisms of online platforms**

**The Student Room**

The screenshot shows a forum thread on 'The Student Room' with the title 'Does this sound like a "soft degree"?'. The thread starter, MeganRuk, asks if it's good sounding to have degrees in Consumer Behaviour and Marketing, Economics, and Business Management. A reply from Superunknown17 suggests aiming for a 'better' degree and considering career paths. The interface includes navigation links, announcements, and user avatars.

In TSR thread starters are invited to start conversations by pre-designated categories. Readers need to sign in to respond. Readers can move between pages of responses, listed in chronological order. Responders can comment on the original thread-starter post, or those of fellow responders. Readers can also explore responder profiles, and follow specific responders.

NB the response mechanisms and profile structures changed during this research and this image shows a version after the initial data selection and analysis process.

HE Specialist commentary

**The Guardian online**

The screenshot shows an article titled 'Will the study of archaeology soon become a thing of the past?' by Michael Braddick. The article discusses the impact of student demand on UK academia. Below the article is a comments section with 69 comments, sorted by oldest. A comment by 'bulwark' discusses the value of education and the impact of university courses.

The GO has specialist educational content which readers are encouraged to share, and it shows the total number of shares and comments. Readers can order the content by age, and can read them in order or by thread. Readers can only place a positive vote for a response. Readers can move between pages of responses, which are listed in chronological order.

HE-targeted sections with specialist and generalist commentary

**The Daily Mail online**

The screenshot shows an article titled 'Scandal of the university students who get fewer than 100 hours' teaching a year'. The article lists statistics about teaching time at various universities. Below the article is a comments section with 190 comments, sorted by best rated. A comment by 'Smoggie Girl' discusses the quality of teaching and the impact of university courses.

The DMO offers a headline, an introduction which is frequently presented in the form of bullet points, and social sharing options including the number of comments made to date. Reader responses (comments) can be sorted by newest, oldest, best rated and worst rated. The green arrows indicate positive ratings and the red arrows show negative ratings. Readers are also invited to 'click to rate'.

HE generalist commentary

This figure shows screenshots of online platforms indicative of landing pages and reader response sections encountered by online visitors. The platforms are shown in order of HE specialist to HE generalist.

there have been records of positive or negative endorsements, a complex system of avatar accolades for thread-starters based on a TSR algorithm, simplified more recently with badges for positive thread starter activity and positive post ratings as nominated by readers.

It is worth noting for additional context that while the public facing purpose of these platforms is to provide content of public interest, or to serve the need for information to a particular community, all are structured around a financial model. In business terms the purpose of the sites may be considered not primarily to provide news and/or services in the public interest, but rather to monetise the free public service by providing premium corporate access to audiences segmented by SES, age, and consumer behaviour; TSR for example can appeal to suppliers of services and consumables to students, including HEIs. Each editorial decision might also, therefore, be read for its commercial leverage via increased readership and digital engagement raising their premium on the saleable space and data. This does not detract from the value of the authored content or reader responses, but serves to remind us that author provocation to stimulate reader responses may not be by chance.

### **5.1.2 Data selection: articles**

Having selected the platforms for RRC interrogation, I adopted a three-stage search and filter approach for each of the platforms to select content related to my marginalisation themes. For the first step I employed a search using ‘diversity’ ‘widening-participation’ ‘higher education’ ‘social mobility’ ‘arts degree’ and ‘humanities degree’ as keywords. Each search resulted in a list of article and post headlines and titles, and metadata indicative of the content available on click-through. If the metadata was a potential match for my research themes I applied a second filter by opening the article and reading the introductory text in full for validation of article relevance. These first two stages reproduced standard online consumer information-seeking behaviour. My third filter was required to eliminate articles which had received no reader responses, resulting in a final corpus of

31 articles for deeper analysis which I catalogued with the prefix of the platform (DMO, GO, TSR), and numbered in chronological order (see Appendix 9).

Having shortlisted the articles using the three-stage filter based on probable relevancy, I then applied a further three-stage text analysis of the authored content and reader responses, printing out the text in full in order to make annotations. My first reading of each article was to gain a sense of the original author intent and the readers' inference, including the propensity to agree or disagree with the author. I highlighted comments which directly addressed themes of marginalisation. I also noted the incidences of voting in agreement or disagreement with the reader responses using the mechanisms presented in Figure 5.1.

On this first read through three things became apparent. Firstly, that responders adopted a variety of stances in the act of providing information e.g. to be helpful or to complain. Secondly, some responders indicated their authority on a subject e.g. on a declaration of first-hand experience or third party anecdote. Thirdly the corpus was heavily skewed to comments about marginalised courses, containing no viable data to compare and contrast attitudes towards marginalised students. This was in spite of their being seven articles which directly address aspects of social mobility and diversity in their titles. As a consequence, for my second read through I focused on the themes of course marginalisation as articulated by the responders. These fell into three broad, sometimes overlapping, categories: 'value-for-money', 'subject credibility' and 'curriculum bias'. My third read through concentrated on 'stance' and 'authority' to see how helpful these were to understand the responders' inference of authored content, and the possible influence their comments had on readers who voted. I now present a fuller analysis of these themes and the implications for HE marketing.

### **5.1.3 Data analysis: experiential and assumed authority attributes**

In this section I discuss my attribution of authority types to those responders who demonstrated a particular stance or experience within their text. I first considered the reader responses from 31 articles (see Appendix 9) for their ‘assumed authority’ which I define as the capacity in which the responder placed him or herself to put his or her point across. The categorisation was determined by tone and main argument within each post. It was not possible to gain a sense of assumed authority for every post, but five were identifiable across the three platforms. Similarly, I read the articles for indications of the nature of each responder’s experience with HE to assign an ‘experiential authority’ for which I identified seven categories. The assumed and experiential authorities are shown in Tables 5.2 and 5.3 respectively, including descriptions derived from the responder statements, style and tone.

**Table 5.2: Assumed authorities of responders to authored content**

Assumed authority	Description	Exemplar quotation	Positive/negative votes
Axe grinder <sup>a</sup>	Post dominated by a negative personal experience, frequently with an element of blame directed at the government, schools, HEIs or ‘the system’	‘I would not encourage any child from a “normal” background to go to uni full stop. My son’s law degree is worthless...Money doesn’t talk in this country it screams’ (mostly fed up, DMO12)	1933/40
Mythbuster <sup>b</sup>	Mythbusters offer measured responses, sometimes in parallel with personal reflection, and sometimes declaring caveats. They are mostly positioned as a critique or counterpoint to the core theme of the article.	‘I completely understand there is some stigma attached to media courses, however, not all are totally useless. Mine taught me the importance of using your own initiative and I am now a freelancer.’ (al, DMO5)	3802/54
Cynic <sup>c</sup>	Posts in these categories are particularly effective in garnering public approval and offer disparaging comments on the state of affairs, are bleak in their outlook, and often attack political parties or high profile individuals named within the article.	‘Russell group universities represent the class-ridden society we live in ...Hard an unacceptable reality of our corrupt and venal society.’(blackfirscharlie, GO6)	2461/381
Solution Provider <sup>d</sup>	Sometimes with an element of ‘self-styled guru’ contributors of this category offer their own opinions as to the way forward. Not all comments are well-informed.	‘So you’d perhaps be better off just doing Business and Management because that would give you a wider variety of skills.’ (llys, TSR3)	2124/253
Antagonist	These contributors will frequently offer a direct and insulting response to a fellow commenter, or group, and make use of commonly upheld stereotypes. While these posts rarely further an argument, they still have value in testing the public’s attitude to the overriding sentiment. However, none of the antagonists from the sample declared their experiential authority and so this assumed authority category was discounted from further analysis).	‘Lord Adonis. Was there ever a more inappropriately named person? He shouldn’t be allowed to put his dirty Common Purpose hands within a million miles of our education system.’ (Rick, DMO10)	109/51
No authority declared	It was not possible to detect a specific stance within the responder text	N/A	3037/48

This table shows the attribution of an assumed authority category based on the stance the responder takes towards the original authored content or fellow responders. Each category is exemplified by typical quotation. The number of positive and negative votes for each identifiable category aggregated across all three platforms is also recorded.

**Table 5.3: Experiential authorities of responders to authored content**

Experiential authority	Exemplar statement	Number of reader approvals/disapprovals/net approval	Net approval (n=5803)	Power ratio of net positive approvals to each post
Student <sup>1</sup>	In my university	1235/1	1234	5:1
Parent <sup>2</sup>	My son goes to university	2013/0	2013	3:1
Graduate <sup>3</sup>	When I was at university	2119/25	2094	4:1
Lecturer (HE) <sup>4</sup>	I teach at university	116/0	116	Experiential authority numbers too small
Administrator <sup>5</sup> (HE)	I work at a university	174/0	174	
Teacher <sup>6</sup> (compulsory sector)	I teach year ...	47/0	47	
Employer <sup>7</sup>	As an employer	125/0	125	

This table shows the incidences where responders indicated their own experiences in relation to their text responses. The aggregated net reader approvals per ‘experiential authority’ category was used to calculate a power ratio by placing the figure against the total net response.

I assigned each assumed authority with a superscript letter from a-f, and each experiential authority with a superscript number 1-7. The responders which contributed to the following analytic themes are identified by their online username, followed by the article prefix. The superscript numbers and letters identify sections of the responses which indicated attributed experiential and assumed authorities in the analysis. The power ratio demonstrates the potential for reader responders to be considered as proxy personal information providers as indicated by the reader endorsements of their comments. This is explored further in Section 5.3.

I will now look at the texts more closely using examples of online comments in relation to the leading articles and forum thread-starters, and discuss the implications of this data as a credible source or market intelligence for students and HEIs alike.

## **5.2 Public perceptions of marginalised courses**

The core of the online reader responses held the belief that the acquisition of a degree should provide an advantage in securing lucrative employment, thus supporting a human capital strategy within HE recruitment marketing. Here I use the responder voices and their assumed and experiential authority attributes to explore the subthemes of the texts, which I present as ‘value-for-money’, ‘subject credibility’ and ‘school curriculum bias’ to explore public attitudes to arts and humanities courses, selected in this thesis to represent subject marginalisation. I also discuss the impact the responders may have on readers.

### **5.2.1 Value for money**

The DMO2 article (see Appendix 9), an exposé covering the ‘scandal’ surrounding contact hours, was particularly effective at eliciting public responses to the notion of value-for-money within HE. The article compared and contrasted the contact hours between differing subjects and institutions, but without benchmarking the norms of subjects or comparing measures of quality between institutions.

The single most influential post based on the voting system (597 approvals) within the DMO2 sample was from a parent in the axe-grinder category:

‘Two of my sons<sup>2</sup> go to our local university and the lectures are dire to say the least. They either don’t turn up, and when they do don’t actually teach them what they are supposed to<sup>2</sup>. My eldest son has paid thousands and has basically taught himself<sup>a</sup>. One of his lecturers actually lives in France and spent a month at home and gave them their assignments a month late, they just literally cannot be bothered<sup>a</sup>, and if you dare to complain the students know that they will mark you down, there is no way you can complain<sup>a</sup>.’ (Smoggie Girl, DM02)

I have assigned this reader with the experiential authority of ‘parent’<sup>2</sup> and with the assumed authority of ‘axe-grinder’<sup>a</sup>. Her post makes no direct reference to the article, but does make direct and negative claims that her eldest son’s substantial financial investment had not been balanced by adequate academic support; she accuses the staff of operating beyond the reach of democratic complaints procedures. Whether the account would hold up to scrutiny or not does not come under visible questioning from the readers as there are no direct responses to this post, only votes. What is apparent is that the shared response of positive votes indicates general support for her views. It is not possible to derive whether this is based on shared experiences, sympathy for her plight, or a general belief that this is representative of HE practice, against which voters may have personal grudges. One possible conclusion is that the shared understanding of the readers supports the proposal that lecturers are apathetic towards their teaching and learning responsibilities and that they are protected by the establishment without recourse to consumer demand. Nevertheless, without a nuanced reading of the motivation for positive votes there does appear to be strong support for her view, and it has therefore been collectively approved as a valid account.

To counterpoint the ‘axe grinder’ view, there is evidence of a demystification role. Graduates are the strongest authority taking up this stance (n=18):

‘I think it depends on the kind of course you do. I studied communications and over my 3 years<sup>3</sup> I had a maximum of 5/6 hours of seminars and lectures a week, which was more than enough. However, I know people studying Engineering and they are in Uni 9-5 every day but they have laboratory sessions as well. A lot of course it’s about your own reading and studies outside the lecture theatre<sup>b</sup> which is the reason you go to Uni anyway? You invest in yourself and your potential- not be spoon fed like in school and college.’ (MzBallet, DMO2)

The authority as a graduate<sup>3</sup> being established, this responder compares and contrasts an arts course with a science course. She provides a justification for the difference between the two, reinforced by the onus on the individual student to put effort into their studies, which positions her comments as mythbusting<sup>b</sup> based on her experience.

The author of DM05 provided narratives from 10 graduates around the UK, having asked the headline question ‘*Is university a waste of money?*’ The editorial style was biased towards linking ‘poor value’ with arts and social science courses, with seven of the article interviewees from the arts and humanities, and three from social sciences. One possible inference is that it is given that sciences are always worth the investment. The article was shared 392 times, and received 58 comments which in turn received an accumulated net approval of 1175 votes. Within the reader responses there was a strong connection between university as a commodity and being held up for consideration as value for money. The theme of gaining a degree in something ‘useful’ for a career is strong:

‘I certainly wouldn’t recommend my grandkids<sup>2</sup>...to go to uni, unless it’s for a course that’s likely to produce a job like the law, medicine, engineering or teaching.’ (longbhanch262, 2013 DM05).

‘It’s funny how people with abysmally useless degrees<sup>c</sup> expect to have a career.’ (MissCheri, 2013, DM05)

‘The answer is not to study something as useless as art history or politics<sup>c</sup>. Study something that employers find useful and that provides a skill or useable knowledge’ (peterjwill, 2013, DM05)

‘Seems to me that far too many young people are being talked into taking courses in subjects that would previously have been studied in evening classes<sup>b</sup>. ‘History of Art’ is doubtless very interesting – but don’t expect it to lead to anything<sup>b</sup>. Acoustics in Music? I cannot see them opening any doors when the recipient gets their degree after 3 years of work<sup>b</sup>. Medicine, Law, English, Sciences, Classics will always help in the search for employment, but unless you wish to teach, History and Geography will be of limited use (we had a Geography graduate doing the photocopying in the civil service department I worked in. He could have joined the service at 18 and had several promotions<sup>b</sup>)’ (Scotts Lass, 2013, DM05)

Responder ‘Scotts Lass’, who generated the most positive endorsements in DM05 (n=72), establishes herself as a ‘mythbuster’ claiming authority on which courses will aid employment and which will not, and yet, while the overall stance is undermining the usefulness of the arts for human

capital pursuits, she does endorse classics and English. So from one perspective responder ‘Scotts Lass’ might be considered an authority on which subjects are an aid to acquiring a good graduate career; alternatively, readers with an understanding of transferable skills might put her authority into question. However, the positive endorsements she receives for her comments suggest that the dominant shared understanding is one where the intrinsic values of transferable skills are not understood.

Connected to the value-for-money debate, there were several occurrences of ‘solution providers’ (see Table 5.2) offering alternative models of teaching and learning, which would help condense the hours of study into a shorter overall time frame, thus reducing the accumulative annual fees. These market-driven models might raise pedagogical questions over mode and quality of delivery and student experience, nevertheless, the discussion highlights two strands of discourse which need addressing; firstly, there is some belief that traditional university delivery does not offer value for money and should attempt to keep up with consumer demand, including the use of technological advancements in distance-learning as exemplified by:

‘Universities simply cannot continue as they are, it’s beyond inefficient to have lecturers delivering the same thing over and over again<sup>b</sup>. Far better to pay for a good lecture which is then available to view on-line as often as students wish and then have tutorials as and when required<sup>d</sup>.’ (noneOfYourBusiness, DMO2)

Secondly, there is a discourse that degrees are being treated as a means to an end without a concept for the transformative benefits acquired over a prolonged period of steady study:

‘Make the terms longer and condense the three year course into two years<sup>d</sup> – perfectly possible if they did not have a ridiculous 5 months’ holiday each year<sup>b</sup>. Tuition fees should then be lower overall, meaning the student loans at the end would be much lower as they would also only need living allowance and accommodation for two years instead of three<sup>d</sup>.’ (Ellie, DMO3)

Strong public support for these ideas might have implications for how HEs rationalise their offer and pricing structure, while still upholding the core values of pedagogically sound degree content and being a graduate.

### 5.2.2 Subject credibility

Linked to understandings of human capital and value-for-money demands are the intrinsic credibility of subjects and their ability to provide useful and transferable skills. Article GO7 captured the debate well. Following a surge of general public interest in archaeology upon the 2013 discovery of King Richard III's remains underneath a Leicester car park, GO asked '*Will the study of archaeology soon become a thing of the past?*' (Braddick, 2013) While it was considered that the discovery would have direct economic benefits to the locale, and help raise the profile and interest in community archaeology, Braddick (*ibid*) also pointed out that 'Archaeologists ... give us access to a vast store of human experience...of direct relevance to some of the greatest challenges we now face.' Archaeology is positioned here as having significant and long-term importance in the humanities. Nevertheless, undergraduate demand and research funding is in decline, as it is not an area recognised for strong economic growth potential, nor does it have high employment demands. The academic concern is that archaeology will disappear from the developing knowledge base. The article had mixed reactions, and while like most articles in this corpus, there was a strong focus on employability, the responses did provide some dialogue on transferable skills:

'Employers don't recognise the extent of the degree's transferable skills<sup>b</sup>, as obviously as say history, or chem./physics – both things that are key to archaeology<sup>b</sup>.' (Craigmelson, GO7)

'Archaeology provides graduates with a rich variety of practical intellectual skills and knowledge<sup>b</sup>... '...archaeology as a subject is perceived mostly as a path to a career in archaeology or 'museums' writ large, which are few in number and poorly paid<sup>b</sup>....a victim of its perceived vocational pathway<sup>b</sup>.' (Wormhole, GO7)

'Archaeology is a very broad subject, which engages with surprising breadth of transferable skills, ranging from the hard sciences to social engagement<sup>b</sup>. There are 34 UK universities which teach archaeology, and some are being disbanded or shrinking dramatically, responding to the short-term diminishing demand<sup>b</sup>, and panic emphasis on STEM subjects.' (Radamanthus, GO7)

These three responses fit the mythbusting category (see Table 5.2); all agree that there are embedded transferable skills within archaeology and suggest that this is not particularly well known as demonstrated by the phrases 'employers don't recognise', 'a victim of its perceived vocational pathway' and 'surprising breadth'.

One responder underpins the relevance of transferability through his statement:

‘Unless one enters a profession such as medicine or the law it is likely that most of us will not remain in one profession for our entire working lives<sup>b</sup>.’ (ChristopherHervet,GO7)

Indeed, this statement presents a more sophisticated goal for representing the human capital approach that requires students to think of themselves as passing through a range of roles instead of one career. This was previously articulated by classics tutors Maria and Heather, and history tutor Dean (see Section 4.3.1).

Two responders from the ‘cynic’ category of assumed authority return to the human capital approach theme linked to society goods:

‘Entrants are realising that you don’t get well paid for pursuing a career which arguably can do some good for the local or national community<sup>c</sup>’ (Bingobob, GO7)

‘This [archaeology] is a vanity subject<sup>c</sup> for many students...we are compounding the problem by diverting resource away from university courses that will educate students in knowledge skills and attitudes which will provide a better future in terms of increasing jobs health and wealth for everyone<sup>b</sup>.’ (Craigmelson, GO7)

The first comment positions archaeology as a worthy subject and laments the sacrifice that might need to be made to pursue a low-paid career of benefit to society. In contrast the second places archaeology as a vanity subject that diverts resources away from more worthy causes.

The archaeology article presents traditional arguments for sustaining a knowledge base for a society good: ‘without history, there is no culture, and without culture, no civilisation’ against the economic value of supporting its study and practice in today’s society,’ (Robalbhen, GO7) and ‘It is a career with very few jobs at the end of it, better to keep it as a small sector for the very dedicated’ (jediperson, GO7). With the loss of the knowledge base, should there be a future resurgence of interest or need, the subject will be behind in its ability to provide a service. This demonstrates how a rigidly applied human capital approach to decisions on the sustainability of subjects could be potentially damaging towards future society needs.

Inferences that arts were simply not valid as a society good were also present in the DMO5 article.

Authored to establish a direct link between poor value-for-money and non-professional courses, arts courses were positioned as exemplars of low-validity degrees:

‘Where are the students with the proper degrees?’ ...My degree was well worth it<sup>3</sup> ...and enjoyed it all. Then again, I studied Physics.’ (Idonotthinkso12, 2013 DMO5)

‘I studied<sup>3</sup> a health care related course...only worth paying for law or medicine. The courses mentioned here are worthless’ (millie, 2013 DMO5)

‘I left university after the first year (achieved a 1st overall) because the course content simply didn’t justify the cost I was paying over three grand for slide shows that were uninspiring and for a library that often run out of the books<sup>a</sup> ...I can’t believe young adults are being conned in to paying over £9000 per year for a mickey mouse subjects like media studies or 17th century art...’ (Kate, 2013, DMO5)

‘If you are doing a useless degree, it definitely is a waste of money...if you’re not doing a proper subject, don’t bother<sup>c</sup>. I personally had to attend university...just finished my Law degree<sup>3</sup> because it helps me with my career path.’ (Melody, 2013, DMO5)

‘I have 10 hours’ lectures a week<sup>1</sup>, and yet fill the rest of my time in the library studying. If you’re reading a subject that is useful then you would do the same, none of this “media” or “history of art” rubbish<sup>c</sup> (Charlotte, 2013 DMO5)

There is an implicit connection between degrees perceived as being of premium academic content, biased towards the sciences, and employability. Graduates with cynical expressions as to the value of degrees are the most endorsed by readers of this article: this presents a concern to universities who use alumni endorsements within their key marketing messages. It may be viewed that social media commentary busts myths created by corporations.

An analysis of the TSR corpus demonstrated shared understandings on the inequality of degrees by subject through a narrative on employability and value-for-money. In contrast to the DMO corpus, but in keeping with tutor and student participant comments in Chapter 4, there were stronger indications of the need to be personally fulfilled as well as career orientated. This is exemplified by the following exchange of ‘mythbuster’ and ‘solution provider’ responses (Table 5.4):

**Table.5.4: Exemplar of shared understandings in an online forum**

Threadstarter Does this sound like a “soft degree”?	‘mythbuster <sup>b</sup> ’ and ‘solution provider <sup>d</sup> ’ responses
‘Obviously, it’s not up there with the highest Maths, Medicine and Economics degrees. But is it still good sounding or do you think it sounds soft? I’m predicted AAB/ABB, do you think I should aim for a “better” degree? (MeganRok)	‘You should aim to do a degree which is related to the occupation you wish to do in the future...People who embark on non-academic degrees should understand the situation in which they voluntarily get themselves into <sup>b</sup> ’ (Silly Eddy)
	‘A graduate without useful skills is no better than an unskilled labourer...If your degree is in a subject where the number of graduates massively outnumber the amount of jobs available in the sector then you’ll struggle to find work <sup>b</sup> ’ (ChocoCoatedLemons)
	‘A lot of people decide whether a degree is ‘worth it’ by its financial potential rather than how interesting it is to them or its inherent cultural value <sup>b</sup> .’ (jc12693)
	‘Choose something you are going to enjoy for 3+ years’ <sup>d</sup> (Superunknown17)
	‘Any time you’re not following your own instincts, you’re setting yourself up to fail in the long run because you’ll be unhappy <sup>b</sup> . Life is not about having anything or anyone, it’s about being happy and fulfilled.’ <sup>b</sup> (ravvv)
	‘It is such a shame that the idea of educating yourself for knowledge’s sake and personal interest can no longer sit alongside getting that piece of paper you need to (hopefully) get a job. <sup>b</sup> ’ Goodcupoftea

This table shows a selection of ‘mythbusting’ and ‘solution provider’ responses (from a total of 19 by 16 different responders) to a single post from a thread starter.

