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POSTGRADUATE STUDY: THE EXPECTATIONS OF STUDENTS AND COURSE LEADERS.

KAY SMITH

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HUDDERSFIELD IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF EDUCATION.

JULY 2016

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Abstract

Postgraduate taught programmes in the United Kingdom have seen significant increases in student numbers since 2008. A significant proportion of this increase is explained by the growth in international students choosing to study both in this country and on these programmes. However, since 2011/12 these programmes have begun to see a decrease in numbers. These students generate significant income for universities therefore this decline could have serious implications for the future viability of the programmes and a reduction in a valuable income stream for universities.

If universities and course leaders are to increase, or even just maintain, current recruitment numbers and remain competitive in this market then they will need to have a good understanding of what attracts potential students to their institution and programme of study. An important aspect of this understanding is up to date knowledge of what students expect to achieve by studying on a particular programme. The growth in international student numbers has increased the diversity of the student profile on postgraduate taught programmes. Therefore, identifying and understanding the differences in student expectations is becoming both more difficult and important.

This research study recognises the importance of understanding student expectations in order to improve student satisfaction, leading to increased success and competitiveness of the programme in the future. It, therefore, makes the assumption that students are customers of the University. It has a pragmatic research methodology, using both quantitative and qualitative data to contribute to knowledge in a number of ways. Firstly, by showing that the specific background factors of nationality, age and gender do have a significant influence on the student expectations of the outcome of a postgraduate taught programme. It can no longer be assumed that the expectations of all students will be the same, but the differences discussed in this study will need to be taken in to consideration when programmes are being designed and developed. Secondly, using the customer service gap model (Parasuraman, 1985) it has identified that statistically significant differences do exist between student expectations and the perceptions of those expectations by course leaders, therefore, a customer service gap is evident. The importance and implications of these expectations for the future competitiveness of the University are then identified.

Although the findings of this study will become out of date as the expectations of students change, the principles introduced will not. That is, the importance of student expectations and that they should be included in the regular reflective processes conducted by course leaders to improve the quality of postgraduate taught provision and compete effectively in this highly competitive market in the future.

Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been possible without the guidance, encouragement and patience of my Supervisor, Dr Graham Worsdale. I would like to thank him for his support as I do not think I would ever have reached the point of submitting my thesis for the EdD without it.

I would also like to thank all my colleagues and friends in the department of Accountancy and Finance at The University of Huddersfield for the practical support that has been provided. However, more importantly, our friendship and team spirit and the encouragement that gives us all has been invaluable throughout this process.

Thank you to my Husband, Christopher, and our children, Owen and Hannah, for their patience and encouragement, especially during the hard times.

I dedicate this thesis to my Mum and Dad. I will never be able to show them how grateful I am for the continuous emotional and practical support that they have given me throughout my life. Without that support none of this would ever have been possible. Thank you.

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Glossary of Terms

Listed in order of appearance in the text

PGT	Postgraduate Taught
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency
HEPI	Higher Education Policy Institute
UK	United Kingdom
REF	Research Excellence Framework
TEF	Teaching Excellence Framework
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
HEI	Higher Education Institution
EU	European Union
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council
HEA	Higher Education Academy
SAC	Student As Customer
KIS	Key Information Statistics
PTES	Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey
NSS	National Student Survey
EdD	Doctorate in Education
BAFA	British Association of Finance and Accounting
BERG	Business Education Research Group

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 The Research Context

There is relatively little literature relating directly to international students studying in the United Kingdom (Lillyman & Bennett, 2014). In addition, there is significant literature concerning student expectations with regard to teaching, learning and assessment and undergraduate students. However, there is little that addresses the expectations of the outcomes of a programme or postgraduate taught students (Morgan, 2014). However, the evidence presented in this study will show that postgraduate taught students now make a significant contribution to the income of many universities in the United Kingdom and therefore, research in to this area is important for their continued success.

The rationale for this study is to address these issues by investigating the expectations of the outcomes of students enrolling on to Business and Management Postgraduate Taught [PGT] programmes at The University of Huddersfield. The differing needs of international students are taken in to consideration by considering how student expectations differ with nationality along with other background characteristics of age and gender. The study takes the concept of student expectations further by analysing the perceptions of those student expectations by course leaders, identifying any key differences between the two, and evaluating the implications for the future success of the Business School and the University. The need for this type of research study is confirmed by Spittle (2012) and Lillyman and Bennet (2014). They suggest that universities need to have a greater understanding of the motivations behind students' decisions to enter postgraduate taught education, be more strategic in the management of student expectations and re-examine the driving forces, intentions and needs of both students and academics in order to realise the aspirations of the international partnership.

The Quality Assurance Agency [QAA] (2007) state that the "overall objective of master's level business and management degrees is to educate individuals as managers and business specialists, and thus improve the quality of management as a profession" (p.1). They continue to explain how the purpose of these degrees is to;

i) develop a range of business knowledge and skills, together with self-awareness and personal development, ii) give students the ability to convert theory into practise from a critical and informed perspective, iii) develop and enhance a range of general transferable intellectual and study skills (QAA, 2007, p.1)

However, do these objectives, provided by the QAA, match what students are really expecting to achieve by studying at this level? There are a number of reasons that students are attracted on to this type of programme. These may include the location and prestige of the university, the teaching, learning and assessment methods used, and, more importantly for this study, their expected outcomes from studying on a particular programme (Higher Education Policy Institute [HEPI], 2010).

The University of Huddersfield is a post-1992 University having previously been Huddersfield Polytechnic. It has approximately 24,000 students of which 22% are studying at postgraduate level, and although relatively small, this has been an increasing area for recruitment over recent years. According to the Guardian (2016) rankings The University of Huddersfield currently sits in 56th/119 in comparison with other universities in the United Kingdom [UK], and was ranked 80th/154 in the 2014 Research Excellence Framework [REF]: Overall ranking of institutions. It was awarded the Times Higher Education 'University of the year' award for 2013, 5 stars for teaching by the QS Intelligence Unit, and was 17th, top in Yorkshire, in the 2016 Times Higher Education, mock Teaching Excellence Framework [TEF] results (Havergal, 2016).

The Business School is one of seven academic schools within the University. There are currently approximately 6,000 students within the School studying at undergraduate and postgraduate level, both full and part time. Students and academic staff are located within one of five departments; i) Accountancy and Finance, ii) People, Management and Organisations, iii) Strategy, Marketing and Economics, iv) Logistics, Operations and Hospitality Management and v) The Law School. Students in the sample for this research study are based in the first three departments as these can be classified in the area of Business and Administrative Studies as described by the Higher Education Statistics Agency [HESA]. The PGT students within the Law department were excluded from the research as they tend to have different characteristics from the other students. Many PGT Law students are part time, distance learning or continuing directly from an undergraduate Law degree. PGT programmes within these departments have seen a rapid growth in student numbers in recent years and are now some of the most successful in the University. The growth consists almost entirely of international students from a variety of countries including Libya, China and Vietnam. It is this growth in international students on PGT programmes and the diversity of student background that creates the interest and importance of this research study.

As a course leader for a PGT programme in the department of Accountancy and Finance, the position of the researcher for this study is as an active participant rather than an observer. The influence that this position may have has been taken in to consideration throughout the research process and will be discussed further in the Methodology chapter. This role as course leader involves working closely as a member of a team to develop PGT programmes that attract suitably qualified students to study at the University. This includes ensuring that the programmes meet the

requirements of the University, the QAA and the students by developing appropriate programme and module specifications. It also involves the development and delivery of the induction programme, and the day to day management of the programme and the students throughout the academic year.

The primary concept for this research study is student expectations and, therefore, it is important to define the meaning and discuss their importance. A variety of different definitions are evident from the literature, for example, Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985) suggest that "expectations in the service quality tradition refer to what customers feel the service provider should offer, they are the desires or wants of consumers" (p.42). Licata, Chakraborty and Krishnan (2008) offer the suggestion that "expectations have been viewed as benchmarks consumers use to determine satisfaction" (p.176). Haman, Donald and Birt (2010) define student expectations as their "hope and objectives for the future" (p.619). This variety of definitions shows that expectations can be defined in a number of different ways depending on the context in which they are being used. For the purpose of this research study expectations will be defined as 'the benefits a student feels they will gain by studying on a PGT programme'. This fits most closely with a definition by Higgs, Polonsky and Hollick (2005) of "pre-trial beliefs about a product or service and its performance at some future time" (p.49). This research study will help to fill the gap identified by Higgs et al. (2005) who suggest that "there is a major gap in the literature on the subject of novice consumers who lack prior experience with a specific service provider or service category" (p.53). Students enrolling on to a PGT programme at the University for the first time can be described as novice consumers of a service.

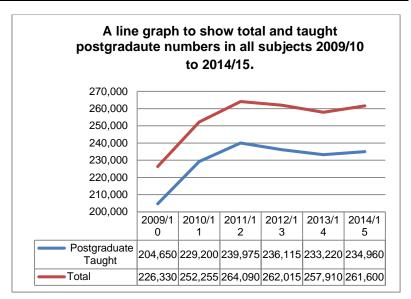
1.2 Postgraduate Education in the UK

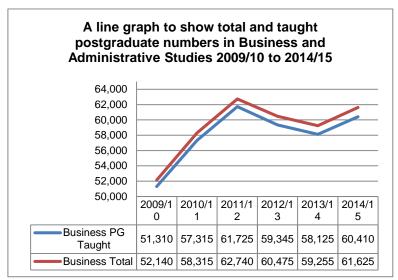
The number of students studying on PGT programmes in UK universities has grown significantly in recent years. HEPI (2010) and Morgan (2014) both agree that postgraduate education has seen a rapid expansion with the biggest growth being in PGT student enrolments. However, as data in Figure 1.1 (page 14) shows, there is now evidence to suggest that these numbers are beginning to decline. This will have important implications for universities who have begun to rely on the income from these student enrolments.

Figure 1.1 shows that from 2009/10 to 2011/12 the total number of postgraduate students in the UK increased by 17%, with a 20% increase in PGT provision. By 2011/12 PGT programmes made up 91% of the postgraduate total of 264,090 students. In Business and Administrative Studies the increase was 20% during the same period, with 98% of the total 62,740 being made up of PGT provision by 2011/12. However, PGT programmes suffered a decrease of 2% for the first time in 2012/13 and again a decrease of 1% in 2013/14. The importance of PGT provision can still be seen, as it continues to make up 98% of the total number of postgraduate students in Business

and Administrative studies in 2013/14. Student numbers did show an increase again in 2014/15 but the total was only 1.5% and total PGT by only 0.7%. The line graphs in Figure 1.1 help to illustrate how universities need to be aware that the significant increase in numbers seen in recent years is not continuing, and they may need to seriously consider strategies for maintaining their current recruitment numbers.

<u>Figure 1.1 Qualifications obtained by students on Postgraduate courses at Higher Education Institutions [HEI's] in the UK, in total and in Business and Administrative Studies.</u>





Source: HESA 2016: Table 11 – Qualifications obtained by students on HE courses at HEI's in the UK by Sex, Level of Qualification, mode of study and domicile, Table 12 - Qualifications obtained by students on HE courses at HEI's in the UK by Sex, Subject area and Level of qualification.

A significant proportion of this growth in student numbers can be explained by the increase in the number of international students choosing to study on postgraduate programmes in the UK. "In June 1999, the UK Government launched an initiative to attract an additional 50,000 international students to UK higher education by 2005 and win market share from its major competitors" (Russell, 2005, p.65). The data in Figure 1.1 shows that the growth continued long after this date

until 2012. Evidence from previous research reports (HEPI, 2010 and Spittle, 2012) supports the explanation for this increase as being due to the rising numbers of international students.

There are two main reasons for this; i) a deliberate strategy by many UK universities to increase their income by increasing the recruitment of international students on to their programmes. Russell (2005) explained how "Financial constraints imposed on higher education have encouraged institutions to recruit larger international student intakes for sourcing revenue" (p.65), ii) The lack of funding available for British postgraduate students is an important factor in many of them deciding not to continue their studies to PGT level. This is evidenced by Spittle (2012) who suggests that "international postgraduate enrolments have increased by more than 200% since 1999. In contrast, over the same period, the number of home and European Union [EU] students has increased by just 18%" (p.11).

In previous years undergraduate students made up the majority of the population in most universities. Postgraduate education has been described as the "forgotten part of the sector" (Spittle, 2012, p.17). In more recent years, changes to Government policy for funding meant that universities had a restriction on the number of undergraduate students that they were able to recruit, limiting the income generated from this source. However, there has been no such restriction on the number of postgraduate students that they were able to recruit. "This limit on undergraduate numbers made PGT students a valuable and increasing income stream for UK Universities" (HEPI, 2010, p.49). However, from September 2015, the cap on undergraduate recruitment has been removed. This could increase income from undergraduate recruitment for some, but for others it will result in income from this area being reduced. The removal of the recruitment restriction will result in more popular or prestigious universities taking an increased proportion of this market, and therefore, other institutions will see a significant reduction in numbers. In addition, there may be a reduction in the number of UK students choosing to continue their studies to postgraduate level. Brown (2008) confirmed that it is possible that, if in the future UK students continue to pay higher fees to study at undergraduate level then they will be less likely to progress on to postgraduate study. Therefore, as suggested by Spittle (2012) "many postgraduate courses in the UK will rely on international students to remain viable" (p.33). This is confirmed by Hall (2015) who discusses the increased recognition of the reliance on international student fee income.

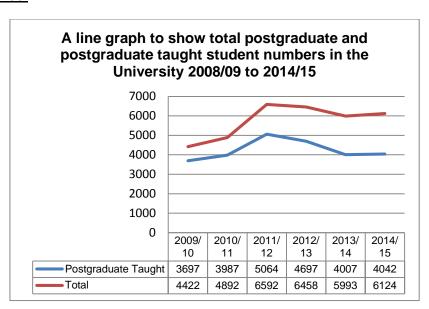
1.3 Postgraduate Education at The University of Huddersfield

Figure 1.2 shows that the patterns in PGT student numbers both at The University of Huddersfield and in the Business School are similar, but not exactly the same, as the national picture. From 2008/09 to 2011/12 the total number of postgraduate students at The University of Huddersfield increased by 72%. This included a 172% increase in postgraduate research students and a 55%

increase in PGT. However, the actual number of PGT students is significantly higher than those on research degrees and in 2011/12 PGT made up 77% of the postgraduate total. This data would agree with Morgan (2014 p.169) who stated that "the increase in the PGT student body at the post 1992 institution is more dramatic than at a national level". Between 2011/12 and 2013/14 this rapid increase was replaced by a 9.1% decrease in postgraduate students as a whole, created by a much larger 20.87% decrease in PGT students. This was followed by an insignificant increase of 0.8% in PGT students to 2014/15.

A similar pattern can be seen within the Business School. Between 2008/09 and 2012/13 the total number of postgraduate students increased by 79.8%, consisting of a 64.26% increase in PGT and a 225% increase in research students. Despite the large percentage increase in research students the actual numbers are much smaller than PGT and only make up 18% of the total number of postgraduate students. The increase in numbers continued for an additional year in the Business School until 2012/13, however, the following years still saw the decline in numbers, although much lower than the University as a whole. The total number of postgraduate students fell by 6.5% up to 2014/15, consisting of a 12% decrease in PGT students and a 16% increase in research.

<u>Figure 1.2 Enrolment of students on Postgraduate courses at The University of Huddersfield and in</u> the Business School



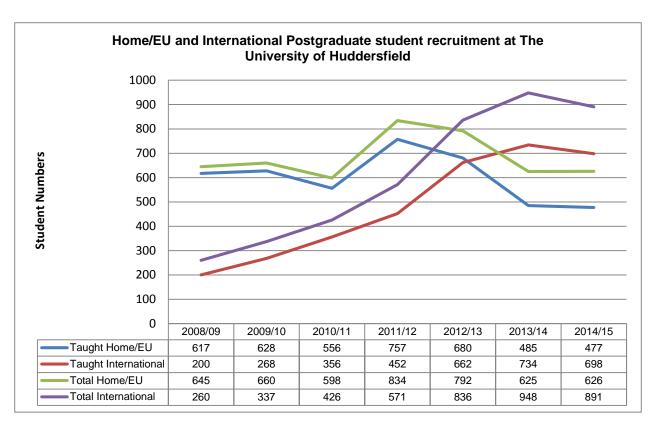
Source: The University of Huddersfield Enrolment statistics (PINS)

Similar to many UK Universities looking to increase the number of international students, The University of Huddersfield strategy map (2008-2013) identified a key performance indicator to double the number of international students, to at least 1,500 by 2013. This target was more than exceeded with a total number of international students of 2,648 by the academic year 2013/14.

Figure 1.3 shows that international recruitment on to postgraduate programmes in the Business School has increased by 243% since 2008/09. The University of Huddersfield International

Strategy (2013/14 – 2017/18) identifies that this recruitment is mainly from China, India, Nigeria, Malaysia, and The Gulf, in addition to a number of EU countries. The School did not see the overall downturn in 2012/13 experienced by the UK and the University. Although the number of home students on PGT programmes decreased by 10%, the number of international students increased by 46%. However, since 2012/13 the Business School has seen a 21% decrease in the number of home students enrolling onto postgraduate programmes, and although, still increasing in 2013/14, the number of international students decreased by 6% in 2014/15. This suggests that the school has begun to see a downturn in both home and international students continuing their studies to postgraduate level.

<u>Figure 1.3 Home/EU and International Postgraduate Recruitment in The Business School at The University of Huddersfield</u>



Source: The University of Huddersfield student enrolment statistics (PINS)

In terms of the future, the strategy map for The University of Huddersfield (2013/14 – 2017/18) identifies a key performance indicator as being in the top 25 among mainstream English universities for the percentage of international students on campus. Currently, it stands at 46th position with 16% of students being international. The University international strategy explains how it needs to continue to develop a whole student lifecycle approach to internationalisation. This study would suggest that this should involve the management of student expectations from before application to graduation.

The discussion in sections 1.2 and 1.3 shows that the recruitment of international students on to PGT programmes, as a source of income, will become even more important in the future for certain universities. However, Donaldson and McNicholas (2004) stated that "UK universities trying to recruit postgraduate students face an increasingly competitive market" (p.346) as universities throughout the world compete for the custom of internationally mobile students. In addition, some international students are seeing the rise and improvement of higher education facilities in their home country, alongside tighter government visa restrictions to enter the UK. Higher education in the UK is no longer just a domestic market and this has created significant challenges to universities with regards to both the demand from students and the competition created in the supply of programmes (Bennett & Kotasz, 2011). The market forces of demand and supply are shaping the education sector worldwide and have led to the increasing marketisation of higher education (Naidoo & Wu, 2011 and Varman, Saha & Skalan, 2011). All these factors "leave our universities vulnerable to changes in international recruitment" (Spittle, 2012, p.33). This is true in 2015/16 as universities who have begun to rely on the income that these students generate have begun to see a small, but significant, reduction in enrolments on to their PGT programmes. The Literature Review will discuss arguments both for and against the marketisation of higher education. Researchers such as Naidoo et al., (2011) and Ledden, Kalafatis and Mathioudakis (2011) suggest that it has increased student choice and improved the quality of the learning experience at University. Whilst others including Bertelson (2008) Molesworth, Nixon and Scullion (2009) and Varman et al. (2011) argue that it has led to students becoming degree seekers rather than learners, where education is considered as a commodity that can be bought. Whether individual universities or academics agree or disagree with these concepts the marketisation of higher education is taking place and is likely to continue in the future. Therefore, there is a need to understand the complex needs and diverse population of PGT students if a University is to maintain or increase its market share in the future. The focus of this study on PGT programmes recognises the rapid growth but recent decline in student numbers and the growing importance of this level of study in UK universities. "With the globalization of the higher education market, strong strategies and new innovations are needed to ensure that all students' needs and expectations are met" (Pitajarvi, Eriksson & Pitkala, 2012, p.1). One way to maintain and improve competitiveness in this market is to know and understand the expectations of current students.

1.4 The importance of student expectations

Despite the increased competition and the importance of postgraduate recruitment, "some universities are not doing enough to inform students of the likely progression and employment outcomes from completing a course" (Spittle, 2012, p.23). If the growth in student numbers is to continue, or even the existing numbers to be maintained, then the findings of this research study, with regards to the expectations of outcome, need to be taken in to consideration when developing

existing or designing new PGT programmes. Sander, Stevenson, King and Coates (2000) explain how "the expectations and preferences of students are valuable data which should be collected and considered" (p.310). This ensures that their expected outcomes are realistic, and informs the development of current and future programmes. PGT course leaders need to ensure that programmes are being designed and delivered in ways that help students to achieve their expectations. Voss, Gruber and Szmigan (2007) suggest that "if lecturers know what their students expect, they may be able to adapt their behaviour to their students' underlying expectations, which should have a positive impact on their perceived quality and their levels of satisfaction" (p.950).

However, Sander et al. (2000) and Russell (2005) explain how universities and course leaders should not feel that they have to automatically change their programmes to meet the expectations and preferences of students. The key to developing an effective marketing culture within an organisation is all employees at all levels to have the ability and information to think of customers as important (Guilbault, 2016). Therefore, student expectations should be taken in to consideration alongside other environmental factors in the marketing mix. The marketing of PGT programmes and the communication of information to students before enrolment and at induction should ensure that students have realistic expectations of what the outcome might be. By communicating with students regarding expectations the potential outcome for current students can be improved and the expectations of future students are more likely to be met.

Realising that expectations are important and addressing the issues can produce significant improvements in the outcomes that students achieve. Lobo and Gurney (2014) explain how "a heightened awareness of the fact that students do hold expectations, presents an opportunity for staff collaboration and reflection" (p.746). Course leaders cannot assume that they know what students expect from their programme, instead, they should be researching what is expected and working to meet those expectations. The findings of Lobo and Gurney (2014) suggest that this should involve all staff working in the University, not just academics. They explain how "the link between met expectations and student satisfaction carries implications for the professional practice of University marketing teams, programme designers, education consultancy services and career advisors" (Lobo & Gurney, 2014, p.747).

Research on both undergraduate and postgraduate students has taken place over a number of years and by a variety of academics (Hill, 1995; Donaldson & McNicholas, 2004; Ridley, 2004; Sastry, 2004; Byrne & Flood, 2005; Haman et al., 2010; Kerry, 2010; Liu, 2010; Lightfoot, 2012; Category, 2013 and Morgan, 2014) showing that an understanding of expectations is important. However, despite the level of research in this field, Bay and Daniel (2001) suggest that education research, in general, tends to concentrate on the process of service delivery and there is very little about the outcomes of a programme. Given the changes in UK higher education, discussed previously, research regarding PGT expectations will become more influential as this student

population becomes increasingly important for the long term sustainability of Higher Education in the UK.

Recent reports for the Higher Education Funding Council [HEFCE] by (Dye, 2013; Mellors-Bourne, Hooley & Merriott, 2014 and Clarke & Lunt, 2014) all emphasise the importance of postgraduate education to the UK economy. They all consider the choices and information needs of postgraduate students, and international comparisons but none directly investigate student expectations. More recently, in January 2015, the Higher Education Academy [HEA] invited tenders for research which answer the following research question. "Which factors influence students' decisions to make the transition from undergraduate to postgraduate education, specifically to taught and research degrees?" Many of the published reports briefly mention the expectations of students, but none have directly studied the relationship between expectations and background or the comparison between the expectations of students and the perception of these expectations by course leaders. This comparison has important implications for the future development of PGT programmes. If any University is to remain competitive in the PGT market, recruiting, retaining and increasing the achievement of students from increasingly diverse backgrounds then issues regarding expectations must be identified and understood by course leaders.

1.5 The Research Process

As the course leader of a PGT programme that has seen a rapid growth in student numbers over recent years, it was felt to be important to investigate student expectations in order to consider whether the programme is enabling them to achieve these expected outcomes. The programmes were designed by course leaders with programme teams using quality specifications, subject benchmarks and some perception of what students are looking for in a particular programme. However, if the programmes are to continue to maintain and increase student numbers in the future, it is important to have taken current student views regarding expectations in to consideration.

As discussed earlier, this research study uses The University of Huddersfield and PGT programmes in the Business School. The data presented for both nationally and the University shows that PGT education is already a popular area but also one of significant growth. In 2013/14 students on postgraduate programmes in the Business School made up 26% of the total number of postgraduate students at The University of Huddersfield, and 30% of the total number of PGT students. This includes a significant number of international students, as 45% of postgraduate students are from outside of the UK (University Guide, 2014). This allows for a more diverse range of expectations from a variety of backgrounds to be included in the research.

The Literature Review chapter puts the current study into context with previous literature. The chapter will consider the importance and growth of PGT education in the UK and the concept of customer expectations is introduced. The marketization of higher education and the students as customer's model is evaluated and the assumption made with regard to this study that it is appropriate to consider students as a customer of the university. Previous literature on student expectations, student satisfaction and motives for study will then be taken into consideration.

This investigation of previous research provides the evidence for the originality of this research study. As discussed in the rationale for this study international students in the United Kingdom and postgraduate taught students are under-represented in the previous research. There is a gap in the literature surrounding the expectations of PGT students, and whether these expectations differ according to background characteristics. The term 'background' is used in this context to describe the characteristics of nationality, gender and age. These characteristics were chosen for this study following the findings of Sander et al. (2000) who suggested that the expectations of students in higher education are affected by a number of factors including; culture, gender, university type and mode of study. There is also little evidence to suggest that research has taken place looking at the differences in the expectations of students and the perceptions of these expectations by course leaders. Both of these concepts could have important implications for the future competitiveness of PGT programmes at a University, and therefore, justify the need for this research study to be conducted.

The aim of this investigation is to critically analyse the relationship between student and course leader expectations on PGT programmes and to evaluate the importance and implications of these expectations for the future competitiveness of the University.

The objectives of this study are to:

- Analyse PGT student expectations of outcome.
- Evaluate any differences in the expectations of students and the perceptions of those expectations by the course leaders influencing the development of the programmes.
- Critically evaluate the implications of any differences for the future strategy of PGT programmes in the Business School.

This will be achieved by answering the following research questions:

- 1. What are student expectations of the outcome of a PGT programme?
- 2. How are student expectations developed?
- 3. Are student expectations affected by background characteristics?
- 4. Are student expectations important to course leaders?
- 5. What are the course leader perceptions of student expectations for study on a PGT programme?
- 6. Do differences exist between the expectations of students and the perceptions of those expectations by course leaders?
- 7. What implications do any differences in expectations have on the Business School and the university?

As will be discussed in more detail in the Methodology chapter the objectives will be achieved and the questions answered by taking a pragmatic approach to research design, using both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods where appropriate. Taking an interpretative viewpoint, the data instruments used have been developed as the research progressed based upon the findings and analysis of data collected earlier in the study. Questionnaires were used to collect a volume of data from a representative sample of PGT students between 2012 and 2014. This allowed demographic data relating to the students backgrounds to be analysed alongside their rankings of the expectations of outcome. The initial findings were used to develop the schedule of questions for student focus groups, where the questionnaire responses could be validated, points of importance identified from the questionnaire results discussed in more detail and more qualitative information gathered. In order for a comparison to be made and differences identified a similar questionnaire design was used to collect data from course leaders regarding their perceptions of student expectations of outcome. Although the number completed was much smaller in number, the data from these was again used to develop a schedule of questions to be used in semi structured interviews.

The Analysis and Discussion chapter shows how the results of the data collection have been evaluated in relation to each research question. Given the pragmatic approach used, statistical techniques such as t tests and chi squared have been used alongside more qualitative procedures such as thematic analysis to produce detailed information in order to evaluate the differences in expectations in some detail. The completion of the data analysis and discussion allowed the key findings to be identified in relation to both students and course leaders. This summary of findings was then used to develop the interview schedule with the Dean of the Business School regarding the implications of this research for the future competitiveness of PGT programmes.

Working with students and PGT course leaders to achieve the aims and objectives of this study will help to maintain and improve the competitiveness of the Business School in the PGT market in the future. Although, a small study, and therefore more difficult for generalisations to be made, other schools within this University and other universities will find the findings useful. By raising awareness of student expectations along with identifying and evaluating the key differences, course leaders and other users will be able to use the evidence presented to develop strategies and solutions for their particular programmes. This will help to ensure that the expectations of a greater number of PGT students are understood and therefore they are more able to realise their expectations of the outcome of their chosen programme of study in the future.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The Introduction chapter identified the main aim for this research study; to critically analyse the relationship between student and course leader expectations on PGT programmes and to evaluate the importance and implications of these expectations for the future competitiveness of the Business School and University. This includes consideration of student expectations in relation to the background characteristics of nationality, age and gender.

The increasing importance of PGT education has been discussed, including how it has become a significant source of income for universities in an increasingly competitive global market. The competition in the market for PGT education will result in universities needing to understand their students' wants, needs and expectations in order to recruit successfully in the future. This includes investigating how the student learning experience, service quality and satisfaction can be maintained and improved in order to compete in this increasingly difficult market.

The Literature Review chapter places the research study in this context. Discussing PGT education and introducing expectations from a customer service point of view by considering customers, service quality and customer satisfaction. Expectations are then considered more specifically in relation to education, students and background characteristics. This includes a discussion of whether PGT students should be considered as customers of a University, and if measuring student expectations and satisfaction has any impact when developing strategies for the future.

2.2 Postgraduate Education

2.2.1 Definition and Importance of Postgraduate Taught Education

HEPI (2010) explain how "there is no one definition of postgraduate" (p.3). The Higher Education Statistics Agency [HESA] describes postgraduate students as those registered for courses or credits where a normal condition of entry is that entrants are already qualified to degree level. Whilst, HEPI (2010) explain how a masters or postgraduate degree includes;

a minimum of 1 year full time equivalent study. In addition, students are expected to have shown originality in the application of knowledge and in problem solving and demonstrated understanding of how the boundaries of knowledge are advanced through research (p.3).

Additional information is given by the QAA (2010) who suggest that "master's degrees in the UK are often described as either 'taught' or 'research' depending on the relative proportion of structured learning and independent study making up the award" (p.3). These definitions show how

HESA, HEPI and the QAA all have their own variation of what constitutes a PGT programme. This research study is interested in PGT programmes, which usually involve a taught course element, consisting of a number of modules, that progresses to research for a dissertation (HEPI & Kerry, 2010). The more standardised nature of taught programmes rather than research, being based upon programme and module learning outcomes developed from QAA guidelines, enables more useful comparisons to be made.

Postgraduate education, but particularly PGT programmes, is becoming an increasingly important aspect of higher education in the UK. Research studies over a period of time by (Donaldson & McNicholas, 2004; Stuart, Lido, Morgan, Soloman & Akroyd, 2008 and Mellors-Bourne et al., 2014) have discussed how PGT programmes are becoming less of a fringe activity and taking more of a central role in University activities, with students on these programmes becoming an important part of the student population, making up one fifth of all students in the UK.

This increase in importance of PGT programmes in higher education provision in the UK can be explained by a number of reasons. Firstly, the proportion of the population who have obtained an undergraduate degree is increasing due to the Government policy of increasing skills and knowledge. The PGT programme therefore becomes a "valuable discriminator in recruitment and employment" (Kerry, 2010, p.12). Wakeling (2005) describes this as "credential inflation" (p.506), or the advantage provided by achieving an undergraduate degree decreases in the labour market due to the number of graduates who have achieved this level of qualification. This results in PGT qualifications becoming more important and in many cases "a key success factor in securing entry to sought after positions in the employment market" (Wakeling, 2005, p.520). This can be discussed further in relation to the higher salaries available to students from postgraduate programmes. Spittle (2012) and Clarke and Lunt (2014) explain how the earnings premium has contributed to the large increase in the number of students choosing to undertake PGT study. Spittle (2012) suggests that the qualification gives students more opportunities in the competitive employment market, by developing the expertise and skills that are in high demand in certain parts of the economy. Secondly, it is suggested that postgraduate education is essential in order to maintain the UK economy. Spittle (2012) explains how a healthy postgraduate system will enable the UK to continue with its current academic and economic success. This is because "postgraduates are a vital part of the innovation infrastructure and are an important factor in attracting companies to locate in the UK" (Spittle, 2012, p.10).

2.2.2 The Growth in Postgraduate Taught Education

Discussion takes place throughout the literature evidencing that the number of students studying on PGT programmes has grown extensively over recent years. Stuart et al. (2008) and Morgan (2014) explain how the new, or post 1992, universities particularly have seen a rapid increase in

their PGT student number. Evidence is presented in the Introduction chapter of this study from both HESA and University data that shows this increase in numbers over recent years especially for international students.

Hoare (2011) suggests that "postgraduate degrees are now inherently international in nature". They continue to explain how "higher education is now part of a global marketplace, and one that the UK has so far played to its advantage" (Hoare, 2011). Warwick and Moogan (2013) describe this as a process of internationalisation of higher education, whereby, there has been a deliberate strategy by many UK universities to increase the number of international students enrolling on to their programmes. Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) and Wilkins, Balakrishnan and Huisman (2012) describe the attraction of the UK for international PGT students in terms of pull and push factors. Push factors are those that help to create a student's interest in undertaking international study. Wilkins et al. (2012) suggest that these push factors will include lack of availability and opportunities in the students' home countries. For example, "a lack of access to higher education among countries in Asia and Africa has been a key driver for much of the student flow that has taken place over the second half of the twentieth century" (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002, p.82). Alternatively, the pull factors are those that operate within the UK making it relatively attractive to international students (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). Wilkins et al. (2012) suggest that these pull factors may include the quality and reputation of the education available, improved prospects for employment, the opportunity to improve English language skills, and the opportunity to live in a different country and experience a different culture. All of the above push and pull factors have contributed to the rapid growth in international students that has been seen in UK PGT programmes in recent years.