This exchange demonstrates that where responders establish themselves as authorities, they may convey messages contrary to those required to promote marginalisation. On face value TSR3 responder ‘Silly Eddy’ makes a straight forward statement about future career planning and the need to study a vocationally related degree. The other responders are more open to the idea of personal fulfilment and happiness as a priority over overtly vocational choices (as expressed by student Sam, Section 4.1), with responder ‘Goodcupoftea’ lamenting that the pursuit of education completely harmonised with the pleasure of acquiring knowledge is no longer viable option. None of the respondents reflected upon the possibility of subjects to deliver transferable skills applicable to a wide variety of careers, and that it should be possible to study a subject that provides both personal fulfilment and respectably salaried graduate employment. Instead it was more common for skills to be understood in the direct context of an intrinsically linked career. This and other

exchanges, when positioned as market intelligence, show a lack of recognition of credibility or concern for recruitment to marginalised courses amongst those who have assumed or experiential insider knowledge of university life.

### **5.2.3 Cultural and curriculum bias**

Of all the arts subjects in the online corpus, languages were singled out for particular attention by online commentators and questioning of their validity and the way they are taught in schools which leads to disinterest in language acquisition and improvement in HE. Termed as ‘lack of visibility’ or ‘limited footprint’ by tutors (see Chapter 4), it was identified that headline arts subjects such as English and history, contained components of other arts subjects such as art history and archaeology, but were not presented as subjects in their own rights. Languages retain individual visibility within the secondary school curriculum. However, government interventions, sometimes matched with endemic cultural values, have affected perceptions of their importance and popularity and have been cited as a reason for the demise of continuing the skill through to HE. The invalidation of subjects through a combination of curriculum and society values can be seen in the responses of two modern language-orientated articles; ‘Why language is in freefall’ (TSR6, thread-starter Nuts ‘N bolts, 2013) and GO’s ‘Anti-European sentiment ‘turning children off learning languages’ (GO9, 2013)

In TSR6 there is near universal agreement that pedagogical approaches and overall UK attitudes towards foreign languages are ‘broken’. In some cases the purpose of learning a language was questioned, while in others the lack of second language skills was seen as a long-term detriment to the country. Comments are typified by:

‘Learning a language in the UK is rubbish<sup>c</sup> ...ultimately young people have no interest in taking language and why would they? It’s dull, difficult, unfulfilling and not rewarding in the slightest<sup>c</sup>.’ (Nuts ‘N bolts, TSR6)

‘I have to say that GCSE modern languages are a joke<sup>b</sup>. They don’t teach you anything...schools actively promote science and maths and don’t encourage modern languages<sup>b</sup> which is so stupid

because the UK is swiftly going to plummet when English isn't the only major language<sup>c</sup>.  
(Alludeen1, TSR6)

'I love languages and I hate our education system for teaching it so badly<sup>b</sup>.' (Willum Infanta, TSR6)

'There needs to be a real rethink of how modern languages are taught in schools if they really want to see numbers increasing<sup>b</sup>.' (aasvogel, TSR6)

'Teenagers aren't taught to have any passion for the languages, they're simply taught to pass an exam<sup>b</sup>.' (majaohalo, TSR6)

'It would help if school bothered to teach languages in a half decent way<sup>c</sup>' (Match, GO9)

'What about the wonderfully inconsistent government policies over the past decade?<sup>a</sup>' (1 ToughCookie, GO9)

'A dominance of English in global culture and a late engagement with languages in school means language learning is difficult for Britons<sup>b</sup>...' (K Thorpe GO9)

In addition, there was some speculation as to how technology might replace the need for language learning:

'Learning a foreign language is a fun thing to do however it really isn't essential<sup>b</sup>. English is the global language and really it is the only language you need...the general pointlessness of learning a second language is only amplified with the recent boom in translation software...'  
(Darth Stewie, TSR6)

'It is also relevant that people now spend so much time online, where English dominates<sup>b</sup> And, if they do need to communicate in another language, why there's Google Translator to do it for them<sup>d</sup>. Badly, to be sure, but then how would they know?' (vernacular, GO9)

As with the way in which online courses were offered as a possible solution to protracted course lengths and high tuition fees within the value-for-money debate (see Section 5.2.1), technology is put forward here as a solution, but this time as a direct replacement for the need to learn. While these might be pedagogically shallow debates, nevertheless there should be concern for the promotion and delivery of marginalised courses should these attitudes become prevalent and require a market driven response.

The human capital agenda is also present:

'The problem with languages is that they are a great additional skill, but on there [*sic*] own they don't improve your employability much<sup>b</sup> (Chemistboy, TRS6)'

Learning a foreign language because it helps you a) travel, b) live abroad, or c) understand foreign literature is useful, but the idea that its helpful in the workplace is one of these huge myths that keep getting pedalled<sup>b</sup> [*sic*] despite how obviously false they are.’ (letusberealistic, GO9)

This leads to the speculation that the problems of recruitment to languages at university is much more deep-rooted than can be addressed simply by altering approaches to marketing. Indeed, in considering marketing solutions, the language debate, extrapolated out to other marginalised courses, suggests intervention at school-level is required. Indeed, *Lorem* approaches this challenge through outreach work, directed mostly at Key Stage 5 (KS5) students, and separate to marketing activities. However, at KS5 A-level choice has already had an effect on university possibilities, and earlier intervention affecting GCSE choices may be more beneficial for altering perceptions. This highlights the possibility of marketing assisting in a space traditionally occupied by outreach work, to provide recruitment messages to target audiences through the delivery of teaching and learning content.

### **5.3 Power and influence based on authority attributes**

I next looked at the data set to determine if it was possible to gain an indication of individual responders’ power and influence over readers’ understanding of articles, based on the voting system (Figure 5.1), and the assumed and experiential authorities (Section 5.1.3).

While these authorities were frequently identifiable within all three platforms, the declaration of position based on experience was dominant within DMO responses. Although it is not the purpose of this thesis to analyse the reasons why DMO responders were more likely to declare their identity, I suggest that in a generalist platform with a diverse audience, it is more likely that contributors feel inclined to make overt statements of their connection to the topic; by contrast TSR contributors are assumed to be students and only when this is not the case is it likely to be declared. With GO, identification was more prominent in news articles than in the HE specialist sections and live chat sessions, which adheres to the same assumptions as students participating in the TSR, though in this

case the connections with HE may be of a broader nature than just students, expanding to HE current and retired staff for example. Owing to the disparities in voting mechanisms between the three platforms, the evolution of the TSR platform since the commencement of this research, and propensity for responders to identify themselves, the texts across the three platforms did not lend themselves immediately to like-for-like comparisons and aggregated quantitative analysis. Nevertheless, I was able to conduct a further piece of quantitative analysis using the DMO data to establish an indication of power and influence over fellow readers, based on the online voting mechanism.

From this corpus I established a matrix of groups who responded to online articles, cross-referenced by their experiential and assumed authorities on the various topics being discussed (see Table 5.5).

**Table 5.5: Refined data selection of reader responses**

Process 1: eliminate response texts which could not claim both an assumed and an experiential authority.				
	Total	Assumed authority	Experiential authority	Both assumed and experiential authority
Articles	13	13	11	11
Reader response texts	562	408	181	129
Net positive reader votes	12639	10429	5803	4905

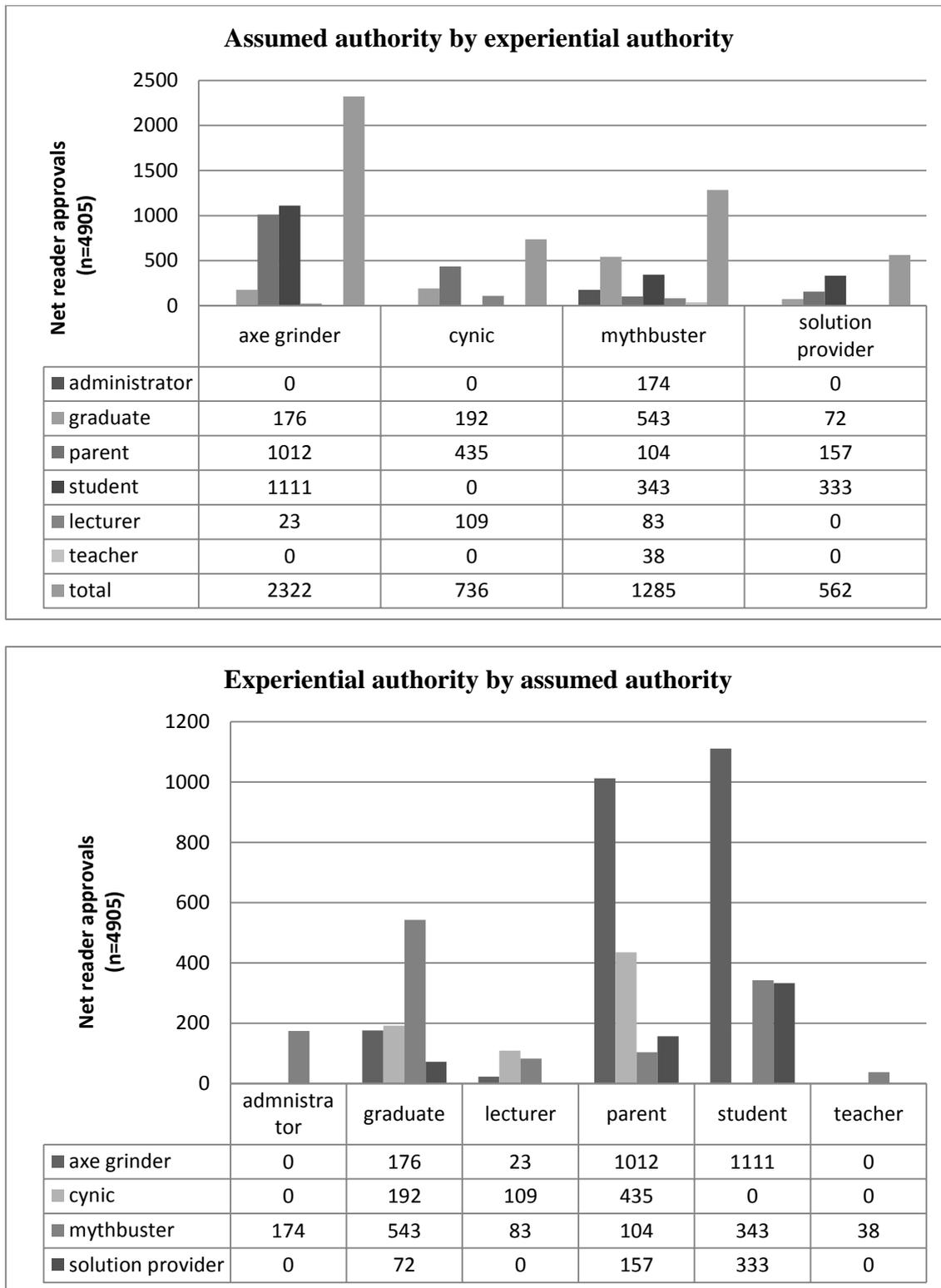
Process 2: determine the power of the reader response by experiential authority type			
	Number of text responders per experiential authority	Reader approval points	Reader approval per responder ratio
Student	26	1787	69
Parent	35	1708	49
Administrator	6	174	29
Lecturer	9	215	24
Graduate	47	983	21
Teacher	5	38	8

Process 1 shows the reduction in data set based on selecting only those reader votes attributed to reader responses that declared both assumed and experiential authority. Process 2 shows the approval rankings per experiential authority type. It demonstrates that students within the DMO data set are the second most active in expressing their opinions and receive the highest approval ratings, whereas the graduates who are the most active, are second to last in receiving approval.

By using only responses where both experiential and assumed authority could be identified, the final corpus for analysis was 129 text responses from 11 articles. To establish the power rating, I looked to the larger population of readers who indicated their positive or negative reactions to the 129 responses by using the green and red arrow voting mechanism. The ability to vote is open to all DMO readers, not just those who are posting comments; only a single vote is possible per response per IP address. As such, the number of votes can far outweigh the number of posts. The use of the arrows is not in itself directly indicative of understanding, though they do serve as a proxy for empathy, sympathy and agreement (positive alignment) and disagreement, dismissal, or anger (negative alignment). I then subtracted the negative votes from the positive votes, to gain a net number of reader endorsements, which I plotted against assumed and experiential authority data. My dataset was reduced to 4905 net positive votes, to responses which have both experiential and assumed authority assigned, out of a total positive 13466 and negative 827 responses of either or both authority attributions. Presented here in bar graphs (see Figure 5.2) it is possible to see how much influence each experiential authority type had over the aggregated reader responses to HE topics, serving as a counterpoint to corporate ambassadors selected to provide endorsements and peer-to-peer engagement for marketing purposes.

Although Table 5.5 shows that graduates were most active in absolute terms, followed by students and then parents, the ‘authorities’ tables illustrated a shift in their overall influence. Graduate viewpoints received only 20% of the overall votes, whereas 37% and 35% were aligned with students and parents respectively. With this sample of DMO articles the data shows that readers of the online responses are more likely to agree with responders with personal reasons for disliking the state of affairs (axe grinder), and that students and parents are most effective in articulating their negative experiences in a manner which resonates with those readers. Graduate influence was most apparent when positioned as mythbusting.

**Figure 5:2: The power of ‘assumed’ and ‘experiential’ authorities**



This figure plots the net positive votes applied to reader responses of the 11 DMO articles selected for statistical analysis. The bars show the relative influence each category of responder had with voters, based on their combined experiential and assumed authorities. The charts show that students and parents dominate as axe grinders, and that graduates are at their most influential as ‘mythbusters’.

The bar charts show two interesting possibilities. Firstly, that reader responses in the public domain can have power and authority over more passive recipients of the information by adding their personal contextualisation. Secondly, that collectively the responders can be influential in generating a shared understanding of texts that could, but do not have to, differ from the author intent. The intelligence gained from this small-scale text analysis method shows that students and parents who have concerns in HE and the related environmental factors are very willing to articulate their grievances. It also shows that these grievances resonate well with other readers' views as indicated by the votes. In the DMO example student and parent power is enhanced by making up the two largest declared experiential categories (see Table 5.5). The implications for HEIs are that in using students for corporately controlled endorsements, they are also a powerful group in voicing their opinions in public forums. Over the reduced data set, students were most active with the assumed authority of 'axe-grinder', closely followed by parents. Alumni were more active as 'mythbusters' but less dominant in the overall online activity. As the responders were largely anonymous, this reinforces the possibility that online reader responses have the power to serve as a proxy for personal knowledge, irrespective of the credibility of the content. This online reader response analysis is offered in contrast to dominant HE practices whereby students are routinely surveyed and graduates are commissioned to reinforce marketing messages, but parents, who are frequently positioned as financiers or underwriters of their children's' study, are rarely consulted.

#### **5.4 Developing marketing solutions from empirical data**

Presenting graduate destinations, alumni endorsements, and starting salaries are well-established within HE marketing messages, but the credibility of marginalised subjects appeared to be undermined by the dominant public understanding of direct lines from courses to specific careers at the expense of understandings of transferable skills to a broad range of careers. In addition, while there was a high incidence of online responders within my dataset being predominantly supportive

of HE in principle, the emphasis frequently leans towards the importance of science and the professions over the arts and humanities.

The reader responses and corresponding reader votes are positioned here as shared understandings that can serve as a proxy for personal knowledge. The investigation shows that within public forums, human capital understandings of the purpose of university are dominant at the expense of validity of arts and humanities subjects. The responses revealed drivers of marginalisation, dominated by the interlinked themes of perceived lack of links to careers and offering poor value for money; students as consumers are increasingly rejecting both in the decision-making process. The data analysis revealed opportunities to improve representation of marginalised subjects by addressing the negative perceptions. Messages which need greater prominence include the balance between short term return on investment and longer term personal satisfaction goals, the existence and application of transferable skills, the long-term view of being a graduate and having a degree.

## **5.5 Summary**

In this chapter I reported an exploratory methodology influenced by RRC to investigate reader inferences of authored content. I invoked online responder voices from 31 articles and forum posts across three online platforms, to articulate public perspectives on marginalised arts and humanities courses. Online keyword searches were used to locate texts within the boundaries of the case study (see Section 3.3), and provided a way of capturing shared-understandings of marginalisation in the public domain. Although the initial data selection process sought to cover marginalised student commentary as well, there was little engagement with this topic in the responses. Nevertheless, the thematic analysis of the data added value to the existing market intelligence corpus and advanced the initial theorisation (see Section 3.3) through providing evidence of human capital-dominated motivations for study, the consumer-orientation that seeks value for money, and the disruption of corporate messages within social media. I used qualitative analysis to ascribed experiential and

assumed authorities to responders of the content. I used quantitative analysis to ascribe a power rating to how strongly the responses resonated with readers who use online voting systems. The reader responses demonstrated consumer attitudes towards having a degree, requiring value for money and a return on investment realised through strong graduate career prospects, invalidating some subjects by their lack of obvious affinity to employment. They also indicated national cultural and curriculum shortcomings which fail to inspire academic inquiry beyond secondary school.

Of particular concern for marketing were the possible power and influence of students, graduates and parents articulating negative views. Typical HE market research is drawn from a number of highly credible sources, and students and graduates are used as brand ambassadors to validate corporate stories. Indeed, I elicited stories from students (see Section 4.1) to consider their value for use in frontline accounts of marginalisation. I demonstrate here that online reader responses positioned as the ‘court of public opinion’ can provide an additional source and style of market intelligence outside corporate control. These ‘insider’ responders, professing an experiential or assumed authority to add credibility to their responses, contribute in ways which can undermine corporate accounts. The endorsed opinions of reader responses, combined with ideas generated in the student and tutor interviews (see Chapter 4) will now be taken forward to the next chapter and used to inform the development of a package of prototype marketing resources.

## **6 Resource development and testing**

The data analysis of the ‘missing voices’ of HE marketing intelligence in Chapters 4 and 5, provided me with a set of ideas to carry forward to the ‘working with resource’ phase of DBR (see Figure 3.1). This moves me towards answering the research question ‘*How can marginalised aspects of HE recruitment marketing be accommodated within mainstream practices without jeopardising the needs of core target audiences?*’ to be answered within the boundaries of the case study examining *Lorem*’s existing core marketing practice. I commence this chapter by mapping these ideas to the triangle of marginalisation and translating them into design principles to be incorporated into marketing messages (see Table 6.1). These messages are then incorporated in a prototype package of promotional resources. I cover the iterative nature of the package development, in collaboration initially with the original research participants, which later expanded to encompass additional academic and administrative colleagues. This expansion happened both through word of mouth and formalised committee structures (see Appendix 2). The resource development was interspersed with testing and evaluation, for which I also include details. I also include a summary of new and ongoing activity which was directly influenced by the findings, but which took place after the fieldwork had been completed.

This chapter concludes with a discussion on how DBR methodology has differed from standard marketing practice in *Lorem*. I demonstrate how the research process has brought about a collaborative model of working where resource development serves to mediate conversation and develop new approaches to recruitment marketing.

### **6.1 The consolidation of market intelligence derived from the empirical data**

The empirical data was gathered from three sources, students, tutors and online reader responses, selected especially to represent aspects of marginalisation within HE as identified in the triangle of

marginalisation model (see Figure 1.1). Each side of the triangle represents an attribute which jointly frames the marketing challenges derived from core *Lorem* marketing practices and associated external environmental factors when applied to marginalised courses and students. An analysis of the empirical data provided themes corresponding to these attributes, which were used in developing resources to overcome these challenges. Table 6.1 charts the movement from each framework attribute, through data collection and analysis to resource development and testing.

In my early research design I had intended to work predominantly with students and to use diverse student voices to speak directly to marginalised audiences. However, as the empirical research progressed I found it more powerful to utilise tutor voices for the long-term sustainability of both the working relationship and the resource development. As well as individual resources developed with an external audience in mind, there was a key strategy document which started out with the working title of *Help with Homework* but which evolved into *Curriculum Enrichment Strategy* aimed at internal *Lorem* stakeholders. Having mapped the analytic themes derived from the empirical data to a set of design principles, I will now present the development of the four resources, including reflections on effectiveness, in order to enhance the viability and credibility of these alternative resources and strategies.

**Table 6.1: DBR outcomes mapped to the triangle of marginalisation attributes**

	<b>Triangle of marginalisation attribute</b>		
Steps in resource development	Marginalised students Chapter 5	Marginalised subjects Chapters 5 and 6	Elite institutions Chapter 4
Research participants/data source	Students, including mature, WP (as defined by policy) under-achieving state school, first in the family, young careers, registered disabled	Arts and humanities tutors of: history, modern languages, music, classics, art history. General public accessed through online reader response content, with particular references to modern languages and archaeology	<i>Lorem</i> case study
Analytic themes derived from the empirical data	Heterogeneous stories Communication and confidence. Benefits beyond the classroom The range of experiences introduced to the classroom via diversity attributes is beneficial for learning and for personal development	Perceptions of employability and validity Visibility in the national curriculum Diversity as a pedagogic good with socially important graduate outcomes Marginalised because of lack of visibility in state school curriculum, and/or poor perception of employability, including by parents (except within high-achieving schools) Invisibility within secondary school curriculum: there is a need to make marginalised subjects visible within the national curriculum so that they can be recognised as opportunities for HE study 'Best kept secrets' approach to open days Value-for-money required	Marketing as an aid to outreach Keeping it personal Playing the long game Core audience is high-achieving state and private school. Selecting subjects in sciences. Marginalised students not the core audience of <i>Lorem</i> and are targeted by outreach but not marketing
Design principle	The need to capture heterogeneous voices to represent marginalised target audiences	The need to raise visibility of arts and humanities subjects within the national curriculum The need to emphasise the use of inherent subject skills in relation to a wide range of careers The need to address perceptions of 'value-for-money' through appropriate attachment to the human capital approach;	The need to alter the temporality of strategy and resource development to permit 'playing the long game'.

Resource	Non-corporate student videos – using student voice directly in messages	<i>Much Ado About Nothing</i> <i>Beginners' Russian</i>	Outreach and marketing collaboration
Description	4 x talking heads videos edited from initial 30-45 minute interviews	1 x web resource around a popular topic unconnected to recruitment cycles 1 x web resource to demystify accessibility of subject	<i>Help with Homework/Curriculum Enrichment Strategy</i> document
Prototype testing	Aimed at student information seekers on the web – videos embedded in a web page, and released directly to YouTube	Student information seekers on the web Working with schools in a targeted approach, with interventions as early as KS3	Academic research participants and outreach working group
Intended audience	Independent information seekers	Independent information seekers School teachers	Internal <i>Lorem</i> stakeholders

This table shows the progress of DBR from defining the practical problem, through empirical data collection, to working with resource, mapped to the triangle of marginalisation attributes.

## 6.2 Marketing resource development

There were several stages to developing the ideas generated from empirical data into four promotional resources, incorporating consultation, evaluation, and iterative development processes. The student and tutor interviews spanned six subject areas, with additional subjects referenced from within the reader response analysis and from routine professional encounters. It was feasible to map design principles framed within one subject to other subject areas. On this basis, the resources were developed as an aggregation of principles from across the market intelligence (see Table 6.1). The key challenge was to adapt the empirical data findings into messages which were suitably demystified for a diverse audience with varying experiences of secondary school education and access to appropriate knowledge.

While I present the resource development as a linear narrative, beginning with my intentions to work with students and progressing to working with tutors, the stages involved their own iterative cycles of production, consultation, change, and evaluation. This change in direction from subject resources to strategy reflects the evaluation process I undertook, moving from providing resources specifically for marginalised students to engage with *Lorem*'s arts and humanities courses, to a toolkit for tutors wishing to pursue outreach work aided by market intelligence. These iterations are discussed throughout.

### 6.2.1 Presenting heterogeneous voices to represent marginalised target audiences

In the early phases of my research design I had envisaged working directly with marginalised students to allow them to articulate their experiences in their own voices, without overt corporate intervention. This resulted in my first four student interviews being video-recorded (three by myself and one submitted in vlog format). The semi-structured interviews allowed students to lead the conversation in a direction of their own choosing. Consequently, four different accounts of motivation, experience, expectations and imperfections were captured. I recognised that there were

limitations to working in this manner, including the resource intensity of working with video, and the availability of the students themselves to participate in editorial decisions over the protracted time frame of the research. Nevertheless, the interviews were successful in providing heterogeneous student stories with a diversity perspective, and I will now discuss the process and limitations of the video resource development in more detail.

**Resource 1 -marginalised students talking heads videos:** I captured the first group of interviews on video in anticipation of being able to present marginalised student accounts in a ‘talking heads’ format direct to the target audience, dependent on the usefulness of the interview content for recruitment purposes. At *Lorem*, standardised marketing messages are constructed in formalised language, with slight concessions made to recorded and written dialogue provided by students, though edited into a corporately acceptable style. I had anticipated that the videos would allow me to consider how marginalised voices might be presented alongside mainstream accounts of success and ‘approved normality’, by presenting unexpected stories, including struggles with adversities in contrast to the corporate norms of confidently spoken victory narratives. They would also allow wide-ranging accents to represent *Lorem*’s marginalisation more prominently than images which would need to be staged and more likely be regarded as stereotyping.

I created three videos from the captured material with an additional vlog being submitted directly by a participant (Denise), equating to one audio-visual resource for each of the video participants. I selected sections of each interview to make a story with a single focus that best represented what was different for each student. When compared to corporate videos featuring normalised and positive accounts from core audience students, the alternative versions where students acknowledged imperfections do appear as a risk to core messaging. This raised a professional practice question of how far it was possible to deviate from ‘victory narrative’ messages without diverting attention from the recruitment intent. I considered that in prevailing marketing practice,

the alternative accounts elicited from my video participants would not have been entirely acceptable for mainstream recruitment requirements, even though their perspectives were helpful in illustrating diversity. In addition, the video quality was below the corporate standard. Although de-corporatising messages for the sake of authenticity was of interest, I concluded that it was not within the scope of my practice area to promote these videos widely as front line recruitment material. With the consent of the student participants, they were made available temporarily on YouTube. However, this line of research enquiry ended here; the reasons for this curtailment are three fold – they risked conflict with core audience marketing, the time frame for this research was too long to make collaborating with the same group of students practical, and the production techniques proved unsuitable from a small-scale resource perspective. Nevertheless, the video transcripts contributed usefully to the student interview corpus.

The decision whether or not to use these videos in front line marketing highlighted the conflict between the desire for change and the need to retain the attention of core audiences. The process of editing emphasised this: the drop-out rate analysis for existing videos suggested that two to three minutes was the absolute tolerance for student engagement in this medium<sup>8</sup>. In order to provide full context to the participants' stories from background and motivation through to struggles and aspirations, each video would naturally last around seven to ten minutes in length. To reduce this to the optimum length for being viewed by the target audience, much of the context had to be abridged. It was necessary therefore to select just the most poignant part of each person's story, thus making the 'diversity as normality' narrative into something more extraordinary. I was conscious of the time it took to edit the footage, and the continual need to replenish the resource as part of a permanent frontline marketing solution. It is at this point that I deviated from my original approach

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<sup>8</sup> Since the time the videos were produced, the threshold for undergraduate students viewing this type of recruitment content has dropped below one-minute.

to create alternative marketing resources directly from student accounts, although the idea of understanding marginalised needs to consider alternative messages was retained. Indeed, the evaluation of the production techniques and administrative and student investment of time led to a longer-term post-research project to capture reflective experiences of marginalised students throughout their time at university (see Table 6.5).

### **6.2.2 Improving visibility of arts and humanities subjects within the school curriculum**

With the second resource I sought to address the problem of invisibility of marginalised subjects on the national curriculum. My tutor participants articulated their concerns about the low visibility of some arts and humanities courses within the national curriculum, and the consequential marginalisation of those subjects. Robin (music) and Maria (classics) were particularly vocal on this point identifying that their subjects already had a vastly restricted target audience owing to their elitist status within schools. Dean (history) and Derrick (modern languages), established that languages were often undervalued through government intervention in the national curriculum, contributing to low visibility. This message also came through clearly in the online reader response analysis (see Section 5.2.3), though with blame also apportioned to teaching quality in schools and the inherent cultural reluctance for language acquisition in the UK. The question derived from the empirical data became ‘how do you make students aware that a subject is offered at university if it has low visibility in the school curriculum, when they do not have access to adequate information?’ To answer this I looked to an internet resource which would raise visibility of subjects through topicality.

#### **Resource 2 -reconnecting with the national curriculum:**

I have considered the internet as a universally accessible tool for information seekers, which include students making decisions about university. I extended this idea to school students seeking information about homework. The internet could then be considered a viable tool through which

universities can provide homework support through content which connects marginalised subjects to the school curriculum. On this basis I conceived the *Much Ado About Nothing* resource (see Figure 6.1). At the time the resource was made available the topic was current, coinciding with the newly released Hollywood film treatment of the Shakespeare play, thus connecting to popular culture and internet search trends. The resource was engineered to reconnect *Lorem's* Shakespearean content with that of the national curriculum via popular culture references, and geared to capture web traffic serendipitously through relevant keyword searches.

Figure 6:1: Linking to the national curriculum - Shakespeare

## Much Ado About Nothing

Joss Whedon has an impressive fan base within the Faculty of Arts, but his work is still subject to academic critique. His 2013 production of *Much Ado About Nothing* was filmed over 12 days in his home in Los Angeles, using a cast rounded up from his 'usual suspects.'

[*Lorem* staff member] saw an advance preview of the film when it was shown to the delegates of the Shakespeare Association of America Annual Conference, and provides a critique from a Shakespearean perspective. By contrast, *Lorem* film student considers the film from the perspective of Joss Whedon as auteur. How did the film compare under these two different lenses?



Joss Whedon's *Much Ado About Nothing* comes under critical analysis from different perspectives.

Section 1

### Blogs

"This *Much Ado* expertly meshes Shakespeare with Whedon's trademarks: witty repartee, confident women and bumbling men, and a mixture of sly wit and emotional heft that clarifies the interactions of the play...this is, at its core, actors having fun playing people having fun, and in doing so Whedon and his team create a lush film, beautifully shot and thrillingly voyeuristic that captures a brief break in the lives of beautiful people."

[staff member]: (Link to *Much Ado* blog)

"Selling a film as the product of a visionary auteur's genius is an old and highly effective Hollywood trick, which has also found its way to television, video games and other media..."

While *Much Ado* was written, directed and produced by Whedon, marketing it as a Joss Whedon film was nonetheless a challenge."

[film student]: (Link to Joss Whedon as Auteur blog)

Section 2

### Videos



Video: How did the French word for 'author' become synonymous with film making and directing?

Section 3

### Section 4

#### Study Shakespeare

[links to related courses and modules across disciplines]

[links to academic units with Shakespeare related content]

This figure is a mock-up of a web page established to provide topical Shakespearean content, as well as showcase a range of teaching and learning connections through literature and film. The page was search engine optimised to pick up on keyword searches for Joss Whedon's *Much Ado About Nothing*.

The *Much Ado About Nothing* resource incorporated the design principles of improving the visibility of subjects on the national curriculum through profiling less visible film studies and linguistics subjects alongside higher profile English literature content. It did this in the following ways:

**Section 1:** This page was search engine optimised to be presented in relation to keyword searches on the *Much Ado About Nothing* play or film which otherwise did not feature in *Lorem*'s web content, but did relate to teaching and learning content in both the core areas of English literature, and film and cultural studies under the broader theme of Shakespeare. The topic was 'owned' by *Lorem* using both academic and student authorities to comment on the film.

**Section 2:** Through the use of blogs, two different ways of studying Shakespeare were explored; one through the traditional subjects of English literature and drama, and the other through film studies, this latter falling into the category of topics studied at school predominantly through the medium of another, or through media studies which is not considered by the Russell Group as a facilitating subject. The first blog was in the process of being written at the time of resource creation, aimed at an existing internal audience of *Lorem* literature students, and an established body of Shakespearean scholars; I obtained permission from the author to re-present it as a recruitment piece. The second blog used in the resource was commissioned from a film studies research student who was recommended to me by her supervisor. Both authors felt they had benefited from the exposure of their work to a wider audience than would have been achieved through their normal channels of distribution; this became a factor in the strategy development resource (see Table 6.4).

**Section 3:** This third section took advantage of an existing video resource explaining the word 'auteur' that fitted with the core theme of the second blog and allowed access to its key linguistic concept. It also served to further raise awareness of languages at *Lorem*, and provided access to a

language tutor. Though in this instance the resource was not related to Shakespeare, nevertheless it did demonstrate the ability to aggregate content around cognate subject areas.

**Section 4:** The final section provides the secondary navigation to courses related to Shakespeare and film through the vehicle of the Hollywood film release. Ordinarily the courses would form the key call to action for a subject page but this alternative approach served to raise awareness of courses connected to the visitor's core information-seeking process.

In addition to capturing search engine traffic, as an online resource this prototype could easily be promoted by social media platforms. Various tracking mechanisms could be employed to determine the initial online source of the inquiry, the interaction with the resource itself, and some demographic information about the visitor. The limited profile provided by such analytic data would include age bracket and domicile of the registered IP address or mobile device, but not an accurate profile or explicit reason for the visit, e.g. research on the play, or interest in the film. In short it would be possible to say whether the resource had performed well in referring visitors on to course content, but visitors would still be broadly anonymous in terms of student segments.

Therefore, the idea of capturing non-segmented target audiences in order to connect with marginalised audiences did not hold up to scrutiny. In addition, to be of true value to the national curriculum, a student would need to be studying this particular play to benefit directly from the content. As a standalone resource this page best served as an exemplar of what could be done with a critical mass of topics embedded within an overarching subject area. The concept of connecting topicality is transferable across a wide range of courses, and ongoing applications of this beyond the conclusion of the research can be seen in Table 6.5). Tighter targeting would be required to understand the ability of the concept to raise visibility within schools, and to understand how it would be received with marginalised audiences. In order to consider the process of targeting and dissemination I moved towards a strategy that would permit *Lorem* to provide such subject content

as a resource for homework for secondary school children. The *Much Ado About Nothing* resource was at this point incorporated into a *Help with Homework* strategy document which formed the basis of another set of conversations with tutors (see Section 6.2.4).

### **6.2.3 Addressing public perceptions of ‘value-for-money’ and employment credibility**

This next resource incorporated the design principles to address employability credibility of marginalised subjects, an issue which came to light in the tutor and reader response analysis. It worked to address the issues surrounding the marginalised students raised in the previous resource, by testing it on small target audience groups of. At the commencement of this research I was concerned that human capital approaches to recruitment marketing lead to an oversimplified message that gaining a degree would lead to a ‘good’ career, at the expense of other motivations for attending university. The career orientation was also a factor in subject marginalisation. The reader response analysis convinced me that the career orientation of HE was already embedded within the public expectations of what it meant to acquire a degree in modern society, (see Chapter 5), though with other motivations present at a subject selection level in the student interviews (see Chapter 4).

The reader response analysis also revealed a linked ‘value-for-money’ discourse. This angle was pressed by media authors, with a tendency to invoke arts and humanities courses as exemplars of poor value-for-money, without contextual evaluation of discipline-specific pedagogical practices such as independent research through reading. Gerry (history of art) and Dean (history) were particularly vocal on the inequity of the value of money measure when defined by a ‘fees *versus* contact hours’ formula, owing to the pedagogical need for extensive independent study in their subjects. They expressed frustration with the pressure placed on them to adapt their curriculum to accommodate more contact hours, at what they felt to be the expense of pedagogical quality. Indeed, they felt that the skills their students acquired through self-study, but which were not accommodated within contact hours, were linked directly to transferable skills and careers. The

positive impact of this approach was also articulated within the student group through their self-directed peer-to-peer interactions, learning from each other including the skills of working in a diverse society.

Transferable skills were embedded in the tutor perspectives of how their subjects contributed to the human capital agenda by a firm attachment to broad career possibilities. They reported to me that they used such narratives at open days, and that the information was messages were well received by the students and parents alike. However, there was general agreement that this approach to disseminating critical information by reserving it for open day talks does not improve recruitment of marginalised students as there were already barriers in place to prevent this group attending. It was thought that explicitly explaining how transferable skills lead to specific careers would be more useful if presented in a permanently accessible online space. In order to better position arts and humanities courses within the public expectations of a human capital approach, I realised that it was necessary to consider how to validate such subjects through established career norms, without devaluing other social goods.

Tutors whose subjects required a specific A-level qualification illustrated how choices at GCSE started a chain reaction eliminating the opportunity to pursue those subjects at the top universities.; the choice of GCSEs narrows the choice of A-levels, so degree choice is also narrowed. Conversely, with many arts and humanities subjects, it was not necessary to have an A-level in the specific subject, but it was thought that this was not an explicit message understood within schools; nor was it a viable 'selling point' within recruitment marketing messages, partly because it drew attention to the differences between recruiting and selecting courses as perceived by entry tariff.

Embedded within the process of school-based subject choices, Year 9 options are selected according to prior achievements, likely future success and also influenced by personal preferences and perceptions of ease. Parental and school pressure may also be present. While the entry

requirements of a selection of arts and humanities courses do not always require an A-level in the subject itself, the lack of knowledge of facilitating subjects and lack of access to coaching or insider knowledge at GCSE options stage can hinder degree choice. Together with the barriers to participation considered prevalent within WP audiences, and high entry tariffs of elite universities, the number of students who would be capable of participating, or knowing that they were eligible would be further reduced.

The *Beginners' Russian* resource was the first resource prototype undertaken with prolonged collaboration, with tutor Derrick (modern languages), and with new participants Sarah (modern languages) and Rachel (administrative support). It was also the first which presented a marginalised subject specifically targeted at marginalised students. We sought to de-mystify the connections between arts courses and employment. We also discussed how to promote the corporately sensitive issue of drawing attention to more lenient entry tariffs as a route into elite institutions.

### **Resource 3: pre-A-level entry requirements and employability**

The third resource was based upon a real need to promote Russian language and cultural studies, the provision of which was felt to be compromised by both the mainstream issues affecting modern languages, and its relationship with scarce provision within the national curriculum (see Figure 3.3).

Through the process of aggregating the human capital themes and mapping them to broader areas, Russian language emerged as a subject suitable for testing on an external audience, being at the centre of the triangle of marginalisation across all themes. The lower than institutional norm entry qualifications made the subject particularly attainable to students from lower-achieving schools, although it was difficult to emphasise this in the resource as it would undermine the institutional trend for high tariff entry requirements.

As seen through the eyes of the tutor participants and reader response investigations, modern foreign languages have been affected by successive government intervention in national curriculum provision. Without the building blocks of more traditional European languages such as French, Spanish or German, less common languages are even less likely to be considered an option or attainable at university. Where Russian is taught in schools, this tends to be within elite institutions; it otherwise has very low visibility (see Figure 3.2). As with other modern foreign languages it can lay claim to transferable skills and employability but the issues which establish this subject as marginalised serve as barriers to getting this point across to marginalised students. As university recruitment is focused on A-level attainment, it is not obvious that *ab initio* languages can be taken without the corresponding school qualification.

At *Lorem* the homogenised course presentation left Russian language embodied with coded content which needed to be demystified before being presented to marginalised audiences. Derrick and Sarah's approach to unlocking the messages, as with fellow tutor research participants was to have candid conversations with students at open days (see Section 4.4.2), which as I have already discussed, is too late for strategic intervention if marginalised students are to be considered a target audience. Instead I created a web resource (see Figure 6.2) which posited being an absolute beginner as a norm, and the marginalised nature of the subject as a competitive advantage for graduate employment. This attribute was transferable across a range of *Lorem's* arts and humanities courses (see Section 6.3). I also sought to portray value for money as an implicit benefit of the employment opportunities. As with the video resources (see Section 6.2.1) I needed to consider the tensions between the explicit statements of demystification presented to a marginalised audience, and a more tempered approach in keeping with the corporate voice of an elite university, that minimised the risk of alienating the core audience.

In collaboration with Derrick and Sarah, through face-to-face conversations and email correspondence, we determined that the following needed to be revealed:

- The inherent curriculum theme of promoting cultural understanding - linked to personal development and citizenship
- Russia as an emerging business market creating career opportunities requiring language skills and understanding of cultural protocol – linked to employability

And the key messages:

- A pedagogical requirement to undertake independent study
- No need to have an A-level in the subject to undertake at beginners' level (though the opportunity to undertake the language as a beginners subject, with some proven ability of language skills would still be required)
- Rarity value as a competitive advantage in career attainment

This led to a series of questions which would need to be answered by the resource (see Figure 6.2)

- Why is Russian important?
- Why is *Beginners' Russian* as a degree subject not undermined by the lack of prior attainment at A-level?
- Why does the lower entry tariff not reduce the competitiveness of the acquired degree?
- How are transferable skills mapped to careers?

In addition, Sarah developed sample teaching and learning material aimed at beginners' guides to speaking Russian to be made available for download by students and teachers alike.

Figure 6.2: Marginalised subjects demystified for marginalised students

## Beginners' Russian

The majority of our students start a Slavonic language from scratch. Our Beginners' Russian course is intended for those with absolutely no prior knowledge of the language.

The Russian teaching programme at *Lorem* pays special care and attention to help student familiarise themselves with new structures and concepts of a Slavonic language – from reading the basic Cyrillic alphabet to using different endings of words.

All students are taught in a friendly supportive atmosphere in small groups.

Below are some reasons to study Russian, and some resources to get you started.

### Why study Russian?

Here are a few reasons why Russian is continuously growing in popularity and importance

Russian is now one of the major languages on the global stage. The language of internationally renowned writers such as Dostoevsky, Tolstoy and Nabokov, Russian is the key to a rich world culture be it literature, music, ballet and art.

Russia today has re-emerged as a global superpower, a member of the G8 and full member of the UN Security Council. Recent years have witnessed the rapid development of a Russian economy fuelled by oil exports, and mineral resources. A major player in business, Russian is on of the four emerging markets for the BRIC group of developing countries.

Russian will host the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics and the 2018 FIFA World Cup. Russian is a land with rich and remarkable history, a vast and breath-taking geography, diverse cultures and an exciting future. Russian is your passport to explore this land of amazing culture, astounding beauty and endless opportunities.

### Careers for Russian language graduates

Language students acquire a wide range of transferable skills through their studies, which in turn are highly valued by employers.

As a language graduate you will be considered an effective communicator who has demonstrated commitment and motivation in mastering your chosen language(s). You will also be acknowledged for the cultural, political, social and historical understanding you have gained through the contextual studies underpinning your language acquisition.

Your third year abroad will provide you with practical international experience, which enhances your core language ability with the nuanced localised communication skills and cultural insights.

The intellectual rigour of your degree, along with your specific language and culture-based skills will equip you for a wide range of careers. These include:

- Business
- Intelligence (including MI5, MI6, and GCHQ)
- Journalism
- Hospitality and tourism
- Teaching
- Finance
- Human resource management

A significant number of Russian graduates continue on to further study including other Slavonic languages, translation, interpreting, teaching, law and international relations.



Russian is now one of the major languages on the global state, and is the key to a rich world of cultural tradition, and emerging business opportunities.

### Section 4

#### Russian study options

[The original web resource contained links to the range of single and joint honours courses offered at *Lorem* which included Beginners' Russian.

In addition there were some downloadable student and teacher introduction to Russian language and Russian culture, and embedded video content of *Lorem* tutors featured as part of an online audio-visual dictionary project.]

This figure is reconstructed from a web page from which a portable document file was made for distribution amongst the resource testing groups. (see Table 6.2). The live web page also contained a video explaining the etymology of 'matryoshka', and some downloadable teacher resources.

The *Beginners' Russian* resource is illustrative of a web-based design approach incorporating chunked text, and bullet points. The themes extracted from the interviews and reader response are mapped to the three sections in the web page.

**Section 1:** This section emphasises that students will be starting with an equal level of knowledge; apart from a demonstration of language acquisition capability, no-one is expected to have any prior accredited attainment of Russian. It also incorporates a popular cultural image aimed at making an instantly visual recognition of the topic.

**Section 2:** The second section addresses market driven issues, establishing demand for the subject. It emphasises the global significance of both the country and the language, and provides external environmental contexts for these claims.

**Section 3:** Human capital approach issues are addressed in the third section. The 'value-for-money' message is implicit through appropriate attachment to the human capital approach. The employability orientation links transferable skills to a range of careers, features the practical experience which is part of the course and adds some graduate destinations.

**Section 4:** The final section provided interactive content, including course links, and teaching resource downloads created especially for the resource by modern language tutor Sarah. This was redacted for the PDF version used for prototype testing.

The message of increasing the chances of gaining a place at university by taking a marginalised degree with reduced entry tariff remained unarticulated in this resource; in consultation with Derrick and Sarah it was deemed too sensitive for a written declaration as it risked a compromise to the institutional message of quality as perceived through high tariffs.

Having established from the *Much Ado About Nothing* resource that promoting a web page was not enough to understand the reception of resources by specific markets (see Section 6.2.2), Derrick, Sarah and I took the concept to Rachel to discuss outreach dissemination. Rachel used her existing contacts to offer outreach opportunities, and Derrick prepared a sample lecture. In addition to the lecture, and as an aid to reciprocity, Sarah also provided a range of academic materials, which were made available to teachers as downloadable resources from the *Beginners' Russian* page. I will now discuss the participant recruitment in more detail, along with the testing methods and analysis.

### **Resource testing group selection**

To comply with DBR methodology, I needed to establish a naturalistic setting for the testing, to incorporate reciprocal benefits for the participants. Traditionally DBR has been conducted in classroom settings testing pedagogical interventions, with the reciprocal benefits being implicit through teaching and learning (Brown, 1992, Barab and Squire, 2004, Bell, 2004). In my case the interventions were based on improving perceptions of arts and humanities courses, using market research mechanisms adapted for the DBR process. Nevertheless, the fundamentals of naturalistic settings and reciprocal benefits were maintained through discussions with *Lorem* collaborators, and negotiations with established networks amongst schools and colleges already engaged in *Lorem* teaching and learning interventions. As a consequence, the testing of the *Beginners' Russian* resource was timed to coincide with a week-long event of modern language outreach activities as part of an annual Council of Europe's European Day of Languages (EDL) programme.

Twenty schools with established relationships with *Lorem* were contacted with a request for access to a small group of A-level modern foreign language students, either in conjunction with an existing EDL activity or as a tailored programme around Russian language. Each school had a history of low participation in HE or was otherwise flagged WP in terms of postcode. Requests were sent via Rachel who introduced me to her existing contacts. The purpose of the request was clearly stated as

‘to try to encourage A-level languages students in city schools and colleges to consider taking up Russian at degree level.’ In addition to this general raising of awareness of Russian as a university option, the invited schools were also made aware of the key marketing message assigned to the Russian resource:

What a lot of prospective students do not know is that Russian can be studied at University from Beginners’ level as long as they have a good A-level in another modern foreign language.

Schools were advised that we were keen to consult with their students to determine how best we could share this message with a wider audience and ask their advice on what else might provoke an interest in learning Russian.

Expressions of interest were invited from target schools to nominate an appropriate date and time to attend *Lorem*, or for *Lorem* to visit them, for an EDL session. Named *Lorem* representatives would spend an hour with a small group of A-level languages students and their teacher, the time to be split into discussing the resources, and the delivery of a twenty-minute taster session from a Russian language tutor in order to demonstrate how much Russian can be learned by competent linguists in a short space of time. In this way the school would receive teaching and learning content in return for their time, as well as being invited to use the downloadable teaching and learning resources.

The session proposition included:

- Introduction by the outreach officer, covering the institutional undergraduate offer in terms of modern languages and cultural studies, and the crossover with topics such as politics and history. (5 minutes)
- Market research session, with a brief narrative introduction, followed by a post-it note exercise, resource consideration, and discussion (20 minutes)
- Language taster session including brief narrative introduction from tutor (20 minutes)

A total of eight different schools and colleges were obliging, one requesting a tailored provision and nine as an addition to two separate EDL programmes (see Table 6.2). All but one of the schools predominantly fitted aspects of marginalisation based on either their SES demographic, postcode or

average to under-achieving A-level performance, and all of whom had an existing outreach relationship with *Lorem*. Ethical approval was provided via an existing model consent form; a Disclosure and Barring Service check was not necessary owing to the existing tutor to student ratio.

**Table 6.2: Resource testing groups**

Group	Number of participants	Location	Reciprocity	Format
1	13 students (2 male, 11 female) from one FE college, undertaking a mix of modern foreign languages	FE college classroom	Russian language taster session	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PowerPoint slide and discussion</li> <li>• Post-it note exercise</li> <li>• Web resource review</li> </ul>
2	18 students (7 male, 11 female) from three schools undertaking a mix of foreign languages	<i>Lorem</i> Lecture theatre	Russian cultural studies lecture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Post-it note exercise</li> <li>• PowerPoint Prompts</li> <li>• Web resource review</li> </ul>
3	6 tutors from 6 schools on outreach programme as part of day visit to <i>Lorem</i>	<i>Lorem</i> Dining hall	Exchange of ideas around encouraging take up of languages at university	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Verbal instructions only</li> <li>• Post-it note exercise</li> <li>• Web resource review</li> </ul>

This figure shows the student and tutor make-up of the resource testing groups, the location of the exercise, and the component parts of the test. Each test had to be adapted to the location, and the pre-agreed structure of the existing EDL event where relevant.