However, the evidence in Figure 1.2 (page 17) shows that the growth in international student numbers is beginning to stagnate. There are a number of reasons as to why this decline in international students is taking place. Firstly, "many of the emerging economies are investing heavily in international postgraduate education in order to build research and teaching capacity in their domestic higher education system" (Spittle, 2012, p.38). Once these systems are established then, over time, the UK will see the demand for their programmes decrease. Secondly, Hoare (2011) Spittle (2012) and Clarke and Lunt (2014) suggest that the number of students on PGT programmes will be affected by the complex immigration system that has been introduced and the Governments visa restrictions on international students. Clarke and Lunt (2014) state that "because of the immigration complexities, funding challenges and the uncertainty of post-graduation job prospects in the UK, the preferred destinations for Indian graduates looking to enter postgraduate programmes are now Australia and Germany" (p.15). Finally, PGT programmes in the UK could be threatened by the "increasing availability of English language teaching in European universities" (Spittle, 2012, p.38).

Given this reduction in international student numbers the recruitment of home students may become more important in the future if programmes are to remain viable. Stuart et al. (2008) suggest that "while clearly there is a market for overseas students, universities need to pay more attention to our home students aspirations" (p.73). This could have implications for universities as the growth in international students on to PGT programmes has not been followed by home students in recent years. Research by Stuart et al. (2008) and Spittle (2012) explained how the rise in PGT numbers is due to international students and the number of home students is actually declining. Paton (2012) explains how only 10% of British students are likely to undertake further study after their degree, and this is less than almost any other nation. What are the reasons for the lack of home students studying for PGT qualifications? Stuart et al. (2008) suggest that "overseas undergraduate students are much more likely to continue with their studies to postgraduate level because students who are prepared to travel to a different country to study will be much more motivated to continue" (p.68). In addition, Spittle (2012) explains how "insufficient opportunities and funding support" (p.37) in an environment where "the majority of PGT students receive little or no financial support towards the cost of their tuition" (p.57) has an effect on enrolment numbers. Moogan and Baron (2003) explain how one of the main reasons for continuing in education is to increase the opportunities for a decent salary. However, this can only be achieved if the student perceives that the benefit of continuing in education outweighs the cost. Paton (2012) agrees with this discussing how rising undergraduate tuition fees and a lack of money during the recession are combining to put more graduates off gaining high level qualifications.

Due to these factors the needs and expectations of home students will be different to those from overseas. Hoare (2011) explains how UK students are more selective about their choice of PGT degree because they are conscious of the debt incurred by studying. Therefore, UK students are more likely to choose vocational or specialist masters programmes, and will expect to see a greater focus on employability in order that they can gain a return on their investment. Spittle (2012) agrees stating that they are more likely to "choose disciplines that they believe will offer them a greater financial return in the future" (p.60). In an attempt to encourage more home students to continue their studies to a higher level some universities may consider "using some of their income, specifically additional fees raised through undergraduate programmes, to subsidise postgraduate education" (Clarke & Lunt, 2014, p.41). In contrast to this suggestion, Spittle (2012) discusses how the average fee for a PGT programme will increase, as universities will no longer feel able to charge £3,000 - £4,000 for this qualification when undergraduates are being asked to pay £9,000, and this will result in students deciding not to enter PGT education.

The issues with home students make many PGT programmes unviable without the recruitment of international students, leaving both programmes and universities vulnerable to changes in international demand. Clarke and Lunt (2014) explain how the "UK currently has a highly

successful higher education system however, there are risks to the current post graduate system if international student numbers decrease" (p.20). This vulnerability is increasing further as the recruitment of PGT students in the UK is becoming concentrated on students from a smaller group of countries. Spittle (2012) suggests that any change in demand for these markets could have a significant impact on universities in the UK. An example of this concentration can be seen in this research study, where a large majority of the international students enrolled on to PGT programmes, in the Business School, are from China and Vietnam. The risks are inevitable as Spittle (2012) explains how international numbers are likely to decline in the future. Therefore, universities need to consider why their programmes are currently successful, whether the rise in demand can continue, how current numbers can be maintained into the future, and the implications for the future of the programmes.

In conclusion, the growth and importance of PGT education is evident. However, it also "faces unprecedented challenges" (Clarke & Lunt, 2014, p.2). One of these is the increase in diversity of students enrolling on to PGT programmes. Mellors-Bourne et al. (2014) state that "the students who participate in PGT study in the UK are also extremely diverse, with different aspirations, motivations and learning needs, as well as very differing personal circumstances" (p.9). Stuart et al. (2008) and Kerry (2010) both agree describing how different student groups have different aspirations in taking on PGT study, and therefore, it is difficult to design and deliver a programme that will meet the needs of all students. Hence, the importance of investigating the influence of background factors in the expectations of PGT students in this study.

2.3 Background Characteristics

"This growth in student numbers has given rise to an increased diversity with regard to student backgrounds, including variations in gender, age, previous qualifications and mode of study" (Smith, 2013). PGT students cannot be treated as one identical group, as differences are evident in relation to their background, social class, family income levels, previous educational experiences and current expectations from the programme (Humphrey & McCarthy, 1999; Ham & Hayduk, 2003; Wakeling, 2005 and Tobbell & O' Donnell, 2013). "The expectations of PGT students are complex and shaped by the identities of each individual" (Morgan, 2014, p.182). Swain and Hammond (2011) agree explaining how "the motivation to learn is affected by the stage in people's lives at which they choose to study and the historical and geographical contexts in which this choice is located" (p.594). Ham and Hayduk (2003) explain how in the process of better understanding students, universities should realise that these background factors will influence student's expectations and their perceptions of service quality.

This diversity in student background can bring both advantages and disadvantages to the PGT programmes. The international diversity of PGT education in the UK generates an environment

that is a vibrant and stimulating place for students to study. It helps to enrich the learning experiences for all students on the programme, both home and international. Students are able to learn and benefit from each other as they contribute their own cultural knowledge, experience and insights (Universities UK, 2010; Coates & Dickinson, 2012 and Smith, 2013). However, this increased diversity also creates a number of challenges for both students and University staff. "This increase in background diversity results in students enrolling on a programme with a greater variety of expectations as to what the programme or qualification will achieve for them" (Smith, 2013). Humphrey and McCarthy (1999) explain how "academic provision should be developed with the differing needs of particular groups in mind" (p.371). However, if these differences are to be taken in to consideration the design and development of PGT programmes becomes a more difficult process for course leaders and universities. Jancey and Burns (2013) explain how "the diversity of the postgraduate student population in terms of age, cultural background, technological expertise and time since their last enrolment poses challenges for university academics" (p.312). Despite this evidence and the concerns regarding diversity there is currently a gap in the literature regarding the difference in PGT student expectations according to background characteristics. Therefore, this study will consider the background characteristics of nationality, age, and gender in relation to the expectations of PGT students.

2.3.1 Nationality

Due to the rapid increase in the number of international students in recent years, from a variety of different countries, and "the economic dependence of British universities on the fees from international students, it is important that there is a clear understanding of the issues facing students if an optimum service is to be delivered" (Brown, 2008, p.76). It cannot be assumed that students will all have the same expectations regarding the learning experience and outcome of a PGT programme. It may also be that their previous experiences and current expectations are not the same as universities and course leaders perceive them to be, and therefore, research is necessary to find out what they might be. "International students will arrive with various expectations and there is often a disparity between international students' expectations and those anticipated by the higher education staff delivering the programmes" (Kelly & Moogan, 2012, p.27). This links closely with the objective of this research study of identifying the gap between the expectations of students and the perceptions of those expectations by course leaders. A significant part of this investigation relates to whether course leaders regard gaining a knowledge and understanding of student expectations to be an important aspect of their role.

A variety of expectations are evident from the literature and international students have "high expectations concerning the future usefulness of their learning experience" (Haman et al., 2010, p.627). In order for students to achieve these expectations "academics need to ensure that what they teach is not only correct and up to date, but also demonstrably useful in real-life decision

making situations" (Haman et al., 2010, p.627). Kelly and Moogan (2012) explain how "international students often want to widen their experience, but the primary goal is to gain a qualification" (p.25). However, the expectations that students have may not be specific to a particular PGT programme, but may just be related to the desire to study in the UK. Kinnel (1989) and Brown (2008) both suggest that having the opportunity to study in England and improve their English is an overriding factor in the expectations of international students. If this is the most important expectation it can have serious implications for the outcome of all students enrolled on to a particular programme. Are students enrolled on to a programme interested in the academic content being delivered or have chosen it because of the English language support that may be available? This could create issues for teaching, learning, and student satisfaction on the programme, especially if the assessment includes a significant group work component. As explained by Brown (2008) "the level of the course was brought down by the linguistic incompetence of the majority of the cohort" (p.90). A consideration for all course leaders may be whether this linguistic incompetence is a barrier to achievement on the course and prevents other students from achieving their expectations from the programme.

It cannot be assumed that the expectations of all international students will be the same. The level of expectations from a particular programme of study of students from different nationalities may also be different. Lobo and Gurney (2014) discuss how the expectations of international students "are argued to be more incongruent with reality than those of domestic students" (p.733). International students are more likely to have "self-perceptions as consumers of a service, rather than students at a University" (Lobo & Gurney, 2014, p.733). This can contribute to them having high expectations of the University, which often are not met. These expectations could be a result of their previous educational experiences, the information they are provided with as a potential recruit to a particular PGT programme, either by the University itself or a recruitment agent, and the amount that they are paying the University through tuition fees. Universities must take the different nationalities and these expectations into consideration ensuring that "course designs are not biased towards any type of student, and that programmes are fit for global purposes" (Kelly & Moogan, 2012, p.26). This will include a consideration of programme outcomes and methods used for teaching, learning and assessment in order to ensure that no particular group of students are potentially disadvantaged on the programme.

2.3.2 Age

The age of a student may affect their expectations regarding the outcome of a particular PGT programme. The literature does not always classify into age groups but has a tendency to discuss young or more mature students. Swain and Hammond (2011) explain how mature and younger students differ in terms of both life stage and circumstances, and therefore, their motivations for learning will differ, and "as mature students are substantial in number it is important to understand

their motivations for study and how they benefit from participation" (Swain & Hammond, 2011, p.594). The research by Swain and Hammond (2011) makes the assumption that mature students will be studying part time and younger students full time. However, this research study will not make this assumption and will consider age as a background characteristic but will not consider mode of study. The mode of study is usually a consequence of other background factors and will therefore these would create bias in any results obtained. For example, international students have to study on a full time basis. Humphrey and McCarthy (1999) suggest that universities "should be encouraging mature students in to Higher Education for more academic and personal developmental reasons" (p.374). This would agree with the findings of Swain and Hammond (2011) who suggested that "mature adults were more likely to give joy of learning as a reason for studying, whilst younger groups were more likely to give reasons relating to work" (p.595).

2.3.3 Gender

The expectations of PGT students on the outcome of a programme may also vary according to gender. Although little has been written about these differences in relation to PGT education, some relevant differences by gender have been discussed in the literature in recent years with regard to workplace expectations. Schweitzer, Ng, Lyons and Kuron (2011) stated that "pre-career women tend to have lower career expectations than pre-career men" (p.423). Kleinjans (2009) and Booth (2009) discuss how women and men tend to prefer different fields of work and within those fields, they are usually found at different levels in the organisation. These differences are created by personality differences, affecting the preference for and behaviour in competitive situations. Women are more likely to be less competitive and stay away from competition, whilst men might choose to compete. This includes competition for entrance in to education, job openings, promotions and salary increases. "Obtaining promotion and pay rises often involves competition and it may be that women do not like to compete but men do" (Booth, 2009, p.603). Research by Sandberg (2013) agrees with the difference in competitive behaviour explaining how women are more likely to question their leadership abilities than men and are less likely to push for promotions or pay rises. Women are more likely to only apply for a job if they meet all of the required criteria, whereas men will apply knowing that they do not meet some of the requirements. Wakeling (2005) explained how women outnumbered men among all postgraduates in the UK, and this may help to explain why. There is a "frequent tendency for women not to put themselves forward to showcase their experience and qualifications" (Hurn, 2013, p.200). Therefore, are female students more likely to enrol onto PGT study and have the expectations of gaining the skills and qualifications they think they need to feel more confident in showcasing themselves? They are then more able to develop their careers by applying for alternative roles or promotion from their current role. Do female employees feel that the PGT qualification is more important for their career prospects and necessary for promotion? Hurn (2013) states that "most women remain insistent that they should

gain promotion only on their merit" (p.201). This would agree with Clark and Anderson (1992) and Swain and Hammond (2011) who suggest that women tend to be motivated by employment requirements, progression and finding a new job. However, they need additional support and encouragement to help them maintain and pursue a challenging career path.

Research by Ozuturk (2012) investigated the motivations of international students in studying the English language. Findings here explained how males think that English is important because it will give them the opportunity to meet and be able to communicate with more and varied people. Knowledge of the language allows them to develop socially, appreciating English art and literature, enabling them to make friends in the UK, and take part in activities with students from other cultures. In contrast, female students learn English for their career, enabling them to get a job as without English they will not be able to finish their studies in the UK. "The main motivation for learning English is that it will help them to get a well-paid job in the future" (Ozuturk, 2012, p.428). This agrees with the research discussed above regarding females being more motivated than males by entry requirements and job prospects.

2.4 The Marketisation of Higher Education

Recent years have seen universities in the UK experiencing a climate of increased competition in both the undergraduate and postgraduate markets. One factor creating this increase being the globalisation of higher education. Potential students from around the world are increasingly mobile and see international qualifications as a way of gaining competitive advantage in the job market. As shown in the Introduction chapter, (sections 1.2 and 1.3, pages 13 – 18) in the years leading up to 2012 universities in the UK, including The University of Huddersfield, had been extremely successful in increasing the numbers of students recruited from overseas on to postgraduate taught programmes. However, since 2012 these numbers have begun to stagnate and decline. One reason for this decline is that competition between universities globally for these overseas students has increased significantly as the revenue generated from their tuition fees has become an important stream of income. Bennett and Kottasz (2011, p.1088) agree stating that "international marketing strategies of HE institutions in many countries have become extremely aggressive in consequence of their need to recruit foreign students". Higher education in the UK is no longer just a domestic market and this has created significant challenges to universities with regards to both the demand from students and the competition created in the supply of programmes. As discussed by Naidoo and Wu (2011) and Varman et al., (2011) these market forces of demand and supply are shaping the education sector worldwide and have led to the increasing marketisation of higher education, because "economic forces impact more powerfully and directly on universities than in previous decades (Naidoo and Wu, 2011, p.1147). Hall (2015) explains the marketisation of higher education as a set of processes that have shifted the relative

balance away from higher education as a public goal towards market based provision and consumption practices.

Government policy towards higher education in the UK over a number of years has been to increase market forces, create competition and encourage universities to adopt business models in order to compete effectively (Ledden et al., 2011). Hall (2015) agrees suggesting that universities have increasingly adopted commercial management practices. The lack of funding for postgraduate taught students and changes in tuition fee policy for undergraduate students now means that most home and international students are fee paying customers. Molesworth et al. (2009) suggests that this financial exchange creates a consumer experience, where by "fee paying customers know how to play the markets to maximise self- interest" (p.279).

The marketisation of higher education has and still is taking place in both the undergraduate and postgraduate taught markets and a number of arguments have been provided that support the concept . Naidoo, Shankar and Veer (2011, p.1144) consider it from the universities point of view. They explain how marketisation is taking place because "public higher education systems have become too large and complex for governments to fund on their own", and therefore, alternative systems need to be introduced if higher education in the UK is to continue to be a world leader in the future. They continue to suggest that "market competition within and between universities will create more efficient and effective institutions, and that management principles derived from the private sector which monitor, measure, compare and judge professional activities will enhance higher education functioning" (Naidoo et al., 2011, p.1145).

Ledden et al. (2011) discuss the benefits in relation to students for the marketisation of HE. They explain how students represent a key stakeholder group. This is because the student is the consumer of the educational experience that is delivered by the University. In this new environment all universities must offer a good student experience if they are to remain competitive. The primary aim must be to create a learning experience that creates value for the students. Naidoo et al. (2011) explains how one of the benefits of consumerism is that it has led to a focus on learning and teaching and the implementation of various mechanisms to assure quality. Daymon and Durkin (2013) agree explaining how marketisation has led to an increase in the accountability of educational institutions, and therefore, more effective delivery of courses. The Governments introduction of the new Teaching Excellence Framework [TEF] 2017 is one example of this. Its aim is to monitor and assess the quality of teaching in order to help inform student choice and recognise and reward excellent teaching. Even before the TEF, as discussed by (Naidoo et al., 2011), this increased competition has led to more student choice and control over the education process. Students now have a greater choice and flexibility, and a greater access to information from multiple sources. Students now have a much greater participation in the educational process (Daymon and Durkin, 2013). They are able to gain detailed information on academic courses

through the use of performance indicators, key information statistics, league tables and student satisfaction surveys for both undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes. Naidoo et al. (2011, p.1145) suggest that the increased competition between universities will result in more responsive, inclusive, and better quality teaching. In the past, this may not have been the case, where other stakeholder groups had greater influence some universities chose to follow other priorities and students may not always have received the learning experience that they deserved. However, McClung and Werner (2008, p.107) explain how now if universities want to thrive and grow they must address how well they match with the target segment of students and their parents' expectations of the benefits of studying at the institution. Therefore, overall, the literature here suggests that the marketisation of higher education should improve the quality provision for students.

In contrast, there have also been a number of arguments given that disagree with the concept of the marketisation of higher education. These can be considered in relation to students, academics working in higher education, and the economy. Molesworth et al. (2009) suggests that this market orientation has resulted in students who believe that higher education is now their right, whereby getting a good degree is an entitlement paid for by their fees, rather than something that they need to work hard to achieve. Varman et al. (2011) agrees suggesting that students have become degree seekers instead of learners. Education is now a commodity that can be bought, and is seen as a financial investment rather than an opportunity for intellectual development. Alderdice (2016) stated that students now come to get a 'ticket', and they are not always interested in the value of learning. In this way, marketisation has contributed to a decline in academic learning (Varman et al., 2001, p.1165), where, in some cases, students consider themselves as "passive consumers of education who abdicate their own responsibility for learning" (Naidoo et al., 2011, p.1150). If the market approach to higher education is to be successful students can not consider themselves just as consumers of education but must be the co-creators of any value created (Ng and Forbes, 2009). Value can only be created when customers and suppliers work together to create solutions. Therefore, students must be given the opportunity to share their knowledge and make significant inputs to the learning and teaching process (Naidoo et al., 2011).

Bertelson (2008) explains this further suggesting that marketisation is leading to vocationalism, whereby universities are making academic programmes more vocational in nature because that is what students are demanding. This can be seen with the increasing use of work placements, exemptions from professional qualifications and programmes and assessments being designed to develop transferable skills on both undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes. Students expect that studying at University will provide them with the personal attributes required in order to successfully position themselves in a capitalist system (Molesworth et al., 2009). However, some personal attributes are very difficult to be taught or learned and this may result in students leaving

University with the feeling that they have not achieved their expectations and therefore not received value for money. Students demanding their rights as consumers become acquisitive rather than inquisitive learners. Many are now learning in order to acquire job relevant qualifications rather than seeking to learn out of interest for its own sake (Daymon and Durkin, 2013). Some students no longer attend University to be a scholar or learner of their chosen subject, but because they want to have a degree in order to secure a professional job, and to become a more employable person. Naidoo et al. (2011, p.1145) explain how students "will apply pressures on universities to make courses more relevant to the skills they require for the workplace". This type of consumer student may wish to achieve maximum outcomes with minimum effort, and expect academics to just give them what they need to pass.

These changes in higher education are leading to a drastic change in the workload of academic staff as the expectations of what they can deliver are significantly increased from both students and University management. Molesworth et al. (2009) explains how academics are now just employees who must have publications, an RAE score, high teaching scores and consultancy work in order to be successful and receive better job titles and performance related pay. Increasing pressure is being put on academics from both students who expect them to deliver success because they have paid for it and also from middle and senior management who want to see their University meeting performance measurements in order to climb various published league tables, and be more competitive in the future. However, Drummond (2004) suggests that the importance attached to league tables and the concentration of senior managers on improving their published position is diverting effort away from activities that add value from the perspective of students and academic departments. Lynch (2006) suggested that marketisation leads to the production of professionals who are more commercially orientated instead of being orientated towards the public interest. It is no longer enough for academics to be scholars within a University. Naidoo et al. (2011, p.1145) states that the introduction of consumerist policies "are attempts to change, fundamentally, the terms on which education takes place in universities".

In the longer term, this consumer approach will have an impact on the development of the economy. Naidoo et al. (2011, p.1145) explains how "universities are expected to contribute to each country's competitive edge in the global marketplace by producing and disseminating economically productive knowledge". However, Molesworth et al. (2009) suggest that this type of marketised education is not an effective preparation for the workplace. It does not provide graduates with the critical thinking skills that are necessary to deal with technological and societal changes that are taking place in the real world all of the time. The customers (students) perception of quality may be perverse. Whereby, immediate satisfaction is gained by achieving the qualification, but at the expense of the longer term interest (Daymon & Durkin, 2013). Therefore, in the longer term, the economy will begin to suffer as organisations are unable to recruit employees

with the relevant skills for future developments. In many cases, currently, the development of programmes is driven by the demands of students rather than the requirements of potential employers. This could be overcome by universities working with national and local organisations to ensure that programmes are being developed that meet their needs.

Whether individual universities and academics agree or disagree with the concept, the marketisation of higher education it is taking place and is likely to continue in to the future. Therefore, research needs to be conducted and appropriate strategies put in place if UK universities are to compete successfully in the global market for higher education in the future. Important concepts to be considered as part of those strategies are those of student choice and satisfaction. These will be discussed further later in the Literature review but introduced now in relation to the marketisation of higher education.

The marketisation of higher education has led to the introduction of student surveys at both undergraduate (NSS) and postgraduate taught level (PTES) to measure a number of quality indicators including overall student satisfaction in order to provide more detailed information to improve student choice on application. Palmer and Koenig-Lewis (2011, p.1210) suggest that "efforts to measure satisfaction have been an important component of marketisation within the higher education sector". As the supply of academic provision exceeds demand universities need to use customer satisfaction measurement techniques similar to those used in the commercial services in order to attract potential students. They continue to explain how "many universities seek to maintain their competitive positioning by putting great effort into measuring and managing items of quality that are incorporated in quality ratings and rankings of external accreditation bodies" (Palmer & Koenig-Lewis, 2011, p.1210). Senior managers within universities take the results of these surveys extremely seriously and apply pressure for academic practices to be changed in line with student requests (Naidoo et al, 2011). Therefore, "consumer choice will foster competition between universities to result in more responsive, flexible, efficient, and better quality teaching" (Naidoo et al., 2011, p.1152).

It is also suggested that increased marketisation has led to "universities developing a more in depth understanding of student needs and providing courses that are designed specifically for market demand" (Naidoo et al., 2011, p.1154). However, they go on to explain how course leaders should not be continually adapting programmes in response to rapidly changing requirements to the extent that consumer expectations are valued more than quality (Naidoo et al., 2011). Gruber, Chowdhury and Reppel (2001, p.1263) agree stating that "professors are in a more advantageous position than service employees in other consumer service industries, as they have greater discretion in carrying out tasks they perceive as appropriate to meet student expectations". Due to the different countries that these research studies were conducted, it can be assumed that professors and course leaders were carrying out a similar role. In addition, course leaders should

not be making the assumption that student consumers always act in a rational fashion. Many of the decisions that they make will be influenced by life experiences, social relationships and historical contexts.

This research study understands the importance of student satisfaction and how this may be influenced by expectations. It considers how postgraduate taught student expectations have been influenced by the background factors of nationality, age and gender. The importance of this research in relation to the marketisation of higher education is confirmed by Ledden et al. (2011, p.1235) who states that "research in to the student experience is necessary in order to understand how institutions might respond to market forces in the climate of increased competition". Ng and Forbes (2009) agree suggesting that it does not matter what universities think students want, as it is clear that students are the consumers of higher education. In this case, it is a student's satisfaction in the consumption of the university experience that is important. In addition, "competition among higher education providers has created a growing imperative for educators to understand the choice and decision making process amongst applicants" (Ledden et al., 2011, p.1235). This research study will also consider the key influencers in the decision making process for postgraduate taught students.

The discussion here highlights that whether marketisation and the changing nature of students is seen to be having a positive or negative influence on higher education it is something that universities and academics need to take in to consideration and create strategies to deal with. An important aspect of marketisation and the development of strategies for the future is a consideration of the assumptions behind the student as customer model.

2.5 Are students customers?

There are arguments for classifying students in a number of different ways including customers, products, clients, and co-workers (Serenko, 2011). For the purpose of this research, before expectations can be considered in relation to students, the debate as to whether students are customers' needs to be evaluated. Finney and Finney (2010) describe this as the student-ascustomer [SAC] model of higher education.

The SAC model of higher education "highlights students as significant stakeholders in their education" (Finney & Finney, 2010, p.277). Students are customers because they are "engaged in a value exchange relationship, and are able to exercise choice by electing institutions that best meet their personal needs" (Serenko, 2011, p.282). If universities are to compete in the market for PGT education then they need to consider these needs or expectations in order that potential students choose to study on their programmes. The research by Serenko (2011) was considering students in Canada, however, it is also true in this country. In the UK higher education students are

considered to be the core or primary customers of a University, because they are the recipients most directly served by the organisation (Douglas, Douglas & Barnes, 2006 and Guilbault, 2016). It is argued, therefore, that they will be the person making the judgement about customer satisfaction and service quality.

There is evidence that suggests that the higher education sector in the UK does consider students to be customers of the universities. Government papers in 2002 and 2003 "identified students as the stakeholders at the centre of higher education" (Lomas, 2007, p.32). More recently, a Government white paper in 2011 was entitled 'Students at the heart of the system' (Government White Paper, 2011). This 2011 paper suggested the introduction of the Key Information Statistics [KIS] for undergraduate students and the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey [PTES] for PGT students in order to provide more detailed information about universities and particular programmes to potential applicants. Even before this paper was published, Lomas (2007) had explained how the Government believes that using this type of survey to provide information about universities to potential students will help them to evolve in to 'intelligent customers' and therefore help to improve the quality of provision.

In comparison, there are a number of researchers who disagree with this model. Guilbault (2016) suggests that the most common argument is that if the concept of student as customer is followed then students must be given what they want. This may be in conflict with what is really needed to provide a quality education. Bay and Daniel (2001) argue that treating students as a customer gives them power and encourages them to blame the University for their short-comings if they don't achieve what they expected to. Universities should not have to "pander to the short term demands of students in order to ensure satisfaction" (Mark, 2013, p3). However, it is also argued that this view is now outdated as "the view that the customer is always right is no longer the prevailing view in marketing" (Guilbault, 2016, p.137). In addition, Bay and Daniel (2001) also suggest that students are not customers because they rarely pay the full cost of their own education, it is often subsidised by others, including the Government, parents and employers. Therefore, they do not have a realistic sense of the value in the way that a true paying customer would.

Other authors would disagree with this opinion, as they suggest that

higher education provision is a service and given that PGT students mostly fund their own tuition, it is not unreasonable to think of students as the customer, and for universities to adopt a more customer led approach rather than just relying on their product to sell itself (Jancey & Burns, 2013, p.313).

Guilbault (2016, p.136) suggests that it is a "natural consequence of taking marketing in higher education seriously". Even so, Mark (2013) suggests that many academics are reluctant to embrace the SAC model. This is because higher education is not the same as the business world and success and failure cannot be measured in the same way. Other arguments against the model include that of 'academic entitlement' or the "tendency to possess an expectation of academic success without taking personal responsibility for that success" (Vuori, 2013, p.177). In order to overcome this, alternative models have been suggested that "emphasize student accountability in that each requires the student to take an active role in producing knowledge" (Finney, 2010, p.278). This relates back to the concept that any customer is involved in an exchange relationship and therefore, learning is a two way process that the student must take some responsibility for. Guilbault (2016, p.136) explains how higher education "should be considered as an experiential service, where the focus is on the experience of the consumer when interacting with the organisation". This situation is not unique to students and can be seen in many other customer and service provider relationships. Therefore, as discussed by Finney and Finney (2010) arguments against the SAC model are over simplifying the role of a customer as not all customer relationships are the same. There does not always have to be an exchange of money for a particular good or service for a customer relationship to exist. In addition, "the supplier-customer relationship is more collaborative now than it was in the past, and customers are no longer viewed as passive recipients, but as active participants in service delivery and co-producers of the services they receive" (Mark, 2013, p.3). This should be true in the service of education as students pay for the service provided but they also need to actively participate in the learning process if they are to graduate successfully. Students should consider themselves to be the coproducers of learning, and therefore, being customer focussed does not have to mean that students are not accountability for their own success (Finney & Finney, 2010 and Mark, 2013).

Overall, the debate continues in to the current education setting. Tricker (2003) suggested that students increasingly believe that they are the customers of a service. Therefore, universities and the staff working within these institutions are the service providers. It could be argued that if students think they are customers, then the universities who treat them as such will be more competitive in the market. If this is the case, then their "needs must be sought and integrated into broad strategic planning and the development of courses" (Jancey & Burns, 2013, p.313). Guilbault (2016) suggests that if students are excluded from the role of customer then this will have an impact on student satisfaction. In turn, this will affect recruitment and retention both of which are becoming increasingly important in the more competitive environment. They continue to explain that "the reluctance to accept students as customers seems to be based on a limited and outdated views about what a customer is and does" (Guilbault, 2016, p.139). This research will concentrate on the theory that students are customers, following the SAC model as it is consistent with the objective of considering the importance of their expectations.

2.6 Expectations

2.6.1 Definition of Expectations

Discussion regarding customer expectations can usually be found in the marketing literature. It is an important concept in relation to any product or service, and an area of research that has been around for a significant length of time. However, Voss et al. (2007) suggest that "the issue of customer expectations is still a neglected area" (p.950). Evidence would suggest that this is true as research as recent as Walker and Baker (2000), McKnight (2009), Hsieh and Yuan (2010) and Cant and Erdis (2012) rely on the research of Parasuraman et al., (1985 & 1991) both of which are over twenty years old, as the key findings in this area.

The literature that does exist suggests that there are a variety of definitions for expectations depending upon the context in which they are being used. However, many of the definitions follow a similar theme around developing initial ideas of the perceived benefits of a product or service before purchase and using these as a measurement for what is actually received. Examples including Walker and Baker (2000), Higgs et al. (2005) show that the most basic ways in which expectations are being defined are still very similar today to those being used in the past. More recent research by Lobo and Gurney (2014) began with the definition that "the term expectation refers to a strong belief that something will happen or be the case" (p.731). An alternative, from a product or service point of view says that they are "the desires or wants of customers" (Hsieh & Yuan, 2010, p.1130). As mentioned previously, Parasuraman et al. (1991) is one of the key texts regarding expectations that is often referred to in more recent research. They suggest that customer expectations can be broken down into two levels. The first level being a desired expectation, or the level of service a customer hopes to receive, and the second being an adequate expectation, or a level of service that a customer believes is acceptable. The difference between the two levels of expectation will provide "the extent to which consumers recognize and are willing to accept heterogeneity" in the provided service (Zeithaml, Parasuraman & Berry, 1990, p.6). This difference can be described as the zone of tolerance. In other words, a particular service may not provide exactly what a customer was expecting but is it still adequate and therefore acceptable to them. The size of this zone will depend upon how willing the consumers are to accept the differences. The position of the upper and lower limits will vary from consumer to consumer.

Research has produced arguments both for and against the idea of a new or novice consumer developing expectations about a particular product or service. Authors such as O'Neil and Palmer (2003) suggest that very little is known about how expectations are formed by novice consumers, but that expectations cannot be developed about a product or service when they have little, if any, knowledge about it. Higgs et al. (2005) argued that customers with little, or limited, previous

experience do form expectations. However, these expectations will be unsophisticated compared to more experienced consumers who will have developed more realistic expectations. This would imply that all customers will have developed some expectations about a particular product or service, regardless of whether they are experienced or novice. How realistic this expectation is will, in part, be influenced by the amount of their previous experience or knowledge, and this could have an impact on the level of satisfaction achieved.

In addition, consumer expectations are not static but develop with time and experience. Although novice consumers may have created initial expectations these are likely to change and develop alongside their experience of the product or service. Higgs et al. (2005) suggest that they would expect novice consumers' expectations to change as their experience develops. In many cases customer expectations will be more realistic after some experience of the product or service, as expectations will have developed in line with what is provided. "Participation in the service experience sharpens the consumer's expectations and aligns them more closely with actual perception" (Higgs et al., 2005, p.62). The expectations of a more experienced consumer should be more realistic and closer to what may actually happen than those of a consumer that is new to the particular product or service. Licata et al. (2008) would agree, as they explain how "expectations would be modified and adjusted as consumers' experiences with a product/service increase or new information about the product/service is received" (p.176).