Each of the resource testing opportunities needed to be adapted to the situation at the time; the variables included group sizes, environment, and schedule interruption. Nevertheless, each section of the resource testing had a specific purpose which I will explain here, including the responses from each group:

**Group 1:** An FE college located in an area of social deprivation with low levels of HE participation, but with higher than average A-level results for the region. The college requested a slot to coincide with their own college-based EDL programme. The language co-ordinator publicised the opportunity to A-level language students and successfully recruited 13 who were willing to participate in their lunch break. Forty minutes were allocated, including a language taster session to aid reciprocity.

In this session the students were accompanied by a tutor who attended out of personal interest.

There was a core of 11 students throughout, with two who arrived separately after the session had started, and two who left together prior to the language taster section. The group was predominantly female (only three males) but of broad ethnic mix.

**Group 2:** Students from three different schools participating in a joint EDL event within *Lorem*, all of whom were studying French. Each group was accompanied by a teacher. The research session took place as an adjunct to a Russian language and culture lecture. The lecture theatre setting permitted the post-it note and resource evaluation exercises, but was not conducive to discussions. However, in this instance the accompanying teachers took the opportunity to offer unprompted feedback on the resource testing exercise after the session was completed. Their comments were recorded and included in the findings.

**Group 3:** As with group 2, group 3 students were part of a pre-established EDL event, the initial agreement for this group consisting of nine different schools, one of which was private, accompanied by their teachers. The intention was to repeat the exercise for Group 2. However, the opportunity was withdrawn on the day itself owing to last minute changes to the programme. Instead, some of the accompanying teachers, including an adult education specialist, agreed to participate in a truncated version of the exercise during their lunch break. The PowerPoint slide content was used to brief the group, and questions about the post-it note and web resource exercise were taken on an *ad hoc* basis. As with Group 2 there was also some post exercise discussion of value to the research.

## **Administration of the resource testing**

I will now explain the format of each aspect of the resource testing (see Table 6.2). At the commencement of each of the sessions participants were reassured that they were permitted to speak freely and that this would be preferable to anticipating what they thought I might want to hear (Bryman, 2008).

The post-it notes exercise served as an ice breaker, and to encourage the participants thinking about Russia and Russian. They were asked to record keywords, one per post-it note, of what they knew about Russia. They were then asked to star which topics they had come across within their school-based curriculum, and circle the ones that they linked to careers. This exercise provided the foundations for the subsequent discussions about the resources and related to the themes identified as gaps in the dominant marketing messages.

Following the post-it note session, with the exception of Group 3, a PowerPoint slide was presented summarising these themes as points for consideration:

- Did you know you can study Russian at university as an absolute beginner? The majority of Russian language students take this beginners route.
- As a niche subject, a degree in Russian will add distinctiveness to your CV – it can also be less competitive than undergraduate subjects which also commonly appear on the UK secondary school curriculum
- “A degree in Russian has a core set of language acquisition and generic intellectual and practical transferable skills which are desirable by a wide range of employers” – but what does this mean?

We spent two minutes discussing the slide, to provide quick access contextualised understanding to the web resource. Transferable skills were introduced to the group as academic or philosophical skills which can be adapted for practical purposes within the workplace, but in addition and contextualised through language learning, providing the building blocks for learning additional languages. The groups were next presented with enlarged and printed versions of the web page (see Figure 6.2) structured to express selected design principles derived from the empirical research (see

Table 6.1). The participants were first asked to circle all the keywords and phrases that they liked or found interesting, and underline all those that they did not like or did not find interesting. They were then asked to write their names and schools at the top of the papers and attach the post-it notes; these were then collected.

Possible only for the first group, as a third and final exercise participants were asked to discuss openly and briefly their feelings about the topics introduced on the earlier PowerPoint slide and prompted by the post-it note and web page exercises. Further prompts were also offered by asking the students:

Thinking about the web page how does this make you feel about:

- Beginners subjects
- Niche subjects (prompt: risk; competition; value for money)
- Transferable skills (prompt: employability)

Members of the group were asked if they had considered these aspects of language learning, and if, portrayed like this, it made them feel different towards language acquisition. They were also asked to consider the notion of starting a course from a 'level playing field' and how this might affect their feelings towards the subject. We covered the perspective of 'small fish in a big pond', and individual concerns about the risk of starting something new. The risk factor was pulled through to the next discussion about tariffs and whether they were concerned about the perception of quality with lower tariff courses. They were asked to imagine getting the relevant A-level grades to enter a university of their choice and consider how they would position themselves in relation to risk. The scenario was extended to consider a mainstream course and a lesser-known course.

The students engaged willingly with each task. The first group were in a formal class setting the second a small lecture theatre, and the tutor group in a dining hall. Each group worked semi-independently, with occasional conferring.

## Findings

The findings from the three groups were aggregated in two key ways. The post-it note exercise responses were tallied by repetition of keywords, and then the keywords were grouped into four thematic areas; named people, culture and popular culture, geography, and politics and political history (see Table 6.3). For the web resource I recorded incidences of positive and negative words and phrases organised by the three key chunked sections of the page. Only in Group 1 was there the opportunity to formally record discussions for qualitative analysis; *ad hoc* comments from groups two and three were also noted.

**Table 6.3: Resource testing - subject keyword recognition**

Ideas	People	Culture/pop culture	Geography	Politics/political history	
Total	35	47	39	36	100% (n=157)
Curriculum recognition	13	4	10	25	33%
Careers recognition	2	3	1	2	5%

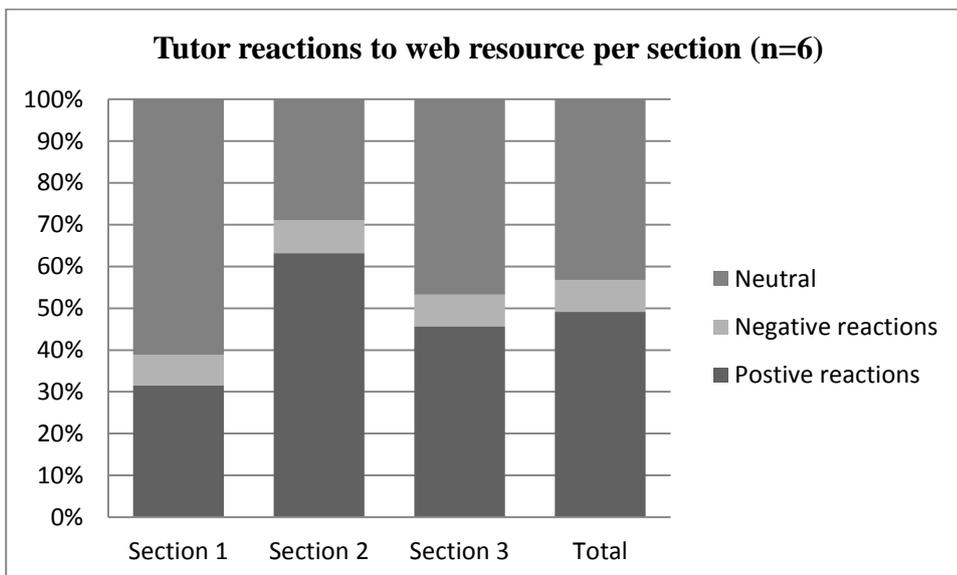
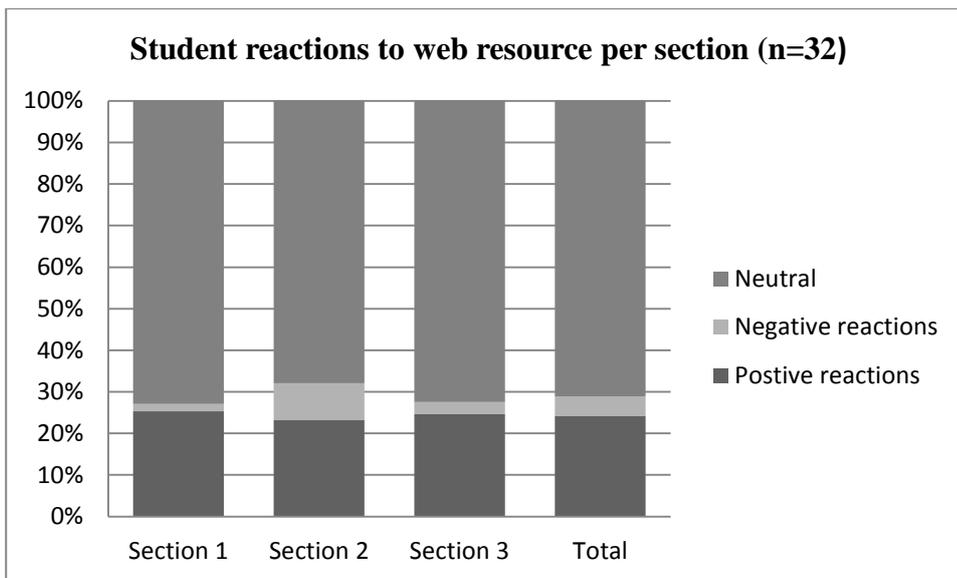
This table shows the incidence of keywords student participants came up with rapidly in relation to Russia, which were then placed into four broad themes. It also indicates the proportionate number of keywords the participants identified either from within their school curriculum or with careers.

At the time of the testing it had been anticipated that current affairs may have heightened participants' positive awareness of the country. Topicality included Russia's political role in the Syria peace talks, the need for linguists for business and the UK intelligence services, and the Sochi Winter Olympics 2014, but the responses showed limited evidence of this; rather that the negative connotations from Russian history were dominant. Instead the post-it note exercise revealed that the participants' existing knowledge of Russia was spread across history, particularly political history, culture, and geography of a general nature. Those who recognised topics from the school curriculum, did so from the perspective of twentieth century political history, particularly in relation to communism, revolution and the cold war. Only five percent of the keywords were associated with careers, with five responses related to performing arts. Vodka and matryoshka dolls were the

top cultural icons (though the latter may be prompted by the image), and the dolls, followed by Moscow and Stalin were the most cited keywords across the exercise. The students' experiences of Russia at this point were not orientated towards positive aspects of social and political communications and commerce, or any identification of careers.

The resource exercise was scored according to positive or negative connotations across the three section categories, where words and concepts which had been circled were seen as positive, those which had been underlined were seen as negative, and those which were not marked were seen as neutral. The quantitative results can be seen in Figure 6.3:

**Figure 6:3: Connotations derived from *Beginners' Russian Resource***



**Section 1: enter into a level playing field as no prior attainment in Russian language required**

**Section 2: establishing the value of the degree through external environmental factors**

**Section 3: employability credibility**

These charts were compiled from the number of positive and negative indications on the PDF copy of the web resource, plotted as a percentage of the total number of possible indications per section (number of options multiplied by the number of participants). They show that tutors engaged more positively with the resource as a whole. The biggest difference in understanding between the student and tutor groups was in considering the value of the degree in response to external environmental factors, where 63% of the tutors were supportive of the claims, and 68% of the students remained neutral.

The students were consistent in the aggregated and normalised responses to each of the three core categories, whereas tutors showed a bias towards the socio-cultural benefits of learning a language. Breaking the reception down by sections, the students were particularly receptive to the teaching and learning approach of being taught in small classes which allowed for tutors to pay particular care and attention to individuals which replicated the experience in the current teaching environment of the student participants. They were also appreciative of the instructional scaffolding approach taken to teaching a new language. In absolute terms, nineteen of the students were impressed by the positioning of Russian as a global language, but opinions were divided on the idea that Russia is re-emerging as a superpower (eleven for and six against). Thirteen of the group were inspired by the practical international experience provided by spending a year abroad. The areas targeted for negative responses from students were those relating to arts and culture (20). With tutors being biased towards these sections, it presents the possibility that the inspiration for progression to languages at HE is being misattributed to the benefits of engaging in new cultures. Students were also inclined to think positively about specific careers (45 positive indications against a range of suggestions), indicating they were receptive to the idea of the language being useful for a wide range of purposes.

For group one only, it was possible to have a general group discussion after they had engaged with the resource and received their language tuition. In general, there was an understanding of transferable skills in relation to the personal statements the group were currently preparing under guidance. In response to what the group considered to be the transferable skills of language, they offered 'thinking on the spot' 'making decisions like you have to do with a language', 'translate in your head – so rapid brain processing'. Offering absolute commitment as a prompt, the group also offered 'patience', 'motivation' and 'hard work'.

There was some suggestion that a language was only relevant if the career choice specifically required that language, and there was a perceived risk in taking a niche language:

‘It is not just the technical skill required to acquire that language but actually it does make a difference which language I would choose because if I specialised too much and I don’t get a job where I want to specialise in I will be at a disadvantage for another job.’ (Brian, resource testing group 1, student participant)

Brian’s reaction suggests that at least in this case, the notion that a demonstrable ability for one language is directly transferable for any further language acquisition, was not a consideration, and it was the absolute language that was considered the necessary primary skill. Indeed, Brian’s rationale resonates with concerns over the constant narrowing of choices that occurs from GCSE options whereby, irrespective of transferable skills contained within individual subjects, the choices automatically bar the pursuit of unrelated subjects at A-level, which in turn can have an impact on perceptions of eligibility at university.

Following a further discussion about the CV-enhancing and competitive edge potential of graduating with a niche language, there was acknowledgement of understanding ‘It is great because it is unusual’ (Ellie, group 1) and ‘not many people would have it, it would make you stand out’ (Kyra, group 1). However, when asked to consider a risk element in order to pursue a niche language without prior knowledge, one comment was ‘it depends if it is useful or not’ (Ben, group 1). This exposed the gamble which students perceive when choosing a course, though the language tutor stated that ‘you can never second guess which language is going to be in vogue’ (Margaret, group 1).

### **Testing methods evaluation and limitations**

In constructing this resource, and similar to the *Much Ado About Nothing* prototype, more possibilities for demystification emerged through the process of collaboration with academic and administrative staff, than through the testing analytics. The time frame for resource testing was very restrictive, but unavoidable in order not to strain the goodwill of students and tutors who were giving up their lunch breaks and/or some of their normal class time within their EDL programmes.

Group 1 was larger than anticipated and the discussion session was compromised by time and the lack of intimacy that a small focus group can generate. The time restriction also prevented the group from warming up properly for the activity, affecting those who preferred a period of observation prior to vocal participation. One student, Brian, dominated the conversation, and was atypical of the group already having a clear idea of his career goals in respect of second language acquisition, and had already grappled with the choices required for international affairs. Nevertheless, the participants remained engaged throughout, and the resource proved useful as an artefact to stimulate conversation

In post-testing evaluation with Derrick and Rachel it was felt that some of the PowerPoint concepts, particularly the notion of transferable skills, were in a register too high for this group, which may also impact on how they might be introduced in future iterations of the presentation. Subsequent correspondence with the college has elicited a request for *Lorem* to provide something similar for future EDLs, which led to revisions in the target audience for promotional activity and allowing resources to be used in outreach spaces as part of a relationship building agenda (see Section 6.2.4),. It is also worthy of note that the *Lorem* collaborators, while holding the roles of co-participants in the construction and delivery of the session and provision of the online resources, continued to reconfirm established themes, and add new points for consideration, as they reacted to participant comments. Their continued contributions further added to iterations of resources and outreach sessions.

With the first three resources, and the testing process of the language resource, there was a significant weakness in providing internet content to be found serendipitously as it would not be possible to gauge how individuals would receive the content cold and how it would compete with other information. The *Beginners' Russian* resource testing also revealed the significant benefits of collaboration, in this case joining up the ambitions of an outreach officer, two *Lorem* language

tutors, and A-level language teachers in schools and FE colleges. In this way the new resource provided a reference point around which marketing messages could be discussed, tailored to the elements of marginalisation identified as affecting perceptions of credibility of subjects in marginalised audiences.

Though this analysis is restricted by a small sample size and a lack of comparison with other modern language, the testing process did have generalisable benefits. Firstly, it opened up the possibilities of working in conjunction with outreach initiatives in a new collaborative arrangement and, secondly it provided a platform for a long-term initiative which would allow relationship marketing engagement resulting in benefits for all participants. The additional opportunity to discuss the resource with a Key Stage 5 (A-level) teacher group indicated that such initiatives would be welcomed by the schools as an aid to curriculum enrichment, and for improved access to additional teaching and learning resources. While the information would still be made available for general access on the internet, I discussed with tutors their portability as resources for outreach interventions, and the mode of dissemination pointing towards face to face communication in a teaching environment. This led to a refinement of the initially intended channels and methods of distribution of material, incorporated in to the fourth resource discussed next.

#### **6.2.4 A strategic approach to playing the ‘long game’**

Returning to the tutor interviews (see Chapter 4), with recruitment of UK-domiciled students from diverse backgrounds as one of the key strands of the triangle of marginalisation, it was important to establish whether tutors considered targeting these students as a worthwhile pursuit. The interview analysis demonstrated an appetite for encouraging diversity. This was true whether a diverse student body was viewed as either a pedagogical and transformative good, or if it was understood in human capital terms of needing to contribute effectively in a diverse workforce. It was also considered that the low visibility of some marginalised subjects in the national curriculum and public perceptions of

their usefulness in employability contributed to barriers to effective recruitment. However, there was scepticism about whether it was the responsibility of marketing to intervene with existing activities, when such work was already in the scope of a specialist department and/or personal interventions by tutors. Nevertheless, there was interest in trying out new ideas that sought both to demystify misperceptions of the validity of marginalised subjects and to reduce the noise of conflicting information. The tutors identified this type of activity with ‘playing the long game’ unrestricted by fixed recruitment cycle activity, and based on relationship building over an extended time frame. Marginalised subjects would need to be promoted by tailored resources, rolled out over time and across subjects. Such a move would become new practice at *Lorem* for which a strategy would be required. With this in mind, alongside creating subject-specific resources, I began to develop an overarching strategy demonstrating the possibilities and flexibility of the resource prototypes, to present to an academic audience.

The original *Help with Homework* project premise, positioned marketing as an aid to raising the visibility of university subjects through a co-ordinated marketing and outreach effort. I proposed that this could be achieved through the provision of long-term sustainable content which would resonate with KS3 topics, seeking early intervention in the school curriculum. The content would be universally available to avoid the stigmatisation of WP labelling, and would be delivered directly to students using internet searches in pursuit of independent research for school work. The proposal incorporated the design principles of the *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Beginners’ Russian* resources, providing a framework within which top-level subjects such as classics and archaeology could be broken down into their component parts allowing for search-engine optimised pages for topics such as the Greek myths and legends, or Roman Britain. Once on the pages, students would also be exposed to study and employability options and the concept of transferable skills. As non-targeted messaging this scenario would permit both marginalised and mainstream students to engage with the content in the same way.

I also proposed a transformation of *Lorem*'s arts and humanities outreach from an events archive into an invitation to schools to request tailored provision. This idea emanated from the teacher conversations conducted during the *Beginners' Russian* prototype testing session. Bringing these elements together with a view to making resources democratically available via the internet, I developed the *Help with Homework* proposal to present to an outreach working group of academic and administrative colleagues (see Table 6.4).

#### **Resource 4: from *Help with Homework* to *Curriculum Enrichment Strategy***

The *Help with Homework* proposal was in three parts. The first addressed past outreach activity to promote new enquiries, the second covered making subjects visible by linking to existing school curricula, and the third was a project proposal which required academic assistance in developing a dedicated online resource. The two previous subject-specific prototypes, *Much Ado About Nothing*, and *Beginners' Russian*, were offered within the project proposal as exemplars for a possible roll out across all subjects.

I will next discuss the development of this fourth resource, from its preliminarily working title *Help with Homework*, to the presentation and reception of the proposal at *Lorem*'s arts and humanities outreach working group, and its evolution into the *Curriculum Enrichment Strategy* (see Table 6.4).

**Table 6.4:** Strategy development iterations

	<i>Help with Homework</i> resource development plan	<i>Collaborative influences on strategic development: changes requested by academic stakeholders</i>	<i>Curriculum Enrichment Strategy</i>
Introduction	<p><i>Help with Homework</i> is the working title for an arts and humanities web-based project which joins together the outreach requirements of the academic units, the curriculum support resource needs of school tutors and Key Stage 3 (KS3) students, and the practical skills development of arts and humanities students across award levels.</p> <p>KS3 has been identified as a currently under-supported target group for this type of assistance, and there is greater opportunity to advise students on relevant GCSE and A-level choices for arts-related HE study and careers.</p> <p>The proposal is positioned to utilise as much as possible existing academic and student-produced resources as a catalyst for further awareness raising and engagement within the primary recruitment audience and general public.</p> <p>The additional placement of resources on the internet permits a more democratic distribution of information over and above the schools which are specifically targeted for outreach intervention.</p>	<p>Request for a shift from student self-service via serendipitous web searches on curriculum relevant keywords, to a tutor to school direct support activity.</p>	<p>The <i>Curriculum Enrichment Strategy</i> project is a development of the original <i>Help with Homework</i> proposal, which allows for a more specific focus on developing existing arts and humanities resources for a secondary school teacher audience.</p> <p>While the resulting content is still intended to be freely accessible via the internet, secondary school students are no longer the primary targets of this material. The revisions are no less ambitious in terms of their impact – raising awareness of the availability, validity and accessibility of arts and humanities courses where they may not be clearly visible within the secondary school curriculum - but are more conscious of the resources currently available, including time.</p>
Aim	<p>To raise awareness of arts and humanities subjects in schools, particularly where the subject is not obviously visible in the curriculum, at a time when such interventions can still be of benefit to GCSE, A-level and university choices.</p>	<p>The aim was accepted without need for change.</p>	<p>[No change]</p>
Objectives	<p>Develop a <i>Help with Homework</i> website building upon existing academic and student resources which connect with KS3 curriculum content, and is particularly responsive to keyword searches by topic.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop and implement a communications campaign to generate traffic to the online resource(s), including targeting of schools and careers advisor networks and existing stakeholder events</li> <li>• Establish an annual cycle of current <i>Lorem</i> student participation opportunities with clearly defined skills acquisition in line with existing careers and skills development programmes, which also encourages interaction with diverse communities to aid the <i>Lorem</i> teaching and learning experience.</li> <li>• Develop existing outreach resources for presentation on the web and provide a clear call to action for schools requiring face-to-face and bespoke outreach provision to make enquiries.</li> </ul>	<p>Tutors expressed concern over the potential workload of developing a dedicated platform pre-populated with tailored resources and requested this be downsized to use existing platforms, adding in new content over time. They also requested that schools should not be overtly encouraged to get in touch via web-based enquiries; the group preferred to retain more control over the process and use existing corporate and personal networks,</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop and implement a communications campaign to generate traffic to the online resource(s), using existing schools and liaison networks and events [as per <i>Beginners' Russian</i> example]</li> <li>• Encourage a curriculum enrichment dialogue with schools to, building up to face-to-face bespoke outreach provision</li> </ul>

Label	<p>Initial scoping: prior to work on the aims and objectives, the following work will need to be undertaken:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Audit of existing external web resources</li> <li>• Audit of internal web and other resources</li> <li>• Internal stakeholder engagement</li> <li>• Quality web design</li> <li>• Identify primary audience for communications strategy</li> </ul>	<p>Request for a shift in focus of the marketing assistance offered, moving away from creating and collecting new material for new resources, to developing existing resources through internal stakeholder collaboration.</p>	<p>Initial scoping: prior to work on the aims and objectives, the following work will need to be undertaken:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Audit of <i>Lorem</i> web and other resources</li> <li>• Internal consultation on development of pieces in line with <i>Much Ado About Nothing</i> and <i>Beginners' Russian</i> exemplars</li> </ul>
Stakeholders	<p>The following have been identified as stakeholders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Lorem</i> (collaborators on development and delivery of the project)</li> <li>• Arts and humanities academic and administrative staff who routinely work with outreach or who would like to</li> <li>• <i>Lorem</i> Outreach/Widening Participation teams</li> <li>• <i>Lorem</i> Marketing and Communications teams</li> <li>• Schools, students and parents (end users of the project)</li> <li>• Schools targeted for, or requesting, outreach programmes</li> <li>• KS3 teachers, students and parents</li> <li>• Creative industries and learned societies (for dissemination)</li> <li>• Existing professional and scholarly networks</li> <li>• Subject and pedagogy-related bloggers</li> <li>• Children' book commercial sites and social networks</li> </ul> <p>In addition, <i>Lorem</i> has several annual events, and public spaces, which can be used to showcase the project and distribute the information.</p>	<p>Tutors asked for an increased focus on schools as the key end-user stakeholders. The strategy was adjusted so that it is no longer pitching for a market-leader in the provision of quality homework resources, but striving for a more constrained and controlled targeting of content in negotiation with schools.</p>	<p>The following have been identified as stakeholders: <i>Lorem</i> (collaborators on development and delivery of the project)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arts and humanities outreach officers and academic staff who routinely work with outreach</li> <li>• <i>Lorem</i> Outreach/Widening Participation teams</li> <li>• <i>Lorem</i> marketing and communications teams</li> <li>• Schools (end users of the project) targeted for, or requesting, outreach programmes</li> <li>• Teachers, KS3 and above</li> </ul>

This table shows the original ideas for the *Help with Homework* project developed from the new market intelligence generated from empirical research, and the evolution of ideas generated as a by-product of the DBR methodological process itself. The core *Help with Homework* concepts were introduced to various staff members during informal encounters, and more formally tabled at an outreach working group meeting; at this point the document was changed to become the *Curriculum Enrichment Strategy*. The original ideas can be seen on the left, and the amended ideas on the right, with the key thoughts of the collaborators shown in italics in the central column.