Despite the issues and problems for a business with the development of expectations by novice consumers, it is just as important to ensure that the expectations of experienced consumers are not neglected, as these may influence others. "Experienced customers are those customers that have a long experience with a brand and thus become strong influencers or opinion leaders" (Shamma & Hassan, 2013, p.384). The management of these experienced customers is important for all organisations if customer satisfaction is to be maintained and increased. They are able to influence perceptions and behaviour and have a great influence on first time, novice consumers. Due to the continuing improvements in information communication technology "customers can now gain near perfect information on their purchasing selections and options" (Shamma & Hassan, 2013, p.384). Many more customers now have easy access to worldwide information about products and services, and more accessible communication with experienced customers using the internet and social media. Novice consumers are able to research a particular product or service in order to create much more realistic expectations, and make more informed decisions. However, this will only be true if the information that is made available to them is realistic, appropriate and up to date. This gives organisations the additional burden of managing these types of communications regularly and effectively. This also relates back to the issue of managing the expectations of experienced consumers and opinion leaders. These are the customers who may be posting reviews on internet or social media sites, discussing their experiences and whether their

expectations of a particular product or service were achieved. For this reason, Shamma and Hassan (2013) explain that it is crucial that organisations try to ensure that the expectations of experienced customers are satisfied. All organisations should be aiming to provide valuable experiences in order that the expectations of experienced customers are either met or exceeded. This will create "positive perceptions of values to experienced customers resulting in positive word of mouth which can influence the less experienced and first time customers" (Shamma & Hassan, 2013, p.385).

Whatever the definition used or how they are developed, an understanding of customer expectations is important in all organisations. Shamma and Hassan (2013) explain that without a clear understanding of customer needs, organisations will find it difficult to be successful in the marketplace. Meeting customer expectations during the first encounter will be important to the organisation in order to gain repeat custom or have new customers recommended to use their service. Parasuraman et al. (1991) suggest that in order to achieve business goals, organisations need to understand customer expectations during service delivery. This is still true today, as more recently, Shamma and Hassan (2013) explained how "the success of today's business is heavily dependent on the adaptability and flexibility to adjust to the changing requirements of customers" (p.380). All organisations need to have an awareness of their customer's expectations and how these may be changing so that they are more able to be flexible and adapt quickly to their changing needs.

2.6.2 Expectations in Service Organisations

Managing customer expectations in a service organisation will be different to that of an organisation with a physical product. This is due to the unique characteristics of delivering a service. Parasuraman et al. (1985) identified these characteristics as i) "intangibility", how a service is not an object but more like a performance. Zeithaml (1981) explains, therefore, how quality cannot be tested and verified prior to the sale taking place. ii) "Heterogeneity", how the same service, in the same organisation, can be different depending on the provider, the customer and the day. It is affected by the consistency of the service personnel, and so what a firm intends to deliver and what the customer actually receives may be entirely different (Booms & Bitner, 1981). iii) "inseparability", how the production and consumption of the service cannot be separated, they take place together, and therefore, the quality is taking place during the delivery of the service (Lehtinen & Lehtinen, 1982). These characteristics "make services high in experience and credence qualities, so consumers have a more difficult time in evaluating services than they do goods" (Walker & Baker, 2000, P.412). The issue here is that customers of a service make their judgement whilst the service is taking place, therefore, they may have little time to consider if their expectations have been met and whether they are satisfied or not. In contrast, the customers of a product have more time to reflect on the benefits that it provides. The effect of customer

expectations in service organisations can be broken down in to two key areas; customer satisfaction and service quality.

2.6.2.1 Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is defined by Luk and Layton (2002) and Hsieh and Yuan (2010) as the difference between prior expectations, what they think they will receive, and actual performance of the product or service in practice. This shows a clear link between customer satisfaction and expectations, and is a common theme throughout the literature. For example, Ofir and Simonson (2007) and Hsieh and Yuan (2010) explain the importance of the relationship between the two and that exceeding customer expectations is the key to customer satisfaction. The smaller the gap between prior expectations and actual performance, the closer the perception of what the customer actually received with what they expected to receive, and the higher the level of customer satisfaction. The issue arising here for service organisations is that "the higher the initial expectations, the more difficult it becomes to satisfy a customer" (Walker & Baker, 2000, p.413). This clearly links back to the previous section that discussed how initial customer expectations are developed, especially if they have not experienced the service before, and whether these initial expectations are realistic. If prior expectations of the service are too high, the gap between expectations and perceptions of the service will be larger, and therefore, the customer is less likely to be satisfied. It is important to measure customer satisfaction, however, it cannot be considered as a one off event, but more part of a quality improvement programme (Luk & Layton, 2002 and McKnight, 2009). The "notion of continuous improvement has to be embedded in to the culture as the environment is rapidly changing and the expectations of customers change over time" (McKnight, 2009, p.82).

In addition to customer satisfaction service organisations should also be concerned with service quality. Walker and Baker (2000) explain the key differences between measuring customer satisfaction and service quality. Customer satisfaction considers the gap between customers predicted expectations, what they think will happen, and perceived performance, whereas, service quality measures the gap between desired expectations, what they would like to happen, and perceived performance.

2.6.2.2 Service Quality

Service quality is defined as "the difference between what service customers expect and the service which a company delivers" (Walker & Baker, 2000, p.413). This is an important concept as "most consumers enter a service encounter with some form of expectation and whether or not these expectations are met will have a bearing on perceived service quality" (Hill, 1995, p.12). Again, the relationship between service quality and knowledge of customer expectations is evident here. In order to conform to customer expectations organisations need to know what they are in

the first place. Zeithaml et al. (1990) explains that the critical factor in managing service quality is understanding consumer expectations, how these expectations have developed, and how they will affect service quality. This is because "delivering service quality means conforming to customer expectations on a consistent basis" (Parasuraman et al., 1985, p.42). The issue regarding services is similar for service quality as customer satisfaction. It "is more difficult for the consumer to evaluate than the quality of goods" (McKnight, 2009, p.81). This is because quality evaluations of a service "are not made solely on the outcome of the service, they also involve evaluations of the process of service delivery" (Parasuraman et al., 1985, p.42). Consumers are making a judgement regarding the service itself, the way that the service is delivered, and the person delivering the service.

When considering service quality there are a number of different factors that can be taken in to consideration and measured. A customer service gap model was developed by Parasuraman et al. (1985) which identifies five gaps that may exist in service quality. Gap 1 is concerned with whether organisations have an accurate understanding of what it is that their customers expect from a particular service. It is "the difference between customer expectations and management perceptions of customer expectations" (Luk & Layton, 2002, p.110). This is the understanding gap, or the "the difference between customer service expectations and the service provider's understanding of customer expectations" (McKnight, 2009, p.85). Do service providers really understand what level of service is expected by customers, and is this understanding consistent? In order to answer this question "measuring management perceptions of customer expectations should be equally as important as directly measuring customers' expectations" (Luk & Layton, 2002, p.110). The importance of having a good understanding of any differences that may exist is emphasised again by Zeithaml and Bitner (1996) and Arambewela, Hall and Zuhair (2005) who explain how an inaccurate understanding of what customers expect will lead to service performance that fails to meet expectations. This will create a gap that will have an effect on customer satisfaction. The level of customer satisfaction will be related to the size and direction of this gap.

Gap 2 identifies "the difference between management perceptions of customer expectations and service quality specifications" (Luk & Layton, 2002, p.110). This is the design gap, or the "gap between the service providers understanding of customer expectations and the design and specifications of service quality" (McKnight, 2009, p.85). A large gap could exist here if management have an inaccurate perception of customer expectations, the organisation did not understand customer expectations when the specification was developed, or the perception of expectations has changed since the specification was developed. Gap 3 explains "the difference between service quality specifications and the service actually delivered" (Luk & Layton, 2002, p.111). This is the delivery gap, or "the gap between the specification of service quality and the

actual service delivered" (McKnight, 2010, p.85). It is how "providers holding different perceptions of customer expectations might render the service in a way deviated from the specifications defined by management" (Luk & Layton, 2002, p.110). Parasuraman et al. (1985) explains how even when organisations produce guidelines for how to perform the service well, including how to treat consumers appropriately, a high level of service quality is not always certain. This is because two customers could receive the same service, at the same time, from the same organisation, but have a completely different experience because of the way that the service is delivered or the person it is being delivered by. Therefore, once again, service firms may have more difficulty in trying to meet or exceed consumer expectations. In many cases, this is because of constraints and inflexibility within the specifications which prevent them from delivering what the consumer expects. An important issue here could be for organisations to keep specifications up to date as the expectations of customers change over time, and that the employees who are delivering the service are aware of the guidelines that they are working within, and the level of flexibility that is acceptable. Luk and Layton (2002) suggest that if gaps 2 and 3 exist within an organisation then maintaining service quality consistently will be more difficult. These gaps should not be considered in isolation but examined together "to add insights on how the gap between service specifications and service delivery can be effectively managed" (Luk & Layton, 2002, p.111).

Gap 4 is related to the marketing activities associated with a particular service. It is the "difference between service delivery and what is communicated about the service to customers" (Luk & Layton, 2002, p.110). This is the communications gap or "the difference between what is actually delivered and what has been promised compared to the previous experiences of the customer with similar services" McKnight (2009, p.85). Parasuraman et al. (1985) suggest that marketing communications by an organisation can affect the expectations of consumers. It is, therefore, important that marketing materials provide potential customers with a realistic picture of the service that they are likely to receive, rather than raising expectations that can then not be achieved. "Promising more than can be delivered will raise initial expectations but lower perceptions of quality when the promises are not fulfilled" (Parasuraman et al., 1985, p.45). In order to remedy this situation, Hill (1995) explains how organisations, in taking steps to manage expectations, should inform consumers of what is, and what is not possible, and outline the reasons why. Potential consumers will then have a much more realistic expectation of the service that they are likely to receive from your organisation. This will help to improve both service quality and customer satisfaction as "external communications can affect not only consumer expectations about a service but also consumer perceptions of the delivered service" (Parasuraman et al., 1985, p.46).

Finally, Gap 5 concludes the customer service model by considering "the discrepancy between customers' expectations on the service and their perceptions of the service performance" (Luk & Layton, 2002, p.110). This is the service gap and it "arises from the difference between the

perceived service and the expected service" McKnight (2009, p.84). For organisations to be able to identify the gap it "requires customers to have a prior perception of what excellence looks like for the service being researched" (McKnight, 2009, p.84). This may be very difficult and often unrealistic if they have no prior experience of a particular service. "The key to ensuring good service quality is meeting or exceeding what consumers expect from the service" (Parasuraman et al.,1985, p.46). However, this may be difficult if customer expectations are unrealistic.

Overall, "improving service quality and increasing customer satisfaction, by reducing the gaps between customer expectation and perceived level of performance, is an on-going task" (McKnight, 2009, p.80). Shamma and Hassan (2013) explain how companies will gain competitive advantage by recognising customer expectations, identifying if any gaps exist and taking action to minimise gaps between actual performance and desired standards. These standards are set not only by the product or service specifications but also by the expectations of customers.

2.7 Student Expectations

Student expectations can be defined as "a forward looking belief reflecting a students' preenrolment assessment of the programme's ability to deliver required services in the future" (Serenko, 2011, p.284). Student expectations will not always be the same, and "in the same way that beauty is in the eye of the beholder, learning expectations are in the eye of the learner" (Lobo & Gurney, 2014, p.730). This suggests that each individual student will have developed their own expectations of a particular programme, and many factors may have contributed to shaping those expectations, not only of what they will learn, but also, of what they will achieve from a particular programme. Sander et al. (2000) and Niehoff, Yurnley, Yen and Sheu (2001) suggest that students from different cultures might hold different expectations, and these will be affected by factors such as; culture, gender, university type and mode of study. This will result in students enrolling on to programmes with a variety of particular expectations to meet their own specific requirements.

The concept discussed by Higgs et al. (2005) that even novice consumers will have developed expectations is true in an educational context. "University applicants are extremely rarely exposed to a University programme prior to actual enrolment, and therefore, they are unlikely to form reliable and valid expectations" (Serenko, 2011, p.292). Although some students enrolling on to a PGT programme may have experienced higher education in some context in the past, they will be novice consumers of their current programme of study, and most will be novices to PGT education. They will have received education previously but in a different context, country, time period, institution, or educational level. Their experience on these programmes will have influenced their expectations for the current programme of study but may not be appropriate. Ham and Hayduk (2003) explain that a customer's levels of expectations are dependent on past experience and personal needs. As new students they do not know what they can expect from the University, and

therefore, their expectations may be too high or low. However, as they progress on a particular programme their expectations will develop and should become more realistic.

Licata et al. (2008) suggest that there are two factors other than prior experience that will influence expectations. Firstly, the expectations of another student will have some influence on a particular students own expectations. In particularly, students may be influenced in their choice of where to pursue their studies. This agreed with the earlier research by Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) who explain that students, but particularly international students, are "pushed" into education by external parties such as their parents. Johnston (2010) and Moogan and Baron (2003) also discuss how choices will be influenced by parties such as peers, teachers and careers officers. In addition family, but particularly parents, can play an important role in student expectations and decision making. Johnston (2010) suggests that parent's play a key role in the decision making process of young adults, but that this influence is likely to decline as they get older. They explain how due to this change in influence the decision making process between undergraduate and PGT study is likely to be different. Secondly, is the "self-perceived service role, or how much the consumer felt he/she will influence the level of service received" (Licata et al., 2008, p.178). This is especially important in an education setting given the "high level of consumer participation required in this context" (Licata et al., 2008, p.178). This agrees with the earlier discussion regarding students as customers and them being part of the learning process, rather than the PGT programme being a service that they purchase that then just takes place.

In addition to the two factors identified by Licata et al. (2008) there are several other influencers on student expectations. These include; "word of mouth communications, personal needs of consumers, past experience of the service, and external communications from the service provider" (Hill, 1995, p.13). Serenko (2011) explains word of mouth in this context as the inclination that a student will give an opinion about the programme to other people, both now and in the future. From a positive viewpoint, it could involve recommending a particular programme to a friend or encouraging others to apply. This will influence what these new students expect to achieve from enrolling on the programme. Word of mouth is an important concept as the service that students have received in the past or are receiving currently may influence the expectations of other students who enrol in the future. "It is widely held that the reputation of the institution, department or course is spread by word of mouth" (Pratt, Hillier & Mace, 1999, p.100).

Word of mouth communications and the use of peer networks may be a positive marketing tool. However, its impact needs to be considered carefully, when changes are made to programme or module specifications or new staff are brought on to the programme. This type of change may result in current student expectations not being met, and can result in negative communications being communicated very quickly. This is important in relation to the work of Shamma and Hassan (2013), discussed earlier, regarding managing the expectations of experienced customers. The

current students on a particular programme are the experienced consumers. They will become the opinion leaders and be seen as a credible source of information about the University and its programmes. This can have a great influence on the development of expectations and decision making of potential new students. "Their messages are believable due to the experience gained from the product or service therefore, it is important to target experienced customers" (Shamma & Hassan, 2013, p.384). Nowadays the experiences of these current and recently graduated students can be communicated quickly and easily around the world using social media. Therefore, from a universities point of view it is important to ensure that the expectations of current students are understood by course leaders, and are realistic and achievable. It is vital that these experienced consumers are satisfied with their programme of study, and feel that their expectations have been achieved. Hopefully, positive word of mouth communications will then take place, helping the programmes to continue to recruit and be successful in to the future.

Student expectations will also be influenced by the marketing materials produced by the University. Vuori (2013) suggests that universities use marketing materials to encourage prospective students to choose them. This includes explaining the unique or different aspects of the programme to try and appeal to their target market and distinguish themselves from competitors. The messages that students receive from these materials will have influenced their expectations of a particular programme. It is, therefore, important that any messages portrayed through these materials are realistic about the learning experiences and outcomes associated with a particular programme. It is then more likely that students will develop appropriate expectations of what can be achieved. Arambewela et al. (2005) explain how universities should be careful not to produce marketing and promotional materials that develop artificially inflated expectations of what can be achieved on a particular programme. "Student expectations should be carefully examined and analysed in order to manage expectations through the delivery of objective information" (Arambewela et al., 2005, p.122). "The aim must be to put the best possible gloss on services provided for reasons of competitiveness, but without making false claims that 'everything in the garden is rosy'" (Hill, 1995, p.14). Ham and Hayduk (2003) discuss that it is more likely that student satisfaction will be achieved if realistic marketing materials are produced. The facts presented to students at induction and during the programme should be consistent with the information that was communicated to them in the recruitment process. Higgs et al. (2005), explain that if students enter a PGT programme with expectations that are too high, however these have been developed, then this will tend to frustrate satisfaction.

One of the unique selling points of PGT education, in general, but also of particular programmes is the career opportunities upon graduation. However, "some universities are not doing enough to inform students of the likely progression and employment outcomes from completing a course" (Spittle, 2012, p.23). Although, a later report disagrees suggesting that "many of the approaches

that higher education institutions are using to motivate learners to actively consider postgraduate courses are to make connections between career progression and postgraduate study" (Mellors-Bourne et al., 2014, p.65). However, as part of the marketing materials, it is important that the information about career progression is objective and realistic in order that appropriate expectations are developed. A good example is seen on the PGT section of the Keele University website. This states that "if your reason for undertaking postgraduate study is to enhance your career prospects, it is important to check that the course will help you achieve this goal". It goes on to say "there is no guarantee that successful completion of the course will lead automatically to employment, and it is advisable to talk to the department concerned about the destinations of previous students" (Keele University, 2016).

2.7.1 Student Expectations; Service Quality and Satisfaction

O'Neill and Palmer (2004) and Ham and Hayduk (2003) explain how service quality in a University is the difference between a student's expectation of what they will receive and their perception of what was actually delivered. Serenko (2011) defines student satisfaction as how well a particular programme has met student expectations. As in all service organisations, service quality and customer satisfaction will be an important concept for universities and PGT programmes to take in to consideration. "Students are customers of an educational service and have prior expectations of the level of service they would ideally like to receive from an educational institution" (Arambewela et al., 2005, p.111). If their expectations are met or exceeded, then they will be satisfied. However, if expectations are not met then they will be dissatisfied (Arambewela et al., 2005). Universities throughout the world are now in competition for students at a national and international level and in order to recruit and retain students, they should be aiming to improve student satisfaction and reduce student dissatisfaction. "Student satisfaction is a key strategic variable in maintaining a competitive position with long term benefits arising from student loyalty, and positive word of mouth communication" (Arambewela et al., 2005, p.105). This will impact on the University, the same as any other service organisation, because "positive perceptions of service quality can lead to student satisfaction and satisfied students may attract new students through word of mouth communication and return themselves to the University to take further courses" (Voss et al., 2007, p.950). In order to achieve this competitive advantage universities need to know what it is that they can offer that will create satisfaction for both current and potential students. Therefore, "educational institutions should carefully analyse key factors contributing to student satisfaction and develop strategies accordingly" (Arambewela et al., 2005, p.106). In recent years the higher education sector has recognised the role of service quality and student satisfaction in measuring the quality of programmes and it is now measured regularly in national evaluations such as the undergraduate National Student Survey [NSS] and PTES.

The issue once again, is how these expectations have been developed and how realistic they will be given that a large proportion of students will be novice consumers. Whether the expectations are realistic or not may not be the key issue, but rather the importance of knowing what they are so that they can be managed before enrolment, during induction and throughout the programme of study. Zeithaml et al. (1990) Byrne and Flood (2005) and Voss et al. (2007) explain how the expectations of students need to be known at the beginning of a programme if a quality service is to be provided. Hill (1995) and Voss et al. (2007) explain that course leaders need to collect information about current student's expectations, and this should take place on application, at induction, and during their time on the programme, so that their expectations are managed throughout the process. This ensures that student expectations are in line, as much as possible, with what can actually be delivered and service quality can be improved. Voss et al. (2007) and Lobo and Gurney (2014) suggest that if course leaders know what their students are expecting, they may be able to adapt aspects of the programme to meet these expectations, which should have a positive impact on perceived service quality and levels of satisfaction. By discussing with students whether their expectations are achievable or not, and how their expectations may need to become more realistic, dissatisfaction with the programme can be kept to a minimum. Students new to PGT study will have formed views, from a variety of sources, as to what they expect to achieve by studying on the programme. How realistic these expectations are will affect whether they are satisfied with the outcome of the programme. "Both conceptual and empirical research suggests that expectations are often imprecise, implicit or unrealistic" (Higgs et al, 2005, p.53). However, it is likely that student expectations will develop as they are inducted and begin studying on the programme. "The student's expectations following enrolment will be negatively disconfirmed (if performance is less than anticipated), confirmed (if performance matches expectations), or positively disconfirmed (if performance exceeds expectations)" (Russell, 2005, p.69). An important consideration for course leaders is that "students expect more from their universities than the universities realise" (Ham & Hayduk, 2003, p.238). This is evidenced by the results of the 2014 PTES where only 83% of respondents said that they were satisfied with their course. The analysis of the survey states that PGT students are less satisfied than the 2014 undergraduates who completed the NSS. This is because PGT students expect more from their programmes and are therefore sometimes disappointed. Universities should take this in to consideration in order to try and improve the quality of their PGT provision (Soilemetzidis, Bennet & Leman, 2014).

Ham and Hayduk (2003) and Byrne and Flood (2005) explain how course leaders should also be communicating their own expectations to students. Communicating with students about expectations helps to "reduce the gap between expectations and the perceptions of University performance" (Ham & Hayduk, 2003, p.240). Reducing this gap will help to increase student satisfaction and improve retention.

2.8 What are student expectations? – Previous studies

Serenko (2011) suggests that, research in education regarding expectations tends to concentrate on the process of service delivery, and teaching and learning. There is very little about the expected outcomes, in relation to how the programme meets personal requirements of students. However, the literature on service delivery suggests that both of these aspects are important if an organisation is to develop strategies to improve customer satisfaction and remain competitive. The literature that is available suggests that career development, the development of transferable skills, and other reasons are the most popular expectations for the outcome of a PGT programme.

2.8.1 Career Development

The key theme that can be drawn from the previous research relating to PGT expectations over the last twenty years is that of career development. Tight (1992) and Clark and Anderson (1992) both studied part time PGT students and showed that career development and gaining knowledge were the most popular reasons for study. Pratt et al, (1999) found "high ratings for gaining a theoretical perspective, acquiring skills and knowledge necessary for a current or future job, and getting a better job in the field" (p.98). Donaldson and McNicholas (2004) and Jamieson (2007) suggest that the improvement of career prospects or their current job situation was the most important motivator for studying a PGT qualification. This was closely followed by a desire to gain or update skills, or to become more employable, by improving their ability to do the job and make it more satisfying. This means that students want courses that relate to work, that provide them with relevant theory, and enable them to do their work more effectively. Liu (2010) agreed showing that career aspirations were the main motivation for the choice of PGT programmes. They explain how "most respondents appeared to think that they would have access to better employment with a postgraduate qualification" (Liu, 2010, 821). This is summarised by Haman et al. (2010) that PGT students have "high expectations concerning the future usefulness of their learning experience" (p.627). Category (2013) also discussed that many students who undertake a MA or MBA are looking to change either employer or careers. Many students believe that a PGT degree would improve their employment prospects. Morgan (2014) suggests that "postgraduate study by the individual is increasingly undertaken for career advancement rather than self-fulfilment" (p.170). Finally, Mellors-Bourne et al. (2014) describes postgraduate students as career centric, and suggests that developing their career is a key motivating factor for when looking for an appropriate PGT programme. All of these research findings are supported by Soilemetzidis et al. (2014) in the PTES who found that 58% and 55% of respondents cited career progression and improving employment prospects respectively as the motivation for enrolling on to a PGT programme of study. There is evidence to suggest that this expectation for career development is not only associated with PGT students from the younger age groups. Davey (2002) reported that a PGT programme can be

important for those in middle age who want to either stay in their current position or attempt to reenter the employment market.

Also associated with career development, Sastry (2004) and Spittle (2012) explain how PGT qualifications are strongly associated with entry in to the professions and are becoming the normal entry criteria in occupations where this has not been previously the case. HEPI, 2010 explain that having a PGT qualification offers a huge advantage to those trying to enter the professions. It is suggested that 94% of postgraduates are likely to get a role in the professions compared to 78% of undergraduates. However, in the 2014 PTES only 17% of respondents said that a professional requirement was their motivation to study (Soilemetzidis et al., 2014). The earnings premium is also closely associated with career progression and employment in the professions, and previously discussed regarding the importance of PGT education. Sastry (2004) discusses how in the UK holders of postgraduate qualifications have an economic advantage and tend to earn significantly more than holders of undergraduate degrees. However, the concept of credential inflation continues and the pay premium of postgraduate study is decreasing as increasing numbers of completing postgraduate students compete for jobs in UK workplaces.

2.8.2 Transferable Skills

There is also evidence to suggest that studying for a PGT qualification may not always lead to the career developments that a potential student is expecting. Lightfoot (2012) discusses how students considering PGT study need to think hard about their reasons and how it will help their future careers. They continue to suggest that some potential employers are biased against PGT students because they are not able to explain either their motivation to study or what they have learned on the programme. Sastry (2004) and Category (2013) explain how many full time students will be deferring the experience of working by choosing to study at PGT level. However, recruiting organisations put a lot of emphasis on workplace skills. The PGT qualification might accelerate their job application but they will need to be able to demonstrate that the content of their course, and the learning and assessment methods used has enhanced their employability in order to complete the recruitment process successfully.

Therefore, course leaders need to think carefully about the skills that are being developed by their PGT students during the time that they are studying on the programme. They need to ensure that employability skills are being developed throughout as graduating with an academic qualification is no longer enough. Dye (2013) states that "expanding knowledge and skills was the second most frequently cited motivation to study on a postgraduate taught course" (p.15). The question is raised with regard to PGT study of "was the subject knowledge important, or was it more to do with the generic skills that they acquired?"(Jamieson, 2007, p.375). If students are to achieve their expectation of better employment then transferable skills required by employers need to be

integrated in to any PGT programme. This is especially important, given that "employers were finding it difficult to recruit postgraduates with the specific skills that they needed" (Spittle, 2012, p.28).

Claussen, Grohsjean, Luger and Probst (2014) suggest that these types of transferable skills should be developed throughout a manager's career. The development of managerial skills is essential for a manager's job promotion, and can be described as talent management. However, Olszewski-Kubilius and Thomson (2015) suggest that "talent development can mean different things to different people" (p.5). This would agree with Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries and Gonzalez-Cruz (2013) who explain that "talent can mean whatever a particular business leader or writer wants it to mean and many different definitions of talent can be found" (p.291). In relation to this research study, recent definitions of talent that are most appropriate are given by Silzer and Dowell (2010) and Ullrich and Smallwood (2012) regarding the skills and abilities of an individual, and what they are capable of contributing to the organisation. They suggest that talent is made up of competence, commitment and contribution. This does include some development of relevant transferable skills, however, talent is more than just these skills and involves other attributes such as commitment, contribution, and willingness to learn. Gallardo-Gallardo et al. (2013) suggest that talent is a natural ability. Therefore, although the skills and knowledge may be easy to teach, other characteristics included in talent are unique. Talent is virtually impossible to learn or teach, because not all people have the same amount of potential or ability.

2.8.3 Other reasons for postgraduate study

A number of other reasons have also been included in the literature regarding the motivations of PGT study. Pratt et al. (1999) cite personal satisfaction as the most important reason for study. Whilst, Category (2013) and Morgan (2014) suggests that for some students the opportunity to learn more about their subject, become qualified to work in specific industry, or advance to study for a PhD is important. In the PTES (2014) 56% of respondents cited personal interest as one of their motivations to study. In addition, 38% wished to progress to a higher level qualification such as a PhD (Soilemetzidis et al., 2014).

Also associated with personal satisfaction "some international students chose to study at postgraduate level because they wanted to spend more time in the UK" (Liu, 2007, p.821). Russell (2005) relates to this suggesting that the ability to improve or learn languages, and the availability of English language teaching facilities was an important consideration for postgraduates when choosing a location to study. International students will have "high expectations of the value of achieving a UK qualification. They believe that a UK qualification is recognised all over the world and can open many doors" (Russell, 2005, p.73).

The evidence discussed above would support the findings of Soilemetzidis et al. (2014) in the PTES that students have a variety of motivations for studying at PGT level. Therefore, course leaders should be catering for multiple aspirations, and not be exclusively focussed on either professional or research. The PGT market is often thought of as two separate groups of students; those motivated by professional goals and employment and those motivated by a research interest or aspiration. However, "student motivations are more complex and often combine contrasting reasons. Therefore, institutions will have to meet multiple needs" (Soilemetzidis et al., 2014).

2.9 Conclusion

The discussion in this chapter has shown that PGT programmes are an important aspect of the higher education market in the UK. They are a segment that has seen significant growth in recent years, mainly due to an increase in the number of international students. For a number of reasons, this growth is unlikely to continue at this pace in the future, and therefore, universities need to think carefully about how they can continue to recruit and retain students in order to keep their PGT programmes viable.

There is contrasting evidence as to whether students should be treated as the customers of a University or not. However, one theory as to how universities can remain competitive is to deliver the programmes as a service, and as individuals paying tuition fees, PGT students should be considered as customers. "The UK system needs to become more responsive to students as potential customers of and beneficiaries of higher education" (Mellors-Bourne et al., 2014, p.9). This research study will follow the SAC model as it is consistent with the value of understanding student expectations. If students are customers then it is important for universities to understand the needs and expectations of those customers, and to take these in to consideration when programmes are being designed and developed. Jancey and Burns (2013) explain how there are benefits for universities in identifying, understanding and acting upon, the particular requirements of PGT students. By satisfying the needs of students course leaders will assist in their retention and progression and this will help to promote a positive image of the University. By understanding student expectations universities can improve their marketing, information provision, recruitment and selection, as well as the overall student experience (Mellors-Bourne et al., 2014). However, customers are not all the same, and PGT students will have different needs and expectations. These differing needs are taken in to consideration in this research study by evaluating whether these student expectations are influenced by the background characteristics of nationality, age and gender.

Donaldson and McNicholas (2004) Spittle (2012) and Mellors-Bourne et al. (2014) agree that there is a lack of research about how student's expectations have been developed. However, universities need to have an understanding of why students are motivated to study for a PGT

qualification in the UK. They also need to investigate how they make decisions about what and where to study, and what information they use in coming to that decision. Universities need to be aware that this information will be individual to each particular student. However, "the Government should improve its understanding of the characteristics of the postgraduate population, in order to improve access to postgraduate study" (Mellors-Bourne et al., 2014, p10). Stuart et al. (2008) agrees research is necessary, stating that there is "limited research about why students decide to continue to study at postgraduate level" (p.3).

The growth in student numbers has increased the diversity of the student profile in postgraduate education, with greater variations in relation to nationality, gender, age and previous qualifications. HEPI (2010) agreed stating that "the diversity of the market for postgraduate education is huge" (p.59). This can generate a stimulating working environment by bringing together a variety of cultural knowledge and experience (Universities UK, 2010). Students "arrive from all over the world with diverse cultures and prior experiences" (Coates & Dickinson, 2012, p.295). The University of Huddersfield currently has students from over 120 countries across the world studying on the campus. This can help to enrich the experience of all students as they learn and benefit from the diverse knowledge and cultural experiences. However, this diversity can also create a number of issues for both the students and course leaders. Students from all over the world with different languages, cultures, traditions, and previous learning experiences are now enrolling on to PGT programmes. These differences in background may create a greater variety of expectations as to what the programme/qualification will achieve for them. By understanding expectations according to background any differences can be explained and addressed in order that strategies are developed to ensure that more students achieve the return they expected. The challenge for course leaders is to consider how the differing backgrounds influence these expectations, and to develop strategies to bridge the gap. Liu (2010, p.812) stated that "it is important that we ask how well we understand the variations in students' pre entry characteristics such as their motives, expectations and preparedness in order to facilitate teaching to an increasingly diverse student population". Strategies to bridge the gap may include; Firstly, ensuring that the expectations students have about the outcome of the programme are realistic, in terms of what the programme will provide for them and the opportunities it may create for the future. Secondly, ensuring that programmes are developed to meet the expectations of students will help to improve recruitment, motivation, achievement and overall satisfaction. As students are then more likely to have their expectations met and promote the University in the future.

This research study will consider how these differences in nationality, age and gender create variations in the expectations of students studying on PGT programmes. Identifying these differences in expectations and making a comparison with the perceptions of course leaders regarding the outcomes of a PGT programme is an important first step in UK universities

maintaining and developing their current advantage in terms of student numbers in this competitive market. Taylor (2002) suggests that as the market for international students is becoming more competitive, universities need to provide a better service for students who are more aware of their power as consumers, if not, the number of students that they are able to recruit in the future will be limited. The decrease in numbers between 2011/12 and 12/13 is perhaps a sign of this already taking place. Therefore, as suggested by HEPI (2010) it is important to ensure that the high quality UK PGT qualifications that are seen currently, are maintained, and that the nature of those qualifications is understood by students from a broad range of backgrounds.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Research Paradigms

The methodology used for any research study will be influenced by the conceptual framework in which the researcher is working. This framework is influenced by their beliefs and assumptions about reality, and therefore the research paradigm within which they are situated. Any researcher will see and investigate the world, and report their findings in different ways depending on the paradigm that they are working within. Any research carried out within a particular paradigm will have a number of similar characteristics in relation to its ontology, epistemology and methodology. This chapter will begin with a discussion of three research paradigms; positivism, interpretivism and pragmatism. The paradigm underlying the research methods used in this research study will also be introduced.

3.1.1 The Positivist Paradigm

The positivist paradigm believes that "the concepts and methods employed by the natural sciences can be applied to form a science of man or a natural science of society" (Giddens, 1974, p.3). A positivist research study will follow a realist ontology, assuming that "the social world is a real world made up of hard, tangible and relatively immutable facts that can be observed, measured and known for what they really are" (Sparkes, 1992, p.20). Usher (1996) explains that it makes the assumption that the world is objective, and therefore, any research carried out will be concerned with collecting objective facts. As part of the objectivity, it assumes that the research study and the researcher are separate entities. Any findings of the research will not have been influenced by the views and values of the person conducting the research. This is explained by Burrell and Morgan (1979, p.1) as "the reality to be investigated is external to the individual", and therefore, any research will "study systematically what is clear, factual and open to observation" (Pring, 2000, p.90).

The objectivist epistemology of a positivist assumes that "it is possible to identify and communicate the nature of knowledge as being hard, real and capable of being transmitted in tangible form" (Burrell & Morgan, 1979, p.2). Any research carried out under the positivist paradigm is concerned with the communication of facts, and assumes that the findings are not specific to the current circumstances but that generalisations can be made. This is seen to be possible because of a methodology that will "emphasise the importance of following systematic protocol and technique" (Sparkes, 1992, p.14). This will involve "the construction of scientific tests and the use of quantitative techniques for data analysis" (Burrell & Morgan, 1979, p.6-7).

However, many of the assumptions of the positivist paradigm; objectivity, the separation of fact from values, the externality of the researcher, and generalisability have created discussion in the

literature regarding its limitations. For example, Usher (1996) and Garrick (1999) both criticise this paradigm explaining how the adoption of these assumptions in research leads to findings that do not adequately represent the real world. Other paradigms have considered the world from another more social, point of view, where findings can be subjective, and fact and values cannot always be separated within the findings of the research. With this in mind, the interpretive paradigm will now be considered.

3.1.2 The Interpretive Paradigm

Thomas (2003) explains the interpretive paradigm as an understanding of the world as social construct, complex and constantly changing. In contrast to positivism, the interpretive paradigm follows an internalist – idealist ontology, assuming that "reality can only exist in the context of a mental framework, therefore, realities are multiple, and they exist in people's minds" (Guba, 1990, p.26). This implies that there are no hard facts, and no definite truth. Instead, there are a number of different interpretations of the same situation, as reality only exists in people's minds.

The subjectivist epistemology of an interpretivist assumes that "knowledge is soft, spiritual and based on experience and insight of a unique and personal nature" (Sparkes, 1992, p.13). Therefore, "knowledge can never be certifiable as ultimately true" (Guba, 1990, p.26). This is because reality is constantly changing, a consequence of human activity, and only "explainable in terms of multiple interacting factors" (Candy, 1991, p.432). The interpretive paradigm is not concerned with trying to achieve complete objectivity, but sees it as being more important to "understand the world as it is, and to understand the fundamental world of nature of the social world at the level of subjective experience" (Burrell & Morgan, 1979, p.28). Due to the changing nature and multiple realities, it is not possible to make generalisations based upon the understanding of an individual case.

Burrell & Morgan (1979) explain how the methodologies used when following an interpretive paradigm will involve the analysis of subjective accounts. This includes the subject of the investigation unfolding as the research develops. The nature and characteristics of the research study will develop as part of the research process. Garrick (1999) and Barbour (2014) explain how this approach involves a detailed examination and understanding of individuals and their experiences and of how they make sense of that experience. Interpretive studies should be using personal experience as their starting point, framed in each individual context.

There are also a number of limitations discussed in the literature regarding the interpretive paradigm. Carr and Kemmiss (1983), Usher & Bryant (1989) and Garrick (1999) all discuss how the subjective nature of this type of study means that it is unable to make generalisations based upon facts. Also, having knowledge of the experiences of an individual is not enough, as human beings do not live in a world entirely of their own devising. Instead, they are affected by the

attitudes and perceptions of others and these are not taken in to consideration. Another criticism of interpretive research is that any researcher will never be completely independent. Instead, they will have their own interpretation of the situation that they are observing. However, this limitation can be overcome, as suggested by Garrick (1999), by researchers being more self-aware or reflexive of both their status and influence in the research situation.

Recognizing the role of subjectivity and bringing the researchers positionality as a tool on the research process can not only enhance the ethical integrity of the research but also enhance both the research process and the analysis and interpretation of the data (Mosselson, 2010, p.479).

Pring (2000) suggested that the idea of the two research paradigms in educational research creates an artificial separation or 'false dualism' where quantitative and qualitative researchers are divided on which approach is most important and appropriate. The two beliefs create divisions regarding objectivity and subjectivity, whether it is possible to separate the researcher from the research, and whether absolute truth or multiple realities exist in the social world. Mehmetoglu (2004) and Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2005) suggest that for a researcher to rely on just one research paradigm can be a limitation for the research. One paradigm should not be viewed without the other as both are useful and legitimate. An alternative is to use a more pragmatic approach, defined as "an approach to knowledge that attempts to consider multiple viewpoints, perspectives, positions, and standpoints" (Johnson Onwuegbuzie & Turner, 2007, p.113).

3.1.3 The Pragmatist Approach

"Pragmatists stress that they would not privilege any one paradigm or methodology over another" (Badley, 2003, p.299). Instead, research following this approach attempts to "respect fully the wisdom of both viewpoints while seeking a workable solution for many problems of interest" (Johnson et al., 2007, p.113). Onwuegbuzie and Leach (2005) suggest that "the research objective should unite quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis techniques under the same framework" (p.287). It was argued by Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998) that collecting the appropriate data to answer the current research question is more important than either the method or paradigm used. If a contribution to knowledge can be made using a mixture of methods and paradigms then it should be considered appropriate. Discussion regarding the benefits of a mixed method approach has taken place over a number of years by authors such as Campbell and Fiske (1959), Denzin (1978), Jick (1979), Rossman and Wilson (1985), Morse (1991), Badley (2003), Mehmetoglu (2004), Collins, Onwuegbuzie & Sutton (2006) and Johnson et al. (2007). For example, Jick (1979) explained using mixed methods enables more detailed information to be collected that a survey methodology would not allow, but at the same time, it increases the

possibility that generalisations can be made in a way that most qualitative methods do not. In addition, Mehmetoglu (2004) explained how using a variety of methods can improve the quality of the research by increasing its credibility and transferability. Badley (2003) suggests that both paradigms offer different opportunities and methods for investigating the world. Therefore, a pragmatist approach does not make one paradigm more important or valuable than any other, as they both help us to investigate the world in a different way.

3.1.4 Where this research study is situated

Figure 3.1 A Timeline of Research Methods used in this study

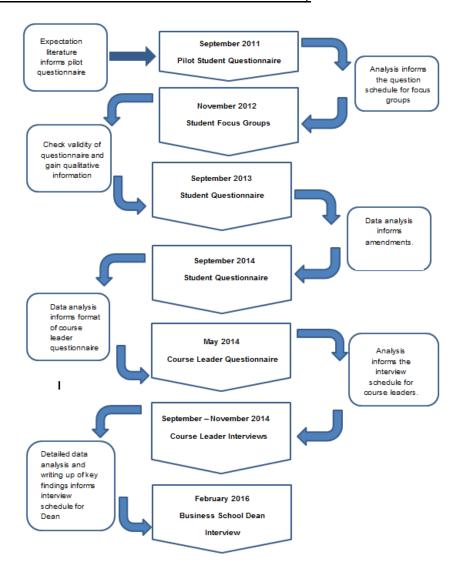


Figure 3.1 illustrates how this research study has followed a pragmatic approach, over a period of time, using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods in order to achieve the following research objectives:

- Analyse PGT student expectations of outcome.
- Evaluate any differences in the expectations of students and the perception of those expectations by the course leaders influencing the development of the programme.
- Critically evaluate the implications of any differences for the future strategy of the PGT programmes at the university.

The positivist aspects of this research study were concerned with collecting demographic data from a representative sample of the PGT population in the Business School in order that the influence of background factors on expectations could be measured. In order to collect the quantitative data questionnaires were distributed to both students and course leaders. This also enabled the researcher to gain basic information regarding initial thoughts on expectations. This was used to influence the structure and questions of the more, interpretive, qualitative elements of the research. These were the student focus groups and course leader interviews that were necessary in order to evaluate the interpretation of individual's expectations. Morse (1991) explained this process as sequential triangulation, when the results of one approach are necessary for planning the next method.

The qualitative data was concerned with trying to understand PGT expectations from the point of view of the participants. The participants here are the students and course leaders of the PGT programmes within the Business School. The students enrol onto a PGT programme with expectations of what completing the qualification will do for them. These expectations may have developed from the students' perspective of what is reality, and influenced by factors in their background such as nationality, age and gender. Their understanding of reality may also have been influenced by individuals such as parents, teachers, marketing materials and course leaders. The course leaders develop the PGT programmes with a perception of what they think students expect to achieve by completing the qualification. These perceptions are developed from their reality, influenced by their experiences as a student, work experience, or the expectations of previous students on the programme. The analysis in this research considered the two realities and any differences, and therefore, what the course leaders and the University can do to bring the two realities closer together. It is important to acknowledge that multiple realities will exist in relation to both students and course leaders and that the responses to this study will be coloured by other considerations that are less obvious and are more difficult to interpret. Barbour (2014) suggests that the interpretive paradigm favours semi structured interviews for generating data. It focuses the researcher on meanings throughout the process of analysis. This research study will use this format choosing to use semi structured interviews with the course leaders, and a semi structured interview schedule with the students but in a focus group format. As the interpretive paradigm has influenced the work of this study then it is important to address the issue of reflexivity, or the role and influence of the researcher as part of the research study.

3.2 Reflexivity

Finlay (2002) defines reflexivity as the process of self-awareness and analysis that a researcher should conduct in relation to their role within the research process. The researcher will influence the collection, selection and interpretation of data, and therefore their behaviour will always affect the responses given by the participants and have some influence on the direction of the findings.

This research study was conducted within the University and School where the researcher is a course leader on a PGT programme. This could have both advantages and disadvantages for the findings of the study, and the implications this could have need to be taken in to consideration throughout the research process. This involves careful planning of the research methods and an awareness of the situation in order to minimise these difficulties.

3.2.1 Motivations for the study

The motivations of the study (page 22) and the subjectivity that they bring need to be taken in to consideration in the design of the data collection methods as they will bring influence on the collection and interpretation of the data. The individual relationships between the researcher and the students and other course leaders within the school will all be different. The researcher is aware that factors such as their regional accent, how they dress, and where the data collection takes place could all have an influence on the data received. Steps were taken to reduce these types of influences including; interviews/focus groups taking place in a neutral location in the Business School that both students and course leaders were familiar with, and the use of a flip chart during the focus group discussions to summarise the discussion points. The researcher should always remember that the students and the course leaders trust them to interpret and make sense of their responses without judgement. Other course leaders may interpret their role in terms of managing the programme in a different way to the researcher. Different course leaders will have different priorities, and different levels of commitment towards their students. "It is important for the integrity and ethical practice of the researcher to be reflexive about the impact of their perspective on the research" (Mosselson, 2010, p.484).

3.2.3 The research process - students

"The qualitative research process itself has the potential to transform the phenomenon being studied" (Finlay, 2002, p.531). Discussing expectations with students could make them more aware of their own expectations and whether they are being met or not. This could create issues with the management of the programme that would not have otherwise been raised. From the student's point of view the researcher, as a course leader, could be seen to be in a position of power and this could influence the responses that are provided by them. To try and reduce this influence the questionnaires were given out during induction week at a full day team building event

at a local scout camp. The nature of this event meant that both staff and students were dressed in casual clothes and it was difficult to distinguish between the two. It is also at the very beginning of all the PGT programmes in the Business School and so is before most students are aware of their course leaders. In addition, the researcher did not identify their role when distributing the questionnaires, but did explain why they were conducting the research. However, the confident way in which the researcher speaks to the students will give them some awareness of their potential role within the school. It is important to remember that "researchers cannot help but bring their own involvement and fore-understandings in to the research" (Finlay, 2002, p.534).

It is also important to remember that "each person will perceive the same phenomenon in a different way; each person brings to bear his/her lived experience, specific understandings and historical background" (Finlay, 2002, p.534). Each student will interpret the questions in the questionnaire in a different way, influenced by their background and previous educational experiences. It is important to not have any preconceived ideas about the type or level of information that may be provided by the questionnaire responses, if so, what was expected and what is received may not be the same. Having discussed reflexivity from the point of view of the relationship between the researcher and the students, it is now also important to consider the relationship with the other course leaders within the Business School.

3.2.4 The research process – course leaders

Will interviewing course leaders about student expectations make them more aware and likely to change their programmes or thoughts accordingly before the findings of the research study are complete? However, it could be argued that if this is the case it can only be good for improving the overall student experience and performance of the PGT programmes.

It is important "to explore the dynamics of the researcher-researched relationship as this can fundamentally shape the research results" (Finlay, 2002, p.534). This should be taken in to consideration when looking at the interviews with course leaders. As Alvesson (2003) suggests "there are always sources of influence in an interview context that cannot be minimized or controlled" (p.169). The researcher has a different working relationship with different course leaders. Firstly, there is a very close working relationship with some of the course leaders as part of the PGT team within one department in the School. Whereas, any relationship with other course leaders in the School is much more distant. Did these different relationships affect the way the questions were asked during the interview process, and/or the way that the course leaders responded? Secondly, the researcher is aware that the individual personality of some individual course leaders being interviewed did affect the way they felt able to ask the questions. They felt more nervous with some rather than others because of their personality, their position in the organisation or the researcher's opinion of their position in the organisation. These differences can

perhaps be overcome by considering the research interview "as a scene for social interaction rather than a simple tool for collection of data" (Alvesson, 2003, p.169). As the course leaders are colleagues the interview process was more like a conversation where both sides got involved in the discussion and expressed some opinions with mutual understanding. This makes the "interview more honest, morally sound, and reliable, because it treats the respondent as an equal, allows them to express personal feelings, and therefore presents a more realistic picture than can be uncovered using traditional interview methods" (Fontana & Frey, 1994, p.371).

However, Alvessson (2003) suggests that we are all political beings and a researcher can never know for certain how honest their subjects are being. In academic contexts, subjects may be conscious of issues like personal, University and professional prestige and reputation. Therefore, the researcher will not know whether the course leaders respond completely truthfully and voice their true opinion, or whether they are worried by doing so and instead answer in a way that reflects them in a good light, by trying to prove that they are doing a good job. If this is the case, then the interview responses may just be a selective account. One of the research questions is trying to identify the gaps between the expectations of students and the perceptions of those expectations by course leaders. If both parties are responding by saying what they think the answers should be, rather their true perceptions then this gap may be bigger than actually revealed in the findings of this study.

In addition to reflexivity, this research study is concerned with students and course leaders and therefore any ethical issues concerning these two groups of individuals need to be taken into consideration.

3.3 Ethics

Orb, Eisenhauer and Wynaden (2001) explain how any research that includes individuals needs to have an awareness of the ethical issues that may arise. The research design, the methodology design, and the reporting of data all need to take these issues in to consideration. The main concern is respect for the people involved in the study. This includes the recognition of the rights of the individuals taking part. All individuals should be informed about the study, and have the right to freely decide whether to participate or not. They should be able to withdraw at any time without penalty. In order that these issues regarding ethics were addressed in this research study the following safeguards have taken place:

 Approval was sought and granted by the ethics committee of the University School of Education and Professional Development before any data collection was carried out.
 Permission was also granted by the Dean of the Business School (appendix 1 (a), page 154) and (b), page 158).

- All students and course leaders were given an explanation at the front of the questionnaire
 that explained why the research was taking place and that any information that they
 included on the questionnaire would remain anonymous and confidential. It was explained
 when the questionnaires were distributed that participation in the research was on a
 voluntary basis and that they could choose not to complete the questionnaire if they wished
 (appendix 2, page 159 and 3, page163).
- All questionnaires, both students and course leaders, are stored in a secure location, a locked filing cabinet within the University Business School.
- Course leader questionnaires were distributed by e mail, as this is the most common form
 of formal communication within the Business School. However, course leaders were asked
 to return a paper version of their completed questionnaire by the internal post to the
 researcher's departmental secretary in order to maintain anonymity, as a return e mail
 would identify them.
- Participants of the student focus groups and course leader interviews were entirely voluntary. The purpose of the research and the opportunity to withdraw from the research was explained again before any discussion took place.
- Focus groups and course leader interviews were audio recorded and then a written transcription produced. Both the audio recordings and the written transcripts have been stored securely. The audio recordings using password protection and the written transcripts in a locked filing cabinet.
- All participants of the focus groups were asked to sign consent forms that gave assurance
 that all discussion would be completely confidential, individuals would not be named and
 would remain anonymous in the data analysis and writing up of the findings, and that any
 information collected would only be used for the purpose of this research (appendix 4, page
 166).

Any other ethical issues will be discussed during the remainder of the Methodology chapter as and when they are appropriate.

3.4 Pilot Questionnaire (September 2011)

The population for this research study was all the students enrolled on to a PGT programme in three departments of the Business School of the University during the years 2011 to 2014. This shows evidence of both depth and breadth of the data collected for this research study. A sampling frame would be available as a list of student enrolments on to these particular programmes was available. However, it was decided that the most convenient and appropriate way to collect data was by using the team building event at a local Scout camp that takes place during induction week each academic year. Attendance at this event is compulsory for all students on the PGT courses chosen for this research study and so was an effective way of ensuring that a representative sample was obtained.

A questionnaire can be defined as "a method of data collection which is completed by the respondent in a written format" (Polit & Hunger,1999, p.210). "Questionnaires can be used on their own as the sole research instrument or in association with other research tools" (Marshall, 2005, p.131). In this research study, the questionnaires collected information from students about both demographics and expectations. The quantitative nature of the questionnaire was intended to generate a volume of data from as many students as possible. This would agree with Marshall (2005) who states that "a questionnaire is a cost effective way to collect data from large numbers of the population" (p.131). Literature by Licata et al. (2008) and Liu (2010) also showed that similar techniques had been used in previous similar studies to gain student views on expectations.

In September 2011 a pilot questionnaire was distributed to students (appendix 5 (page157)). This followed a structured approach of short and focussed questions, where the students had very little to write. This made it user friendly and easier for the respondents to complete, especially, given the environment, at the team building event, in which they were being asked to complete it. It also "made it easier for the researcher to interpret" (Marshall, 2005, p.132). The questionnaire enabled basic demographic data to be collected including nationality, age, gender, mode of study and the number of years of work experience. The intention was that the data generated from these questions could be used to identify whether there was any relationship between each of the demographic variables and the students expected outcomes of the programme.

Ten statements were included on the questionnaire regarding the expectation of outcomes of the students. The content of these statements was informed by previous studies on student expectations by Donaldson and McNicholas (2004) and Liu (2010). Donaldson and McNicholas (2004) investigated why postgraduate students in the UK decide to take up a further degree, and the factors influencing their choice of programme. They used a questionnaire with 11 statements and asked students to mention which one of the statements was their main motivation for study.

Liu (2010) considered the motives, expectations and preparedness of postgraduate marketing students. Again, a questionnaire including a number of statements that students had to rank was included in the research. However, this time the statements were put in to categories; intrinsic, career related and extrinsic. As discussed in the Literature Review (page 51) both studies concluded that the improvement of career prospects and aspirations was the main motivation for further study. Similar statements were used to investigate expectation in this research. However, a decision was made to use a random list rather than putting them in to categories in order to minimise any bias in the results.

Table 3.1: Expectations Statements

Develop talent and creativity in me
Develop my leadership skills
Enhance my communication skills
Develop decision making skills
Enhance my interpersonal skills
Provide specialized training and instruction
Provide real life learning experiences
Develop opportunities for promotion and/or career development
Give me access to better employment
Enhance my achievement at work

Students were asked to respond to the ten statements using the Likert Scale. This measurement scale was introduced by Renis Likert in 1932 as a technique suitable for attitude measurement. "An individual is confronted with statements which are essentially value judgements" (Gob, McCollin & Ramalhoto, 2007, p.604). For the purpose of this study the students are being asked to make judgements regarding their expectations of the outcome of their PGT qualification. (Gob et al., 2007) explains how the individual completing the questionnaire indicates their attitude towards each statement by choosing between a number of grades on the Likert Scale. The five grade scale as used in this study is usually interpreted by; strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree and strongly agree. This was the format used by Brinkworth McCann, Matthews and Nordstrom (2009) in a similar study investigating the expectations of first year undergraduate students. However, it was decided that the quality of the data generated in this study may be improved if 'no opinion' was chosen as the neutral category and shown in the final column in the table. It was felt that this would encourage students to voice their opinion about their expectations rather than just choosing the middle column as an easy option for each question. The responses were then ranked; 4

corresponding to strongly agree, 3 to agree, 2 to disagree, 1 to strongly disagree and 0 to no opinion. This would enable the data to be analysed more easily.

There are always issues surrounding the use of any rating scale. However, Devlin, Dong and Brown (1993) suggest that a good rating scale should have minimal response bias, discriminating power, and ease of use by both the researcher and respondents. Ease of use by the respondents was especially important in this study as a large proportion of the students completing the questionnaire do not have English as their first language. If as accurate as results as possible were to be obtained then the questions needed to be written in a way that all students could understand.

The final section of the questionnaire asked the students to identify the most important and least important statement from the ten expectations considered. This enabled some additional analysis to be undertaken in relation to which expectation they considered to be the most important.

The disadvantages of using questionnaires are "the researcher has no idea if the questionnaire was filled in by the respondent it was meant for, if there are confusions caused by the questionnaire the researcher cannot clarify these, and they can give a poor response rate" (Marshall, 2005, p.132). All of these disadvantages were managed and an attempt was made to minimise them by, as mentioned previously, the pilot questionnaire being distributed, personally by the researcher, at the team building event during induction week. "The personal touch is successful in eliciting a good response" (Douglas et al, 2006, p.255). The time allocated to discussing and completing the questionnaire was between 15 and 30 minutes. This provided the researcher with an opportunity to explain the aims of the research to the students and encourage them to complete the questionnaire, whilst also confirming that all data generated would be anonymous and confidential. Students were encouraged to complete the questionnaire on their own, and were able to seek clarification from the researcher, if necessary. However, some discussion did take place between respondents during completion, and this may have introduced some bias as the responses may have been influenced by each other. When using a group administered approach "there is a risk of respondents discussing their responses and thus contaminating them" (Marshall, 2005, p.134). However, it was decided that the benefit of a greater response rate outweighed the disadvantage of possible contamination.

Marshall (2005) explains how "piloting must occur before the questionnaire is administered to the research sample to ensure that the reliability and validity of the questionnaire" (p.135). This was true in this study, as the data produced from this pilot questionnaire did not lead to suitable results for effective data analysis. One issue was that a large number of students responded by agreeing or strongly agreeing with all of the statements. This made it difficult to distinguish which expectations were most important to particular groups of students. This agrees with Jamieson (2004) who suggested that data sets generated with Likert Scales will often result in most students

either agreeing or strongly agreeing. Carifio and Perla (2008) also explain how individuals giving the same response to a Likert item do not share the same response value. This means that agree or strongly agree will not have exactly the same meaning to different respondents of the questionnaire. They continue to explain how this is a particular problem when comparing different countries or cultures. This could be a problem for this questionnaire when a large proportion of the sample is international students from a variety of countries and cultural backgrounds. There is also the issue for the students who have identified the researcher as a course leader, and who feel that because the ten statements have been identified as student expectations, they should be seen to be agreeing with them. The section asking for student's most and least important expectation was also poorly completed, with students not answering these questions or mentioning something that was different to the ten statements identified. Both of these issues made this section of the questionnaire difficult to analyse, and would need to be improved for when the questionnaires were distributed to students again in the future.

Brinkworth et al. (2009) stated following their study that "the need for a future addition of qualitative data to investigate how students interpreted the questions in the survey was felt to be important" (p.160). For this research study, it was decided to follow up the questionnaires with focus group discussions with students who volunteered to take part. The focus groups took place early in the academic year in November 2012. These discussions provided information to aid the improvement of the questionnaire for the following years.

3.5 Focus Groups (November 2012)

A focus group is defined as "a small group discussion in which participants respond to a series of questions focused on a single topic" (Marelli, 2008, p.39). Similar to interviews, the objective of a focus group is to obtain detailed, in depth information. However, the group members' comments help to stimulate and build on each individuals thinking. The focus groups were comprised of a small group of PGT students who had already completed the questionnaire and were willing to take part further in this research study.

Simon (1999) suggests that defining the purpose of the focus group will help to guide the kinds of questions that you will ask as a researcher. As discussed earlier, the main purpose of the focus groups in this study was to check the validity of the questionnaires, improve their construction, and gain additional, more qualitative information about student expectations. The information gained from the focus groups also informed the development of the course leader questionnaire and interview schedule. It was felt necessary that the focus groups took place early in the academic year so that the possibility of gaining the students true opinions was increased before they had been influenced too much by their attendance at the University.

3.5.1 Sample selection

The participant population for the focus groups were PGT students who had enrolled on a programme in September 2012. The subjects were contacted by letter via their course leaders asking them if they would like to take part in the research and what would be involved (appendix 6, page 171). This was chosen as the most suitable method of initial contact as previous research in the Business School had identified that communication by e mail was often ignored by students. The letter explained the purpose of the research and why the findings may be valuable to the School and University in the future. It also stated that 'help with this research would be greatly appreciated', that 'the focus group meeting would take place in the Business School', and 'would last no longer than 1 hour'. The Business School was chosen for the location as it is somewhere that the participants are familiar with, would feel comfortable in the environment, and would involve no additional transport costs. The researcher felt that choosing an environment where students were comfortable would reduce their influence over the responses.

"Multiple focus groups on the same topic are suggested to balance out individuals and groups and to include enough people who can provide the best information and insight in to what is being explored" (Franz, 2011, p.1382). In order for multiple focus groups to take place potential participants were asked to choose one of six possible dates that would be most convenient for them to attend, and to respond by e mail by a particular date. This would enable students to plan their attendance around other timetable commitments but would hopefully produce an appropriate mix of participants at each meeting. Between 6 and 10 participants should be planned as "this number is appropriate for the moderator to facilitate, encourage, and respond to each member of the group" (Vaughn, Schumm & Sinagub, 1996, p.51). It also ensures that the discussion that takes place generates enough information to be useful, but that there are not so many people involved in each group that participants feel uncomfortable talking or are unable to follow the discussion.

Acocella (2012) explains how when undertaking focus groups a comfortable environment should be created so that participants feel free to express their opinions. This is most likely to occur if each focus group includes people who share similar interests and who feel equal to each other. This involves creating a "homogenous group to avoid situations that may cause inhibition and discourage conversation" (Acocella, 2012, p.1127). During the planning stages of the focus groups this had been taken in to consideration and thought was given to which participants should be selected to be together in particular groups. Consideration had been given to age, gender and nationality issues and the most appropriate combinations to allow all students the opportunity and confidence to respond to the questions. Factors considered included students from some cultures may feel unable to express their opinions openly in a group made up of both genders, and students

from some nationalities may feel uncomfortable with others from a different nation. A purposive sampling technique could be used with participants for each focus group being selected from the volunteers based upon predetermined criteria regarding their backgrounds. An alternative view is that, "a certain level of heterogeneity can facilitate the collection of a wider range of opinions and perspectives" (Acocella, 2012, p.1127). After consideration it was decided that the make-up of each focus group needed to be considerably different in terms of background characteristics so that informative comparisons can be made.

However, in the end, these considerations were limited by the fact that only fifteen positive responses were received from students volunteering to take part in the focus groups. This was disappointing given the number of PGT students enrolled, and made it difficult to execute any plans to ensure that the meetings were representative of the whole population. For example, the groups were largely made up of students from a minority of nationalities, and therefore, the nationalities of all students were not evenly represented. 66% of the students involved in the focus groups were Chinese, 20% were Vietnamese, 7% were Iraqi and 7% were British, and 94% of the participants were under the age of 30. Even so, the convenience sampling approach that was used for the focus groups enabled the pilot questionnaire to be validated, and more detailed qualitative information regarding student expectations to be collected. A number of focus groups were designed based on the dates and times that were convenient for the students who had responded positively and four meetings took place between the 9th and 19th November 2012. This needs to be taken into consideration as a limitation to the results of this study, as "convenience sampling is the least desirable approach to purposive sampling because the tendency is to rely on those subjects that are available and willing to attend with little regard to the pre-determined criteria" (Vaughn et al.,1996, p.59).

3.5.2 Management of the focus groups

For effective analysis of the data gained in the focus groups in relation to the research questions it had to be possible to identify individual students background characteristics. Therefore, during the focus group meeting each student was identified by a number. At the end of each focus group each student completed an anonymous form providing information about their nationality, age, gender, previous qualifications and current programme of study. This information could then be matched against the appropriate student number during the analysis stage.

Initially, students were welcomed to the meeting, thanked for their participation, asked to sign the consent form, and given an overview of the research topic. The welcome instructions were read out to each focus group verbatim, so that all groups received exactly the same information in the same way.

Simon (1999) suggests that because the duration of a focus group is limited, it is important to have only four or five questions. An interview schedule was developed so that the same list of questions was asked to each focus group, in order to ensure consistency and a voice for everyone (appendix 7, page 172). The questions were developed from concepts in the literature and analysis of the data produced from the 10 expectation statements on the student questionnaire (appendix 8, page 175). All questions were also designed to help to check that appropriate statements regarding expectations were included on the questionnaire.

"The value of the data collected in a focus group is heavily dependent on the facilitator" (Marelli, 2008, p.41). The role of the researcher in these focus groups is not to contribute to the discussion. Instead, they should be keeping track of time, ensuring that each of the students is able to contribute to the discussion, and making sure that all of the issues that contribute to the research questions are discussed. The researcher chose to use a round robin approach to the management of the conversations. This ensured that all students had the same opportunity to speak, by inviting each one in turn to make their contribution to answering the same question. Once all students had given their answer then they were all invited to give any further comments if they wished. During the discussion a diagram showing the theme of the current question was built up using flip chart paper. This helped to remind all students of the focus of the current discussion, but was particularly useful for the international students for whom English is not their first language. It helped them to clarify what was being asked, and to see the development of the discussion. It may also have helped to overcome any issues arising from the regional accent of the researcher. It was also thought that these diagrams would be helpful in addition to the audio recordings and transcripts at the analysis stage. This was aided by the points made by individual students being identified on the flip chart paper using their number so that it could be linked to their background characteristics that may have affected their expectations.

3.5.3 Analysis of the focus group data

On completion of the focus groups the audio recordings were transcribed and the written transcriptions analysed alongside the flip chart notes using thematic analysis. This type of analysis technique was chosen because of the volume of qualitative information that had been collected in order to ensure that no important points were over looked. Grbich (2013) explains how thematic analysis involves focusing on words or phrases that are repeated. Researchers should see what emerges from the data rather than using predesigned themes. The written transcripts were analysed using sticky labels and colours in order to code the information according to themes, and then analysed using a constant comparison approach, so that patterns were allowed to emerge. A table was produced collecting together quotes from each of the transcripts under the various themes or headings that had emerged from the discussions (appendix 9 (page 166)). The themes

were then used to give more detailed insight and to support and validate the findings from the student questionnaires.

3.6 Final Questionnaire Distribution (September 2013 and 2014)

The issues identified in the pilot questionnaire and focus groups were taken in to consideration in developing the questionnaire for distribution in September 2013 in order that the data collected could be improved (appendix 2, page 159). Firstly, the question asking whether a student was studying on a full or part time basis was removed. On consideration, it was felt that this is the mode of study and not a background characteristic, and therefore, was not helping to achieve the objectives of the research but could be influencing the results. In addition, it was decided to remove the Likert Scale and instead ask the students to rank the same 10 statements in order of importance from 1 to 10, with 1 being the least important and 10 the most important. This would eliminate the opportunity for students to agree with every statement, instead they would have to make a decision, and therefore create more meaningful data for analysis. This method was more successful than the Likert Scale but some students still did not answer the questions about expectations in the way expected. A number of students ranked each question from 1 to 10 rather than the 10 statements in total. At first, this was disappointing, especially given the number of questionnaires that were affected.

In addition, following the information collected in the focus group meetings it was decided to include an additional question where students were asked about who had the most influence in developing their expectations of the programme. This was a tick box to enable more effective analysis, but students could also add additional information if their influencers were not included in the list.

The questionnaire was again distributed at a similar team building event in 2013. However, based on the previous experience, on this occasion it was distributed earlier in the day when students were collected together waiting for the evaluation session to begin. This meant that they were more motivated to spend time completing the questions accurately, as at that moment in time they had nowhere else to go and nothing else to do. Due to the nature of the rest of the team building event, pens were provided to the students to help to improve the response rate, and it was possible to collect in most of the questionnaires before the evaluation session began.

Exactly the same process and timing at the event was used in September 2014 as had worked successfully in 2013. Following consideration with peers and research groups some additional wording was added to the question about ranking the expectations to try and eliminate the ranking error. On this occasion, there were still some completed incorrectly, but not as many as there had been the previous year.

3.7 Analysis of student questionnaires

The original plan for analysing the student questionnaires in relation to the research question about expectations had been to use the ranking to produce a correlation coefficient. This was a very quantitative approach, and due to the number of questionnaires where the expectation statements had not been ranked correctly this could not be completed effectively, so a suitable alternative had to be considered. It was decided that it was possible to analyse the responses by identifying patterns in the data. This follows the dated but effective method discussed by Ehrenberg (1975) that shows that for data analysis to be meaningful, complicated statistical programmes are not always necessary, but what is needed is for the data to be reduced to meaningful summaries. The first step is to gain a quick visual impression of the data. The researcher should then be looking to see if patterns and relationships exist in the numerical data. These summaries can then be interpreted, used and communicated.