The *Help with Homework* document was initially useful in stimulating conversations about marketing interventions developed from issues identified within the triangle of marginalisation which could serve an unsegmented audience. I approached the original tutor participants for follow-up meetings to present and discuss these ideas (see Appendix 7). Some of the ideas met with a degree of resistance, particularly in relation to workload concerns, for example where the responsibility for creating the subject-specific resources was assumed to be placed on the individual tutor. In addition, there was still an appetite for retaining personal contact with schools, even though this was acknowledged as operationally difficult within the context of existing workload. In response to this concern I offered to present the outreach provision as a pick-list of packaged outreach options which could be promoted publically, and could also be targeted. The tutors expressed concern that if opportunities were promoted publically then they might become victims of their own success with demand outstripping supply.

With the evidence gathered from the empirical data to date and the experiences of resource testing with tutors, I was invited to produce a paper to present at the *Lorem* arts and humanities outreach working group, which had no formal marketing member. The paper proposed to aggregate existing outreach initiatives into an online resource aimed at students seeking help with specific aspects of the curriculum with which *Lorem* could naturally support; for the most part the proposal was seeking to re-purpose, reorganise and digitise existing resources to aid with the workload issues articulated by academic staff. However, upon discussion with the working group, coupled with reinforcing comments from the tutor interviews, it emerged that although workload remained uppermost as a barrier to being more effective with outreach work, academics were reluctant to remove themselves from the process. The group members were in agreement that a consolidated effort in outreach intervention was appealing, but required some refinements to the *Help with Homework* proposal for it to be considered feasible.

The tutors' immediate concerns with the original proposal were centred on the increase in workload which would render it instantly redundant in its initial format. They requested that refinements be made to reduce the workload, and also to allow them more control over the interactions with the resources covered by the document. These reactions had echoes of the tutor interviews whereby on the one hand help was desirable, but on the other hand there was a lack of willingness to hand over control to marketing. Instead, the preferred approach was to retain the personalisation of communications in spite of the workload issues.

Owing to the need to retain the personal touch, and re-focusing on face-to-face relationship-building which emerged from the *Beginners' Russian* resource, the *Help with Homework* project was re-worked to remove the emphasis on connecting directly with students, and refocused on relationship building with secondary school tutors. Nevertheless, the working group was interested in pursuing a practical interface between outreach and marketing. This led me to consider how the strategy might be adapted to school-based interventions, strategically aimed at marginalised students, moving away from a solely internet based distribution. This development allowed for continued collaboration with key academic stakeholders beyond the existing parameters of routine marketing practice.

I was asked by the group to amend the project document and invited to re-present it at the next group meeting so that it could be discussed. The changes they required to the original proposal were minimal and are documented in Table 6.4. The committee required that, in order for academic stakeholders to have more ownership, it should be retitled as *Curriculum Enrichment Strategy*. This was felt to reflect more clearly the ethos of existing and intended outreach work. Students and parents were removed as primary stakeholders, focusing instead on signposting teachers to the subject specific resources as part of individual correspondence and dialogue. The proposal to invite tailored outreach provision requests was tentatively accepted. At the conclusion of this research

period, there was an agreement to act on the strategy, which was subsequently incorporated in the core arts and humanities five-year marketing plan. This permitted a continuation of developing subject specific resources, and targeted teacher resources in the live environment. It also permitted the expansion of conversations to cover a wider group of academic and administrative staff than were initially consulted. In this respect the *Curriculum Enrichment Strategy*, incorporating the design principles of the empirical data, became both sustainable and scalable, using existing resource and temporally independent from the routine recruitment cycle.

### **6.3 Resource sustainability**

The sustainability of the resources has various interlinked components, each involving collaborations with academics and specialist units to address the long-term promotional needs of marginalised subject and recruitment of marginalised students. The resource design phase and the establishment of the five design principles provided a structure to start new conversations, with the methodological approach allowing academic voices to inform further marketing practice decisions and directions. Beyond the field work I continued with conversations with academic and non-marketing administrative staff, and the implementation of the *Curriculum Engagement* strategy. The themes and challenges derived from the empirical research are mapped to the new approaches, including resources and implementation work in Table 6.5:

**Table 6.5: Resource sustainability: new approaches to promotional practice**

<b>Theme/Challenge 1: Explicit understandings of the importance of diversity</b>				
<b>Data source</b>	<b>Development concept</b>	<b>DBR phase 3 resource</b>	<b>Status during DBR period</b>	<b>New approaches/resource sustainability</b>
Social mobility discussions in the online press. Teaching enrichment discussions amongst tutor participants. Learning enrichment discussions amongst student participants.	Student voices discussing overcoming the unknown	Video interviews portraying varied backgrounds and accents, and discussions about 'struggles' with confidence – rough cut	Pilot videos available on YouTube and embedded into an extra web page linked from the core course entry Example video: <b>bit.ly/resourceprototype1</b>	A new arts and humanities foundation year course has presented an excellent opportunity to narrate marginalised students journeys from the start of their university experience.  Opportunities for paid blog/vlog work where specific peer to peer engagement pieces have been established.
<b>Theme/Challenge 2: Invisible subjects</b>				
<b>Data source</b>	<b>Development concept</b>	<b>DBR phase 3 resource</b>	<b>Status during DBR period</b>	<b>New approaches/resource sustainability</b>
'I didn't know you could do that at University' Information seeking habits of student participants. Tutor concern over subject footprint	Pull out popular culture aspects of the subjects which cut across the curriculum. Pick topical themes to show different ways in which subjects can be explored Use search engine optimisation techniques to foreground subjects via key-words which connect directly to the National Curriculum	<i>Much Ado About Nothing</i> web page featuring Shakespearean perspectives taken from a range of subject areas	Live page. Reached the top search engine ranking page position in Google, Yahoo and Bing when suffixed with keyword 'university': <b>bit.ly/resourceprototype2</b>	Mapping and display of interconnected subjects: an audit of research areas of expertise has been conducted and interdisciplinary themes have been extracted to highlight in new online resources. Live resources include Shakespeare, Photography, and Creative Writing and Performance.  Commissioned blogs linking aspects of the arts and humanities curriculum to topical news and events, and anniversaries, e.g. Brexit, Black Lives Matter, Anti-slavery  This has had an added benefit of raising awareness amongst research staff.
<b>Theme/Challenge 3: Entry tariff</b>				
<b>Data source</b>	<b>Development concept</b>	<b>DBR phase 3 resource</b>	<b>Status during DBR period</b>	<b>New approaches/resource sustainability</b>
Tutor discussions around entry tariffs pitched high for quality, but against market 'supply' of students	Introduce discussion around entry requirements of <i>ab initio</i> courses	Considered too sensitive to develop into publicly accessible resource	Considered for discrete discussions with teachers and career advisors	Continued statistical analysis covered in Section 3.2.2 to drive outreach strategy development. Implementation plan developed to work with schools on awareness raising and outreach programmes. Budget allocated.
<b>Theme/Challenge 4: Non-competitive recruitment.</b>				
<b>Data source</b>	<b>Development concept</b>	<b>DBR phase 3 resource</b>	<b>Status during DBR period</b>	<b>New approaches/resource sustainability</b>
Modern language tutor discussions	Articulation of being able to get the competitive edge through differentiation of degree	Discussions linked to <i>Beginners' Russian</i>	Theme used as part of the resource testing sessions, in the spoken presentation	Of use in face-to-face school interventions. See above.

<b>Theme/Challenge 5: Employability demystification</b>				
<b>Data source</b>	<b>Development concept</b>	<b>DBR phase 3 resource</b>	<b>Status during DBR period</b>	<b>New approaches/resource sustainability</b>
Social media emphasis on only professional and vocational courses being valid in terms of graduate careers, with others lacking value for money when considered in the context of a 'return on investment'. Tutor concerns over the same problem Students under pressure from schools and parents to study courses with a high perception of employment credibility.	Making transferable skills visible. Explicit links between transferable skills and careers Unpack 'transferable skills' in explanation and through graduate profiles Transferrable skills – what do these actually mean – how do they actually work	<i>Beginners' Russian</i> , written with reference to the tutor concerns	Live web page: <b>bit.ly/resourceprototype3</b>	Collaboration with the careers service to demonstrate transferability of skills using alumni destinations and explanations, and a showcase of work experience and volunteering opportunities connected to relevant skills development. Basic content already exists but is now being collated to address the employment credibility challenge.
	Compare and contrast CV of students who have engaged with extra-curricular activities, and those who can only demonstrate achievement of accreditation	Musical CV which charts the student experience of a Music student, including performance and volunteering activities, linking the transferable skills to specific careers	Not produced during research period	The idea was used in post-application English resource, and discussions are being held with the careers service for further development
<b>Theme/Challenge 6: Accessible and demystified messages</b>				
<b>Data source</b>	<b>Development concept</b>	<b>DBR phase 3 resource</b>	<b>Status during DBR period</b>	<b>Development potential beyond DBR</b>
Tutors holding back demystification information for one to one delivery at open days	Strategy document which would allow students to access key university messages, linked to content useful for their school-level curriculum studies.	<i>Help with Homework</i> proposal document, changed into <i>Curriculum Enrichment Strategy</i>	Strategy pitched to outreach committee, and refined through collaborative process	Open day email campaign indicating the three key questions that are asked by students at open days, inviting students to ask the same and other questions of tutors. This preserves the content that tutors feel is better delivered face to face to mitigate misinterpretation.
Tutor desire to work directly with teachers but for lack of resource	Strategy document which would enable marketing to facilitate tutor outreach work,			Strategy implementation plan to work directly with school teachers, both in schools, and on campus. This involves clustering courses allowing high profile subjects to open conversations about less visible but related subjects, some with lower entry requirements, and which might be conveyed as less competitive for applications, but with a competitive edge for graduate differentiation.

This table maps the marketing challenges derived from the empirical data analysis through to resource development and dissemination. It also identifies the iterative developments which occurred after the fieldwork period of this research.

Beyond the period of my fieldwork, a significant change in *Lorem*'s portfolio, the introduction of an arts and humanities foundation programme, directly addressed my ability to focus on marginalised student recruitment. It also provided me with a provided resolution for the problems I encountered in bringing heterogeneous student voices in to promotional messaging (see Section 6.2.1). This new programme is primarily aimed at WP students, but not restricted to *Lorem*'s WP target schools. This has opened up a dialogue with schools which fall below the GPA target, but whose higher achieving students would benefit from the extra skills-building programme to enable them to study at degree level. Students who successfully complete their foundation year are guaranteed progression to a variety of direct entry degree programmes, excluding the most selective courses in *Lorem*'s undergraduate portfolio. Working directly with the course convenor and the first cohort, it has been possible to resurrect the original idea of working directly with students to present their stories of non-traditional route entry, and their reflections of what this means in personal development and study. We are achieving this by gathering the first cohort's reflective journeys which they are curating in alignment with the pedagogic outcomes of their course. Students on the media studies pathway have been given access to recording equipment to present their reflections in video or vlog format. In addition and in collaboration with careers and external relations administrative units, all students were invited to attend a careers fair at which they could sign up to work on a commission basis to produce peer to peer content.

The core post-fieldwork development was the *Curriculum Enrichment* implementation plan relating specifically to outreach work. Two key clusters of courses were created; History as a high profile course was used to demonstrate other ways of studying the subject through the showcasing of related less visible courses. The language cluster addressed the issue of not requiring a language A-level if studying at Beginners' level alongside the better known post-A level options. Printed and online resources will be developed, with the principle that online content is accessible to everyone, but the printed material will be targeted at teachers in schools. In addition, school interventions will be sought, by academic visits to schools, and through on campus outreach events.

In addition, while English is for the most part considered a selective degree, the creative writing pathway is less visible, and as such is a progression option from the new foundation programme. Furthermore, while drama is a feature of English courses, it has not been promoted in its own right. Borrowing from the interdisciplinary resources and the clustered courses approaches, a web resource was created to highlight these less visible aspects, and the creative community that is becoming established around them. Awareness raising literature will also be created through the *Curriculum Enrichment* implementation plan, which will present both foundation and direct entry options.

#### 6.4 Summary

This chapter addressed the question of how to accommodate the needs of marginalised subjects and students into mainstream marketing practices without jeopardising core approaches and the needs of core audiences. In so doing it also provided a joint solution for both the audience and subject needs, realised through the academic-marketing collaboration of resource design. The achieved this through two key steps. Firstly, I have transformed the findings of the empirical data of Chapters 4 and 5 into marketing resource 'design principles'. These principles informed the development of a series of prototype marketing resources positioned as possible solutions to the practical problems identified in Chapter 3. I have detailed how I used DBR to develop a package of marketing resource prototypes to generate further discussion around strategic approaches to tackling the issues of marginalisation. I have recorded the iterative process by which prototype resources were developed and in some cases tested, and the limitations of the development and testing methods. During this 'working with resource' phase of the DBR cycle (see Figure 3.1). Secondly, I have shifted my position from producing web-based resources primarily directed towards potential student audiences, to a strategic approach where as partners in the design and dissemination of resources academic staff are able to use these resources in conjunction with their outreach provision and discussions with teachers (see Table 6.5).

The themes extracted from the empirical data were translated into five key design principles (see Table 6.1) which formed the foundations for developing three subject-specific resource prototypes and a strategy document. These principles covered the empirical themes of heterogeneous stories, visibility on the school curriculum, public perceptions of human capital validity and employment credibility, and ‘playing the long game’ outside of fixed-term recruitment cycles. Consumer orientation towards value-for-money investments places arts and humanities courses in a vulnerable position which requires a better understanding of the skills embedded within the academic disciplines as a justification for curriculum structure. The findings suggested that more emphasis should be placed on transferable skills to make the subjects more credible to a wider audience, and human capital expectations linking of courses to careers. Similarly, more explicit connections need to be made between content which ordinarily occurs discretely within school curricula, and the opportunities that exist to specialise at university.

This was a small-scale study which was directed in part by conversations with enthusiastic tutors who were willing to try out new ideas. Nevertheless, as the ideas were translated into resources to aid understanding and access to specific subjects, it became apparent that the prototypes could be rolled out to a larger number of subjects, and that they could be developed and deployed at any time, and in conjunction with other events independent of university recruitment timelines without losing their value to recruitment aims. The strategy document created a framework in which resources could be introduced to marginalised students directly at strategic points within the school calendar to permit an understanding of marginalised course options from as early as KS3, to be able to make more informed choices around their validity in human capital agendas. In providing demystified and sustainable web-based resources in conjunction with an outreach strategy aimed at year groups rather than postcode areas, the recruitment messages become less core audience focused and more accessible to all.

An overriding impression made upon me during the whole resource development and testing processes was the relationship that must be fostered between HE marketing, academic staff, and outreach in order for alternative marketing promotional methods to be most effective. This is demonstrated in part by the previously articulated problem of the vast array of information available to information seekers. The research design called for the generation of resources which could be made democratically available via the internet, identifying likely keyword-searches, and search engine optimisation techniques to return content on the first page of the search. This was achieved through the *Much Ado About Nothing* prototype (see Figure 6.1). Nevertheless, online interventions are secondary to personal ones, and it was the responses of the school tutors which emphasised the idea that new resources should not rely upon supposed serendipitous encounters, but rather be developed in conjunction with, and for use by, those who are in a position to develop institutional relationships and engineer encounters in existing pedagogical settings. Therefore, both the development of the resources, and the key messages contained within, should form part of package distributed in a variety of ways, including web and face-to-face. Significantly, adopting the personal approach provides an earlier opportunity to commence a scheme of relationship marketing, where the relationship is formed between students and tutors, and not between students and the corporate entity. In employing DBR methodology to investigate new sources of market intelligence to inform prototype resources, I had new conversations and possibilities opened up to me; in particular it revealed the ability to work in close partnership with academics who are in a position of influence with potential students but who are not ordinarily at the centre of marketing practice. By working directly with the tutors to address the nuanced needs of their subjects, there was greater understanding and trust on both sides, and this new approach has been adopted within core practice beyond the completion of the research.

## **7 New collaborative approaches to HE promotional marketing**

In this chapter I summarise and conclude my research. I discuss my contribution to knowledge, and demonstrate how I have advanced my initial theorisation established in Chapter 1, achieved the overall aims and objectives and answered the research questions. These concluding discussions explain how this research has affected my own professional practice, and include a reflection on the methodological approach in relation to ongoing practical applications of the outcomes. In summary, I propose three key criteria for new approaches to current HE marketing core promotional practice. Firstly, through an alteration to professional practice which recognises academic staff as significant marketing partners. Secondly, by the application of design principles emanating from small-scale market intelligence gathering and resource production, involving academic input, to meet the nuanced needs of marginalised subjects and students. Thirdly, in planning for the portability of resources, facilitating academic staff to commence relationship building earlier through the joining of promotional and outreach activities. These proposed alterations to the core practice, under scrutiny from my case study norms, form my contribution to knowledge.

### **7.1 Contribution to knowledge**

At the centre of my contribution to knowledge is a new way of working with academic stakeholders. Through working outside of the practice norms imposed by core approaches and rigid timeframes, I have addressed the tensions felt by academic staff when they encounter the production of homogenised messages for the nuanced needs of their subject areas, and the core audience segmentation which ignores their desire to attract diverse student audiences for pedagogic enrichment. The key outputs of this research are a long-term strategy and toolkit of design principles to create sustainable resources aimed at normalising aspects marginalised in mainstream practice. Together these offer a new approach to promotional marketing practice which utilises insider and public voices to inform demystified messaging to benefit marginalised and core

audiences, delivered through bespoke face-to-face methods with mass online reinforcement. The strategy is structured to add value to core practice and allows the resources to be positioned to stimulate the formation of a relationship leading to a recruitment transaction. In addition, where resources are made portable, they can be deployed by academic staff undertaking outreach interventions. This brings forward the subject-specific relationship building opportunities to an earlier part of the student information-seeking process. For the promotion of marginalised subjects this earlier intervention could be crucial to alerting marginalised audiences to study opportunities that have been hidden in the school curriculum, and the relevance of the inherent transferable skills for career considerations. The co-production of this content allowed academics to match messages to their inherent understanding of subject-specific diverse student needs. Furthermore, the methodological approach enabled these opportunities to happen outside of the rigid core recruitment cycle timeframes which frequently conflicted with teaching and learning timetables, and aided the spirit of collaboration.

Through the process of empirical research and resource development I have gained the trust of academic communities so that I can deliver promotional materials using their insider knowledge and tailored to their own subject areas. Lack of time and shortage of access to administrative personnel were the key concerns from the academic collaborators, which were resolved in part by rapid prototyping using live testing and development environments for new marketing resources. The prototypes can be adapted and rolled out over other subject areas at a time convenient to the academic staff rather than in adhering to recruitment cycle requirements. These alterations to prevailing practice allow for flexibility both in design and implementation.

The resources created for this research are intended to have a long life span, designed to become embedded in the value-added offer of the institution. Over time dissemination of the content will become more widespread through a sustained communications strategy, generating dialogue

between schools and students to mitigate the drivers of marginalisation. While this content is corporately constructed from within a single institution, it is not intended to be restricted to a specific year's recruitment, nor is it intended to be a one-way communication. The resulting resources defy conformity with current provision, aiming for heterogeneous accounts demystified for marginalised audiences, and developed and deployed in accordance with events not governed by fixed recruitment timelines. In this respect the resources and the underpinning strategy, are both sustainable and scalable.

In championing promotional marketing as a valid contributor to addressing the marginalised courses and marginalised students in the under-represented sectors of society, I have not ignored the judgements of management strategists and the valuable outreach work conducted by specialist units. Rather I have positioned promotional marketing as a complementary activity. I continue to share the findings with academic, outreach, careers and marketing stakeholders to embed new ways of working, acknowledging the importance of small-scale market intelligence and the development of bespoke resources, alongside large-scale corporate norms.

### **7.1.1 Reflections on professional practice**

The reflection on and modification of my own practice was a pivotal factor in the development of new approaches to promotion. As a marketing professional I am responsible for tailoring recruitment messages to complement corporate 'brand values' (Harris & Chernatony, 2001) in line with strategic goals; yet as a research student of HE I sometimes found my thinking in conflict with my profession. My professional self depicts a glamorous picture of university life, subconsciously disregarding struggles with study that might reasonably be anticipated for some students, in order to present an image of success or of Berger's envy (1972). My research self is acutely aware that degrees can come at a high emotional and financial cost, so student satisfaction, welfare and value for money is very important. Equally I am cognisant of the marketing ideal where potential students

are able to identify positively with the text and image messages to instigate a 'purchase' decision, and I am careful to select visual representations of the core target audience. My research self knows that this can be problematic to those who do not identify with the corporate marketing constructs yet are still academically capable and entitled to participate. I therefore need to adjust promotional messaging to be more inclusive of the wider audiences to comply with my research findings.

Parallel issues occur in consideration of subjects on offer; there is pressure for UK universities to conform to government economic and employability agendas, where vocational courses have an advantage over their non-vocational counterparts, at least in the public perception. Messages of intrinsic subject value which cannot readily be decoded risk undervaluation where access to word-of-mouth and experiential knowledge is lacking. From the empirical data I surmised that in accepting the encroaching need to attach vocational outcomes to all subjects, demystification of messages about the transferability of skills to careers would aid acceptance from difficult to convince audiences.

As a general reflection, I recognise that the professional development of HE administrators does not have to be via the academic route. Indeed, traditional development includes leadership and management, as well as technical skills. However, my own development has exposed me to a new level of critical thinking that is hard to reconcile with the need to adhere to centrally created strategies that rely more heavily on homogenised target audiences. The research process has suggested to me that there is value in applying the rigours of academic research to the business of administration; my journey has caused me to question the ethical issues surrounding promotional marketing - what looks good versus 'truths'. My role within this research was to consider new marketing approaches to address specific issues relating to arts and humanities courses and their recruitment of WP students. As a consequence, I have deviated from my normal marketing practice by adopting an academic research approach.

My experience of HE recruitment marketing is where activity takes place in tandem with teaching and learning, but with marketing strategy being decided upon separately. On occasion, where I have attempted to draw together the academic and business strands of HE, I have found myself in an invidious position, seemingly fighting against the norms of recruitment marketing, and at the same time encroaching on outreach and teaching and learning territory. In working with social science research, pursuing academic literatures and empirical data from alternative market intelligence sources as a replacement for traditional market research, I have deviated from my practice norms. However, the result has been to make connections across institutional boundaries of marketing, academia and outreach, provided a combined approach to message creation and dissemination.

Marketing, when treated as a pure business procedure of identifying and enticing a specific market segment, can remove the need for nuance in approach, and the process and goals are clear.

Successful marketing mixes may undergo minor changes over a period of time, but the core components remain the same. In undertaking this research I had to acknowledge professional risks, working against the precision of the craft in order to experiment for possible gain, and in spite of good intentions accept that certain experiments designed to resonate with stakeholder requirements could fail. The result is a compromise; a drip feed of new ideas into a large system where experimentation is endorsed by the frontline deliverers of teaching and learning which ensures that, if the marketing is successful, then new entrants to the existing HE culture are supported effectively. This brings about a more complex partnership arrangement between the marketing administration and teaching and learning strands of HE.

It would be rational to believe that marketing can operate without prolonged consultation with academic staff thus avoiding additional workload for them. Although it would seem easier to keep the processes within the remit of the marketing practitioners, this can lead to unintended consequences in how subjects are portrayed and to whom they are targeted. It is preferable to work

in partnership with those who have to manage the subjects and students, after the recruitment marketing process has handed over to teaching and learning, in support of ongoing student/institution relationships. Agreeing mutual approaches and goals reinforces the notion of ‘touch points’ (Kotler & Armstrong, 2007; Chaffey, 2006; Kotler & Keller, 2008) whereby everyone who has some form of contact with students is also involved in marketing.

Some HE promotional practices, including prospectus publication and open days, are routine, and an established part of an annual cycle of events. Each year there are adjustments to be made to the previous year’s messages in accordance with survey data, and changes in policy and strategic direction. The strict adherence to the recruitment cycle and scale of promotional activity leaves little room for supplementary strategies and non-core experimentation. This results in the homogeneous deployment of marketing activities without reference to the nuances of individual courses e.g. messages created to address human capital motivation are more likely to benefit subjects directly connected to high-remuneration careers. Nuanced approaches oppose institutional preferences when enacting specific and consistent strategies across all units. However, I have demonstrated that insider student and academic accounts, and voices from the general public who are not accountable to specific institutions, provide rich qualitative data that enhance the statistical analysis and I have presented alternative notions of routine activity to promote heterogeneity and be of value-added benefit to all recruitment audiences.

I have also considered the possible negative impacts of this research. In proposing to assist academic departments with the recruitment of marginalised students in line with WP policy, there is a need to establish whether there are pedagogical obstacles resulting in unintended consequences for academic staff. It is conceivable that attractive and appealing recruitment texts may not always be representative of the lived student experience; reality falling short of expectation may affect student retention and grades, ultimately reflecting poorly upon institutional reputation. In addition,

success in recruitment of non-traditional students may result in improved perception of accessibility for this audience, but may damage the perception of reputation from the traditional elite market. It is therefore vital that this research is approached as a joint effort of academic input and marketing output, and that it proceeds with caution, and presents ideas for further consideration by the academic end users.

Owing to the positive encouragement I received from academic participants, and the acceptance of the developments continuing after the empirical research (see Section 6.3), over time the outputs of this research felt less like an exploration, and increasingly like the obvious thing to do. However, taking a step back to a time when I was focused on being just a marketing practitioner operating without reference to social science literatures and untrained in the rigours of academic inquiry, I would be far more likely to deliver content which had been corporately prescribed, taking little account of those areas I have identified as marginalised. Furthermore, this approach opened up conversations with a broader group of stakeholders. In practice now, it is my belief that DBR methods can be considered as part of the continuing promotional marketing toolkit for discrete and exploratory work where the identified problem cannot readily be resolved by existing mass marketing approaches.

### **7.1.2 Potential for generalisation and reconceptualisation**

In the application of a case study approach supported by DBR methods, access to insider and public voices has provided rich market-intelligence to inform new message creation. As a consequence of this new approach, the resulting promotional resources are better adapted to the heterogeneous needs of subjects and students, circumnavigating problems raised by the homogeneous core approaches under scrutiny. This research was conducted within a case study bounded by arts and humanities subjects, and with the insider voices drawn from students and tutors with experiences of marginalisation within these subjects. However, the new approaches to resource design, the

generation of design principles, and the channels of dissemination are generalisable. In the instance of *Lorem*, this generalisation occurs within the context of the original unit of analysis, that of the institutional core approaches to promotional marketing. However, it is also possible to conceive that in defining promotional problems through a triangulation of subject, student segment, and university mission group, the methodology employed here can be followed to create tailored design principles and resources to case studies with alternative configurations of the bounding parameters. Furthermore, the collaboration with academic staff as marketing partners has the potential to lead to a reconceptualisation of promotional marketing practice in HE, where the experiences of this research can be shared and adopted among other institutions experiencing relatable problems to those defined here. This is not to suggest that this methodology and collaborative approach should replace core activity and expertise, but that it operates alongside and complements the corporate strategy. The approach allows for small scale exploration and innovation with dedicated marketing resource in a timeframe more compatible with other academic duties, instead of the one imposed by the A level and UCAS calendar. The experience at *Lorem* has led to a better understanding of academic staff as valuable sources of market intelligence and promotional marketing partners, in the spirit of all members of staff having some responsibility for marketing (Çetin, 2003, Guilbault, 2016).

## **7.2 Achievement of research aims and objectives**

My key research aim, motivated by my professional experience, was to generate new approaches to HE marketing that would aid recruitment for both marginalised students and subjects. The core marketing approaches and high A-level entry requirements of an elite university, *Lorem*, were used for triangulation purposes. This showed how traditional core audience segmentation and messaging, and the lack of visibility of some subjects within the national secondary school curriculum acted as drivers of marginalisation. The aim was broken down into three objectives: to understand the

interconnectedness of course and student marginalisation from an elite institutional perspective; to capture an alternative market intelligence corpus to address aspects of marginalisation; and, to produce a package of tailored recruitment marketing resources adapted to the interconnected needs of marginalisation developed from the voices of the empirical data. The political, economic, social and technological environment factors affecting marginalisation were identified through a review of literatures, and led to the construction of a conceptual framework, introduced in Chapter 1 as the ‘triangle of marginalisation’. Through the mapping of the environmental factors to this conceptual framework, I arrived at my research questions:

- How can traditional approaches to mainstream undergraduate recruitment promotion be altered to aid the needs of marginalised students and marginalised courses?
- How can existing experiences of marginalisation be used to develop new promotional practice?
- How can shared understandings of marginalisation in the public domain be captured and utilised as market intelligence? and,
- How can marginalised aspects of HE recruitment marketing be accommodated within mainstream practices without jeopardising the needs of core target audiences?

I sought answers by employing a case study approach supported by DBR methods. This took me through four distinct phases; defining the research problem; working with empirical data; working with resources; and, determining the new approach. Each successive phase contributed to formulating new approaches. The function of these phases can be summarised as understanding the marginalising effect of current marketing practice; developing a new market intelligence corpus; using this new market intelligence to develop new resources, design principles and ways of working; and, using the results to generate a marketing strategy and toolkit for sustained use adaptable across subject areas. The iterative nature of DBR allowed me to develop research outputs that were both flexible and practical. I will now explain the steps by which the new approaches were conceived and developed, ordered by the phases of DBR.

### **7.2.1 The marginalisation effect of current marketing practice**

In the first phase of DBR I defined the practical research problem. This process was informed by the external environmental factors identified in the literature review, combined with and applied to my professional knowledge of *Lorem*, my case study university. The process was aided by the triangle of marginalisation framework, which I used to map the interconnectedness of marginalised students and marginalised courses as seen through an elite institution. Core promotional methods, in conjunction with human capital messages, were seen as drivers of marginalisation. I argued that elite HEIs take a mass market approach via their focus on their core target audiences, at the expense of marginalised audiences. If marginalised audience requirements differ too much from the core then these groups of potential students become further marginalised by marketing practice, as well as the socio-economic factors which are used to distinguish them from core audiences in the first place.

In my experience, core recruitment promotional marketing is traditionally conducted within clearly defined time frames and operational structures, and targeted to a specific audience. The norm of the marketing specialised products requires effective market segmentation to optimise the way a campaign resonates with its intended audience (Marigne & Gibbs, 2008). This presents challenges to marginalised aspects of HE as the overarching marketing practice of corporate branding requires a homogenisation of the HEI offer and student experience, tailored for the largest and most sought after ‘core’ audience. This situation is the norm for any HEI which adopts an institutional-wide branding strategy. Paradoxically, my research sought to create tailored information for a non-segmented audience. The practice of core audience targeting is in part a necessity when working within the temporal and economic constraints of a routine recruitment cycle, and particularly where corporate branding is required to pervade all aspects of marketing collateral; nevertheless, this ‘one size fits all’ approach remains at the expense of students on the margins of the core target audience, and of courses that are not readily visible in the secondary school curriculum. In addition, while

market segmentation permits messages to be tailored to suit a particular demographic, non-targeted audiences are not hindered from receiving segmented information, though they may be less receptive.

The precision of market segmentation has been diluted by the democratic access to online content, allowing all audiences more agency in choosing whether the content is relevant to their needs. In this way messages addressed to one audience may also enrich information-seeking for others, including parents, and ‘levels the playing field’ of access. By harnessing the power of the internet, more people are empowered to reach informed decisions. For this purpose I originally positioned the internet, and social media, to provide specialist content presented to a mass audience. I envisaged that it would assist in overcoming marginalisation problems caused by typical HE segmentation, with the intention of working directly with marginalised students to create resources from which they themselves would have benefited. However, as the research design evolved, social media was more prominently used as a source of market intelligence, demonstrating shared understandings in the public domain. The internet remained important as a message dissemination tool, supporting outreach interventions.

### **7.2.2 Developing a new market intelligence corpus**

In the second DBR phase I addressed the objective to identify voices missing from routine market intelligence gathering. I focused on those who might be considered as untapped potential for meeting the information requirements of marginalised students and recruitment messages of marginalised courses, having previously identified their interconnectedness. Through the exploratory data collection and analysis exercise conducted with online reader responses, I also answered my research question of how shared understandings in the public domain can be captured and used as market intelligence. In this empirical data phase I worked with small samples of rich,

predominantly qualitative data to generate a market intelligence corpus alternative to the HE norms of predominantly large-scale quantitative data.

My sample groups of research participants were selected for their insider knowledge of teaching and learning within arts and humanities subjects at *Lorem*. The students were defined as diverse both in WP policy and age terms, and made claims of being able to learn and gain critical support from each other as a direct result of their different life experiences. Tutors were of the opinion that diversity in most cases aided academic enrichment and dynamism in class and was to be encouraged. In addition, they expressed support for the citizenship value of having experienced UK-domiciled student interaction between socio-economic groups, with references being made to social harmony, and working together. Collectively the students and tutors demonstrated an appetite for UK-domiciled diversity in the classroom through social and pedagogic enrichment. The small sample size negates my ability to make general claims, but provides the foundations for building prototype resources which can be tested, evaluated, and developed further where viable.

As a contrast to insider data, I selected three online resources Daily Mail Online (DMO), Guardian Online (GO) and The Student Room (TSR) (see Chapter 5). Each had a different overall target audience, but there was some crossover within a broad HE market, and all enabled readers to respond to authored content. Public discourses on marginalised students were absent from the responses even where social mobility was a distinct factor of the original online article, but marginalised courses featured strongly, with the human capital approach to HE as a dominant theme. Arts and humanities courses were frequently cited as less valid than their more obviously vocational counterparts in terms of the ability to provide graduate employment and make a contribution to the economy.

Using the public comments and voting mechanisms within the selected online resources, I developed a mixed methods approach to analysis of reader responses to authored articles. I

established a measure of assumed and experiential authority of the responders, and the power they had over fellow readers, based on identifying factors about the responder, and the reader votes the comments received. This exploratory analysis of online content established shared understanding from reader responses about marginalised courses. It demonstrated that both students and parents were particularly active in responding to HE-related articles, and that they were influential in gaining public support for negative accounts of HE, receiving high numbers of endorsements from fellow readers via the online voting mechanism. Alumni, a group which is regularly used for student profiling in HE marketing materials, was less influential in the public arena than groups wishing to share accounts which compromised marketing messages. The power of parent responders suggested that, as with the students themselves, preconceptions of marginalised courses are too firmly entrenched to be easily convinced by routine statements of employability. This led me to consider the need for greater transparency in employability statements to mitigate challenges based on return on investment and economic validity.

HEIs have ready access to mass market quantitative surveys which establish norms and trends from which positioning and marketing strategy can be derived, but struggle to identify and work with qualitative data collected at grass roots level, leaving gaps in market intelligence. Indeed, the economies of scale, temporal restrictions, and need to maintain and grow core audiences might render such exercises as costly and wasteful. However, the core market segment approach (in *Lorem's* case appealing to private and high-achieving state schools) misses important concerns raised by stakeholders with investment in the marginalised subjects and students. These stakeholders include the government, HEIs responding to social concerns, tutors who are finding it difficult to meet the demands of consumer orientation, and students without ready access to personal support and experiential knowledge to decode the marketing messages aimed at core audiences. By looking beyond traditional marketing intelligence I generated nuanced themes

appropriate to represent identified aspects of marginalisation, which I took forward to the ‘working with resource’ phase for moulding in to a set of design principles to inform resource prototypes.

### **7.2.3 Application of design principles to prototype resources**

The third phase of DBR, working with resource, fulfilled the objective to produce a package of tailored recruitment marketing resources based on the key findings of empirical research. In so doing I was able to consider how marginalised aspects of HE recruitment marketing can be accommodated within mainstream practices without jeopardising the needs of core target audiences. In collaboration with the tutors I constructed new prototype resources which spoke directly to some of the issues raised from the new market intelligence, which stimulated further discussions and resource iterations. The desire to avoid alienating the core audience limited what could be said in the new resources. For example, while lower entry tariffs for marginalised subjects could be represented as giving a competitive edge, this could not be explicitly stated as it countered institutional messages of high entry tariffs as an indication of quality. These prototypes were constructed with reference to Barthe’s *Mythologies* and the need to add transparency to coded corporate messaging.

The data analysis highlighted two core components contributing to a rethinking of HE promotional marketing which can be of key benefit to the aspects of marginalisation under scrutiny here. Firstly, there needs to be an understanding that, in attempting to recruit in a competitive market place, the core audience approach to marketing will marginalise students who do not fit the norms for targeting, but who are important for the pedagogical enrichment of classroom interactions. Therefore, consideration needs to be given to how marginalised students can be normalised within recruitment activity. Secondly, the predominantly quantitative sources of market intelligence data do not reveal the nuanced complexities of student and public perceptions of participation in HE. The empirical data shows that where parents and students are positioned as powerful public

commentators on issues which cause dissatisfaction, this can be counterproductive to corporate messages.

The dominant story of developing the resources was the tailoring of texts to suit marginalised students seeking information about marginalised subjects, addressing the interconnected marketing challenges framed in the triangle of marginalisation model. Each resource incorporated alternative texts to the core norms. Of several resource concepts arising from the findings (see Table 6.5) four prototypes were developed, three of which were subject specific, with the fourth being a strategy document. The design principles addressed were the depiction of diverse students in their own words (recorded on video); the linking of marginalised subjects to publically accessible and popular topics (web resource); and, the explicit linking of subjects to specific careers, thus promoting employment credibility (web resource and portable document for use in outreach work). Each resource was evaluated for its viability. In the case of the student videos the narratives featured personal experiences of diversity, reflecting non-core backgrounds and motivations to study, which deviated from the more traditional and homogenised sound bites style. The *Much Ado About Nothing* resource, connected a topic more normally claimed by English literature, to a film pathway to broaden the possibilities of studying Shakespeare. The *Beginners' Russian* resource emphasised the lack of need to have prior experience of the Russian language and created a sense of security, this being the normal cohort experience. It also enhanced employability credibility by making strong connections between the subject and possible careers via transferable skills messaging, for which no allowance is made in more formalised comparative measures such as KIS. This resource was also taken through to a testing stage with KS5 students and their teachers, providing an additional way of working with staff engaged with outreach provision. While the adjustments to existing content might be considered minor, the resources are still geared towards the nuances of marginalised subjects and known audiences, creating an overarching design principle requiring that not all course representations should be made in the same way.

#### **7.2.4 The new collaborative approach**

The choice of methodology was conducive to collaborating with academic staff in a way that eased the tensions I had previously experienced with routine marketing practice. It allowed conversations to be conducted within convenient timeframes, on specific subject related issues, with dedicated resource and delivery of a tailored resource and implementation plan. The strategy document, developed alongside the resources, allowed me to identify academic needs for a long term approach. It used the original resources as exemplars to stimulate conversations and gauge the suitability of the design principles to be adapted to promote other subject areas within the arts and humanities. It also gave me access to an outreach working group whose opinions led to strategy iterations. From this document emerged ideas for making resources into portable outreach tools. Prior to this point, I had been creating resources on the principle that they would assist as promotional tools available for a student-instigated information search, bringing them closer to the point where a dialogue can commence. However, by making resources portable for academics engaged in outreach work, the relationship building can commence at the same time the promotional content is delivered. As a result this enables earlier intervention in the decision-making process to address perceptions of the value of arts and humanities courses, as well as more general decisions about university.

The DBR approach to market intelligence data collection and resource development allowed for discrete pockets of marketing activity operating in parallel with routine marketing business, but not bound by the same recruitment cycle time frames. The resource prototypes were positioned to complement rather than replace existing messages aimed at the core audience segments, and offered demystified accounts of course benefits while presenting study possibilities via topical connections. Through the design process individual resources were brought together into a strategy document reinforcing the principles established in the initial resource prototyping. The principles guided discussion about the use of resources on the internet and as tools for outreach, and served as a catalyst for further conceptual development amongst *Lorem* academic staff. Although a number of

initial ideas for resources designed for this research were not fully implemented, the collaborations are ongoing, and the design principles have been offered across a range of arts and humanities disciplines. The continuation of the resource development and the collaborative efforts which built trust and understanding between academic and marketing staff can be seen in Section 6.3.

### **7.2.5 Limitations on non-core strategy and resource development**

This research was carried out alongside my routine promotional practice, the norms of which became a bounded case study. The empirical research was conducted on a small-scale, but the outputs proved adaptable and scalable as they were adopted into corporately approved strategy. While the outputs were practical and continue to be used and developed, there remain some operational limitations that need to be addressed. I define the limitations loosely in terms of institutional tensions, resource, temporality, and segmentation, each of which can restrict the ability to consider alternative analysis, strategy and implementation to core approaches.

The institutional tensions are played out between academic and administrative understandings of the function and enactment of marketing (see Section 1.2), and it is imperative to the new approach that academic staff are considered as marketing stakeholders in the development of promotional resources that reflect their subject needs, and their student recruitment preferences where UK-domiciled diversity is seen to promote pedagogical enrichment. In considering academic staff as collaborative partners, the timeframe in which recruitment activity normally takes place needs to be relaxed to fit in with teaching, marking and examination activities, which in turn will distort rigid annual recruitment activities bound by A-level and UCAS cycles. The limited resources allocated to non-core strategy development and implementation also requires an extended period for development to take place, mitigated in part by rapid prototyping through DBR methods. Nevertheless, playing the long game in considering the value of these enterprises is necessary. Finally, the practice of segmentation that encourages elite universities to maintain their market

position through recruiting from the highest achieving schools will continue to miss academically capable students from non-mainstream backgrounds, and that any shift from recruiting subjects to selecting subjects as a result of improved student numbers and tariff, may perpetuate the marginalisation problem at the heart of this thesis.

### **7.3 Reflections on methodology**

The research problem and design took a long time to define owing to constant changes in the dynamic environment in which they took place. I commenced with a theoretical perspective discussed within the motivations and contexts of the research, and advanced through a review of literatures focussing on the environmental factors of HE marketing. As part of my initial investigation I considered the interconnectedness of promotional marketing problems affecting both marginalised students and marginalised courses. I addressed neither the raising of academic attainment within schools, nor the funding of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, although I did consider the ‘headlines’ dealing with the financial costs of education and value-for-money as possible barriers to participation. Instead I focused on establishing the contribution marketing can make to initial relationship formation up to the point of recruitment of marginalised students alongside the more clearly understood remit of recruitment to marginalised courses, and I have developed common solutions through a package of resources. I will now discuss the circumstances which helped shape the research, including external environmental factors; the role of the internet; the role of social media; data challenges; and, collaborative partners, and consider where decisions were justified, compromised, or were challenged retrospectively.

#### **7.3.1 Rapidly changing marketing environment**

As I knew that the marketing environment was constantly changing, due to political, economic, social and technological influences, I was acutely conscious of the speed in which research ideas could become obsolete. It was a pressing concern that by taking a lengthy academic approach to

what might be covered more briefly through routine HE market research, the findings would be rapidly outmoded, and though original to myself, would be superseded by others' enquiries and practice. As a consequence, this research has undergone several iterations, not only because of discoveries as part of the research process, but also because marketing, and particularly the technologies which support its endeavours, has advanced so much over the period of study. While individual resources may have a limited life span, redundancy of the research is mitigated by iterative cycles of DBR and the ability to transfer and evolve ideas between subject areas and outreach environments, played out over a long period of time independent of the temporally restrictive recruitment cycle.

### **7.3.2 The role of the internet for research output dissemination**

I had anticipated that the internet would be instrumental in deploying and evaluating new resources, and web analytics for the initial online resources would aid design iterations. By harnessing the ability of the internet to democratise the availability of content, as opposed to targeting discrete market segments, I was anticipating that marginalised audiences could be reached through serendipitous encounters, aided by search engine optimisation techniques and social media sharing. This was in the belief that self-selection would still occur through information seekers identifying personal compatibility of their needs and wishes, and that the corporate filters of A-level entry tariffs would still apply. However, during the development and testing of resources, I encountered sensitivities with my original approach, as the proposed new content could be viewed as undermining carefully structured visual branding and messaging tailored to core audiences, as illustrated by the video prototypes (see Section 6.2.1). Conceived as a form of peer-to-peer engagement, the videos addressed themes of marginalisation, but the viewer analytics were not sophisticated enough to reveal if marginalised audiences were watching. The same conclusion was reached with the *Much Ado About Nothing* resource. However, I was able to conduct some off-line testing directly with marginalised students using the *Beginners' Russian* resource. This testing

demonstrated the variations of interpretation, even within a tightly segmented audience, and there was some evidence of shared understanding. More usefully the testing encounters allowed for conversations with FE and school teachers who declared their willingness to become partners in delivering demystified marketing content, cutting through the plethora of information available to their students. The exercise revealed the necessity of providing resources embedded with the design principles established from the empirical data, as part of a package and strategy requiring face to face interventions as well as for stand-alone online deployment.

### **7.3.3 The role of social media**

In the earliest conception of my research design I considered exploring how corporations might appear authentic in delivering messages via social media. Anecdotal evidence recorded in field notes suggested there was a perceived threat to academic integrity by engaging in popular ‘banter’ on these platforms. Institutions which were already participating were seen by some student users as invading their social spaces, and manipulating conversations to control their brands. Now it is commonplace for HEIs to encourage students to engage with their brands in this manner. The user-generated content has an outward appearance of authenticity through the dominant syntax of social media which is markedly different to carefully worded official institutional dialogue in corporately controlled media such as websites and prospectuses. The original question of how information seekers might question the authenticity of corporately generated social media content was replaced by how they perceived non-corporate content as established in Chapter 5. My interests shifted from how HEIs can participate in social media in an authentic manner to how reader response content might be interpreted by students to reinforce or distort corporate messages, and how HEIs can interrogate the same information as a source of market intelligence.

### **7.3.4 Scale of data**

Hypothesising that it would be improbable for an information-seeker to absorb all the information available in an ever-expanding data pool, and that a personal saturation point would soon be reached, I needed to set myself data collection limitations. While it would have been possible to continue to expand the data sets to reach a saturation of themes, the aim was ultimately to obtain enough empirical data to shape rapid prototype resources. The student and tutor interviews and online sampling gave access to rich and varied accounts, the analysis of which produced several themes which could be shaped into design principles, negating the need for a larger initial sample. Having established the usefulness of the data sources to inform design decisions, I can return to them to elicit more data in response to demand for future resources, and to further changes in the HE environment.

### **7.3.5 Collaborative partners**

At the commencement of this research I had envisaged that students would be my key collaborative partners, together creating online marketing materials accessible to all, irrespective of institutional targeting preferences. The content would be tailored to their retrospective information-seeking needs providing heterogeneous stories which might resonate with non-core audiences. Working directly with students to develop new messages was superseded by the closer working relationships with academic staff which could extend beyond that of the student relationships. The tutor participants were initially approached to establish if there was an appetite for marketing to assist in sustaining knowledge bases and recruiting diverse students who they could support pedagogically. However, it soon became apparent that working with them allowed for prolonged research encounters of advantage to their long term recruitment marketing needs, whereas the student participants would not personally benefit from sharing their own experiences. This change in direction created a new collaborative arrangement which required me to rethink the resources as contributing to a larger strategy rather than being the key research output. The information gained

from the students remained important to the analytic corpus used in the ‘working with resource’ phase of DBR (see Chapter 5). However, it was the collaborative process of the resource and strategy development with the academic staff which became pivotal in developing alternative approaches to marketing.