In order to begin to summarise the data so that any patterns could emerge all of the data from both September 2013 and 2014 was developed into a spreadsheet using excel. Each of the ten statements had their own column, and each individual student was a row. Once all of the data was entered, each column could be filtered so that the rankings 1-10 were shown in order. This overcame the issues with the data collection inaccuracies, as the rankings could be taken into consideration from all students irrespective of the way they had interpreted the question. From these filtered columns it was possible to produce graphs to show the percentage of each ranking for each expectation, thus identifying the expectations that had been ranked as most important, most frequently. Descriptive statistics of the rankings was also calculated for each of the ten expectations. Further, more detailed analysis also involved calculating the total percentage of rankings in the categories 1-5, and then 6-10 for each of the ten expectation statements.

More complex quantitative analysis was necessary and possible when the research question regarding the relationship between student expectations and their background characteristics was considered. The data in this case was put into SPSS and Pearsons Chi Squared calculations were conducted in order to establish whether a significant relationship existed between each of the background characteristics and each of the ten expectation statements. The relationships that were identified as being significant were then considered and discussed further.

3.7.1 Issues with data analysis

Some issues were identified that needed further consideration in terms of the analysis of the data and the interpretation of the findings. To begin with, the influence of the part time MBA students on the results needed to be considered. These students have been included in the study, as it is a PGT programme within the Business School. However, these students have distinctly different characteristics from students on the other programmes, and therefore, may have an influence on

the results. These students are mostly British, they have a tendency to be older and usually have work experience. Therefore, their expectations of the programme could be significantly different from the other students. For this reason it was decided to analyse the data both with and without the MBA students included and compare the results. The results of this separation will be explained further in the Analysis and Discussion chapter.

In addition, there were very low numbers of students from particular nationalities. This sometimes led to a significant relationship being established, but with only one student. It was therefore decided to put the countries together in to regions rather than countries so that individual students would have less influence on the results. The regions used were Home and EU, Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. These are the same categories of regions that are used by HESA in their analyses. These changes to the data were particularly important when looking at the influence of nationality as a background characteristic for expectations.

3.8 Course Leader Questionnaires (May 2014) and Interviews (November – September 2014)

In order to achieve the research objectives it was important to collect similar information regarding the perceptions of course leaders of the expectations of PGT students. Course leaders were chosen as they are members of the University who have influence over the design of the PGT programmes and are involved with the induction of students and the general management of the programmes.

3.8.1 Distribution of the questionnaire

A decision was made to send the questionnaire to all 18 course leaders of PGT programmes in the three departments of the Business School used in the student sample. These questionnaires included the same ten statements about student expectations as had been used in the student questionnaires (appendix 3, page 163). The course leaders were asked to use the same method of ranking in order of importance (1-10) but for their perceptions of student's expectations of the outcome of the programme. This similar process was used deliberately so that a comparison of the responses of staff and students could easily be made. This enabled the research question regarding the differences between the expectations of students and the perceptions of course leaders to be addressed.

Disappointingly, despite a number of reminders being sent out during the summer months to try and improve the number of responses, only 8 questionnaires were returned by course leaders. The questionnaires were sent out during May 2014 and the time in the academic year perhaps influenced the response rate. The researcher should have paid more attention to course leader workloads and distributed the questionnaire at a time in the year when they were more likely to

create time to complete it. This is a busy time of year for academic staff due to examination marking. In hindsight, if it had been sent out at a different time of year the response rate may have been higher.

3.8.2 Interviews

As part of the questionnaire process, course leaders were asked if they would be prepared to take part in a short semi structured interview regarding their perceptions. Mosselson (2010) and Hannabuss (1996) explain how interviews are a frequent method of data collection in qualitative research. They are an especially useful for a researcher using their own organisation as they enable the gathering of information and opinions of people and show the perspectives of different individuals. Interviews also "encourage the participants to open up and express themselves in their own terms and at their own pace" (Mosselson, 2010, p.481). This would be true of this research study, as it is looking to see whether different course leaders working together in the same School have different understandings of the expectations of their students.

Of the 8 course leaders who completed and returned the questionnaire 6 agreed to be interviewed. As interviews are "intensive and time consuming, they run the possibility of being an unrepresentative sample of respondents" (Hannabuss, 1996, p.23). However, in this research study, despite the low response, the completed questionnaires and interviews that took place did represent courses that are offered in each of the three departments in the Business School even if every course was not included. The course leaders included also showed some variation in relation to age, gender and experience, and therefore, enabled the findings to be representative.

Following the interpretive approach of continually developing the research, the course leader's interview schedule (appendix 10, page 180) was developed by considering the responses and themes that developed from the student questionnaire, the student focus groups, the course leader's questionnaire and the relevant literature on consumer service and gap analysis (appendix 11, page 181). The interview schedule was developed to ensure some degree of comparability between respondents. However, a semi-structured interview format was proposed and additional and different questions were added in to certain interviews as and when it was felt to be appropriate by the researcher based upon the discussion that was taking place. All the interviews were carried out by appointment, and took place in a private office, in most cases, not belonging to either the interviewer or interviewee. All conversations were audio recorded and written transcriptions produced anonymously, both with consent of the interviewee. Confirmation of anonymity was especially important for some of the course leaders, who asked for assurance that anything they had discussed during the interviews was not traceable directly back to them. The researcher has to take in to consideration when analysing and discussing the results that this

traceability is not just from their name but also from the course that they are leading or the department to which they are attached.

During informal interviews "there is always the risk of putting ideas into the heads of respondents, or giving them a clue about what they want to hear" (Hannabuss, 1996, p.24). To help in managing this, the researcher made the decision not to give the interviewees the questions before the date and time of the interview. In this way, they were not able to try and predict what it was that the researcher was looking for, and prepare their answers accordingly. Instead, their answers to the questions were spontaneous at the time of asking. There are disadvantages to this approach, as some answers were very brief, and may be, would have been more detailed if the interviewee had been given time to prepare. In addition, the researcher was very careful when asking the questions to ensure that they did not put forward their opinions and perceptions about student's expectations as it was important to ensure that the views of the interviewee were obtained without bias or influence. Hannabuss (1996) would agree stating that "the purpose of interviewing is not to put things in someone's mind... but to access the perspective of the person being interviewed" (p.24).

3.8.3 Imposter Syndrome

The imposter phenomenon or syndrome was first named by Clance and Imes (1978) when they explained how some high achieving individuals are unable to accept their accomplishments and constantly fear being exposed as a fraud. The major obstacle surrounding the interviews with course leaders was the researchers issue with confidence in their own ability which could be classified as imposter syndrome. Completing the course leader questionnaires was delayed for a substantial period of time due to the researcher's worries about being credible, and may be this situation was made more serious due to the research being in their own organisation and the interviews taking place with their work colleagues. The researcher was extremely nervous about interviewing these work colleagues, due to worrying about whether the research was good enough, whether they would approve of the research that was taking place, and whether it was as good as the research that they were undertaking. However, having discussed these feelings with some respondents afterwards, the researcher found that they were just as nervous about being involved in the interviews for very similar reasons. They were worried that the researcher would think that their responses were not good enough, or did not relate to the research questions that were being considered. All of this relates back to the more general problem discussed earlier about conducting research in your own organisation. In addition, it should be remembered as discussed in the section regarding reflexivity that the participants of the interviews might be engaged in an exercise of presenting themselves in the best possible light to the interviewer. This might result in the researcher not always receiving 'true' responses, and therefore, when looking at the research questions about differences in the expectations of students and staff, the gaps in reality may be bigger or smaller than those identified in this research.

3.8.4 Interview data analysis

Using the same method as the student focus groups, thematic analysis was used to analyse the transcriptions. Sticky notes and colours were used to identify themes and then quotes were collected together into a table under the various themes (appendix 12, page 183). Forman Creswell, Damschroder, Kowalski and Krein (2008) and Barbour (2014) suggest that analysis in the interpretative paradigm should be an iterative process, where data collection and analysis occur at the same time. Unanticipated themes should be allowed to emerge during the analysis stages, and the researcher should not just be looking for what they expect the findings to be. This is true of this research study as the results from the analysis of one data collection method have been used to inform the theme of questioning in the next process. The analysis throughout has involved identifying emerging patterns of commonality and difference. However, Barbour (2014) also suggests that only when each individual case has been analysed is there an attempt to conduct cross case analysis as the table of themes for convergence and divergence are identified. In this research the individual cases were the students and course leaders, and when they had been considered individually the interpretation then involved considering any similarities or differences between the two groups and what that might mean for them and for the Business School and University as a whole. The final stage of the data analysis stage was to identify the key differences between the student expectations and the perceptions of those expectations by course leaders.

3.9 The differences between the expectations of students and the perceptions of course leaders.

The results of the analysis of the questionnaires completed by both groups were used to identify whether there were any significant differences between the expectations of students and the perceptions of those expectations by course leaders. The mean ranking for each expectation for both students and the course leaders was calculated and the difference between the means was identified. At test was then conducted to test whether the difference in the means was significant at the 5 or 10% level of significance. Although, all of the differences could be discussed, these calculations created a focus upon which the discussions could be based. The student focus group and course leader interview themes were also used to give evidence towards the significant differences that had been identified and to create a more extensive discussion of the key findings.

3.10 The implications of the differences for the Business School

Using an interpretive, iterative process, following the writing up of the analysis from both students and course leaders, a summary of the key findings was able to be presented (appendix 13, page 187). This enabled the research questions regarding the implications for the Business School of the differences between the two groups to be considered. The findings summary was used to develop an interview schedule to be used with the Dean of the Business School in February 2016 (appendix 14, page 189). It was felt that this was the appropriate person to be involved as they would have the knowledge about the current PGT strategies in the Business School, but also the most impact if the implications of the findings of this research are to be taken into consideration in the future.

A method consistent with those used for the students and course leader qualitative data analysis was adopted. The interview was audio recorded and a written transcription produced. The transcription was used to identify key themes that could be evaluated in the Analysis and Discussion chapter as the key implications of the findings of this research for the Business School.

"All research studies must be open to critique and evaluation" (Long & Johnson, 2000, p.30). It is therefore important to complete the Methodology chapter with a discussion regarding the validity of the data collected and the limitations of the research process for this study.

3.11 Data Quality

Campbell and Fiske (1959) first introduced the concept of 'triangulation'. This is when more than one method is used in order to validate the research process. Denzin (1978), Jick (1979), Roberts and Priest (2006) and Forman et al. (2008) explain triangulation as a method to improve the validity of qualitative research, by collecting data from more than one source, and using a variety of data collection methods from an appropriate sample. This helps to ensure that any results gained are consistent, a comprehensive, robust study has been created, and the researcher can be more confident with their results. As discussed previously, this research study involved collecting data using a variety of methods over a number of years. Data analysis has taken place continually throughout the process. This follows the pattern suggested by Forman et al., (2008) who suggest that "conducting data collection and analysis concurrently improves methodological rigor" (p.768). Data analysis was taking place throughout the collection process and not just when this stage of the research was complete. "Research is a never ending process towards improved understanding" (Gummesson, 2003, p.482).

Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson and Spiers (2002) explain how verification involves checking, confirming, making sure and being certain. By following this process any errors can be identified

before the research model is developed further. In an interpretive study this verification procedure should be taking place continually to improve the validity and rigor of the study. Forman et al. (2008) suggest that this validity can be assessed by considering rigor of the methodology used in the research process. This should be a systematic part of the research process that is comprehensive enough to support the findings of the study. The discussion included in this methodology, for example, the use of a pilot study, the use of the focus groups to test the data collected, and the incremental development of the questionnaire provides evidence to show that this systematic, incremental verification process has taken place in this research study. Further limitations that have been identified as a result of this verification process have been discussed in the Conclusion chapter.

Chapter 4(a): Results

4.1 Introduction

Significant research has taken place over time regarding the expectations of PGT students, including literature by Donaldson and McNicholas (2004), Sastry (2004), Haman et al. (2010), Kerry (2010), Liu (2010), Lightfoot (2012) and Morgan (2014) and Government reports by Dye (2013), Mellors-Bourne et al. (2014) and Clarke and Lunt (2014). Following the review of this literature and the researcher's knowledge and experience of PGT education the objectives of this study are to;

- Analyse PGT student expectations of outcome.
- Evaluate any differences in the expectations of students and the perception of those expectations by the course leaders influencing the development of the programme.
- Critically evaluate the implications of any differences for the future strategy of postgraduate programmes at the university.

Hammersley, (1992) stated that "no knowledge can be counted as certain, and the best that we can do is to seek means of judging claims in terms of their likely truth" (p.69). As discussed in the Methodology chapter this research study uses both qualitative and quantitative data in order to achieve its objectives. Claims regarding the likely truth can be assessed by judging the validity of the data, and therefore to begin this chapter, the validity of the quantitative data collected will be discussed.

4.2 Data Validity

One of the main concerns regarding validity is whether the data has been collected and analysed in such a way that the findings can be used reliably and with confidence in different but similar contexts. "External validity addresses the ability to apply with confidence the findings of the study to other people and other situations" (Roberts & Priest, 2006, p.43). In this case, how reliably can the data and the findings be applied to other schools within the University and to other universities? In order to improve external validity "representative samples should be drawn, with reference to relevant variables in the study such as, gender and age"(Roberts & Priest, 2006, p.43). The external validity of this study was assessed by comparing the sample student data against; i) the total number of students enrolled on each programme in the Business School and ii) the relative representation in the PTES (2014). In both cases percentages on each programme were considered rather than actual student numbers so that a comparison between the sample and population could still be made given the difference in overall student numbers.

4.2.1 The Business School

The sample was considered both including and excluding the MBA part time students as they have rather distinct characteristics that are different to the other PGT students. The differences in their characteristics will be explained later.

Table 4.1(a) % of students enrolled on to each programme of study (including MBA part time)

Postgraduate taught	Research sample %	% of total number of	% Difference
programme of study	including part time	students on each	
	MBA	programme in 2014	
Accounting	13.16	10.21	2.95
Finance	16.45	14.04	2.41
Banking and Finance	11.18	6.80	4.38
International HRM	13.82	9.36	4.46
Business	6.58	29.78	-23.2
MBA part time	30.92	23.04	7.88
MBA full time	7.89	6.38	1.51
		Mean	0.0557
		Standard Deviation	10.46
		Test Statistic	0.014
		Critical Value (5%)	2.45

Source: Student questionnaires, Business School data 2013 and 2014.

The data shown in table 4.1 (a) identifies that when the MBA part time is included, the % of students in the sample from most of the programmes is similar to the overall proportion of students on that programme in the Business School. With only two exceptions (Business and MBA part time) the difference between the sample and the population percentage is less than 5%.

A t test was conducted to test the null hypothesis that the mean of the differences between the sample and the population proportions is equal to 0. The test statistic of 0.014 is less than the critical value of 2.45 using a 2 tailed test at 5%, and therefore, the null hypothesis should not be rejected. It can therefore be concluded that the difference between the two sets of data is not significant at 5% and therefore the sample is representative of the population.

Table 4.1(b) % of students enrolled on to each programme of study (excluding MBA part time)

Postgraduate taught	Research sample %	% of total number of	% Difference
programme of study	excluding part time	students on each	
	<u>MBA</u>	programme in 2014	
Accounting	19.23	10.21	9.02
Finance	23.04	14.04	9
Banking and Finance	16.35	6.80	9.55
International HRM	19.23	9.36	9.87
Business	9.62	29.78	-20.16
MBA part time		23.04	
MBA full time	11.54	6.38	5.16
		Mean	3.74
		Standard Deviation	11.83
		Test Statistic	5.00
		Critical Value (5%)	2.57

Source: Student questionnaires, Business School data 2013 and 2014.

The data shown in table 4.1(b) identifies that when the MBA part time is excluded from the sample the % differences between the sample and the Business School are much greater, with the differences on every programme being in excess of 5%.

Again, a t test was conducted to test the null hypothesis that the mean of the differences is equal to 0. The test statistic of 5.00 is greater than the critical value of 2.57 using a 2 tailed test at 5%, and therefore, the null hypothesis should be rejected. It can therefore be concluded that the difference between the two sets of data is significant at 5% and the sample is not representative of the population.

This would suggest that despite reservations due to the difference in nature of the MBA part time students, the sample data is more representative of the Business School PGT population when these students are included. The only programme where students are significantly underrepresented in the sample is the Msc Business programme. However, this will not create a major flaw in the findings as the nationality and age profile of these students is similar to other programmes included in this research sample.

4.2.2 Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey

The PTES is produced annually and is a sector wide survey in the UK to gain insight from PGT students about their learning and teaching experience. It also includes questions about their motivations for study. In 2014 it recorded 67,580 respondents and claims to include a broadly representative group of students, by subject, by domicile and by mode of study (Soilemetzidia et al., 2014). Therefore, comparing the sample data collected for this research with the proportions collected in the PTES (2014) helped to show that a representative sample similar to all PGT students in the UK has been included and therefore more effective generalisations can be made from the results.

<u>Table 4.2: Statistics of the research sample compared with Postgraduate Taught Experience</u> Survey (PTES)

	Research Sample % Including part time MBA	Research Sample % Excluding part time MBA	PTES 2014
<u>Gender</u>			
Male	51.97	47.62	42.7
Female	48.03	51.43	57.3
<u>Age</u>			
18-25	47.36	66.67	44.1
25-34	26.97	25.71	20.9
35-44	15.13	5.71	19.9
45-54	7.89	1	10.7
55-60	1.32	0	4.5
60+	1.32	1	0
<u>Region</u>			
Home/EU	35.76	9.52	53.7
Africa	6.62	7.62	
Asia	50.99	74.29	33.6
Middle East	6.62	8.57	

Source: Student Questionnaires, Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) 2014, Business School data 2013 and 2014.

The data presented in table 4.2 in relation to region shows that 64.23% of the sample (including part time MBA) was made up of international students (not home/EU) compared with 33.6% in the PTES 2014. This shows that the % of international students in the sample for this research study is 26.9% higher. However, Figure 1.3 (page 18) showed that 60.5% of PGT programmes in the Business School at The University of Huddersfield are made up of international students. This therefore suggests that the research sample of 64.23% (including the MBA) is a representative sample for the Business School. In addition, 50.99% of those international students in the sample are from Asia. This again, reflects the large number of students from China and Vietnam that are enrolled in the Business School. This evidence provides further justification for the need for this research study, in this School at the University. Given the large increase in international students in recent years, it is important to identify and understand all student expectations, and how these may be different according to their background characteristics, if the Business School and University is to remain competitive in the area of PGT education in the future.

When the MBA part time students are included in the sample the % of students in each age category are similar to those of the PTES (2014). When the part time MBA students are removed from the sample then the % of students in the younger age categories is significantly increased. This is expected as students enrolling on full time PGT programmes tend to be relatively younger than those enrolling on part time post experience programmes such as the MBA. However, this is

further evidence to suggest that the data including the MBA part time students provides a more representative sample of the PGT population.

4.3 Generalisability

The data presented in tables 4.1 (a) and (b) (pages 82 and 83) and 4.2 (page 84) provides evidence that the data collected for this research study, including the MBA part time students, is representative of the PGT student population in the UK, but more specifically of the Business School in this University. The use of a representative sample will increase the validity and therefore the opportunities for generalisability of the findings with regards to the expectations of PGT students, into other schools in the University and also in to other universities.

Even so, a decision was made to analyse the data both including and excluding the MBA part time students. This is because the nature of these students is rather different from the characteristics of students on other PGT programmes. They are usually home students, located within the region of the University, older than students on other programmes, and are more likely to have work experience. For these reasons it was decided that this should be taken into consideration when discussing PGT student expectations as these differences in characteristics could significantly influence the results. By analysing both with and without the MBA students a comparison of the results can be used, where necessary.

The results of the data analysis regarding expectations for students, course leaders and a comparison between them will now be presented.

4.4 Students

Johnston (2010), Licata et al. (2008) and Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) discussed how student expectations will be influenced by significant external forces. The investigation of student expectations in this study will begin by identifying the major influences in the decision making process to study on a PGT programme.

4.4.1 The Influences of student expectations for PGT programmes.

Student focus groups took place in November 2012 (see Figure 3.1, page 60). In order to investigate the influences on student expectations all the focus groups began with the questions 'how did you find out what a Master's degree in the UK involved'?, and 'how much time did you spend researching and investigating'? The discussion that took place suggested that most students had done very little research about studying in the UK, the nature of PGT study or the content of their chosen course before either application or enrolment. Some students suggested that they had completed research for up to 3 months, but a number said as little as a week or a

couple of weeks. Others stated that they 'didn't have much time to research Masters' degree in the UK' and that 'to be honest I did little research'.

Having discovered in the focus groups that the students themselves had done very little research, it would be interesting to investigate who had influenced their decision of what and where to study. Therefore, in the following questionnaires carried out in September 2013 and 2014 (See Figure 3.1, page 60) students were asked 'Which two people or organisations had the **MOST** influence in developing your expectations'?

Table 4.3 Influence on expectations

	<u>%</u>
Parents	30.34
Previous educational establishment/Teacher	17.93
Current or previous employment/colleagues	21.72
Agents	0.34
University prospectus/website	5.17
Friends	16.90
Government	3.45
Other (Please state)	4.14

Source: Student questionnaires, Business school, data 2014

Table 4.3 shows that parents had the most influence in developing student expectations with a response of 30.34%. Other important influencers were previous education, current or previous employment and friends with percentages ranging between 16.90 and 21.72%.

4.4.2 Student expectations of the outcome of a PGT programme?

Authors including Haman et al.(2010), Serenko (2011) and Lobo and Gurney (2014) defined student expectations in a variety of ways depending on the context in which it is being used. For the purpose of this study expectations are defined as 'the benefits a student feels they will gain by studying on a PGT programme'.

The results of the questionnaires carried out in September 2013 and 2014 (see Figure 3.1, page 60) regarding student expectations will now be considered, including whether these expectations are influenced by the background factors of nationality, age and gender. Students completing the questionnaire were asked to rank the ten statements regarding their expectations in order of importance with 1 (least important) and 10 (most important). As discussed in the Methodology chapter some students used each ranking more than once and this had to be taken in to consideration when analysing the results. Amendments were made to the questionnaire between September 2013 and 2014 in order to try and improve the results obtained (see Figure 3.1, page 60).

4.4.2.1 Most Important Expectations

Table 4.4 identifies the % of ranking 10 for each expectation statement as a proportion of the total number of 10 rankings for all statements. The higher the % and the more times a statement was ranked as 10, most important, in comparison with the other statements. For example, talent was ranked as 10 on 13.30% of occasions in comparison with the other expectation statements. The % to show the number of times that each statement was ranked between 6 and 10 in comparison with the other statements has also been included. This ensured that any expectations that were regularly identified as important but not the most important were still included in the analysis. The mean ranking and standard deviation for each expectation was calculated, to identify the average location and spread of the rankings. In table 4.4 the colour green has been used to highlight the overall highest percentage rankings and red the lowest.

Table 4.4: The % of student higher level rankings for each expectation

	With MBA				Without MBA			
	% of Ranks				% of Ranks			
	<u>10</u>	<u>6-10</u>	<u>Mean</u>	St.Dev	<u>10</u>	<u>6-10</u>	<u>Mean</u>	St.Dev
Talent	13.30	10.23	7.00	2.82	13.18	10.31	7.51	2.38
Leadership	11.15	10.79	7.14	2.74	8.91	9.56	6.86	2.79
Communication	11.76	10.61	7.20	2.64	13.18	10.69	7.79	2.45
Decision Making	9.59	11.17	7.22	2.36	10.08	10.94	7.54	2.31
Interpersonal Skills	6.81	9.19	6.55	2.45	7.75	9.56	7.10	2.43
Training	5.88	9.19	6.44	2.71	6.20	9.56	7.00	2.56
Real Life	9.59	9.28	6.40	3.02	10.08	9.56	6.91	2.92
Promotion	10.83	10.04	6.97	2.79	9.30	10.06	7.31	2.52
Employment	10.52	8.71	6.34	3.33	11.63	9.31	7.07	3.06
Achievement	10.52	10.79	6.99	2.66	9.69	10.44	7.27	2.54

Source: Student questionnaires 2013 and 2014.

The data here has been analysed both including and excluding the MBA part time students. This is because, as explained, the nature of these students is rather different from the characteristics of other PGT programmes and may therefore influence the results.

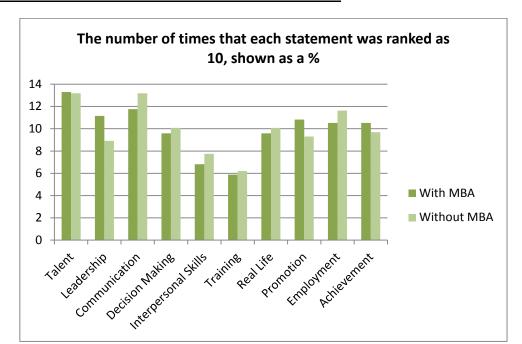


Figure 4.1: The % that students ranked each statement as 10

Source: Student Questionnaires 2013 and 2014.

It can be seen from Table 4.4 (page 87) and Figure 4.1 above that the expectation of 'Develop talent and creativity in me' has the highest percentage of 10 rankings when the MBA is included (13.30) and excluded (13.18). Olszewski-Kunilius and Thomson (2015) explain how talent development can mean different things to different people, and this is important to take in to consideration as part of this study. The students were not given an explanation of the term talent development when the questionnaires were distributed, and therefore, may have different interpretations of what the term means to them. A number of definitions that have been used in the literature to describe talent development (Silzer & Dowell, 2010 and Ullrich & Smallwood, 2012) relate to an individual's transferable skills and abilities. Evidence from the student focus groups would suggest that this definition of talent associated with transferable skills is appropriate for this study. Students made comments such as 'masters provides me with the best skills for me to use in the future, lifelong skills', 'not only the specific knowledge but also other skills', and 'I find it difficult to have transferable skills'.

This is also confirmed by 'enhance my communication skills', showing a 10 ranking frequency of 11.76% and 13.18% when the MBA was included or excluded, and had the highest mean at 7.79.

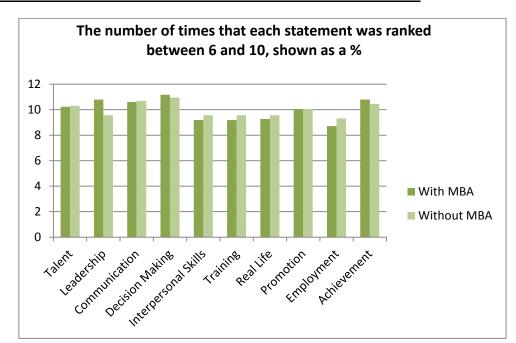


Figure 4.2: The % that students ranked each statement between 6 and 10

Source: Student Questionnaires 2013 and 2014.

In addition, Figure 4.2 shows that when the number of times that a statement was ranked between 6 and 10 is taken in to consideration then 'develop my decision making skills', is also important, with a frequency of 10.94%. This statement also had the smallest standard deviation showing that there is little variation in student opinion with regards to this expectation.

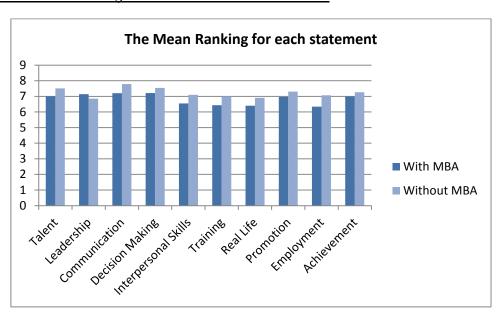


Figure 4.3: The Mean ranking for each statement for students

Source: Student Questionnaires 2013 and 2014.

Figure 4.3 highlights the mean ranking for each of the ten expectation statements, showing that all had a mean higher than 6 with the lowest being 6.34. Overall, the mean for 9 out of the 10

statements was higher when the MBA students were included. This makes it more difficult to make clear distinctions regarding the relative importance of the various statements regarding expectations. Although, high and low scoring expectations can clearly be seen, there are not any significant differences between many of the other statements. This could be because many of the statements relate to the development of transferable skills, and if the definition of talent development relating to skills is used, then these are all an important expectation of the PGT programmes.

4.4.2.2 Least Important Expectations

In addition to considering the data with regard to the expectations identified as being most important by the students it is also interesting to identify the percentage that each statement was ranked as being less important.

Table 4.5: The % of lower level rankings for each expectation for students

	With MBA		Without MBA	
	% of ranks		% of ranks	
	<u>1</u>	<u>1-5</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>1-5</u>
Talent	8.40	9.48	4.76	9.01
Leadership	9.60	8.19	19.05	11.37
Communication	8.40	8.62	9.50	7.84
Decision Making	3.60	7.33	4.76	7.05
Interpersonal Skills	3.60	11.85	0	11.37
Training	8.40	11.85	7.14	11.37
Real Life	19.20	11.64	23.80	11.37
Promotion	4.80	9.91	2.38	9.80
Employment	27.70	12.93	21.43	12.16
Achievement	6.02	8.19	7.14	8.60

Source: Student questionnaires 2013 and 2014.

Table 4.5 identifies the % of 1 ranking for each statement as a % of the total number of 1 rankings for all 10 statements. The % that each statement was ranked somewhere between 1 and 5 has also been included, in addition to just 1, to ensure that any expectations that were regularly identified as low importance but may be not the least important were still included in the analysis. On this occasion, the colour green has been used to identify the lowest percentage rankings, and therefore the expectations that were considered to be more important and red to highlight the highest percentage rankings, and therefore, least important.

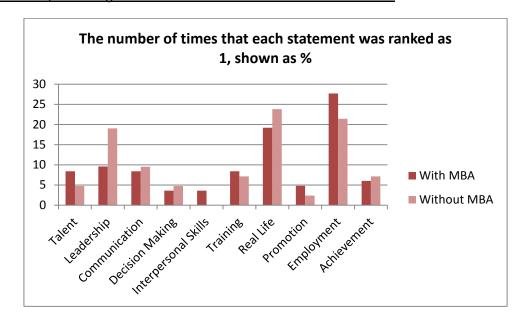


Figure 4.4: The percentage that students ranked each statement as 1

Source: Student Questionnaires 2013 and 2014

Figure 4.4 confirms the importance of all the transferable skills with a low % of rankings but especially 'develop decision making skills'. This expectation statement has the lowest percentage of students ranking this expectation as 1 (least important) when the MBA part time was included. When the MBA is excluded it is still very low with a percentage of 4.76% and a low overall percentage when all the rankings between 1 and 5 are taken in to consideration.

Table 4.5 (page 90) and Figure 4.4 identify that 'give me access to better employment' was the expectation with the highest frequency of 1 rankings (least important) and therefore regarded as the least important outcome of the PGT programme for many students. However, some influence of the MBA part time students can be seen as the percentage rose from 21.43% to 27.70% when they were included. This could be the influence of their different circumstances, as discussed earlier, where most students are already in paid employment and their employer contributing partly or in full to the fees for the programme. This variation in opinion is confirmed by the fact that the statement regarding employment also has the highest standard deviation of 3.06 which suggests that it is the one with the highest variation in student opinion on its importance. Despite this variation in opinion employment is clearly identified as the least important as the % of 1 ranking for this expectation was still 8.5% higher than the next one of 'provide real life learning experiences'.

During the focus group discussions (November 2012, see Figure 3.1, page 60) students explained how it is the skills gained while studying that gives them the edge in employment and enhanced career prospects rather than the PGT qualification itself. Comments included 'it is a way of thinking rather than specifically training you for a job' and 'a masters provides me with the best skills for me to use in the future, lifelong skills'. The findings of the focus group discussions show that students

see the development of these transferable skills as being just as important in improving their career prospects as developing specific subject knowledge from a particular PGT programme.

4.4.3 Student Expectations and Background

Previous research regarding student expectations by Humphery and McCarthy(1999), Sander et al. (2000), Niehoff et al. (2001), Swain and Hammond (2011) and Tobbell and O'Donnell (2013) suggest that a number of factors may have effected student expectations and these may include culture, gender and mode of study. This study has considered PGT student expectations in relation to the background factors of nationality, age and gender. Data regarding the course of study was also taken in to consideration as the different characteristics of the students studying on the part time MBA programme may have had some influence on the other results.

4.5.3.1 Nationality

As discussed in the Methodology chapter, the nationality of students was grouped together in to regions of origin, as used by HESA, to ensure that a small number of students from a particular country did not create bias in the results.

Figure 4.5 shows that the expectation of 'develop talent and creativity in me' had the highest mean (8.42) for students from the Middle East. This compares with 'enhance my communication skills' with a mean of 8.01 for students from Asia, 'give me access to better employment' (9.20) for students from Africa and ''develop my leadership skills' (7.59) for students from the EU.