#### **7.4 Concluding discussion**

I have presented a complex picture of HE promotional marketing in which the practice is becoming accepted, albeit in some cases reluctantly, as a necessary process to enable UK HEIs to compete in a global consumer environment. My concern as a practitioner is that the adoption of corporate business techniques and a core promotional approach to HE recruitment has, unintentionally, ignored some politically and socially important student recruitment audiences and hindered the recruitment prospects of some subjects. Drawn from my own professional experience I have mapped these interconnected areas of marginalisation using the triangle of marginalisation model (see Figure 1.1). This illustrates the marketing practice relationships between marginalised courses, marginalised students from an elite university perspective. In this model marginalised students are defined as those who are academically capable of study (at elite institutions in the case of this research), but are hard to reach; this includes those identified by WP policy but also encompasses a broader constituency of high achieving students at lower achieving schools who have not been specifically targeted for WP interventions. Marginalised courses are defined as those which are vulnerable to poor perceptions of validity in relation to human capital, exemplified here by arts and humanities subjects. I have challenged the norms of the core-audience approach to undergraduate recruitment promotion, and provided an alternative account of how HEIs might regard segmentation, and message creation and presentation.

The human capital approach to marketing requires the construction of recruitment messages which persuade students to enter into knowledge acquisition for the primary goal of future trading in the

employment market. Within this transaction, students are enticed with the possibility of greater personal financial gain than they would achieve by not participating, and by so doing with contributing to society in a variety of positive ways, most notably the economy. In order for this transaction to work, the idea must prevail that the dominant motivation to study is the ability to optimise one's return on investment as materialised through salary. Poor perception of the ability of arts and humanities to provide careers to the same level as science, technical and professional subjects is a driver of marginalisation, further exacerbated by poor visibility of subjects which do not feature strongly within the secondary school curriculum; this problem is prevalent in student groups without ready access to personal advice. My alternative approach to promotional marketing requires better connections to be made in understanding the value of arts and humanities subjects in relation to careers, and raising awareness of the possibilities and potential advantages of starting university with perhaps only a rudimentary knowledge of the subject to be studied.

HE marketing takes place in a dynamic environment, with a rapidly expanding data pool from which students can seek information and from which institutions can draw market intelligence that allows them to develop recruitment messages. There is a heavy reliance on large-scale compulsory and quantitative data collection, comparative across disparate subjects, forming the basis for marketing messages. This misses the nuanced qualitative data that can be extracted from richer encounters with students on specific courses. In adopting a case study approach supported by DBR methods I have introduced marginalised student, academic and social media voices to the market intelligence corpus to form a basis for message generation. In addition, I have challenged the segmentation and targeting practices of HE, where frontline marketing materials cater for core students, placing responsibility for WP recruitment within specialist departments. I present a case that WP policy segments its audience too rigidly, missing an extended audience who would benefit from outreach interventions, and that such segmentation can be overcome through the provision of appropriately structured messages. I present resources which normalise UK-domiciled diverse

student recruitment into mainstream messages and/or adapt mainstream messages to be more accessible to all.

The long term sustainability of this research is seen in an evolving strategy and implementation plan, incorporating new HE marketing processes and practices in relation to core approaches to recruitment. The physical output is a package of exemplar resources and design principles presented in a strategy document, developed with and for use by academic staff at my case study university over a long time frame and for a wide range of subjects. These complement existing materials, neither alienating the core audience, nor transgressing established corporate guidelines. The approach allows for a deviation from the adherence to traditional market intelligence gathering, routine recruitment cycle activity and audience segmentation techniques, and introduces an administrative/academic collaborative approach, addressing marginalised students and marginalised courses. Continuing with my use of DBR methodology allows me to adapt market intelligence and message construction needs in an exploratory manner in a live environment, parallel to but not restricted by routine business. The collaboration, taking place outside of the core marketing-imposed parameters of timeframe and activity, has helped to develop a more equitable partnership that allows academic voices to contribute in ways not previously adopted by the practice under scrutiny within the case study. These voices have led to alternative approaches to message construction and presentation, complementary to the core marketing staples, providing practical solutions to the real problems of marginalisation.

The methodological approach to the research problem, and the continuing theoretical and practical development of the empirical findings, have the potential to reconceptualise HE marketing practice in the future. Claims for generalisation of the findings are currently limited to practice within the bounded case study of *Lorem* allowing for the new approaches to practice to be applied to different subject areas. However, there are implications for elite institutions which share the recruitment

problems derived from marginalisation of students and courses. To move towards this reconceptualisation of practice, there are opportunities to discuss with fellow HE practitioners in the wider industry the new approaches derived from this empirical research. Such discussions would include the use of individual institution specific theorisation of recruitment problems to drive the design and dissemination of new promotional materials, which may include greater collaboration with academic staff, demystification of messages to non-core audiences, responding to public voices outside of corporate control, and earlier development of relationships through interventions in secondary schools. By adapting the methodology to different institutional settings, in this way my research outputs may become generalisable outside of the case study subjects and audiences.

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## Appendices

Appendix 1: Readings of undergraduate recruitment imagery

## Sociability, serenity and study: a Barthesian analysis of a higher education recruitment image



UNITED KINGDOM · CHINA · MALAYSIA

**Introduction**

This project looks at recruitment marketing within higher education (HE), and considers the challenges faced when producing material which needs to speak to diverse audiences. In particular it considers the impact of mainstream messages on widening participation (WP) audiences, demonstrated here through a 'rainbow' picture of integrated groups (Ralph & Boxall, 2005)

**Theoretical perspective: Reader Response Criticism**

Reader Response Criticism (RRC) prioritises reader experiences and interpretations of texts, diminishing the importance of author intention. Roland Barthes' influential work on RRC expanded the definition of texts beyond traditional literature, to advertising, film, theatre and images. He argued that signs and the signified contained in these expanded notions of texts changed according to the readers' personal contexts so that there could be no definitive and final meaning.

**Higher Education recruitment marketing challenge**

Providing images of universal appeal to HE's diverse target audience is challenging. This well composed image portrays diversity in gender and ethnicity, but does not signify other forms of diversity derived from WP literatures and non-traditional students' experiences. An RRC approach to the analysis of texts has significant implications for HE recruitment images, and associated messages encoded in signs, which traditionally rely on knowing and understanding what appeals to a clearly defined target audience. Through a Barthesian lens non-traditional students would interpret the signs representing diversity and normative student life seen in this image in a different way to traditional students; their understanding of 'diversity' and 'normal' is obscured by the author's marketing construct, possibly prompting a 'not for the likes of us' (Archer, Hutchings & Ross, 2003) interpretation. By identifying the plurality of meaning in texts based upon the personal contexts of readers, marketing authors can tailor messages to 'speak their language' (Burgh-Woodman & Brace-Govan, 2008) and assist in the social construction of understanding of the messages as an aid to WP recruitment in HE.

**Author intent**

- Beautiful serene campus
- Diverse student body
- Sociable and friendly

"We offer you the best of study and social experiences"

**Parent reading**

- Safe and peaceful environment
- Sociable yet studious
- Health conscious students

"I can be confident my child will have a quality education here"

**Student reading**

- Friendly and sociable
- Relaxed atmosphere
- Young and stylish

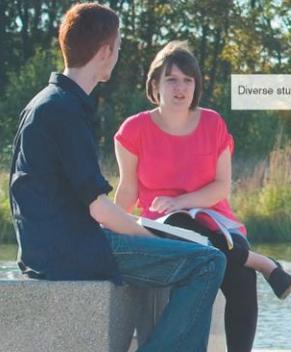
"I can identify with these students and I conform to their world"

**Non-traditional student reading**

- Sophisticated and confident students
- Wealthy upmarket setting
- Not my normality

"This is beyond my view of normal: how will I relate to these people?"

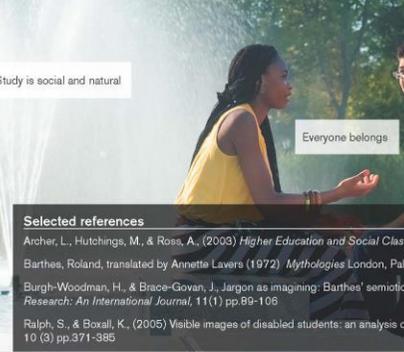
  



Diverse student body



Study is social and natural



Everyone belongs

**Normative student life**



**Selected references**

Archer, L., Hutchings, M., & Ross, A., (2003) *Higher Education and Social Class: Issues of Exclusion and Inclusion*, London, Routledge Falmer

Barthes, Roland, translated by Annette Lavers (1972) *Mythologies* London, Paladin

Burgh-Woodman, H., & Brace-Govan, J., Jargon as imagining: Barthes' semiotics and excavating subcultural communication, *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, 11(1) pp.89-108

Ralph, S., & Boxall, K., (2005) Visible images of disabled students: an analysis of UK university publicity materials, *Teaching in Higher Education*, 10 (3) pp.371-385

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This annotated poster was the summary result of a small scale study of imagery used for undergraduate recruitment campaigns. It demonstrates how an image, used as text in the RRC tradition, can be read differently by three separate stakeholder groups, irrespective of the marketing author intent for the visual message.

The image was selected to represent the findings that study was frequently portrayed as social and happy, taking place in idyllic or idealised settings.

## **Appendix 2: Promotional assets and channels of distribution**

### **Principles of undergraduate recruitment promotion resource production**

All promotions must

- have a hub or a point of contact for more information and relationship building opportunities (e.g. attend an open day or make an enquiry)
- have a call to action (CTA) (e.g. apply)
- have audience relevant content

### **Asset creation**

Promotional material content can be built from a range of assets. These can include, but are not limited to:

- Advertisements
- Endorsements
- Images
- News and events items
- Student profiles
- Text (accessible to the intended audience(s))

Digital specific

- HTML emails
- Social media
- Video

Print specific

- Booklets
- Flyers
- Posters
- Prospectuses

### **Promotional channels**

The promotional channel mix will can include, but is not limited to:

- HE and careers fairs
- Open days
- Third party directory sites
- University website
- School and college networks
- Social media e.g. Facebook, YouTube and Twitter (see digital assets)

### Appendix 3: Field note opportunities

Personnel	Routine professional encounter	Context and frequency	Field note record
Academic units	Undergraduate admissions meeting (termly)	Open day (twice yearly) and UCAS visit day planning (yearly)	Annotated agendas and minutes
Centralised marketing units	Undergraduate forums (termly)	Open day (twice yearly) and UCAS visit day briefing (yearly)	Annotated agendas and handouts
Widening participation	Subsection of undergraduate forums (termly)	Academic unit working group (termly)	Annotated agendas and email correspondence
Tutors	Bespoke consultations	<i>Ad hoc</i> (10 in total during empirical research period)	Personal record and email correspondence

This table records the routine and *ad hoc* professional encounters that provided the opportunity for me to record field notes, which in turn assisted with defining the practical problem.

#### Appendix 4: Data source categorisation available to institutions and potential students

	Common sources of information	Contextualisation (volume of choice)	Data selection for this research
Data used to inform recruitment promotional messages	<p><b>Market intelligence</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>National Student Survey</li> <li>HEIST Reports</li> <li>Government policies and reviews</li> <li>UCAS End of Cycle Analysis</li> <li>HEFCE reports</li> <li>HESA reports</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Marginalised student voices</li> <li>Academic voices</li> <li>Online reader responses</li> </ul>
Corporately controlled and official data for students	<p><b>University choice by mission group</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Russell Group</li> <li>Million +</li> <li>University Alliance</li> </ul> <p>And/or</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>research intensive</li> <li>post-1992</li> </ul> <p><b>Official course listings and comparative data</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>International prospectus and website</li> <li>UCAS</li> <li>Third party directory listings sites</li> <li>League tables</li> <li>Key information sets</li> </ul>	<p><b>Courses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>19 subject groups</li> <li>102 principle subjects</li> <li>1281 course classification codes</li> </ul> <p>(2013 snapshot from www.UCAS.com )</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Russell Group</li> <li>Arts and humanities courses</li> </ul>
Non-corporately controlled and unofficial data for students	<p><b>User-generated content within social media</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social networks</li> <li>Bookmarking sites</li> <li>Blogs</li> <li>Microblogs</li> <li>Forums</li> <li>Social news (including online) newspaper social commentary</li> </ul>	<p><b>Social news</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>22 UK national daily and weekend newspapers in print and online, plus urban freesheets, with online reader response opportunities</li> <li>Specialist and sponsored forums and directory listings, with voluntary rating and commentary opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Daily Mail online</li> <li>Guardian online</li> <li>The Student Room</li> </ul>

This figure shows the categorisation of primary and secondary data into market intelligence, corporate and official and non corporately controlled content, and whether that data is predominantly publically accessible, or restricted to HEI use. There is some contextualisation to demonstrate the scale of information sources available to potential students and marketing practitioners. Also shown is the smaller data set selected for further analysis in this research.

## Appendix 5: Research process table

Aims and objectives	Research questions	Data selection	Analysis and outcomes	Dissemination and engagements activities
<p>Generate a design proposal for use within HE marketing to aid recruitment of both marginalised students and subjects through an exploration of the interconnectedness of information needs, and where marginalisation is viewed from the perspective of elite UK HEIs</p>	<p>How can traditional approaches to mainstream undergraduate recruitment promotion be altered to aid the needs of marginalised students and marginalised courses?</p>	<p>Creation of the triangle of marginalisation model through which to consider relationships of marginalised aspects of HE as determined through other data selection</p>	<p>Triangle of marginalisation model to problematise existing marketing strategies in the context of marginalised portfolio of a case study university (<i>Lorem</i>).</p> <p>Produce a marketing strategy that focuses on inclusion and normalises the non-traditional students within core materials, and demystifies arts and humanities subjects within elite universities</p>	<p>Continuous engagement in conversations to understand the marketing challenges of marginalisation, and the needs of tutors and students in developing a recruitment strategy.</p>
<p>Consider marginalisation from the angles of courses and students in relation to elite institutions and to understand why these groups are worthy of attention.</p>	<p>How can existing experiences of marginalisation be used to develop new promotional practice?</p>	<p>Students and tutors selected with knowledge of their backgrounds in related to experiences of marginalisation</p>	<p>Text analysis to extract themes of marginalisation which can inform the construction of new marketing messages</p>	<p>Policy and practice discussions with key stakeholders responsible for policy on marketing and widening participation.</p> <p>Presentations to academic units for using research outputs in live situations.</p>
<p>To identify whose voices are missing routine market intelligence gathering which may be considered as untapped potential for meeting the information requirements of marginalised students and recruitment messages of marginalised courses.</p>	<p>How can shared understandings of marginalisation be captured and add value to the existing market intelligence corpus?</p>	<p>Reader responses generated from online public domain media and forum sites related to aspects of HE marginalisation</p>	<p>Develop a reader response method of analysis for social media content</p> <p>Analyse social media ‘texts’ through the lens of reader response criticism and consider the usefulness of such content as surrogate personal information</p>	<p>Use Barthes’ concept of demystification to structure meaningful accounts for audiences who may not yet have been exposed to skills to decode marketing constructs</p> <p>Present analysis to tutors for further consideration of developing tailored ‘mythbusting’ responses for their subject areas.</p>

<p>To produce a package of tailored recruitment marketing resources based on the key findings of empirical research which can be tested and adapted according to student, tutor and subject needs, and positioned to attract diverse student audiences as a long term norm.</p>	<p>How can marginalised aspects of HE recruitment marketing be accommodated within mainstream practices without jeopardising the needs of core target audiences?</p>	<p>Aggregated analysis of student and tutor interviews and online reader responses, categorised as marketing message ‘needs’</p> <p>Understand and use the interconnectedness of subject and student needs to allow the messaging of the former to appeal to the latter.</p>	<p>In collaboration with research participants, create a package of marketing resources answering to the messaging needs as identified in the empirical data analysis</p> <p>Market testing of resources on non-traditional students,</p> <p>Strategise the resource package to be employed by tutors over a range of subjects in a long term sustainable manner.</p> <p>Consider the effect on current marketing paradigm.</p>	<p>Present the new way of strategising WP messages disseminated through marginalised subject recruitment materials.</p> <p>Continued dialogue with academic and administrative staff in respect of appetite for and issue with specific targeting of non-traditional students.</p> <p>Ongoing conversations in my professional practice to promote the sustainable growth and generalisability of resources which will assist with normalising aspects of marginalisation within mainstream messages.</p>
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## **Appendix 6: Ethics documents**

The following documents were submitted to the research ethics board. They detail early versions of the research aims and objectives, methods, and access to participants. They also include the approval from the research ethics board.

Copies and transcripts of original documentation submitted and approved in 2010.

- Appendix 6a: Aims, Questions and Proposed Methods (copy)
- Appendix 6b: Ethics: Access to research participants (transcript)
- Appendix 6c: Student participant interview invitation (copy)
- Appendix 6d: Consent form for video participants (copy – completed and signed documents held on file)
- Appendix 6e: Ethics - participant consent form (copy – completed and signed documents held on file)
- Appendix 6f: Statement of research ethics (copy)
- Appendix 6g: Research Ethics Approval Form (copy)

### **Appendix 6a: Aims, Questions, and Proposed Methods**

#### **Aims:**

- To understand the decision-making process about attending university of those who have the capability to study but who do not conform to the traditional audience of university recruitment and who as a consequence perceive they are not invited to participate.
- To develop a set of recruitment messages that are accessible in context and medium to assist non-traditional route students in capability formation and successful participation in higher education.

#### **Objectives:**

- To trace the information trails followed by non-traditional students during the decision-making process and identify where those trails crossed and deviated from the corporately controlled marketing material.
- To analyse the responses of students to different accounts of the student experience (of corporate and user-generated origin), and identify where these differ from the intended corporate messages of the university.
- To construct a new set of recruitment messages from the perspective of non-traditional students.
- To consider an extended duty of care of universities to non-traditional students based on expectations raised in recruitment messages, and the implications to policy and practice.

#### **Research questions:**

- How can universities better capture and present realistic student experiences as part of the recruitment process to aid decision-making and retention amongst non-traditional student audiences?

#### **Sub-questions**

- How do non-traditional students respond, test and validate corporately constructed marketing messages in relation to their own experiences and identities?
- How do user-generated social networks assist in mobilising capabilities of non-traditional students?
- How can student narratives be employed to produce an alternative approach to marketing which resonates with a diverse and non-traditional audience?
- How can an alternative theorisation of HE marketing be generated, and what are the policy and practice implications?

#### **Proposed methods of data generation**

I will focus on one course which, based on an adult education model, which routinely attracts non-traditional route students but has more recently been adapted to recruit from the traditional audience as well. This will be compared and contrasted with equivalent courses at one each of a Russell Group and post 1992 University.

## **Documentary Analysis**

In collecting secondary data I will adopt an internet search strategy informed by market research on web-based consumer behaviour. I will record my own search terms, hyperlink trail, and time spent searching as part of the data collection.

### **Sources of secondary data to be analysed:**

1. Online university generated marketing material:
  - a. Corporate-owned web-based content
  - b. Corporate-sponsored web-based content
2. Social media platforms:
  - a. Specialist student content
  - b. Generalist platforms with university content
3. Influential third party research e.g.
  - a. National Student Survey
  - b. League tables

### **Focus groups 1 and 2**

Two groups of between four and six 2nd and 3rd year students, one of traditional age and one of mature students, will be convened to discuss resources consulted as part of the decision-making process and the strength of influence of these resources. Participants will also be asked to consider what information would have been useful retrospectively based on their subsequent on-course experiences (45 mins.).

#### **Semi-structured interviews**

Interviews will be requested from focus group participants, (max. 6, 30 mins.) to extract richer personal information. Participants will also be asked to consider what information they would pass on to potential students in similar situations to themselves. A summary of the interview will be presented to each interviewee to confirm this was their view, and each will be invited to add further comment.

#### **Creation of new marketing material**

Participants will be invited to assist in the creation of new marketing materials, to include extracts of existing narratives, and freshly recorded material or photographs based on routine aspects of student life. This group may include new participants.

### **Focus group 3**

A 3rd focus group will be convened (45 mins.) from 1st year students of the same course as the previous focus groups, through which to gather opinions of new marketing materials created as a result of the research findings.

## **Appendix 6b: Ethics: access to participants**

For the first two focus groups and individual interviews I will require a mix of 2nd and 3rd year students, one group of traditional age and one group of mature, with a balance of gender, ethnicity and entry qualifications for each group. The 3rd group, convened at a later stage from 1st year students, will be of a similar mix, but without separation of traditional and non-traditional students. The diversity of the student body on the [*Lorem's* creative writing] course provides a suitable match to my research requirements.

I have an established rapport with a small group of creative writing students with whom the current working arrangement is mutually beneficial; in providing marketing and technical support for the students' extra-curricular work, they in return have been willing participants in promoting their course through a variety of publicity channels. It is my intention to approach some of the students already known to me to participate in my research. I will emphasise the collaborative nature of my project by extending the current arrangement of reciprocity. The invitation will outline where I can offer participants anonymity and confidentiality, where anonymity cannot be completely upheld e.g. during the focus group, and where pseudonyms will be used. I will also promote the use of Workspace for participants to review the material and continue to contribute comments throughout the research period. At each stage where the data collection provides information which would be suitable as new marketing material, I will follow standard university procedure in asking permission to use this material and request a signed consent form.

Should my primary approach not elicit a satisfactory number of participants, with the permission of the course leader and relevant module convenors, I will seek to address one or two classes with my proposal, illustrated by existing collaborative work. To provide anonymity from other class members, I will follow up the presentation with an email invitation to which those who wish to participate can respond. Should I not recruit sufficient participants from the first two classes, I will repeat the presentation to a third class.

## Appendix 6c: Student participant interview invitation



My name is Helen Frost. I am a part-time PhD student in the University of [Lorem] School of Education, and am undertaking research as part of my professional development as a Web and Marketing Officer. My interest is in the information resources you consulted in making your decision to choose your course and this university, and how you now view these in terms of your student experience. I am particularly interested in your course as it is structured differently compared to many courses in the university and attracts a wider than average age-range of students. I would like to invite you to participate in one or more activities which will cover several aspects of your own student experience to date. These activities include a focus group, and individual interview, and the creation of possible new internet resources aimed at future potential students of your style of course.

For each research activity, if you consent to participate, you will retain the right to anonymity and confidentiality, and you will retain the right to withdraw your participation and/or consent at any time.\* Activities which involve the production of new marketing material will require additional consent as to how the material is used.\*\* I would be happy to extend my knowledge of creating and distributing publicity material in the hope that this will provide you with additional skills for your study and your future career.

### Research activities

The research activities in which you are invited to participate include:

**Focus group** (with up to 5 other students from your course lasting approximately 45 minutes), to discuss:

- Who and what informed your decision to attend university and choose your course.
- What was influential and what was detracting within the decision making process.
- Based on your experiences to date, what would have been useful to you in forming your decision.

This session will be video-recorded to aid transcription purposes only.\*

**Personal interview** (one to one – lasting approximately 30 minutes)

A more in-depth discussion about your own background, sources of influence for making the decision to come to university, and the experiences you have encountered since commencing your studies.

This session will be video-recorded to aid transcription purposes only\*.

You will be provided with a summary of the transcript, with the opportunity to refine or add additional comments.

### Experience-capture

You will be invited to express a routine student experience in prose, poetry, photography or video (hand-held video camera to be provided). Material will be considered for its use within a web-based environment, and will be subject to your preference for anonymity or identification, or use of an existing social network pseudonym.\*\* You are welcome to be involved in the editing process if you wish, and I will invite you to comment on your choice of subject matter.

### Data protection, confidentiality and anonymity

\*Some of the activities will be video-taped or audio-recorded to aid transcription. Any such material will be retained in a secure environment until my research has been completed, and then erased. At no point will this material be made public.

Transcriptions will be held in a secure online 'Workspace' environment. You will be given access to any area of the Workspace which hosts the material to which you contributed. Collaborative pieces, e.g. focus group transcripts, may be accessed by all participants for that activity. Activities unique to you will be accessible by me, my supervisors, and yourself only,

\*\* For activities where you assisting in the creation of potential new internet resources for future students, you will be given the option to retain anonymity, to be identified, or to publish the material under an existing online pseudonym. You have the right to change your mind or withdraw your consent completely at any stage.

If you consent to participate in any or all of the above activities, please complete and return the consent form to me at the address below. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Kind regards,

Helen Frost

**Appendix 6d: Consent form for video participants**

This form was used for students who contributed to the video resources which were commissioned specifically for frontline marketing purposes.

**Use of Photographs — Form for individual consent**

Main purpose of photoshoot/video: .....  
Exact location: .....  
Name of equipment/what model is doing? (if applicable): .....

I hereby consent to the use of **photographs**/video taken of myself/of my child.....  
(\*delete as applicable), taken by members of the University or by agents authorised on behalf of the University, for use of the following purpose(s):**Further permission**

I further consent to the use of images/video footage in:

- official publications and University publicity material, including, but not limited to, the University’s prospectuses, Global course leaflets, advertisements, website (including external locations, which include, but are not restricted to, resources such as YouTube and iTunes and Flickr) and University on-line photographic image bank.
- any other external publications or websites endorsed or supported by The University of Nottingham.

**Please tick box if you do not consent to further permission**

INDIVIDUAL’S NAME: ..... STUDENT ID NO:.....

(or parent/guardian’s name if the individual is under 18 years of age)

SIGNATURE: ..... DATE..... AM/PM.....

ADDRESS: .....

.....

TELEPHONE NUMBER.....

E-MAIL: .....

UNIVERSITY DEPARTMENT/COURSE AND YEAR (if applicable): .....

UNDERGRADUATE/POSTGRADUATE (if applicable): .....DATE: .....

ETHNICITY.....NATIONALITY..... MALE/FEMALE

For office use only

Department:

Campus:

Project Name:

Image number:

Discerning features:

Event organiser:

Photographer:

Notes:

**Appendix 5e: Ethics - participant consent form**

Project title: A reconceptualisation of Higher Education marketing

Researcher's name: Helen Frost

Supervisor's name: Dr Monica McLean and Professor Melanie Walker

I have read the Participant Information Sheet and the nature and purpose of the research project has been explained to me. I understand and agree to take part in:

- A focus group
- A personal interview

- 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 opinions and comments will remain confidential, unless I agree otherwise.
- I understand that I will be audio taped / videotaped during the interview.
- I understand that data will be stored in a secure environment. Video and audio recordings will be retained until after publication of the thesis and then erased. I understand that transcripts and additional correspondence will be kept in a secure online (Workspace) environment, and will be erased after publication of the thesis. I will have access to those areas only where my contributions are stored, and this rule will apply to other contributors.
- I understand that with prior agreement, materials created specifically for the research may be published in a public online environment, but only with my specific consent.
- I understand that I may contact the researcher or supervisor 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: Helen Frost [contact details supplied]

Supervisor: Dr Monica McLean [contact details supplied]

School of Education Research Ethics Coordinator: [contact details supplied]

## Appendix 6f: Statement of research ethics

Name (Student): Helen Frost  
 Supervisor: Dr Monica McLean and Professor Melanie Walker  
 Course of Study: PhD in Higher Education  
 Title of Research Project: A Reconceptualisation of Higher Education Marketing

	Tick where appropriate
1. I have read and discussed with my supervisor(s) the British Educational Research Association's Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (BERA, 2004).	√
2. I have read and discussed with my supervisor(s) the Research Code of Conduct of the University of Nottingham: <a href="http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/rso/policy/code_of_conduct.doc">http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/rso/policy/code_of_conduct.doc</a> .	√
3. I am aware of and have discussed with my supervisor(s) the relevant sections of the Data Protection Act (1998): <a href="http://www.hmsso.gov.uk/acts/acts1998/19980029.htm">http://www.hmsso.gov.uk/acts/acts1998/19980029.htm</a> .	√
4. Data gathering activities involving schools and other organizations will be carried out only with the agreement of the head of school/organization, or an authorised representative, and after adequate notice has been given.	√
5. The purpose and procedures of the research, and the potential benefits and costs of participating (e.g. the amount of their time involved), will be fully explained to prospective research participants at the outset.	√
6. My full identity will be revealed to potential participants.	√
7. Prospective participants will be informed that data collected will be treated in the strictest confidence and will only be reported in anonymised form, but that I will be forced to consider disclosure of certain information where there are strong grounds for believing that not doing so will result in harm to research participants or others, or (the continuation of) illegal activity.	√
8. All potential participants will be asked to give their explicit, normally written consent to participating in the research, and, where consent is given, separate copies of this will be retained by both researcher and participant.	√
9. In addition to the consent of the individuals concerned, the signed consent of a parent, guardian or 'responsible other' will be required to sanction the participation of minors (i.e. persons under 16 years of age) or those whose 'intellectual capability or other vulnerable circumstance may limit the extent to which they can be expected to understand or agree voluntarily to undertake their role'.	N/A
10. Undue pressure will not be placed on individuals or institutions to participate in research activities.	√
11. The treatment of potential research participants will in no way be prejudiced if they choose not to participate in the project.	√
12. I will provide participants with my contact details (and those of my supervisor), in order that they are able to make contact in relation to any aspect of the research, should they wish to do so.	√
13. Participants will be made aware that they may freely withdraw from the project at any time without risk or prejudice.	√
14. Research will be carried out with regard for mutually convenient times and negotiated in a way that seeks to minimise disruption to schedules and burdens on participants.	√

15. At all times during the conduct of the research I will behave in an appropriate, professional manner and take steps to ensure that neither myself nor research participants are placed at risk.	√
16. The dignity and interests of research participants will be respected at all times, and steps will be taken to ensure that no harm will result from participating in the research.	√
17. The views of all participants in the research will be respected.	√
18. Special efforts will be made to be sensitive to differences relating to age, culture, disability, race, sex, religion and sexual orientation, amongst research participants, when planning, conducting and reporting on the research.	√
19. Data generated by the research (e.g. transcripts of research interviews) will be kept in a safe and secure location and will be used purely for the purposes of the research project (including dissemination of findings). No-one other than research colleagues, supervisors or examiners will have access to any of the data collected.	√
20. Research participants will have the right of access to any data kept on them.	√
21. All necessary steps will be taken to protect the privacy and ensure the anonymity and non-traceability of participants – e.g. by the use of pseudonyms, for both individual and institutional participants, in any written reports of the research and other forms of dissemination.	√
22. Where possible, research participants will be provided with a summary of research findings and an opportunity for debriefing after taking part in the research.	√
<p>23. Does your research involve (please tick ALL that apply):</p> <p>Schools? <input type="checkbox"/> Vulnerable Adults? <input type="checkbox"/> Children? <input type="checkbox"/> None of these groups <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p>	
<p>24. a) Will your research be conducted in (please tick ONE BOX only):</p> <p>UK only? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Overseas only? <input type="checkbox"/> UK &amp; overseas? <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>b) Please name the country(ies) involved:</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 20px; width: 100%;"></div>	
25. FOR ALL STUDENTS UNDERTAKING RESEARCH INVOLVING UK SCHOOLS, CHILDREN (UNDER 18) AND/OR VULNERABLE ADULTS I have received Enhanced Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) disclosure through the University of Nottingham and the School of Education Research Office has the reference number	
26. FOR ALL NON UK STUDENTS I have received a Certificate of Good Conduct (or equivalent)* and the School of Education CRB Coordinators have a copy of this**	

\* Countries that produce a Certificate of Good Conduct are: Australia, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Irish Republic, Italy, Jamaica, Latvia, Malaysia, Malta, Netherlands, New Zealand, Philippines, Poland, South Africa, Spain, Sweden & Turkey.\*\* UK students who have lived in one of the above countries for 6 months or more may also need to apply for one of these.

Please provide further information below in relation to any of the above statements which you have not been able to tick, explaining in each case why the suggested course of action is not appropriate (continue on a separate sheet if necessary):

Please outline any areas of risk, which have not been referred to above, associated with your research, and how you intend to deal with these (continue on a separate sheet if necessary):

Some of my secondary data collection will be conducted within online social media environments. These may be accessed by myself in one of three broadly categorised ways:

- Observer of publically available content
- Observer as an account holder within a password protected environment
- Active participant of content generation

At each level I will consider whether participants in each environment can reasonably assume that their correspondence is public or private (Ess, 2002). As an observer of publically available content I will treat any material as usable. As an observer of password-protected content I will examine the purpose and terms and conditions of having an account and the degree of anonymity offered by the use of pseudonyms, common to social media sites. As an active participant in user-generated content I will declare my identity as a researcher and seek permission to use content in accordance with standard ethical procedures.

Ess, C. and the AoIR Ethics Working Committee, 2002: Ethical decision-making and internet research: recommendations from the AoIR ethics working committee. from <http://www.aoir.org/reports/ethics.pdf>

Checklist:

Please check that you have attached the following and return with the form to the School Research Office

- (1) a brief statement of my research aims or questions and proposed methods of data generation (maximum 200 words); [see appendix 6a]
- (2) a brief statement of how I plan to gain access to prospective research participants; [see appendix 6b]
- (3) a draft information sheet to be provided to prospective participants; [see appendix 6c]
- (4) a draft consent form to be used with prospective participants. [see appendix 6d and 6e]

NB Please do NOT include copies of research instruments (e.g. questionnaires).

Signed (student) \_\_\_\_\_ Print Name (Student) Helen Frost \_\_\_\_\_ Date  
8/11/2010

Signed (supervisor 1) \_\_\_\_\_ Print Name (supervisor 1) \_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signed (supervisor 2, \_\_\_\_\_ Print Name (supervisor 2, \_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_

[contact details supplied]

## Appendix 6g: Research Ethics Approval Form

Name	Helen Frost
Main Supervisor	Monica McLean
Course of Study	PhD in Higher Education
Title of Research Project:	A Reconceptualisation of Higher Education Marketing
Is this a resubmission?	No
Date statement of research ethics received by PGR Office:	15.12.10

Research Ethics Coordinator Comments:

This is a well-organised and well-designed ethics proposal, and I am happy to approve it, subject to two comments relating to the “area of risk” you described in the form, viz: “Some of my secondary data collection will be conducted within online social media environments. These may be accessed by myself in one of three broadly categorised ways:

- Observer of publically available content
- Observer as an account holder within a password protected environment
- Active participant of content generation

“At each level I will consider whether participants in each environment can reasonably assume that their correspondence is public or private (Ess, 2002). As an observer of publically available content I will treat any material as usable. As an observer of password-protected content I will examine the purpose and terms and conditions of having an account and the degree of anonymity offered by the use of pseudonyms, common to social media sites. As an active participant in user-generated content I will declare my identity as a researcher and seek permission to use content in accordance with standard ethical procedures.”

My comments: (i) this appears to be primary data, not secondary; and more important, (ii) in relation to password-protected environments, you do not specify what you will do when you have “examine[d] the purpose and terms and conditions of having an account and the degree of anonymity offered by the use of pseudonyms”. You will need to ensure that you do not use such data without permission from the site controller and the individual contributor quoted, and that anonymity is ensured as far as practicable. If this presents difficulties, please back to me for further consultation.

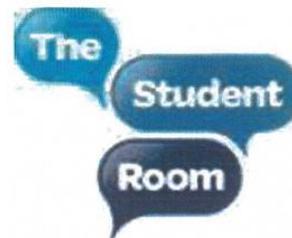
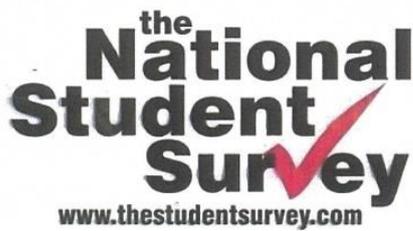
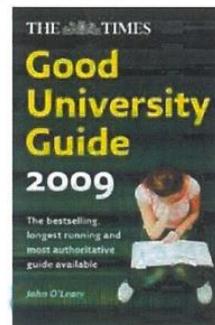
## Appendix 7: Interview schedule and questions

Working with empirical data phase of DBR		
Students	Joint Interview	Individual interview
Michael		24 March 2011
Darren		24 March 2011
Patrick		15 April 2011
Denise		28 April 2011 (self-submission of vlog)
Lauren	21 September 2011	13 Dec 2011
Karen	21 September 2011	9 December 2011
Tina	21 September 2011	(invited but did not attend)
Sam	7 October 2011	14 December 2011
Jane	7 October 2011	15 December 2011
Tutors	Interview	Follow-up meeting
Gerry	10 Jan 2013	8 July 2013
Robin	14 Jan 2013	
Derrick	16 Jan 2013	21 Mar 2013
Dean	16 Jan 2013	12 April 2013
John	20 Jan 2014	
Maria	4 July 2014	
Heather	10 Jul 2013	

Working with resource phase of DBR	
Resource testing groups	Outreach working group meetings
26 Sep 2013	8 Jan 2013
29 Oct 2013	10 Jan 2014
	1 Dec 2014

This table shows the dates set for each interview by type of interview. \*The dates shown for tutors are the audio-recorded sessions. Other opportunities for discussions and resource development were recorded as field notes (see Appendix 1).

Student questions: joint interviews



Participants were shown the above composite image of third party HE information service platforms to promote thinking about their own information seeking process, prior to the interview questions.

## **Student questions**

Thinking about your own route into university, what questions did you ask of yourself and others when deciding to register for your course?

- Did you have any anxieties?
- With whom or what did you consult?
- Were these questions answered adequately and with what resources?
- Now that you are half-way through, and thinking about your own student experience, in hindsight what questions might you have asked?
- What would have been good to know?
- Whom/what might you have consulted?
- How important would it be to connect with someone who could share their own experiences?
- If there was a single piece of advice that you would give to a potential student, what would it be?
- Thinking in the context of your course, if you were asked to reproduce this advice for an assignment, what form would it take?
- If you were looking for this advice yourself, where would you look?

## **Tutor questions**

- Why do you think the arts fail to attract larger numbers of WP students?
- Would you be interested in WP as a target group?
- If you were to recruit successfully from this group, how do you think it would affect your teaching, if at all?
- Based on your experience of teaching WP students, what additional information do you feel they might have been given to assist them with their choices?
- What do you think marketing is doing or not doing?

## Appendix 8: Biographical sketches of student research participants

Student and story 'headline'	Biographical confessions
Karen's story: serendipitous entry into HE	<p>Karen, now in her 70s had a 'bizarre' but not unprivileged childhood, growing up in her native South Africa. Her young adulthood was very much shaped by parental pressures and their perceptions for suitable careers for females of her background. As such Karen was persuaded not to pursue a particular career opportunity in television because 'they are all homosexuals', (an attitude which she refutes) though she does not express dissatisfaction with the way her life progressed. As a happily married pensioner in the UK, her route into HE was serendipitous. She 'would never of dreamed' of entering HE had she not been encouraged to by her FE college tutor who saw her potential. Her motivation for seeking FE was her grandchildren's desire for Karen to record her memories for the sake of posterity and family enjoyment. Happily, this coincided with Karen's love of writing, but she felt she needed to acquire specialist skills to do a 'professional' job.</p> <p>Karen has confidence in herself as a person, 'I'm an extrovert', which she on occasion puts down to the longevity of her life experiences 'when you get to my age...'. However, she recognises and holds respect for professionals who have earned their status and authority. University is opening her eyes to the possibility that she also might have the skill to earn public accolade, but remains in awe of the possibility of earning a degree.</p>
Lauren's story: career change following redundancy	<p>Lauren is a mature student, divorcee, and mother of two teenage boys. She already holds an undergraduate degree in psychology and Masters and PhD in computer science. Following redundancy from her information technology firm and a period of ill health, Lauren rejected re-employment in her original high-stress profession which she ultimately felt was disappointing in term of her aspirations, opting instead for something which was more creatively stimulating and personally satisfying within the writing and publishing industry. Lauren professed to having resisted the academic rigor of her first degree in pursuit of 'typical student' activities of socialising and drinking, and didn't really begin to fully apply herself until PhD level. Returning to undergraduate study as a mature student, she now has a completely different attitude and sees her earlier self in some of her fellow undergraduates, but is now taking full advantage of many extra-curricular activities that might be considered transformative and employability-enhancing as opposed to her previous pursuits which she deemed purely hedonistic.</p>
Tina's story: managing chronic illness	<p>Tina, a mother of mature children, is living with a chronic fatigue condition which affects her ability to apply herself with consistency to full-time study. Applying some positivity to her condition she was able to consider herself free to relocate for the sake of her first choice course, rather than accept a compromise course in her home town, owing to her unemployed status, and without dependents. She studies part time to manage her illness which on occasion prevents her from participating in class for prolonged periods.</p>
Jane's story: personal assistance versus school pressure	<p>Jane is a bursary student who went to a grammar school 'not a posh one...I think it's an academy now'. She worked hard and is fully aware that she was provided with what many would consider an advantageous schooling, which she matched by working hard. She is serious about her study and considers her options carefully, weighing up the advice she is given and information she has sought, against her own beliefs. Her school put her under pressure to attend university which appeared to have instrumental goals in progression of its students into HE. Her parents offered encouragement, and occasional intervention, but allowed Jane freedom to know her own mind.</p>

<p>Sam's story: enjoyment of future career more important than salary</p>	<p>Sam, a WP student by virtue of being the first in his family to go to university, was brought up in the vicinity of one of the country's most elite universities and was particularly influenced by the aesthetic impression this created upon him. He had a literal vision of what university should look like, being put off by one establishment because '...the outside was covered in air-conditioning units', and another because of its location - 'I didn't want to be in a big city'. He was also aware of the prestige factor of the university - 'I did study a few league tables' - but this did not ultimately override his pursuit of a course which suited him and the desire for job satisfaction, possibly at the expense of a better paid career.</p>
<p>Michael's story; seeking professional validation</p>	<p>Michael is an FE teacher in his early 40s working full-time and studying part-time. He is seeking a change in vocation to performance arts, where he is both creator and performer. In his youth he was a lyricist 'in a few bands...I started my craft there'. While both his previous performance experiences and his current employment require the confidence to present before an audience, he does not consider his abilities sufficient to take forward into his aspirational career. His motivation for study is to seek empowerment through affirmation of his skills from the 'professionals' and via university accreditation and the creation of a career specific CV.</p>
<p>Patrick's story: validation and rehabilitation</p>	<p>Patrick was a manual worker who sought out HE having been forced to retire on medical grounds while still in his 50s. 'I couldn't work anymore and I realised that I needed something to fill in my time and also something that would get me working...life had changed and everything slowed down - I needed to reinvent myself.' Patrick might be considered to have an alternative lifestyle, living on a canal boat and having been involved in the festival circuit. He appears to be less motivated by higher potential salary than the accolade of public recognition as demonstrated through competitions; on winning two prizes he says 'I felt very pleased and in a way no matter what the piece is or whether you had any money out of it, it is as big as having a novel published.'</p>
<p>Darren's story: young carer</p>	<p>Darren was a young carer from a low income background, and started university in his early 20s. He expressed surprise to be accepted into an elite university, 'I never dreamed I could come to this [Lorem] university', and that his portfolio, developed entirely on his own, was being taken seriously. He is appreciative of the collegiality of group work 'it's helping me know my own strengths and weaknesses...critiquing others work definitely helps you identify things in your own - the fact that we can get feedback from our peers really helps develop us - a service we provide to each other.' Darren entered into the courses with a specific career goal in mind, but has since been encouraged to deviate 'you can experiment with things that you wouldn't have experimented with before' and is now looking in a different direction.</p>
<p>Denise's story: missed grades</p>	<p>Denise is from a low income and has a strict religious background. She did not achieve her expected grades at school, partly due to her struggle with dyslexia. Lorem was not her first choice of university, but the lower entry grades which were permissible at the time owing to the adult education model of the courses enabled her to avoid compromise on her subject of choice. She is a traditional-age student, confident and ambitious. She employs a nickname which fits with her self-confessed chaotic life style. Denise's opinion of university has altered. She admits to having said previously that 'university is the biggest anti-climax of my life'. Her attitude has changed; 'Everyone on the course who knows me knows that sometimes I sit there clapping like a seal because I am so excited.'</p>

This appendix depicts aspects of the student participant biographies which provide a sense of motivation and information seeking which differs from the norms of recruitment to *Lozem*. They are introduced with an overarching headline extracted from the longer interview transcripts from joint and individual interviews (see Table 5.1)

### Appendix 9: Online social media article sources and references

Article reference	Article headline	Date and author/threadstarter	Primary intended theme for article*	Number of reader responses
DMO1	More students don't always mean more social mobility	9 Dec 2009, Short house, R	Social mobility	3
DMO2	Scandal of the university students who get fewer than 100 hours' teaching a year	Petre, 27 Apr 2013	Students as consumers	189
DMO3	Students pay nine times more for their University fees. but get just 20 minutes more time with their lecturers	Edwards, 15 May 2013	Students as consumers	112
DMO4	Is university a waste money? Last month we asked students if their courses represented good value. Hundreds of you responded with your stories, good and bad. Here is selection...	28 July 2013, You Magazine Reporter	Students as consumers	4
DMO5	The price of education: one third of students think their courses offers poor value, so we ask: Is university a waste of money?	2 June 2013, Williams, S	Students as consumers	58
DMO6	Is it worth it? Plans to increase university fees leave parents querying value of higher education	28 Dec 2010, anonymous	Students as consumers	98
DMO7	Universities to be made better value-for-money to make up for tuition fees hike	28 June 2011, This is money reporters	Value-for-money – market driven response	2
DMO8	A gilded political elite, hypocrisy and the death of social mobility	7 April 2011, Sandbrook	Social mobility	64
DMO9	Universities 'are running background checks on applicants so they can fast-track poorer students'	29 June 2012, Harris	Social mobility	46
DM10	Universities told to find pupils aged seven years old from deprived backgrounds to plan to boost higher education.	17 Jan 2013, Reynolds, E	Social mobility	62
DMO11	Students to get minimum teaching hours under new university 'charters'	2 April 2010, Clark, L	Students as consumers	2
DMO12	Backlash over university access tsar's attack on 'snobbery' that see schools focus on elite institutions	2 Dec 2012, Harris, S	Social mobility	27
DMO13	How university social engineering has failed: despite millions spent, private schools tighten grip on top places	8 August 2013, Levy, A	Social mobility	49

GO1	Live chat: should the higher education sector regard students as consumers?	Guardian, Anyangwe 20 Sep (article) and 23 Sep 2011 (live chat)	Students as consumers	163
GO2	English universities still failing poor students, says government watchdog (quarter of colleges have missed targets for access, even before fees trebled)	Guardian, Shepherd, 29 Sep 2011	Social mobility	123
GO3	How can universities communicate the wider value of education?	18 Oct 2011, Anyangwe, E	Market driven	2
GO4	The evolving role of careers and employability professionals in HE	25 November 2011, Guardian Professional	Employability	131
GO5	Secondary schools are not adequately preparing students for higher education	22 Dec 2011, Eve, M.P.	Marginalisation	16
GO6	Why should I study at a Russell Group university	19 Dec 2012, Ratcliffe	Social mobility	227
GO7	Will the study of archaeology soon become a thing of the past?	Braddock 27 Apr 2013	Validity of the arts	69
GO8	University mission groups: what are they good for?	Scott, 4 March 2013	Social mobility	3
GO9	Anti-European sentiment 'turning children off learning languages'	20 Mar 2013, Press Association	Validity of the arts	53
GO10	Diversity in university: how far have we come?	30 April 2013 Shaw, C	Social mobility	136
GO11	Higher education in 2013: the year of marketisation – but to what extent?	23 Dec 2013, Wyness, G	Market driven	5
TSR1	Studying, can everyone do it?	26 May 2013	Social mobility	10
TSR2	Oxbridge social exclusion – Mary Beard comments	20 June 2013	Social mobility	20
TSR3	Does this sound like a 'soft degree'?	31 July 2013	Validity of the arts	20
TSR4	Creative and Professional Writing – thoughts?	6 Aug 2013	Validity of the arts	11
TSR5	I've got a Degree, I shouldn't be stacking shelves	15 Aug 2013	Employability	128
TSR6	Why language learning is in freefall	17 Aug 2013	Validity of the arts	69
TSR7	Nottingham University named #1 for graduate employment (High Fliers research)	1 Feb 2014	Employability	21

\*These articles were selected by keyword search in Google. Each appeared within the top half of the search engine ranking page. While each article was started with a particular theme in mind, and an intended direction, social media commentary was frequently tangential.