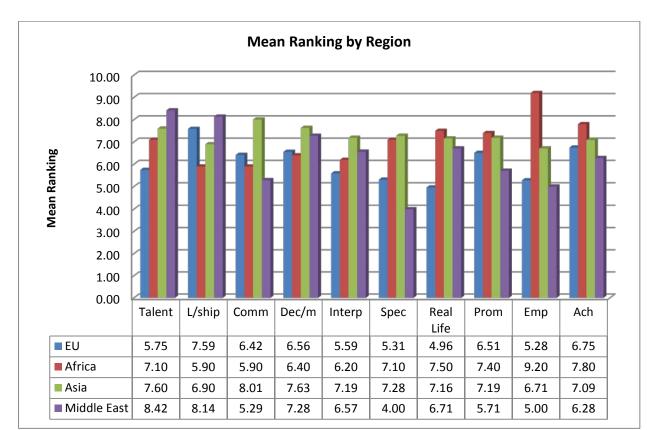


Figure 4.5: Mean ranking for students by region

Source: Student Questionnaire 2013 and 2014

The chi squared test was used to test the hypothesis that there is no association between each of the statements regarding expectation and the region of origin.

Table 4.6 identifies that the expectation statements of 'develop talent and creativity in me', 'enhance my communication skills', and 'enhance my interpersonal skills' show an association with background at a 10% level of significance. Two of the statements, 'provide specialised training and instruction' and 'provide real life learning experiences', show a stronger association with a 5% level of significance. However, the results in Table 4.6 also show that there is no association between background and the importance judgements for 'develop my leadership skills', develop my decision making skills', 'develop opportunities for promotion', give me access to better employment', and 'enhance my achievement at work'.

Table 4.6: Chi Squared results for expectation and region of origin.

Expectation Statement	Significance Level from Chi Squared
Talent	0.056*
Leadership	0.114
Communication	0.068*
Decision Making	0.116
Interpersonal Skills	0.070*
Training	0.000**
Real Life	0.034**
Promotion	0.595
Employment	0.120
Achievement	0.689

^{*}significant at 10% **significant at 5%

Source: SPSS statistics from student questionnaires 2013 and 2014

The importance of leadership skills for students from the EU should be considered alongside the chi squared test looking at the association between each course and the expectation statements. This test showed that there was a 5% level of significance for an association between courses and 'develop my leadership skills'. As discussed previously, the majority of MBA students are part time home/EU students who live within the region of the University. These students will make up a large proportion of the home/EU students included in this sample as the majority of the other PGT programmes in the Business School recruit a large proportion of international students. Therefore, the results here would suggest that the different nature of the MBA course means that students enrolling on to this programme have an expected outcome from the programme that it will enable them to 'develop leadership skills'.

Further discussion in the focus groups (November 2012, see Figure 3.1, page 60) explained why the expectation of enhancing communication skills was so important to the international students, especially for those from Asia, but also the Middle East. Comments explained how it is not general communication skills that the students are expecting but rather the development of their English language skills. Comments included 'it's the language, because I like English language, it is an international language', and 'we can do our English, it is very important'. One student in the focus groups took this discussion even further and suggested that it is studying in the UK that is most important. They stated that 'the education system in England is quite strong. I think that sometimes it doesn't matter what you have learnt, what matters is that you have been to the UK to learn'. This agrees with the findings of Russell (2005, p.73) who stated that "the ability to improve or learn

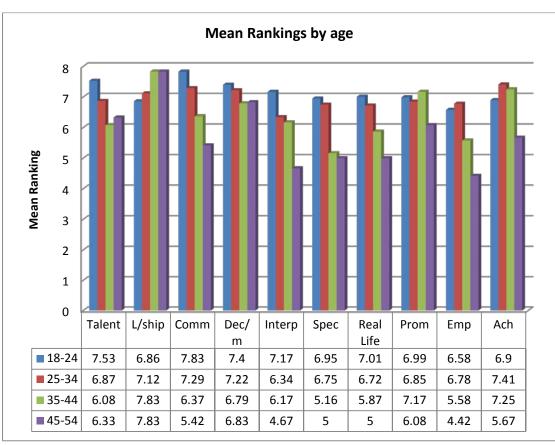
languages was considered important by postgraduates". The lower % for EU and African students may be explained by the fact that many students from these backgrounds will already be well developed in English language skills, as many qualifications in these countries are taught in English. Therefore, this interpretation of communication skills is not as important to them. Overall, the results show that nationality is an important background characteristic and does influence the expectation of PGT programmes, although, its influence varies depending upon the expectation that is being considered.

Age will now be considered in relation to whether it effects the expectations of students enrolling on to the PGT programmes.

4.5.3.2 Age

Four categories (18-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54) were included in the analysis of age in relation to the expectation statements. Although two older age categories (55-60 and 60+) had been included in the questionnaire, a decision was taken not to include them in the analysis because the numbers of students in these categories were so small, only one student in each category, that they created bias in the results.

Figure 4.6: Mean rankings for students by age



Source: Student Questionnaires 2013 and 2014

Figure 4.6 identifies that 'enhance my communication skills' was the most important expectation for students in the 18-24 age group with a mean of 7.83. This compares with a mean of 7.41 in the 25-34 age group for 'enhance my achievement at work' and 'develop my leadership skills' for the two age groups 35-44 and 45-54 both with means of 7.83. The expectation regarding access to better employment is more important to younger students as the mean in the age group 45-54 was only 4.42. However, 'enhance my achievement at work' was more important in the age groups 25-34 and 35-44. The findings here compare with those of (Davey, 2002 and Jamieson, 2007) who both suggested that students in midlife are still concerned with the labour market and improving their current job situation. The differences shown in this study are that by mid-life the transferable skills such as decision making are more important outcomes from the PGT programme than those of communication skills that are more important to students in the younger age categories.

This is most likely due to the nature of any career development. Younger students are hoping to get on to the career ladder whilst more mature students may already be in employment or have some work experience and are hoping to develop this further with the use of a PGT qualification. These results should be discussed with caution as the students from Asia who also identified 'enhance my communication skills' as being the most important are usually in the younger age categories. They are full time international students who have made a decision to study at PGT level often immediately after completing an undergraduate qualification. Therefore, it is likely that there is a relationship between the two results. In addition, the MBA students who identified 'develop my leadership skills' as being their most important expectation when considering regions are also more likely to be in the older age categories as relevant work experience is one of the requirements for enrolment on to the programme. However, the chi squared test between course and expectations identified no significant relationship, and therefore, it cannot be concluded that these findings with regard to age have been influenced by the different characteristic of the MBA programme.

Table 4.7: Chi Squared results for expectation and age.

Expectation Statement	Significance Level from Chi Squared
Talent	0.044**
Leadership	0.198
Communication	0.094*
Decision Making	0.747
Interpersonal Skills	0.04**
Training	0.155
Real Life	0.287
Promotion	0.380
Employment	0.085*
Achievement	0.064*

^{*}significant at 10%

Source: SPSS statistics from student questionnaires 2013 and 2014

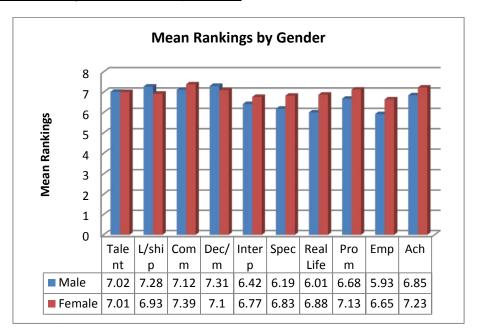
Further analysis using the chi squared test shows no significant relationship between 'develop my leadership skills' and age. This was also true of 'develop my decision making skills', 'provide specialised training and instruction', 'provide real life learning experiences', and 'develop opportunities for promotion'. An association between age and the expectations of 'develop talent and creativity in me', and 'enhance my interpersonal skills' does exist at the 5% level of significance. The data in Table 4.7 would suggest that both of these expectations are more important to younger students. An association also exists between age and 'enhance my communication skills', 'give me access to better employment' and 'enhance my achievement at work' at a 10% level of significance. It may be that enhancing communication skills is more important to younger students as they have had less opportunity to develop this type of skill through 'real' work or other life experiences. As discussed earlier, it could be argued that there is a link between this relationship and that of communication skills and region of origin, as the international students tend to be in the younger age groups. However, the relationship was still apparent when the MBA part time students were included, and they are all usually home students who live locally to the University.

^{**}significant at 5%

4.5.3.3 Gender

Gender was analysed as a background factor in order to consider whether the expectations of male and female students were the same or different.

Figure 4.7: Mean rankings for students by Gender



Source: Student questionnaires 2013 and 2014

Figure 4.7 shows that the most important expectation for male students, with a mean of 7.26, was 'develop my leadership skills'. The least important expectation, with a mean of 6.01, was 'provide real life learning experiences'. In comparison, the most important expectation for female students was 'enhance my communication skills', with a mean of 7.39, and least important was 'give me access to better employment', with a mean of 6.65. However, the mean for all ten statements are within a limited range, which suggests that there is little difference between the expectations of male and female students. Further analysis will identify whether there are any significant differences between the opinions of male and female students for any of the ten statements.

Table 4.8: Chi Squared results for expectation and gender.

Expectation Statement	Significance Level from Chi Squared
Talent	0.859
Leadership	0.066*
Communication	0.231
Decision Making	0.524
Interpersonal Skills	0.057*
Training	0.851
Real Life	0.471
Promotion	0.04*
Employment	0.237
Achievement	0.374

^{*}significant at 10%

Source: SPSS statistics from student questionnaires 2013 and 2014

Table 4.8 identifies that there is a difference in the expectations of male and female students regarding the statements of 'develop my leadership skills', 'enhance my interpersonal skills', and 'develop opportunities for promotion and/or career development' at the 10% level of significance. The means shown in Figure 4.7 (page 98) identify that leadership skills are more important for male students whilst interpersonal skills and opportunities for promotion are more important for female students. These findings would support the literature on differences in gender in the workplace. Booth (2009) suggested that men are more likely to see themselves as potential leaders, which could explain their interest in developing leadership skills as part of the PGT programme. In addition, Clark and Anderson (1992), Swain and Hammond (2011) and Hurn (2013) all explain how women are more likely to expect to only gain promotion on merit, lack confidence in showcasing themselves, and are motivated by employment requirements. Therefore, they are looking for a PGT qualification to develop the appropriate transferable skills, but also have a qualification that allows them to feel able to seek promotion opportunities.

4.5.3.4 Course

Finally, although not a background factor, the expectations of students in relation to the different PGT programmes that they are enrolled on to will now be considered. The analysis here will enable discussion as to whether or not the MBA part time students have created any influence or bias within the results.

^{**}significant at 5%

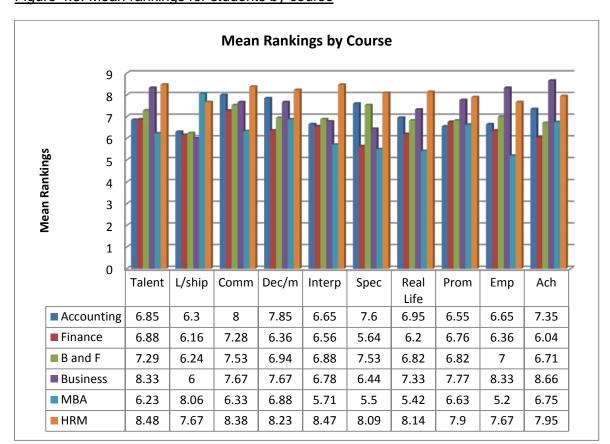


Figure 4.8: Mean rankings for students by course

Source: Student questionnaires 2013 and 2014

Figure 4.8 identifies that 'enhance my communication skills' was the statement with the highest mean for students on Accounting, Finance and Banking and Finance PGT programmes with means of 8, 7.28 and 7.53 respectively. The majority of students on these programmes are international from Asia and in the younger age categories. This would therefore agree with earlier findings regarding these characteristics and the importance of developing communication skills, especially regarding the development of the English language.

For students on the Business programme, 'enhance my achievement at work' had the highest mean at 8.66, although this was closely followed by 'give me access to better employment', and 'develop talent and creativity in me' both with 8.33. This shows that despite the other findings regarding the importance of transferable skills, students enrolled on to the business programme found the statements regarding career progression to be most important. The statement with the highest mean for students enrolled on to the PGT programme in HRM was 'develop talent and creativity in me' with a mean of 8.48.

The highest mean for students on the MBA programme was 'develop my leadership skills' with a mean of 8.06. As discussed previously, these students are already working and these results would suggest that they are using the achievement of this qualification as a way of being promoted

into management or leadership positions and therefore, the development of this type of transferable skill is most important.

Table 4.9: Chi Squared results for expectation and course

Expectation Statement	Significance Level from Chi Squared
Talent	0.120
Leadership	0.032**
Communication	0.570
Decision Making	0.164
Interpersonal Skills	0.023**
Training	0.011**
Real Life	0.375
Promotion	0.715
Employment	0.090*
Achievement	0.847

^{*}significant at 10%

Source: SPSS statistics from student questionnaires 2013 and 2014

Table 4.9 identifies that there is a difference in expectations in relation to course at the 5% level of significance for the statements regarding leadership, interpersonal skills and training at the 5% level of significance. For the statement 'develop my leadership skills' the mean is higher for both the MBA and HRM programmes. An explanation for has been discussed in relation to the nature of the MBA students but this could also be explained by the nature of students on the other programmes such as Accounting, Finance and Banking and Finance who at this stage of their development do not see leadership skills as an important transferable skill for their chosen career path. The statements regarding interpersonal skills and specialized training were seen as being most important by students enrolled on to the PGT programme in HRM. Again, this could be explained by the specific nature of this programme and the skills that are identified as being important to take up this type of role in the future.

The results discussed here would suggest that no significant bias has been created by including the MBA part time students in the sample. The analysis does identify that their expectations are different to students enrolled on to other courses, however, these differences are no more significant than differences identified on other courses, and therefore, the decision to include them in the analysis to ensure that the sample was representative was appropriate. The analysis of all of the background factors shows that each one cannot be analysed in isolation as they can be

^{**}significant at 5%

dependent on each other. For example, the results by course will have been affected by the fact that particular courses attract students of a certain nationality and age group. The results by region may be influenced by the fact that a large proportion of international students tend to be in the younger age groups.

4.5 Course Leaders

In order to achieve the objectives of this research study, the analysis will now continue by considering the perceptions of course leaders with regard to the expectations of students.

4.5.1 Course leader perception of the importance of understanding student expectations

Interviews were conducted with six course leaders of PGT programmes within the Business School between September and November 2014 (see Figure 3.1, page 60). Although this is a small number in relation to the number of students involved in the research, it is a representative sample of course leader profiles. All departments involved in PGT programmes in the research study have been represented, along with both genders and a distribution in terms of age and experience. Shank, Walker and Hayes (1995) stated that "the small sample on the service provider side may be problematic however, the nature of education services means that there will be many more students than professors" (p.77). This research was conducted in the USA where professors carry out a similar role to the course leaders involved in this study, and therefore a similar comment can be made here.

4.5.1.1 Expectations are important

Discussion during the interviews discovered that some course leaders did feel that it was important to have an understanding of PGT student expectations. Comments included 'it is really important, how else can we meet their expectations if we don't know what they are', 'I think it is very important, but difficult to do so', 'it is incredibly important, I don't think enough attention is paid to it', and 'an understanding of student expectations at the start of the programme are absolutely essential'. Relating this more directly to students, one of the reasons identified in the interviews for the importance of understanding student expectations included that without this knowledge 'how can we help them understand whether or not their expectations are realistic?'

This appeared to be a recurring theme and a number of course leaders expressed concern that student's expectations were often unrealistic using comments such as 'totally ill informed' and 'there is always that expectation that they want something that we are not able to give them', 'they are not always realistic, but it depends on each individual student', and 'students are wanting more from the programme than the programme can deliver'. Another stated that 'students didn't have

quite enough humility'. They explained this by saying 'students have expectations of the masters qualification that they are going to go on and rule the world and of course the extent to which they are going to do this is actually very limited. They have expectations that are not going to be met. One course leader went as far as to say that 'some students expect an awful lot more from doing the course than they realistically can get from the amount of effort that they put in'. Another explained how they believed that 'a lot of their expectations may be based upon their previous experience of education so they expect to get the same again'. However, these expectations may not always be realistic. In addition, it was also discussed that student expectations are not always the same and there will be 'students with different expectations within the same class', for example one course leader suggested that 'international students might have very different views to UK students'. This agrees with the work of Sander et al. (2000), Niehoff et al. (2001), Ham and Hayduk (2003) and Morgan (2014) who suggested that expectations are shaped by the identities of individual students, are influenced by a number of factors, and therefore culturally diverse students might hold different expectations. There was also a concern expressed about whether students really knew what their expectations of a particular programme were. A course leader stated 'I don't think they know what they want but that 'their expectations are not always the same as ours' and there is 'always that expectation that they want something that we are not able to give them'.

4.5.1.2 Expectations are not important

Other interviews took place with course leaders who were not as definite about the importance of understanding student expectations. One suggested that 'it is important to some degree', because 'it makes a difference in some ways as to how you position the course and how you pitch a course, however, the extent of what you know is probably fairly small'. However, another stated 'I don't really think it is important'. They discussed how 'I don't think I would change my teaching if they had different expectations....., in all the years I have been teaching I have never asked what their expectations are or thought about it, I have never really sat down and thought what do they expect to get out of it'.

It was suggested that 'we cannot just design what we are delivering to meet their expectations as there are also other demands for the programme to meet particular standards'. An interviewee explained how what should be happening is 'educating and supporting them to the best of our ability to enable them to complete a postgraduate programme that also meets the benchmark of what a UK Masters programme looks like'. The previous interviewee continued to say that 'I'm not convinced any of them (programmes) are set up with expectations of students in mind. We set programmes based on what we think we can deliver with the staff that we have got. I don't think student expectations are key in that at all, and I don't think we ever ask students what their expectations are or what they want. Our courses are driven by what we can physically deliver at any point in time and the QAA benchmarks'.

It would appear that those course leaders who do not consider student expectations to be important do not identify with or accept the SAC model, and their opinions do not assume students to be customers of the University. This would agree with the statement that "universities should not only be working towards meeting the short term demands of students in order to ensure satisfaction" Mark (2013 p.3).

4.5.2 Course leader perceptions of student expectations of the outcome of a PGT programme Having discussed whether student expectations are considered to be important, the staff perceptions of student expectations of the outcome of a PGT programme will now be discussed. These perceptions were collected using questionnaires in May 2014 (see Figure 3.1, page 60). Just as students have different expectations of the programme, course leaders have varying perceptions of what the expected student outcome of a programme might be.

Table 4.10: The Percentage of higher level rankings for each expectation (Course leaders)

	<u>10</u>	<u>6-10</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>StDev</u>
	% of			
	ranks			
Talent	14	29	4.57	3.36
Leadership	29	71	6.71	3.25
Communication	-	57	6.43	2.07
Decision Making	-	43	4.43	2.94
Interpersonal Skills	-	57	4.57	1.90
Training	-	57	5.29	3.35
Real Life	-	29	4.57	2.76
Promotion	-	86	7.29	2.43
Employment	57	71	8.14	2.91
Achievement	-	86	7.00	1.83

Source: Course Leader Questionnaire 2014

Table 4.10 identified the % that each statement was ranked as 10, most important, as a % of the total 10 rankings for all statements. The same as for the students, the % that a statement was ranked between 6 and 10 (important) has also been included. The same colour coding as for student expectations have been used with the highest values (most important) highlighted using green and the lowest (least important) red.

The number of times that each statement was ranked as 10 or between 6 and 10 (shown as a %)

Ranked 10

Ranked 6-10

Ranked 6-10

Figure 4.9: The % that course leaders ranked each statement as 10 or between 6 and 10

Source: Course Leader Questionnaire 2014

The data in Table 4.10 and Figure 4.9 shows that the expectation of 'give me access to better employment' was perceived by course leaders to be the most important expectation of PGT students with 57% ranking this as 10. It also has the highest mean value of 8.14. When the number of times that each statement was ranked between 6 and 10 is taken in to consideration then 'develop opportunities for promotion and career development' and 'enhance my achievement at work' are also seen as being important both with percentages of 86%. 'Enhance my achievement at work' also has the lowest value standard deviation of 1.83, suggesting that there was little difference in the perception of course leaders about the importance of this expectation for students.

A number of explanations were included on the questionnaires as to why or how course leaders have developed these perceptions about the importance of employment/career development as an expectation of the PGT programmes. One course leader explained how 'most students cite work/career enhancement as a reason for taking the course during induction'. Another suggested that 'employment prospects appear to be a return variable on the tuition fee which is considered an investment'. Comments made during the interviews confirmed the results of the questionnaire, with comments such as; 'I would have thought that most students who come on a master's programme usually would be looking to get a qualification which could further their career prospects', and 'they are expecting something that will give them a distinguisher in the employment market'.

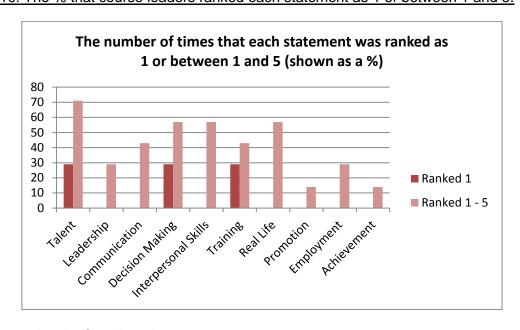
Table 4.11: The % of lower level rankings for each expectation (Course leaders)

	<u>1</u>	<u>1-5</u>
	% of	
	ranks	
Talent	29	71
Leadership	-	29
Communication	-	43
Decision Making	29	57
Interpersonal Skills	-	57
Training	29	43
Real Life	-	57
Promotion	-	14
Employment	-	29
Achievement	-	14

Source: Course Leader Questionnaire 2014

Table 4.11 identifies the % that each statement was ranked as 1 (least important) by the course leaders as a percentage of the total rankings for that statement. The % to show the number of times that each statement was ranked somewhere between 1 and 5 has also been included, in addition to just 1, to ensure that any expectations that were regularly identified as low importance but may be not the least important were still included in the analysis. As with the student data, on this occasion, the colour green has been used to identify the lowest percentage rankings, and therefore the expectations that were considered to be more important and red to highlight the highest percentage rankings, and therefore, least important.

Figure 4.10: The % that course leaders ranked each statement as 1 or between 1 and 5.



Source: Course Leader Questionnaire 2014

The data in Table 4.11(page 105) and Figure 4.10 confirms the course leader perception of the most important expectation for students of the outcome of a programme as 'develop opportunities for promotion and career development and 'enhance my achievement at work' as both of these statements had no 1 rankings (least important) and the lowest number of rankings between 1 and 5 at 14%. The data also shows that 'develop talent and creativity in me' was perceived by course leaders to be the least important expectation for students of the outcome of a PGT programme in the Business School. This statement was ranked as 1 (least important) in 29% of cases. In addition 71% of the rankings for this statement were in the range of 1-5. This shows that it was not perceived to be an important expectation for students by the majority of course leaders. This was confirmed by comments included on the questionnaires such as 'creativity is not a prime reason for doing a postgraduate business course', and 'I have never seen any creative accounting students and feel that this is not something that they expect. They prefer rote learning over creativity'. This could be an issue for further research internally within the Business School. Do PGT students prefer rote learning over creativity, especially given the findings of this research about student expectations of developing talent? Or alternatively, is that the type of teaching and learning that staff are more comfortable with?

Despite these reservations some course leaders did make comments in the interviews that would suggest that they are aware that some students expect to develop transferable skills during their time on a PGT programme. One course leader stated 'students want to get something that is a vehicle for them to be able to use in their everyday life'. Another explained how 'some are expecting to come here and study in the UK just to develop better English language skills'. However, they continued by arguing that this should not be an expectation of the programme. They suggest that 'it's not really about increasing your English language skills, you need that level of skill in the first place'.

4.5.3 Adaptability

During the interviews (September to November 2014, see Figure 3.1, page 60), course leaders were also asked about whether they were willing to adapt their programmes to meet the expectations of students.

The discussion that followed showed that some were willing to be adaptable and made comments such as 'I would adapt it to the needs of the students' and 'I would explore what their expectations were and if they were realistic'. However, other course leaders made comments that suggested that the needs and expectations of the students were not taken in to consideration and that they were not willing to be as adaptable. Comments included 'I think there are issues about clarity and understanding what they (students) want, is it needed, not really even sure that it is, does it matter, maybe, maybe not, as in a way the systems worked imperfectly but it's worked for many

years. We have a long tradition of this and there does seem to be some sort of positive outcomes from it for some of the students'. This would suggest that on some programmes there is an attitude that the programmes have worked well for years, and some students are happy with the outcome, therefore, changes and improvements are not necessary. However, is this enough in today's more competitive higher education environment? Another course leader went further and suggested that some programmes are developed based upon what is convenient at the time. They stated that 'I'm not convinced any of them are set up with expectations of students in mind, we set up programmes based on what we think we can deliver with the staff that we have got and that often means borrowing modules that already exist. I don't think the student expectations are key in that at all, and I don't think we ever ask students what their expectations are of what they want. I don't think you could change a master's program to meet the expectations of students. We cannot meet all of their expectations at the same time. A British Masters programme should meet certain standards set and requirements and, you know, what students expect might not meet those requirements. I am not saying that we should just ignore what students want and expect but the students are not always the best judge of what will give them that'. These comments should be analysed in the context of the QAA guidelines. The interviewee above explains how standards and requirements have to be met, but is not aware that these requirements expect programmes to "reflect both the desires and ambitions of students" (QAA, 2010, p.4) or rather their expectations from the programme.

The results from both students and course leaders have now been analysed and the differences in expectations between them can be presented.

4.6 The difference in expectations between students and course leaders

The first gap of the customer service model (Parasuraman et al.,1985) was that of the difference between customer expectations and management perceptions of those customer expectations. This study has interpreted this gap as the difference between the expectations of students and the perceptions of course leaders regarding the expectations of students from the outcome of a particular PGT programme.

Table 4.12: A comparison of student and course leader expectations

Expectation	Mean of students	Mean of staff	Difference in the mean
	expectations (with	perceptions of student	
	<u>MBA)</u>	<u>expectations</u>	
Talent	7.00	4.57	2.43*
Leadership	7.14	6.71	0.43
Communication	7.20	6.43	0.77
Decision Making	7.22	4.43	2.79**
Interpersonal Skills	6.55	4.57	1.98*
Training	6.44	5.29	1.15
Real Life	6.40	4.57	1.83
Promotion	6.97	7.29	-0.32
Employment	6.34	8.14	-1.8
Achievement	6.99	7.00	-0.01

^{*}significant at 5%

Source: Student questionnaire 2013 and 2014 and course leader questionnaires 2014

It is difficult to make direct comparisons in terms of the number of rankings or percentages due to the large difference in numbers completing the questionnaires from each category. There were considerably more students involved in this study compared with a small number of course leaders. However, the difference in the mean between student's expectations and the perceptions of staff for each of the ten statements is shown in Table 4.12. T tests were conducted for each statement to test whether the difference was significant at the 5% and 1% level of significance.

The t tests identified that the means for 'develop talent and creativity in me' and 'enhance my interpersonal skills', both of which could be described as transferable skills, were different at the 5% level of significance. In addition, the difference for 'develop my decision making skills' was more significant at a 1% level of significance.

^{**} significant at 1%

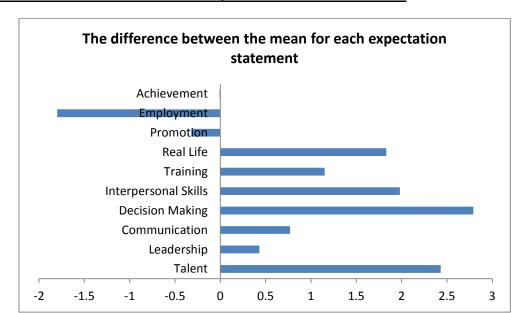


Figure 4.11: The difference in the mean expectation for each statement

Source: Student questionnaire 2013 and 2014 and course leader questionnaires 2014

Not all of the differences calculated were significant however Figure 4.11 shows that all of the statements relating to transferable skills showed a positive difference between the means. This identifies that transferable skills were seen to be more important expectations for students than they were perceived to be by course leaders. The statement for employment and achievement at work show a negative difference between the means, therefore, these were perceived to be more important by course leaders.

The analysis of the data will now be discussed further in relation to the objectives of this research study.

Chapter 4(b): Analysis and Discussion

The aim of this research is to complete a gap in the literature and make a contribution to knowledge by critically analysing the relationship between student and course leader expectations on PGT programmes using the customer service model (Parasuraman et al., 1985). This includes an evaluation of the importance and implications of these expectations for the future competitiveness of the Business School and University and consideration of student expectations in relation to the background characteristics of nationality, age and gender.

It is important to begin the discussion by identifying and explaining a major assumption of this research study; that students are considered to be the primary customers of the University and Business School. This assumption can be explained and justified in a number of ways.

4.7 The Student as Customer Model

This research study is interested in increasing knowledge of student expectations. This may lead to improved student satisfaction and the increased success and competitiveness of the PGT programmes in the future. By conducting research about their expectations the study is implying that knowledge about the students and their opinions regarding the programmes is important in the same way as another organisation may investigate opinions from customers.

Walker and Baker (2000) explained how it is important to understand the nature of customer's expectations. The reason for this importance as discussed by Luk and Layton (2002), Ofir and Simonson (2007) and Hsieh and Yuan (2010) is due to the clear links between exceeding customer expectations and customer satisfaction. If prior expectations of the service are too high, the gap between expectations and perceptions becomes larger, and the customer is less likely to be satisfied.

The SAC model is consistent with the objective of this study of considering the importance of student expectations, and whether meeting these expectations is important for student satisfaction and maintaining student numbers in the future. This implies that PGT education is a two way relationship between the Business School and the student. Meeting student expectations is just as important for both partners in the relationship. For the student in terms of satisfaction and achieving success in the future, and for the Business School in maintaining and increasing student numbers in the future. This would be in line with Douglas et al. (2006), Finney and Finney (2010) and Serenko (2011) who all agree with SAC model describing students as significant stakeholders in their education, because they are involved in a value exchange relationship, and are the direct recipients of the service being provided. Following this principle is also in accordance with the QAA

guidelines for the characteristics of a master's degree that states that the purpose of a programme will "reflect the desires and ambitions of students" (QAA, 2010, p.4).

The chapter will continue by considering each of the research objectives.

4.8 Analyse PGT student expectations of outcome

4.8.1 The influencers of student expectations

The evidence presented in the Results chapter (4a) agrees with Sander et al. (2000), Niehoff et al. (2001), Licata et al. (2008) and Serenko (2011) that most students enrolling onto PGT programmes are indeed novice consumers (Higgs et al.,2005) with little experience or knowledge of the path they are embarking upon. Most have not been a student on a PGT programme at this University or any other in the UK before. Some may have been involved in undergraduate programmes, either in this country or another, and their experiences there may have influenced their expectations. However, these may not be realistic for either a programme in this country or at PGT level. This would agree with the statement that "University applicants are extremely rarely exposed to a University programme prior to actual enrolment, and therefore, they are unlikely to form reliable and valid expectations" (Serenko, 2011, p.292).

Even so, they have done little research about the programme of study they are enrolling on to, but instead are more likely to have been influenced in their decision making by external parties. This agrees with Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) and Licata et al. (2008) who explained how expectations will have been influenced by another party, and in the case of international students they may have been pushed by external forces such as their parents. However, the results of this study (page 86) would suggest that for a majority of students' Agents, the University prospectus/website and the Government of their country has had little influence on their expectations of what the outcomes of a PGT programme would be for them. Government was included in this list of influencers as a number of international PGT students are sponsored by their home country's Government. There is an important implication for the University here, given the amount of time and expenditure that is involved in developing and continually updating the University website and prospectus. This will be discussed in more detail later.

Pratt et al. (1999), Serenko (2011) and Shamma and Hassan (2013) discuss how the current students on a programme become the experienced opinion leaders of the future. Word of mouth is an important marketing tool as the current students become a credible source of information for potential new students seeking information about a programme. These research findings show that it is important to target current students and ensure that their expectations are understood, realistic and achievable as they are likely to become the friends, parents, employers or teachers of the future influencing the decision of potential recruits. These influencers are more important than any

information that the University may publish for potential students to use. In addition, nowadays, the experiences of these current and recently graduated students are communicated quickly and easily around the world using social media. From a University's point of view, therefore, it is important to ensure that the expectations of current students are understood, realistic and achievable if the programmes are to continue to recruit and be successful in to the future.

Research has taken place over a number of years and by a variety of academics showing that an understanding of student expectations is important, for example Byrne and Flood (2005), Sander et al. (2010), Liu (2010), Lobo and Gurney (2014) and Morgan (2014). Despite the differing definitions, the importance of student expectations in the literature relates to student satisfaction and its increasing importance for universities. Student satisfaction can be defined as "the extent to which the programme has met student expectations" (Serenko, 2011.p.285). Therefore, if student expectations are not identified it is very difficult to maintain or design strategies to improve student satisfaction. The opinions of these novice consumers, their expectations before any influence by University staff or delivery of the programme are important for this study. Therefore data regarding student expectations was gathered at induction during their first week on the programme. The aim and objectives of this study and the timing of this data collection would agree that "higher education organisations need to gather information on students' expectations at the point of arrival along with other times during their programme of study in order to try and improve service quality" (Hill, 1995, p.10).

4.8.2 Student expectations

The results of this research of student expectations regarding the importance of talent development and transferable skills (page 88) identify both differences and similarities to previous research. In contrast to the findings of this research, a number of studies have highlighted the importance of career development as an expectation of PGT study. The studies were not entirely the same as this one as some concentrated on part time students and others undergraduates. Tight (1992), Clark and Anderson (1992), O'Neil and Palmer (1995) and Liu (2010) all suggest that career development was the most important reason for undertaking study, and "40% of students considered career developments to be the most important anticipated benefit" (Clark & Anderson, 1992, p.383). The research by Liu (2010) does include detailed discussion about transferable skills, however, this is related to the students preparedness for study rather than their expectations from the programme. Morgan (2014) found the most important expectations of PGT students to be to improve their knowledge of the subject, provide more career options, and improve their chance of getting a graduate job. However, a key difference in that research was that the students were given no opportunity to discuss the development of transferable skills. This study shows that the students do not expect the programme itself to 'give them access to better employment' (page 91), but expect that studying at PGT level will enhance their transferable skills.

In comparison, a number of other researchers (Pratt et al., 1999; Donaldson & McNicholas, 2004; Sastry, 2004; Jamieson, 2007 and Lightfoot, 2012) have discussed the importance of development of transferable skills or acquiring the skills and knowledge necessary for a students' current or future job. The students wanted courses that related to their work and enabled them to undertake their role more effectively. The findings here still relate closely to employment and career prospects, the key difference is identifying that these prospects may be improved by the development of transferable skills. This would suggest that the two concepts, career development and transferable skills, cannot be considered in isolation, but rather that one enhances the possibility of the other.

Donaldson and McNicholas (2004) explain how the potential PGT student recognises that there is a gap between the position they would like to be in, and where they are currently. The student must decide whether and how to fill this gap. The findings of this study suggest that the gap that needs to be filled is the development of transferable skills, especially those of talent, communication and decision making skills. These could be the skills that a full time PGT student are missing having chosen to continue with study rather than seeking employment following undergraduate education. Lightfoot (2012) did question whether graduates who choose PGT education are improving their employability or by choosing further study they risk making themselves less attractive to employers.

The importance of the expectation of 'develop talent and creativity in me' (page 88) creates important implications for course leaders within the Business School and universities in general. As argued by Gallardo-Gallardo et al. (2013) some aspects of talent involve natural ability and personal characteristics, and are therefore, virtually impossible to teach or learn. The findings here, with regard to talent, show that some PGT students are enrolling onto programmes with expectations of what it will achieve for them regarding personal development. These will be impossible for them to achieve, or for a University programme to meet, because the student does not have the appropriate abilities or characteristics. Some transferable skills can be developed through the programme, but others are skills, attributes or characteristics that a student will either have or not. They may be disappointed with the outcome of the programme when they do not achieve their expectations. This would agree with the findings of Ham and Hayduk (2003) and Soilemetzidis et al. (2014) who suggested that PGT students expect more from their universities than is realised and are therefore sometimes disappointed. The analysis for this research study continues by identifying whether the expectations identified as being most important are influenced by the background factors of nationality, age or gender.

4.8.3 Student expectations and background

Recent years have seen a rapid growth in student numbers on PGT programmes and a growing importance of this level of study in most universities. There is, therefore, a need to understand the

complex and diverse population of PGT students if a University is to maintain or increase this market share in the future. The growth in student numbers has increased the diversity of the student profile, with greater variations in relation to nationality, gender, age and previous qualifications. "The diversity of the market for postgraduate education is huge" (HEPI, 2010, p.59).

The data analysis showed that background characteristics do influence student expectations (pages 92 – 101). The background factors of nationality, age and gender are all important influencers and the analysis has shown some significant differences in relation to the opinions of students regarding their expectations of the outcome of a PGT programme.

4.9 Evaluate any differences in the expectations of students and the perceptions of those expectations by the course leaders influencing the development of the programme.

4.9.1 Course Leaders

An important implication for this research is whether PGT course leaders within the Business School assess student expectations as a relevant consideration when designing, developing and managing their programmes. Course leaders who consider student expectations to be important are more likely to be following the SAC model and therefore understand the implications of and use the findings of this research study when trying to improve their student experience in the future.

Course leaders and lecturers should have an understanding of student expectations (Zeithaml et al., 1990; Hill,1995; Ham & Hayduk, 2003; O' Neil & Palmer, 2004; Byrne & Flood, 2005; Voss et al., 2007 and Lobo & Gurney, 2014). They can be managed effectively throughout the programme in order to improve perceived service quality and student satisfaction. In most of the previous literature students expectations are defined in relation to teaching and learning. This research study uses a different definition and is concerned with student expectations in relation to the outcome from completing a PGT programme. However, this will still have an impact on perceived service quality and student satisfaction. "The ultimate aim of a University should be to benchmark performance against student expectations" (Shamma & Hassan, 2013 p.386). It would be difficult to achieve any of this if course leaders were unaware of the importance of understanding student expectations at the beginning of a programme of study or if students were enrolling with unrealistic expectations that were not challenged during induction programmes.

The findings show that there is variation in opinion between course leaders regarding the importance of knowledge regarding student expectations (pages 101-102). There are course leaders who do consider student expectations to be an important aspect of managing student satisfaction and have developed aspects of their programme to ensure that this type of information can be collected effectively. These course leaders have some understanding of how considering students as customers and managing expectations now may bring benefits in terms of recruitment

of students in the future. However, for others, it is not an important consideration when designing or delivering programmes and they see factors such as the QAA benchmarks or the availability of staff to deliver materials as a more important consideration. However, if a programme is being designed and delivered without taking the expectations (desires and ambitions) of students in to consideration then it is not meeting the requirements of the QAA guidelines. The QAA guidelines, the availability of resources and staff expertise are important considerations when designing programmes. There would be no point in investigating student expectations and designing a programme to meet these needs, if there were no staff with the appropriate qualifications or experience to deliver the programme as required, or that it did not meet the relevant subject benchmarks. However, the way forward is for all of these factors, including student expectations, to be used in collaboration when designing effective PGT programmes.

In terms of course leader perceptions of student expectations of a PGT programme. The findings here showed that course leaders perceived access to better employment, opportunities for promotion and career development and the ability to enhance achievement at work as being the most important expectations of the outcome of a programme (page 104). This would suggest that although course leaders are aware of some student expectations regarding transferable skills they do not perceive them to be one of the more important expectations by students of the outcome of a programme. This disagrees with the research by HEPI (2010) who explained that the transferable skills required by employers need to be integrated in to any Masters programme. They explained how in many cases a PGT qualification is seen as being secondary to work experience, and therefore universities need to think carefully about the skills that are being developed by their PGT students during the time that they are studying if they are to compete effectively in the job market. This research would suggest that course leaders are aware of the importance of PGT study in terms of future employment but not always what it is that employers are looking for from the qualification. This raises the question again about employability and what makes PGT study important for future employment? As quoted previously, "are graduates who choose postgraduate taught programmes improving their employability or do they risk making themselves less attractive to employers?" (Lightfoot, 2012).

4.9.2 The gap between student expectations and course leader perceptions of those expectations

The data analysis shows that a gap in the customer service model (Parasuraman et al., 1985) has been identified in relation to the expectations of students and the perceptions of those expectations by course leaders on PGT programmes in the Business School (pages 108-110). Research by Zeithaml and Bitner (1996), Luk and Layton (2002), Arambewela et al. (2005), McKnight (2009) and Shamma and Hassan (2013) all explained how a knowledge of the size and direction of this gap is important as strategies can then be put in place to reduce the gap, improve service quality and therefore increase overall customer satisfaction. The student expectations are all closely

related to the development of transferable skills, especially, the development of talent, interpersonal skills and decision making. In contrast the perceptions of course leaders were that students would be expecting completion of the programme to lead to enhanced employment opportunities, opportunities for promotion and achievements at work.

The importance of transferable skills is well researched and publicised, for example, Lightfoot (2012) published a quote from the Director of Careers at The London School of Economics who said that "A really sound reason for postgraduate study is a love of the subject or to gain skills that will make you more attractive to employers". However, if this is the case, then why were they perceived to be less important by course leaders? Liu (2010) questioned whether appropriate teaching and assessment was being designed and integrated in to the programmes to allow the development of transferable skills to take place. This question would also be true for this study. If course leaders do not perceive these skills to be as important as students then are they embedding them in to the programmes? This should include the design of teaching, learning and assessment activities that allows these skills to be developed. The development of transferable skills should also be considered in relation to the QAA (2010) guidelines regarding the characteristics of a master's degree. It is explained in the guidelines that these qualifications vary in their purpose or intention and that "programmes may assess not only academic skills but also other skills and competencies" (QAA, 2010, p.8). The documentation continues to explain how the characteristics of graduates will include subject specific attributes but also generic attributes, including skills relevant to an employment setting. It suggests that these include; using initiative and taking responsibility, solving problems in creative and innovative ways, making decisions in challenging situations, learning independently and developing professionally, and communicating effectively. Many of these are the transferable skills that have been identified by students as expectations of their PGT programme but are not perceived to be expectations by the course leaders.

It could be that on further consideration this gap is not as big as it might first appear. Both parties involved are looking in a similar direction, however, the course leaders are looking at the final goal, whilst students are considering how to get there.

4.10 Critically evaluate the implications of any differences for the future strategy of postgraduate programmes at the University

Having discussed the expectations of students, the perceptions of these expectations by course leaders and the differences between the two, the implications of these differences for both the Business School and the University will now be examined.

The Methodology chapter explained how the findings regarding both course leaders and students were summarised and an interview schedule was developed to be used with the Dean of the

Business School in February 2016 (see Figure 3.1, page 60) regarding the implications of the findings of this research. It was felt that this was the most appropriate person to be involved at this stage of the research as they have the knowledge about the current PGT strategies in the Business School and University, but also the most impact if the implications of this research are to be taken in to consideration in the future.

4.10.1 Student Numbers

The Introduction and Literature Review chapters analysed how PGT programmes in the UK, including those in the Business School at The University of Huddersfield, experienced a rapid increase in student numbers, especially from international students, in the years leading up to 2011/12. However, more recent years have seen numbers declining or increasing at a drastically lower rate. This could have serious implications for the Business School and the University in terms of the income that is generated from these student enrolments. "Much of our postgraduate provision is unviable without international students. This leaves universities vulnerable to changes in international demand for UK higher education" (Spittle, 2012, p.33). The Dean agreed with research by Hoare (2011), Spittle (2012) and Clarke and Lund (2014) that this decline in numbers is caused by a reduction in international students applying for programmes in the UK and is due to Government policy. It was stated that 'changes to Government policy are not helping universities to recruit overseas students including; the disappearance of post study work opportunities, changes to the funding requirements, visa requirements, health charges and an unwelcoming attitude'.

In contrast, the Dean also suggested that future years could see an increase in home students choosing to study at PGT level for some universities. 'Many organisations are now beginning to use a Masters qualification as a recruitment filter. Therefore, individuals will need to study at this level, not because they need the level of knowledge but in order to be eligible for particular employment opportunities'. This agrees with Wakeling and Hampden-Thomson (2005) and the concept of "credential inflation" (p.506). Whereby, as the number of undergraduates increases, their relative advantage in the labour market decreases, and the importance of a PGT qualification increases. This however may create a social disadvantage to some individuals and an advantage to others. Wakeling and Hampden-Thomson (2005) identified social class differences in progression to PGT study. One of the factors creating these differences is the cost of studying at this level, where currently, there is no student finance available. Spittle (2012) and Paton (2012) both explained how PGT students receive little or no financial support towards the cost of their studies.

The implication here is that this future growth in home students will only have a positive effect on the PGT student numbers in some universities. The dean explained how the key student demographic for other universities 'is not families with the finance to fund PGT study, as these are

more likely to be attracted to more prestigious institutions. For these other, less prestigious institutions, it may be that the only way to increase home student numbers is to encourage current undergraduates to continue with their studies in to PGT education. This may include offering more bursaries or sponsorship for students showing the most potential in order to overcome the student finance problem. This would agree with Stuart et al. (2008) and Clarke and Lund (2014) who suggest that universities need to give more attention to the aspirations and ambitions of home students. This may include using some of their income to subsidise PGT education. Universities also need to consider developing the type of PGT programme that will attract home students. Hoare (2011) suggested that UK students are more likely to choose vocationally oriented masters programmes and will expect to see a greater focus on employability. This shows that if universities are to increase the number of home students recruited on to PGT programmes in the future then the findings of this study regarding the expectation of transferable skills should be given serious consideration, and programmes need to be developed that meet these needs.

The alternative to increasing home student numbers will be competing to maintain or increase a share of a smaller market of international students. However, the University needs to consider whether increasing or maintaining market share will result in accepting lower quality students. This will create implications for course leaders and academic staff in relation to the teaching and learning experience, programme quality and student satisfaction. In order to compete effectively the Dean suggests that 'general perceptions in the market, league table position and reputation will be important factors to manage'. Many of these will be affected by student satisfaction and opinions of the service levels received, and therefore, an improved knowledge of student expectations, and the findings of this study, will be even more important in developing strategies for the future. In addition to student numbers three key themes regarding implications were addressed during the interview; marketing strategy, postgraduate students and course leaders.

4.10.2 Marketing Strategy

The Dean identified that 'the University does not have a specific strategy for the marketing and recruitment of PGT students, and any postgraduate marketing that does take place is not particularly strategic'. This is because it currently identifies home/EU and international as the two key segments in the market place rather than undergraduate and postgraduate. 'The increase in student numbers on the PGT programmes is as a result of the international marketing strategy not a postgraduate strategy'. In addition, the Dean continued to state that at University level the current key focus is home/EU undergraduate as 'that is where the strategy/competition is in the sector' and therefore 'this is where the strategic cross campus thinking tends to be'. This strategy conflicts with the findings of Donaldson and McNicholas (2004), Stuart et al. (2008) and Mellors-Bourne et al. (2014) who all agree that PGT education in the UK is becoming an increasingly important aspect of higher education.

Due to the current importance given to the marketing of home/EU students onto undergraduate programmes, the marketing strategy concentrates time and effort in to the development of web pages to promote the University and the programmes that are available. This strategy would agree with literature by Hill (1995), Arambewela et al. (2005), Higgs et al. (2005) and Vuori (2013) who all discussed the importance of marketing materials and what should and should not be included in order to develop realistic expectations for students. However, the findings of this research study show that to compete in the PGT environment where i) recruitment of international students is more competitive, and ii) in the future universities are looking to recruit a greater proportion of home students, then this strategy may need to be reconsidered. This research study identified that the University website or prospectus had little influence in the decision making process of PGT students. Instead, the most important influencers in decision making were parents, friends, employers and educational establishments when considering whether, where and what to study at this level. Therefore, published marketing materials are less important than ensuring that the programmes are of good quality and include appropriate learning experiences in order to meet current student expectations. They can become "opinion leaders" (Shamma & Hassan, 2013, p.384) using their experiences to influence the potential students of the future.

This is an important implication for consideration given the amount of time and expenditure that is currently used for the development and updating of the prospectus and website. How worthwhile is this investment? The current marketing strategy should be reviewed and consideration given to whether different strategies should be employed in the future in order to recruit additional students. Course leaders and marketing staff also need to consider how important they consider current student satisfaction to be in the marketing process and the successful recruitment of future intakes of students. The Dean did agree with the importance of current student satisfaction stating that 'current students are our ambassadors all the time'. If it is considered to be an important factor in terms of future success then the other implications regarding student expectations should be taken in to consideration.

An alternative viewpoint with regards to marketing strategy, student expectations and satisfaction is that course leaders, The Business School and the University marketing department need to ensure that students are given accurate information. This is throughout the recruitment process, on enrolment and during induction to ensure that their expectations of the outcome of a particular PGT programme are realistic in terms of the programme and what they as an individual are capable of achieving. Mellors-Bourne et al. (2014) suggested that a number of universities use examples of career progression and employment prospects as a way of motivating PGT students to apply and enrol for a particular programme. However, it is important to ensure that these aspirations are realistic and that students are not developing expectations that they are unable to achieve. For example, the Keele University website (2016) advises potential PGT applicants to talk to the

specific department with regards to employment prospects and the destinations of previous students. Admissions tutors need to be realistic during such discussions rather than over emphasising the most impressive appointments in order to maintain the balance between student recruitment and student satisfaction once enrolled on to a programme. The unrealistic marketing of programmes could have serious implications for future competitiveness in terms of poor student satisfaction.

4.10.3 Postgraduate Taught Students

Various transferable skills have been identified in this study as important expectations for students. A gap in customer service has been identified as PGT students see these transferable skills as being a more important expectation than they are perceived to be by course leaders. The implication here is that awareness needs to be raised regarding the importance of these transferable skills with course leaders to ensure that their development is integrated in to programme design. In the future, other strategies should also be employed on a University or Business School basis to ensure that transferable skills are developed within programmes and expectations are achieved.

Recent developments have made excellent support available to international students with a weekly timetabled session to develop their English language, and communication skills. However, it is currently only available to international students, not home/EU, and other strategies similar to this one need to be employed to encourage the development of other transferable skills for all students. The Dean agreed that the research study here had identified a gap stating 'I think you might be on to something here, it is whether you can give them what they are expecting, the generic skills but particularly the work experience type stuff. One strategy suggested by the Dean is the development of an 'Applied Consultancy' module. This is currently available on one PGT programme within the Business School, and was designed as an alternative to the dissertation. This should be developed further as an option module for students on all PGT programmes. The dean explained how 'the module involves developing relationships in order to give students opportunities to work as a group of consultants with an external organisation. It gives students a connection to the real business world, working in a team on a real life scenario, using the various strengths and weaknesses that are identified within the group. It is an excellent strategy to help with meeting the expectations of some appropriate students. However, in order to manage external relationships with the Business School it would not be possible to allow all students an automatic right to complete this module'. An alternative to this module for some students could be 'the development of volunteering opportunities at a University level. This needs to be planned systematically as an organisation, but would give excellent opportunities and experiences for the development of transferable skills'. "The aim should be to meet and exceed expectations of experienced customers by providing valuable experiences" (Shamma & Hassan, 2013, p.385).

Once these developments are embedded throughout the Business School and University they could be excellent selling points, and used to market the PGT programmes.

As discussed previously, by ensuring that expectations are realistic, student satisfaction is more likely to be achieved. The Dean stated that student expectations can be 'a bit naïve, because they are not educated expectations'. This agrees with the concept of the novice consumer (Higgs et al., 2005) discussed earlier. Therefore, it is important to ensure that strategies are developed to ensure that more appropriate expectations are being developed at the very beginning of the programme. As one course leader explained 'induction was identified as an important aspect of the programmes that could be designed to gain information about student expectations'. One interviewee explained how they use 'some activities that involve them talking to each other about what they wanted to get out of the course'. Another discussed how 'induction periods are incredibly important because knowing your student means that you know or learn what they are expecting from you and if their perceptions are wrong then you can sort of inform them and stop any gap'. A further course leader explained how 'induction should be a two way process where student expectations are discussed but also 'our' expectations of them'. This would agree with Hill (1995) who suggested that universities should be collecting information about student expectations at the point of arrival. This is because "student satisfaction can be determined by the difference between what students initially expected from the programme and what they actually experienced after being enrolled" (Serenko, 2011, p.285). Walker and Baker (2000), Ofir and Simonson (2007) and Luk and Layton (2002) all discussed how customer satisfaction is difficult to achieve if initial expectations are too high. If prior expectations of the service are too high, the gap between expectations and perception of the actual service will be larger, and therefore, a student is less likely to be satisfied. If this is the case, then using induction to ensure that students have a realistic expectation of the outcome of the programme is an important consideration for course leaders. The Dean suggested that 'reflection should be used at the end of an academic programme in order that students can evaluate what they have achieved from the programme'. The discussion suggested that 'when this process is used, many students realise that they should have been seeking something else from studying on a particular programme and what they have achieved is much more than their original expectations'. This agrees with Higgs et al. (2005) who stated that they "would expect novice consumers' expectations to undergo major transitions as experience accrues" (p.53). The expectations of a more experienced consumer should be more realistic and closer to what might happen. Therefore, reflection at the end of the programme should lead to students graduating more satisfied with the outcome from their programme of study and the quality of service delivery. The key implication here is that if student expectations are to be met the development of transferable skills needs to be a key learning outcome of all PGT programmes. However, in addition, it is important to put strategies in place at the beginning of a programme to ensure that student expectations are realistic.

It is now also important to consider that course leaders need to take any differences in expectations between themselves and the students in to consideration. This will enable to adapt the current programme or plan new programmes for the future in order to try and reduce this gap where possible.

4.10.4 Course Leaders

During the interviews with course leaders (September – November 2014, see Figure 3.1, page 60) a number of statements were made suggesting that the important factors in programme development were QAA requirements, resource availability and staff expertise. Although, some course leaders did explain how student expectations may be taken in to consideration they were not seen as being an important aspect of concern. The Dean explained in relation to course development that they believed that student expectations 'must get in there somewhere but they are not explicitly considered. They continued to discuss how 'it should come through in approving courses, through the idea that there is a market for it, but I suspect that it doesn't in any major way'. The implications from this are that there is a lack of awareness during course development regarding the QAA requirements or guidelines and that staff development in this area is required. The QAA (2010) document regarding the characteristics of a master's qualification clearly mentions in its statement about purpose that the 'desires and ambitions' of students should be taken in to consideration. Therefore, in order to meet these requirements student's expectations need to be investigated, and the findings of this research study taken in to consideration. In addition, in order to raise awareness consideration needs to be given as to whether these QAA guidelines are currently included as part of the induction process for new members of academic staff and if not whether they should be included in the future.

There is little need to collect information about student expectations if University systems and procedures, QAA requirements and other regulations make it difficult to adapt programmes regularly to meet the changing needs and expectations of students. If this is the case, do systems and procedures need to be less bureaucratic in order to allow more flexibility to meet the requirements of current students whilst still working within guidelines and maintaining quality standards? This is not suggesting that course leaders should be constantly changing the programmes to meet the needs and expectations of every student, but that they should had least be taken into consideration. "The notion of continuous improvement has to be embedded in to the culture as the environment is rapidly changing and the expectations of customers change over time" (McKnight, 2009, p.82).

4.11 Conclusion

The results and discussion chapter (4a and 4b) of this research study has analysed how student expectations are developed, overall student expectations, how these expectations differ according to background and the perception of those expectations by course leaders. In relation to the research objectives it has evaluated any differences between the expectations of students and the perceptions of those expectations by course leaders. The differences create a gap in the customer service model (Parasuraman et al., 1981), and the implications of this have been evaluated in terms of the Business School and the University.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

The number of students studying on PGT programmes in UK universities has increased significantly in recent years. Figure 1.1 (Page 14) and Figure 1.2 (page 17) show the increases in the UK, but also, and more importantly for this study, in the Business School and at this University. A significant proportion of this increase is explained by the growth in international students choosing to study both in the UK and on PGT programmes. However, the data and graphs in Figure 1.1 also show that since 2011/12 PGT programmes have begun to see a stagnation or decrease in numbers. Tobbell and O'Donnell (2013) and Hall (2015) explained how there is an increasing recognition that PGT students generate income for universities. Therefore, this decline in numbers could have serious implications in terms of the future viability of current PGT programmes and a reduction in an important income stream. If universities and course leaders are to increase, or even just maintain, current recruitment numbers and remain competitive in the market for PGT students then they will need to have a good understanding of what attracts potential students to their institution and programme of study. An important aspect of this understanding is up to date knowledge of what students expect the outcome to be of studying on a particular programme.

This research study recognises the importance of understanding student expectations in order to improve student satisfaction, leading to increased success and competitiveness of the programme in the future. It therefore makes the assumption that students are customers of the University and has followed this model throughout. This agrees with the work of (Douglas et al.,2006; Finney & Finney,2010; Serenko, 2011; Government White Paper, 2011; Jancey & Burns, 2013 and Guilbault, 2016) who all agree that students are customers of the University because they are significant stakeholders in their education, who are involved in a value exchange relationship, and are the direct recipients of the service being provided by universities. A variety of definitions regarding expectations have been discussed, however, the expectations being considered within this study are "the benefits a student feels they will gain from studying on a particular PGT programme".

5.2 Aims and Objectives

Given the importance of both PGT programmes and an understanding of expectations to improve student satisfaction the aim of this research study is to; critically analyse the relationship between student and course leader expectations on PGT programmes and to evaluate the importance and implications of these expectations for the future competitiveness of the university.

In order to achieve this aim the following research objectives were developed:

Objectives

- Analyse PGT student expectations of outcome.
- Evaluate any differences in the expectations of students and the perceptions of those expectations by the course leaders influencing the development of the programmes.
- Critically evaluate the implications of any differences for the future strategy of postgraduate programmes in the Business School.

The objectives were achieved using a pragmatic research methodology. Quantitative demographic data from a representative sample of the PGT Business School population was collected in order to measure the influence of the background factors of nationality, age and gender on student expectations. Qualitative data from both students and course leaders was also gathered so that expectations and perceptions could be interpreted. This combination of data collection methods enabled the following research questions to be answered.

5.2.1 What are the student expectations of the outcome of a PGT programme?

This research study identifies that the development of transferable skills is the most important expectation for students for the outcome of a PGT programme. The most important skills being the development of talent, the enhancement of communication skills, and the development of decision making skills. The development and enhancement of transferable skills is just as important to students as developing subject specific knowledge from a particular PGT programme. These findings are consistent with Pratt et al. (1999), Donaldson and McNicholas (2004) Sastry (2004) Jamieson (2007) and HEPI (2010) who all argued the link between transferable skills and employment prospects, discussing how acquiring or updating skills to improve a current job or to become more employable were key expectations.

The development of talent has been identified as the most important student expectation. However, is it ever possible for this to be achieved? Gallardo-Gallardo (2013) discuss whether talent can be taught or learned or if it just formed from natural ability and personal characteristics. This needs to be considered with regard to the implications of unrealistic student expectations. If some students are never able to achieve this goal, because they do not possess some or all of the appropriate personal characteristics then can they ever be satisfied with a particular programme of study? Expectations that are not achieved and the poor student satisfaction that may follow will have serious consequences for the future competitiveness of the programme. Course leaders need to use the induction programme to ensure that all students on their PGT programme have realistic

expectations of what can be achieved by studying on the programme. The management of student expectations should be part of a systematic process where information is collected from students on a regular basis during the programme as to whether their expectations are being achieved or not. It may be that minor adaptations to the design of a particular aspect of the programme, or an explanation as to why something is not possible would improve overall student satisfaction. It is too late if this information is collected at the end of the academic year when little can be done to improve the satisfaction of a student who has already completed their programme of study.

5.2.2 How are student expectations developed?

The evidence presented in this research study shows that most students enrolling on to PGT programmes had little experience or knowledge of what they were embarking upon. Despite this lack of knowledge or experience, little if any investigation prior to enrolment about the nature or content of their chosen PGT programme had taken place. The students had not involved themselves in any extensive research, instead, other people had been the key influencers in their decision making process. The most important influencers were parents (30.34%), along with previous education, current or previous employment and friends, ranging from 16.90 to 21.72%. These findings related to research by Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) and Licata et al. (2008) who showed that expectations are influenced by other parties, and in the case of many international students they have been pushed by external forces such as their parents.

The impact that these external influencers have confirms the importance of investigating current student expectations. Shamma and Hassan (2013) discussed how current students on a programme become the experienced opinion leaders of the future. Therefore, it is important to target current students and ensure that their expectations are understood, realistic and are being achieved as they will become the parents, friends, employers or teachers of the future influencing the decisions of potential recruits. This study shows that personal influencers are more important than any information that the University may publish for potential students to use either in prospectuses or on the website.

This study has shown that student expectations are varied and not always realistic due to a lack of research about the programme. However, student expectations cannot be overlooked or ignored if customer satisfaction is to be maintained and improved, and programmes promoted in the future. The detailed findings of this research study will become out of date as student expectations change over time, however, the principles identified will remain important. The implications discussed should result in an increased awareness of the need to consider student expectations. Course leaders should have the procedures in place to be more aware of student expectations at any time and any changes are included when programmes are designed or developed.

5.2.3 Are student expectations affected by background characteristics?

This research investigated whether the expectations that a student may have of the outcome of a PGT programme are influenced by the background factors of nationality, age and gender.

In terms of nationality, the expectation regarding the development of talent was most important for students from the Middle East. In comparison, communication skills were important for Asian students, access to employment for students from Africa and leadership skills for students from the EU. Further discussion identified that communication skills was important for all international students, but especially those from Asia and the Middle East. However, comments show that it was not communication skills in general that were important but the development of English language skills. This agrees with Russell (2005) who suggested that "the ability to improve or learn languages was considered important to postgraduates" (p.72).

Age also creates significant differences in the expectations of PGT students. Developing communication skills was the most important expectation for students in the 18-24 age category, whilst the age group 25-34 were expecting to enhance their achievement at work. Students in the age categories 35-44 and 45-54 were looking to enhance their leadership skills. Davey (2002) and Jamieson (2007) had similar findings suggesting that students in midlife are concerned with the labour market and improving their current job situation.

The findings regarding differences according to gender showed that although it did have some influence on expectations it was not as important as either nationality or age. Analysis showed that male students expected to develop their leadership skills. Booth (2009) had suggested that men are more likely to see themselves as potential leaders. The female students were looking to develop their communication skills and get access to better employment. Swain and Hammond (2011) and Hurn (2013) had explained how women are more likely to expect to only gain promotion on merit. Females lack confidence in showcasing themselves, are motivated by employment requirements, and are therefore, more likely to enrol for a PGT qualification because it allows them to feel more able to apply for promotion opportunities.

These findings regarding background should not be considered in isolation, as they are inter related and could be dependent on each other. For example, full time international students who have made a decision to study at PGT level, often immediately after completing an undergraduate qualification are more likely to be in the younger age category. Therefore, the students from Asia identifying communication skills to be most important are also most likely to be in the 18-24 age category where the same expectation was identified. Again, the students in the older age categories are more likely to be the home/EU students on the part time MBA programme. As significant and relevant work experience is one of the requirements of this programme it may be

expected that they will be looking for more advanced and specialised transferable skills, which explains why the older student's important expectations included leadership skills.

Due to the different nature of the part time MBA students it was felt appropriate to consider expectations according to course to ensure that the inclusion of the MBA part time students had not created bias in the results. Findings show that the students studying on Accounting, Finance and Banking and Finance were expecting the development of communication skills as an outcome of the programme. Business students were expecting to enhance their achievement at work, HRM students were also expecting to develop talent, whilst the MBA students expected to develop their leadership skills. The results show that there are some differences according to course but the differences in the MBA were no more statistically significant than the other programmes and therefore it was appropriate to include these students in the sample.

5.2.4 Are student expectations important to course leaders?

Opinions between course leaders regarding the importance of understanding student expectations were divided. Certain course leaders explained how a knowledge of student expectations was important, however, these expectations were difficult to determine and often unrealistic. The opinion that student expectations may be influenced by background was expressed, and of the factors included in this study, nationality was especially important.

Other course leaders discussed how knowledge of student expectations was not important. They felt that other factors were more important in programme development and student satisfaction, including, meeting QAA subject benchmarks, resource availability and staff expertise. These opinions could create an area of conflict with implications for the Business School and the University in terms of staff development. It is explicit in the QAA (2010) guidelines that it is expected that student's expectations will have been taken into consideration in the development of programmes. They clearly explain how "the purpose for which the degree is intended will reflect both the desires and ambitions of students" (QAA, 2010, p.4).

5.2.5 What are course leader perceptions of student expectations for study on a PGT programme?

Course leader perceptions were that access to better employment, opportunities for promotion/career development, and enhance achievement at work were the most important expectations for students enrolling on to PGT programmes. This agrees with Category (2013); Donaldson and McNicholas (2004); Liu (2010); Mellors-Bourne et al. (2014) and Morgan (2014). However, many of these researchers associated improved employment prospects with the development of transferable skills. Only a minority of course leaders made any acknowledgement of this relationship, and for many, transferable skills were not perceived to be one of the more important expectations for the outcome of a PGT programme.

5.2.6 Do differences exist between the expectations of students and the perceptions of those expectations by course leaders?

This research study applied the customer service model (Parasuraman et al., 1985) to the difference between student's expectations and the perceptions of those expectations by course leaders and showed that statistically significant differences do exist between the two. The main expectations identified by students enrolling on to PGT programmes were the development of transferable skills. Which of these skills was most important was dependent on the background factors of nationality, age and gender. Statistical analysis showed that there were key differences between students and course leaders for the statements regarding the development of talent and interpersonal skills at the 5% level of significance. For the statement regarding decision making skills, this statistical significance increased to 1%. On the other hand, course leaders perceived that enhanced employment prospects and the possibility of promotion would be a more important expectation from the programme. Significantly, they did not make the link between these employment expectations and transferable skills.

The gap identified between student expectations and the perception of expectations by course leaders may not be as big as first perceived. Both parties are looking in the same direction, however, course leaders are looking at the final goal (employment) whereas, the students are looking at how to get there (transferable skills). This is related to the work of Tobbell and O'Donnell (2013) who discussed how students are not as prepared for PGT education as universities may think, and course leaders on PGT programmes cannot assume a certain level of academic competence. The findings of this research show that course leaders can also not assume that students have the appropriate transferable skills at a high level. Instead, these need to be developed as part of the PGT programme if the potential enhanced employment prospects are to be realised.

5.2.7 What implications do any differences in expectations have on the Business School and the University?

This research study has identified the implications of failing to meet the expectations of students under a number of key themes; student numbers, marketing strategy, PGT students and course leaders.

5.2.7.1 Student Numbers

The rapid increase in student numbers that was seen in the years up to 2012/13 has slowed and universities and programmes are now seeing decline, stagnation, or significantly smaller increases in student enrolments. This change is a result of a decline in international student numbers, with serious implications for the Business School and the University in terms of the income that is

generated from these student enrolments and the future viability of some PGT programmes. Changes in undergraduate education and employer expectations due to credential inflation (Wakeling, 2005) will result in some universities benefitting from an increase in home students choosing to study at PGT level. However, demographic issues around the lack of availability of funding for students for PGT programmes means that the more prestigious universities are the ones most likely to benefit here, due to the different nature of their student intake.

Universities also need to compete in order to maintain or increase their market share of the now smaller market of international students. They need to identify how market share can be maintained whilst still recruiting the same quality of students as they have done previously. The alternative of student numbers being maintained by accepting lower quality applications has serious implications for course leaders, academic staff, programme quality, the reputation of the programmes and the University.

In order to compete effectively, league table position and reputation will be important factors to manage and both are affected by student satisfaction and opinions about service levels. Therefore, the findings of this study will increase in significance as improved knowledge of student expectations becomes an important aspect in developing strategies for survival in the future. Research by Luk and Layton (2002), Ofir and Simonson (2007) and Hsieh and Yuan (2010) all showed how a knowledge and understanding of expectations is essential in order to improve customer satisfaction.

5.2.7.2 Marketing Strategy

The findings showed that the Business School and the University does not currently have a specific marketing strategy for the marketing and recruitment of PGT students. Currently, marketing is targeted towards home or international students rather than a particular level of study. However, in order to compete in the changing PGT market this strategy may need to be reconsidered, and marketing strategies developed that specifically target PGT students whether home/EU or international. This research study identified that University marketing materials whether published or on line had little, if any, influence on the decision of students to study a particular programme. Instead, the key influencers were parents, friends, employers and previous educational establishments. The implication here is that the Business School and the University need to target efforts towards ensuring that current students have realistic expectations that they feel are being met. By creating an environment where students feel that they are studying on good quality programmes with excellent outcomes they are likely to be the opinion leaders (Shamma & Hassan, 2013) of the future. Marketing strategies need developing further so that good quality alumni are used as student ambassadors for the Business School and the University, promoting PGT programmes in their home countries.

5.2.7.3 Postgraduate Taught Programmes

A significant finding of this study regarding the expectations of PGT students was that they expect to develop transferable skills during their time studying on the programme. The implication here is that awareness of this expectation needs to be raised with course leaders through staff development sessions so that they are able to integrate opportunities for the development of transferable skills in new programme design, and existing programmes can also be developed with this consideration. The development of an 'Applied Consultancy' module as an option on all PGT programmes throughout the Business School could be an example of one future development. However, individual course leaders will also need to consider the specific expectations of students on their particular programme.

5.2.7.4 Course Leaders

The Dean stated that student expectations are probably considered somewhere in the programme development process, but not explicitly. A significant finding therefore is that course leaders are designing, developing and managing programmes where they don't fully understand what the students enrolling on to those programmes are expecting to achieve. For some course leaders, student expectations are not even seen as an important consideration, and yet, as discussed on page 126, expectations that are not achieved and the poor student satisfaction that may follow will have serious consequences for the future competitiveness of the programme The implication here is that other factors are seen as being more important in programme development than student expectations. This research has already indicated that there is a lack of awareness of the QAA guidelines regarding the 'desires and ambitions' of students that should be taken into consideration during programme development. A future development should be to ensure that new academic staff are made aware of the QAA guidelines as part of their induction programme in to the University and Business School. In addition, systems and procedures need to be less bureaucratic in order to allow more flexibility to meet the requirements of current students whilst still working within University guidelines and maintaining quality standards. Developing an understanding of the importance of knowledge about student expectations for course leaders could have serious implications for maintaining and improving both the quality and appeal of any current and new PGT programmes.

5.3 Contribution to Knowledge

Research on student expectations has taken place previously by authors such as Byrne and Flood (2005); Category (2013); Donaldson and McNicholas (2004); Haman et al., (2010); HEPI (2010); Kerry (2010); Lightfoot (2012); Liu (2010); Morgan (2014); Ridley (2004) and Sastry (2004). This previous research has considered both undergraduate and postgraduate students, and identified that an understanding of their expectations is essential if universities are to improve service quality, student satisfaction and overall performance. However, the majority of work on student expectations concentrates on the undergraduate experience, and, as suggested by Bay and Daniel (2001) education research, in general, concentrates on the process of service delivery. Therefore, it discusses expectations in relation to the student experience and teaching, learning and assessment. In contrast, this research study is concerned with PGT students and their expectations of the outcomes of their programme. The PTES (2014) showed how important the investigation of expectations are at postgraduate level when they stated that PGT students expect more from their programmes and are therefore sometimes disappointed (Soilemedzidis et al., 2014). Despite this, recent HEFCE reports by Dye (2013); Clarke and Lunt (2014) and Mellors-Bourne et al. (2014) have considered the choices and information needs of postgraduate students, and made international comparisons, but none have directly investigated student expectations.

Therefore, this research study has made a contribution to knowledge in the area of student expectations and postgraduate education by:

- Identifying the relationships between the background characteristics of nationality age and gender and PGT student expectations
- Applying the customer service gap model (Parasuraman et al., (1985) to the expectations
 of students and the perceptions of those expectations by course leaders.

5.3.1 Expectations and Background Characteristics

Previous research by Niehoff et al. (2011); Sander et al. (2000); Swain and Hammond (2011) and Tobbell and O'Donnell (2013) had discussed how students are not all the same and each individual will have developed their own expectations of a particular programme. Many factors, such as culture, gender, university type and mode of study, will have influenced each student's particular requirements.

The growth in international students, as evidenced in the introduction chapter of this study, has increased the diversity of the student profile on PGT programmes. This diversity can enrich the learning experience of all students as they learn and benefit from the variety of knowledge and cultural experiences. The increase in diversity in relation to background and the increasingly

competitive market means that identifying and understanding the differences in student expectations for a particular PGT programme is becoming both more difficult and important.

The importance of this study was identified by the PTES (2014) who stated that knowledge of the relationship between student expectations and background characteristics was valuable. It explained how universities will want to reflect on differing student expectations as they strive to improve the quality of PGT education in the UK (Soilemedzidis et al., 2014). This research study has investigated the specific background characteristics of nationality, age and gender further and has shown that they have a significant influence on the student expectations of the outcome of a particular PGT programme. The findings of this research should be included in the reflective process of course leaders as they have important implications for the future success of PGT programmes. They will enable universities and course leaders to recognise the importance of understanding student expectations and to improve the quality of PGT provision in order to compete effectively in this highly competitive market. It can no longer assume that the expectations of all students will be the same, but these differences will need to be accepted and taken in to consideration when programmes are being designed and developed.

5.3.2 The Customer Service Gap Model and PGT Education

This research study is unique and has made a contribution to knowledge by applying the 'understanding gap' of the customer service gap model (Parasuraman et al, 1985) to PGT education. This is the difference between customer expectations (students) and management perceptions (course leaders) of customer expectations. The findings have identified that statistically significant differences do exist between student expectations and the perceptions of those expectations by course leaders and therefore an understanding gap does exist in this context. The research identifies and discusses the extent of this gap and the important implications for course leaders and universities of not having an accurate understanding of what it is that students are expecting the outcome of a particular programme to be. The identification of this gap has serious implications for the achievement of service quality and student satisfaction, and therefore the competitiveness of the University in the future.

5.4 Limitations of the Research Study

As discussed on page (66 and 67) the ten expectation statements used were developed based on previous research by Donaldson and McNicholas (2004) and Liu (2010). However, this study has given no consideration to the expectation of PGT programmes regarding the development of academic knowledge. In the early stages of the research it was assumed that all students are looking for academic knowledge, and that this study would identify the additional requirements of the PGT programmes that are expected by students. On reflection based on the findings of this

research it cannot be assumed that all students are looking develop academic knowledge, as a greater variety of expectations became evident. However, the focus groups with students had been used to develop the questionnaires and check validity and academic knowledge was not identified as an issue here. Further consideration should also be given to the order in which the statements were written on the questionnaire, and whether this has influenced the results. The questionnaire was distributed on three occasions (Pilot September 2011, final questionnaires September 2013 and 2014) to different students and also to the course leaders (May 2014). However, on each occasion the order of the ten statements remained the same. Would the results would have been different if the order of the statements had been randomly redistributed each time the questionnaire was used? Especially given that 'create talent and creativity in me' was the first statement in the list each time and the findings show this to be the most important expectation.

The student SAC model has been used throughout this research. This implies that PGT education is a two way relationship between the University, Business School and the student. The Results and Discussion chapter (4a and b) described how students were considered to be the significant stakeholders in their education as the direct recipients of the service being provided. However, consideration should be given to some of the alternative viewpoints, and these might be areas of focus for future studies. For example, are parents and Governments the 'real' customers of the programme as in many cases they will be financing payment for the programme of study. Another alternative viewpoint could be that potential future employers are the 'real' customers as they will benefit from the skills and experiences gained by students whilst studying on a particular PGT programme. "Future employers are the primary customers, as they depend on educational institutions to provide qualified and capable individuals to run organisations" (Mark, 2013, p.5). Therefore, should course leaders be approaching employers to investigate their expectations from newly qualified PGT students who begin work in their organisation?

This research study has limitations in terms of the size of the sample that has been used, especially with regard to course leaders. In addition, it has focused on one School, within one University in the UK. However, its generalisability is improved by the use of a sample that was both representative of the Business School at this University, but also of the PGT population in the UK, according to the PTES (2014) (see section 4.2, page 81) .This study does not claim to be exhaustive or even to have created a great breadth of knowledge in this area. However, as a PGT programme course leader the author of this research will be able to take the findings of this study in to consideration in their own work in the future. Other course leaders involved in PGT education will also find these findings useful for consideration in the design and development of their programmes. In addition, this study has raised awareness of the PGT population and their different expectations. It has identified differences in these expectations and the perceptions of those

expectations by course leaders. The implications that these differences create may also be important to other schools within this University and other universities within the UK.

5.5 Recommendations for future research

This research study has identified the gap between student expectations on PGT programmes and the perceptions of those expectations by course leaders. It has also discussed what the implications of these differences might be. A similar research process could be carried out but considering the expectations of postgraduate research students. This population of students is also growing and increasing in importance and it would be interesting to see if similar background factors affect their expectations and make the comparisons between what they are expecting to achieve and the perceptions of course leaders or supervisors.

Further research now needs to take place to consider the strategies that could be put in place to reduce the gap that this research study has identified, in the future in order to improve student satisfaction and University performance. This may involve further interviews with course leaders, the Dean of the Business School and other managers within the University.

Research should focus on two key areas as the gap could be reduced from more than one direction. Firstly, by considering whether, and how, University practises could be changed to make course leaders more aware of the importance of understanding student expectations. Programmes can then be designed and developed in a way that gives students more opportunities to achieve their expected outcomes. It would also be useful to consider whether the expectations around the development of transferable skills are similar in other disciplines and schools across the University and in other universities. In other words, this small scale study could be expanded so that more detailed analysis and comparisons can be made. Secondly, what good practise needs to be designed or developed to ensure that new students have realistic expectations of the outcome of a particular programme? Any future research may want to investigate the following areas in more detail; marketing materials, induction programmes, systems and procedures involved in course development, the systems used for collecting and analysing student expectations and the inclusion of transferable skills in PGT programmes.

This research study has identified and discussed gap one from the customer service gap model in relation to student expectations and the perceptions of these expectations by course leaders. However, there are an additional four gaps identified in the model and further research could apply these to PGT programmes. Gap 2 identifies the difference between management perceptions of customer expectations and service quality specifications. Research here would relate to course leader perceptions and the QAA requirements. Any findings from this research could be closely linked to the current study which showed that many course leaders perceived QAA requirements to

be more important than student expectations. Gap 3 is concerned with the difference between service quality specifications and the service actually delivered. In terms of PGT education this would be the QAA specifications and what is actually delivered on the programmes. Gap 4 is the difference between service delivery and what is communicated about the service to customers. Therefore, what is actually delivered on PGT programmes and what are potential and current students told in the marketing materials and at induction. Gap 5 identifies the discrepancy between customer's expectations on the service and their perceptions of the service performance. In relation to PGT education this is what students expected the outcome to be at the beginning of the programme and their perception of what they have actually received on completion. There is evidence that research in this area is currently taking place with a research bid being recently submitted to the HEA entitled "Mind the postgraduate gap: Investigating and bridging the gap between student expectations and experience in transition to part time postgraduate study" (Inglish, 2016). Any future research into one of these gaps should be closely related to this study and will have equally important implications for improving service quality, student satisfaction and the future competitiveness of the PGT programmes.

5.6 Personal Reflection

The Doctorate in Education [EdD] programme, the research activity involved and the resulting thesis has been a long personal journey. For a significant period of time through this journey I would describe myself as a reluctant researcher. Upon graduation from my undergraduate degree I trained as a secondary school teacher, and then worked in Further Education for 12 years before securing a position at the University in the department of Accountancy and Finance in September 2007. During my early years at the University I still considered myself to be a teacher, and had little, if any, interest or motivation in carrying out research. I enjoyed spending time in the classroom and was motivated by the student learning experience and helping them to achieve success. After two years at the University I was encouraged to enrol on to the EdD programme as part of my personal development, but did so reluctantly mainly due to a lack of confidence in my research ability. Looking back now, in hindsight, I should not have allowed a lack of confidence in my ability or the value of my research, to hinder my progress. I delayed the interviews with course leaders for longer than was necessary as I was nervous about their opinions of both the research study and my chosen approach.

The research process and the writing of the thesis has been a personal, rather lonely, journey with both positive highs and negative lows. I have learnt to celebrate the highs and motivate myself to work through the lows with the continuous invaluable support of my supervisor, along with the support of work colleagues and the Business School education learning set. However, the key turning point in my research journey was the decision to attend a thesis boot camp organised by

the University and run by Dr Peta Freestone in May 2015 (appendix 15, page 190). The publicity materials for the boot camp described it as an intensive writing programme for late stage doctoral researchers that can transforms lives. I can state that it dramatically changed my life in relation to research. Before attending, I had spent a lot of time writing, but also a lot of time making excuses, procrastinating about every sentence and not making very much progress in the writing up of my thesis. Attending this three day session developed my confidence, enjoyment in writing at an appropriate level and enabled me to write freely therefore, enabling the completion of my EdD thesis.

Attending the boot camp also transformed my approach and opinion to research, by giving me the confidence that I could be successful in this area. I would no longer describe myself as a reluctant researcher, but someone who enjoys the research and writing process and more actively manages her time in order to ensure that it can take place. The findings of this research study have given me the opportunity to attend and present at a number of conferences both internal and external to the University (British Accounting & Finance Association [BAFA], Accounting Education Special Interest Group, 2012 & 2013 and Business Education Research Group [BERG], 2016). They have also encouraged the enhancement of my current teaching and management practise. For example, the findings of this current study have shown me that as a course leader, I need to be more aware of the differing needs and expectations of students and take them in to consideration when developing programmes, modules and teaching materials.

In the future, I would like to continue with research in education and enhance my skills further. This may follow a number of directions due to work and personal interests in a number of areas. My first objective is to publish research articles and attend research conferences based on the results of this study. In addition, I have also been involved in a small research project collecting data from our current undergraduate students to investigate the benefits of both a skills based module in year 2 of the programme and the work placement opportunity in year 3. On a more personal basis, I am the Chair of Governors at a recently formed federation of 3 local primary schools. In the current climate of changes in education, I would like to research and write about the federation process along with its advantages and disadvantages for this type of school. This would also fit with my role within the department of Accountancy and Finance as part of the governance research group.

The whole EdD process has taught me that developing my research skills and confidence in this area can enhance my role at the University, by providing variety and greater flexibility. I am now able to still enjoy teaching but the research activity can enhance my original motivation for working in education which was to inspire learning by enhancing the student experience.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 (a) - Ethics Approval Form

THE UNIVERSITY OF HUDDERSFIELD

POSTGRADATE STUDENT / STAFF RESEARCH ETHICAL REVIEW

SECTION A: TO BE COMPLETED BY THE APPLICANT

Project Title	Student and staff expectations of Masters programmes
Applicant	Kay Smith
Award (where applicable)	EdD
Project start date	September 2011

SECTION B: PROJECT OUTLINE (TO BE COMPLETED IN FULL BY THE APPLICANT)

Issue	Please provide sufficient detail for your supervisor to assess strategies used to address ethical issues in the research proposal. Forms with insufficient detail will need to be resubmitted.					
Researcher(s) details	Kay Smith					
Supervisor details	Dr Graham Worsdale					
Aims and objectives of the study. Please state the aims and objectives of the study.	Aim of investigation: The aim of this investigation is to examine the relationship between student and staff expectations on taught postgraduate programmes and to consider the importance and implications of these differences for the future competitiveness of the University. Research Questions					
	 What are student expectations of the outcome of a postgraduate taught programme, and are these affected by their background? What are the staff expectations of the outcome for students studying on a taught postgraduate programme? Is there a gap between the expectations of outcomes for staff and students? If so, what is it? What implications do the differences have on 					

	Universities?					
	5. What is the current/future university strategy for dealing with the differing student expectations?					
Brief overview of research methodology	Questionnaires to Course Leaders – Use same					
The methodology only needs to be explained in sufficient detail to show the approach used (e.g. survey) and explain the research methods to be used during the study.	criteria as have been previously used with students to identify any potential gap in expectations. Interviews with Course Leaders – To gather detailed information from students regarding their expectations of the programme of study.					
Does your study require any permissions for study? If so, please give details						
Participants	Postgraduate taught students – Business					
Please outline who will participate in your research. Might any of the participants be considered 'vulnerable' (e.g. children)	School (research already taken place) 2. Postgraduate Taught Course Leaders – Business School 3. Dean of Business School					
Access to participants	Postgraduate Taught Course Leaders have					
Please give details about how participants will be identified and contacted.	been identified by administration staff in the Business School. 2. They will be contacted via e mail and asked if they would be willing to take part in the research by 1) completing the questionnaire 2) being interviewed.					
How will your data be recorded and stored?						
Informed consent. Please outline how you will obtain informed consent.	When Course Leaders have agreed to take part in the research they will be asked to complete and sign a consent form.					
Confidentiality Please outline the level of confidentiality you will	All interviewees will be made aware that any data collected will only be used for the purpose of this research.					
offer respondents and how this will be respected. You should also outline about who will have access to the data and how it will be stored. (This information should be included on Information your information sheet.)	Data collected from the questionnaires and interviews will be stored in a secure location.					
Anonymity If you offer your participants anonymity, please	All participants will be made aware that individuals will not be identified by name or role within the written					

indicate how this will be ac	hieved.	findings of the research.						
		j						
Harm		Minimal risk to any participants as the questions being						
Please outline your assess	ment of the extent to	asked regarding expectations and motivations are						
which your research might		unlikely to cause stress or anxiety.						
stress, anxiety, cause harm								
consequences for the parti-								
risks encountered in norma	*							
minimal risk, you should ou there will be for participants	• •							
there will be for participants	.							
If you believe that that there	•							
harm, please articulate why	y you believe this to be	e						
SO.								
	ns. If your application	for Ethics approval is retrospective, please explain why this						
has arisen.								
L								
SECTION C _ SUMMARY	OE ETHICAL ISSUES	S (TO BE COMPLETED BY THE APPLICANT)						
OLOTION O COMMAN	SECTION C – SUMMARY OF ETHICAL ISSUES (TO BE COMPLETED BY THE APPLICANT)							
Please give a summary of	the ethical issues and	any action that will be taken to address the issue(s).						
		be aware that their position as a senior lecturer in the ults of the research (answers provided) and should be taken						
in to consideration when ar		dits of the research (answers provided) and should be taken						
SECTION D - ADDITIONA	AL DOCUMENTS CHE	ECKLIST (TO BE COMPLETED BY THE APPLICANT)						
Diagram and a series of a		and a summer of the subset of the Health of the terror than the						
electronically, please pro		ng documentation electronically. If this is not available						
ciccironicany, picase pro	vide explanation and	з зарру пага сору.						
I have included the following	ng documents							
		No. 11 C						
Information sheet	Yes □x	Not applicable						
Consent form	Voc. ¬v	Not applicable						
COUPEUT TOTAL	Yes □x	Not applicable						
Letters	Yes	Not applicable □						
Lougis	163	Not applicable —						

Questionnaire	Yes	$\Box x$	Not applicable □
Interview schedule	Yes	$\Box x$	Not applicable
SECTION E – STATEMENT	BY AF	PLICANT	
I confirm that the information sufficient).	ı I have	given in this form	on ethical issues is correct. (Electronic confirmation is
Applicant name K.L.Smith			
Date:8 th September 2011			
Affirmation by Supervisor			
	Applic		nfirm that, to the best of my understanding, the appropriate to allow an informed judgement on whether
282	-		
Supervisor name Dr 0	∂raham	Worsdale	
Date 10/09/11			

Appendix 1(b) – Business School Permission Letter

Dear Chris

As you are aware I am currently studying for an EdD (Doctorate in Education).

The proposed title for my investigation is "A study of the expectations of students and staff relating to Masters programmes".

My research questions include:

- 1) What are the backgrounds of students studying on full and part time Masters programmes in the Business School and Computing and Engineering?
- 2) What are the student expectations of a Masters programme?
- 3) Is there a relationship between background and expectations of a Masters programme?
- 4) Are there any major differences between the expectations of students in the Business School compared with those in Computing and Engineering?
- 5) What are the staff expectations of students studying on a Masters programme?
- 6) What are the similarities and differences between the expectations of staff and students?

I am writing to ask if you would give me permission to conduct this research within The Business School. This would involve making contact with relevant postgraduate course leaders to arrange the distribution of questionnaires to students at the beginning of their programme of study during the academic year 2011/2012, and to interview appropriate teaching staff on the programmes.

Regards

Kay Smith

k.l.smith@hud.ac.uk

472689

Room BS1/19

Appendix 2 – Student Questionnaire

Expectations of students studying on Masters Programmes at The Business School, The University of Huddersfield

A research study is currently being undertaken to examine the relationship between the background of students studying on taught postgraduate programmes in The Business School at The University of Huddersfield, and their expectations of the outcome of the programme. The study is also interested in how these expectations were developed.

If you could take the time to complete the questionnaire attached, your contribution to this research will be valuable. The information provided will be anonymous and will only be used for the purpose of the research as stated above.

Questionnaire – Postgraduate Student Expectations

1. Demographic Information

Please tick the appropriate box

Gender	Male			Female			
Age	18-24	25-34	35-44	35-44 45-54	55-60	60+	
Masters course attending	Please s	Please state					
Nationality	Please st	ate					

2. Expectations

Please rank in order the statements below from 1 - 10.

10 = most important to you and 1 = least important.

I expect studying for a postgraduate qualification to:-

	Rank(1-10)
Develop talent and creativity in me	
Develop my leadership skills	
Enhance my communication skills	
Develop decision making skills	
Enhance my interpersonal skills	
Provide specialized training and instruction	
Provide real life learning experiences	
Develop opportunities for promotion and/or career development	
Give me access to better employment	
Enhance my achievement at work	

3.	3. For the statement that you have ranked 10 – most important , please explain why this is the most important expectation for you of the postgraduate programme.						
4.	For the statement that you have ranked 1 – least important, please this is the least important expectation for you of the postgraduate pro						
5.	Which two people or organisations had the MOST influence in development of the most	oping your					
		Tick					
Paren	ts						
Previo	ous educational establishment/Teacher						
Curre	nt or previous employment/colleagues						
Agent	S S						
Unive	rsity prospectus/website						
Friend	ds .						
Gover	nment						
Other	(Please state)						
6.	Please explain how and why they influenced your expectations						

Thank you for your support with this research

Appendix 3 – Course Leader Questionnaire

Expectations of students studying on Postgraduate Taught Programmes at The Business School, The University of Huddersfield

Educational institutions need to 'carefully analyse the key factors that contribute to student satisfaction and develop strategies accordingly' Arambewela (2005, p.105). One of the factors identified as affecting student satisfaction is regarding whether their expectations of a particular programme are being met.

As part of my Doctorate in Education, A research study is currently being undertaken to examine the expectations of students studying on taught postgraduate programmes in The Business School at The University of Huddersfield. As part of the study a comparison will be made between the expectations of the students and what the Course Leaders of the programmes think the expectations of their students may be.

If the findings of the study identify a gap in opinions between the two groups then strategies may be implemented to reduce the differences in order to improve student satisfaction and maintain student numbers for the future.

Please be aware that it is **not** investigating what your postgraduate programme currently offers, but what students are expecting to achieve from having studied at this level.

If you could take the time to complete the questionnaire attached, your contribution to this research will be valuable and appreciated. The information provided will be anonymous and will only be used for the purpose of the research as stated above.

If possible, I would like to follow up on the questionnaire results with a short informal interview with Course Leaders. Again, the results of these will be completely confidential and anonymous.

Please return the completed questionnaire via the Business School internal mail to Kay Smith, BS1/19.

Thank you for your time

Kay

<u>Course Leader Questionnaire – Postgraduate Student Expectations</u>

1. Expectations

Which of the expectations below do **you** believe will be important to the majority of your student's?

Please rank the statements in order of importance. **10 = most important** and **1 = least important**. Studying for a postgraduate qualification will:-

	Rank
	(4.40)
	(1-10)
Develop talent and creativity in me	
De de la	
Develop my leadership skills	
Enhance my communication skills	
Develop decision making skills	
Enhance my interpersonal skills	
Provide specialized training and instruction	
Provide real life learning experiences	
Development of the control of the co	
Develop opportunities for promotion and/or career development	
Give me access to better employment	
Enhance my achievement at work	
Enhance my achievement at work	

2.	For the statement that you have ranked 10 – most important , please you think this is the most important expectation for your students.	explain why
3.	For the statement that you have ranked 1 – least important , please of this is the least important expectation for your students.	explain why
4.	Which people or organisations do you think have the MOST influence your student's expectations as mentioned above. (please tick)	in developing
		Tick
Paren	ts	
Previo	ous educational establishment/Teacher	
Curre	nt or previous employment/colleagues	
Agent	S	
Unive	rsity prospectus/website	
Friend	ds	
Gove	nment	

Other (Please state)

Appendix 4 – Focus Group Consent Form

Expectations of students on taught postgraduate programmes

Focus group research conducted by Kay Smith (Autumn 2012)

Consent Form

I agree to take part in a focus group session to discuss my expectations of and motivations for studying for a Masters qualification. I agree to the discussion being recorded (audio only) and that anything I say may be quoted anonymously. I understand that any information collected during the focus groups will remain confidential and will only be used for the purpose of this research.

I understand that I can withdraw from the research at any time if I no longer wish to continue.

Name	 	
Signature	 	
Date	 	

<u>Appendix 5 – Pilot Student Questionnaire</u>

Expectations of students studying on Masters Programmes at The University of Huddersfield

A research study is currently being undertaken to consider the expectations of the outcome for students on taught postgraduate programmes at The University of Huddersfield. The study will compare the expected outcomes for students starting postgraduate programmes in The Business School and The School of Computing and Engineering during the academic year 2011/2012.

A comparison will be made with the expectations of staff developing the programmes and identify any similarities and differences. This information can then be used to make recommendations in order to ensure that our programmes are meeting the needs of students.

If you could take the time to complete the questionnaire attached, your contribution will be appreciated. The information provided will be anonymous and will only be used for the purpose of the research as stated above.

Demographic Information

Please tick the appropriate box

Gender	Male					Female			
Age	18-24	25-3	34	35-44	45-54		55-6	60	60+
A student of:	The Busir School	ness				The Sch Computi and Enginee	ng		
Masters course attending	Please st	tate							
	T		Г			T		T	
Mode of Study	Full Time)				Part Tin	ne		
Nationality	Please sta	ate							
Mode Evertier of (1999)	0.4		.		40	\ 4.4 \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \	45.00		20.
Work Experience (year)	0-4		5-9		10)-14	15-20		20+
Please describe the nature of this work (eg. Full/part time, skilled, managerial, professional)									
Previous Educational Background	Please state your highest previous qualification								

Expectations

Please tick the appropriate box for each of the following statements

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	No Opinion
	I expect my Masters programme to:				
Develop talent and creativity in me					
Develop my leadership skills					
Enhance my communication skills					
Develop decision making skills					
Enhance my interpersonal skills					
Provide specialized training and instruction					
Provide real life learning experiences					
Develop opportunities for promotion and/or career development					
Give me access to better employment					
Enhance my achievement at work					

From the statements shown above, please choose the one that you think is the most/least important in terms of your expectations of the Masters Programme and explain why.

important Why?
Why?
Why?
vvriy?
The least
important
Why?
····y·

Thank you for your co-operation

<u>Appendix 6 – Focus Group Letter</u>

Request for research help

I am currently undertaking research for a Doctorate in Education and am working towards a thesis which discusses the expectations of both students and course leaders on Masters programmes at The University of Huddersfield but particularly in The Business School.

The purpose of the study is to identify differences in expectations between course leaders and students on Masters programmes. It is hoped that the results will contribute to the development of strategies at school and university level to reduce the expectations gap, improve the service provided to students, and increase the competitiveness of the university in the taught postgraduate market in the future.

I am looking for a sample of postgraduate students who enrolled in September 2012 to take part in a focus group meeting during November. This would involve a small group discussion of approximately one hour, where I will ask questions about your expectations and motivations for enrolling on your Masters programme.

Anything that you say during the meetings will be kept confidential and anonymous, and if you volunteer to take part, you are able to withdraw from the research at any time.

If you would be willing to take part in one of the focus groups then please send an e mail to k.l.smith@hud.ac.uk by Monday 5th November 2012 giving two dates and times from the ones shown below that would be most convenient for you.

I will then confirm the date, time and room number to you as soon as possible.

Your help with this research would be greatly appreciated.

Focus Groups

- 1. Friday 9th November 10.15 11.15
- 2. Friday 9th November 13.15 14.15
- 3. Monday 12th November 10.15 11.15
- 4. Monday 12th November 14.15 15.15
- 5. Wednesday 14th November 10.15 11.15
- 6. Monday 19th November 14.15 15.15

<u>Appendix 7 – Focus Group Interview Schedule</u>

Focus Groups - October 2012

Interview Schedule

Welcome

Explain to students that I will read out the welcome and instructions so that all focus groups follow the same procedure. Help to ensure consistency between groups.

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this focus group. I am currently undertaking a Doctorate in Education and am working towards a thesis discussing the expectations of both students and course leaders on Masters programmes at the university. The purpose of the study is to identify differences in expectations between staff and students on Masters programmes. It is hoped that the results will contribute to the development of strategies at school and university level to reduce the expectations gap, improve the service provided to students, and increase the competitiveness of the university in the taught postgraduate market in the future.

I am going to ask you some questions about your expectations and motivations for enrolling on your Masters programme. I hope these questions will stimulate discussion between you. I will not be contributing to the discussion, but I am here to moderate the session by keeping track of time, ensuring that each of you is able to contribute to the discussion, and making sure that all of the issues in which I am interested are discussed. I will contribute to the discussion as little as possible.

I am also going to record the discussion, so please speak clearly. All discussion will be anonymous and no individuals will be identified in the research.

Overview of the Topic

The aim of this part of the study is to identify whether there is any relationship between the background of students studying on taught Masters programmes and their expectations of the outcome of the programme. The difference in backgrounds may include nationality, learning culture, age, previous education level, work experience and mode of study.

The purpose of the discussion today is to collect information about your expectations of a Masters programme in the UK before you enrolled. Expectations will be defined as the skills a Masters programme will equip you with, and where it may lead you in the future. It is your expectations of how a Masters degree will help you in the future rather than your expectations of teaching and assessment style that this piece of research is most interested in.

Ground rules of the focus group - assurance of confidentiality

- The discussion will be recorded (audio only), so please speak clearly.
- All comments that are made during the discussion will be kept completely confidential, will
 only be used for the purpose of this research, and no individuals will be named.
- Exactly the same questions will be asked at all the focus groups.
- Flash cards showing each question will be used to help to ensure that you understand the question, and to remind you of the focus of the current discussion.
- I will give you the opportunity to think about each question before the discussion begins.
- A round robin technique will be used to ensure that you all have the opportunity to speak. I shall ask each person in turn to respond to the same question. When you have all given an answer you are all invited to give any further comments if you wish.

The questions – all questions link to two research objectives:

- What are student expectations from a Masters programme?
- Is there a relationship between background and expectations from a Masters programme?
- 1) How did you find out what a Masters degree in the UK involved? How much time did you spend researching and investigating?

Links to literature about expectations – How do customers with little or no prior experience of a product/service realistically form expectations?

When comparing expectations with findings from staff – could it be that students have unrealistic expectations due to lack of research/lack of relevant information available. How can the School/University improve information to students in the future to try to ensure that expectations are more realistic?

2) What motivated you to study for a Masters degree in the UK?

Links to literature about student motivation, and that students' need to identify precisely what their motives for study are (Martin, 1993). Also (Lightfoot 2012) students need to think hard about their reasons for undertaking postgraduate study and how it will help their future careers.

(Donaldson and McNicholas 2010) researching the factors that motivate students helps to define the universities messages to potential students.

Is there a link between motivation and expectations?

3) What type of skills (not subject specific skills) do you expect to gain from studying on a Masters degree?

Links to literature about expectations – (Donaldson and McNicholas, 2010) Students may have no prior experience of Higher Education but very high expectations of what it is going to provide for them.

Directly links in to research question regarding expectations.

4) How do you think studying a Masters degree will help you in developing your career in the future?

Links to literature about expectations - Students will have formed expectations about the benefits that the qualification will bring them in the future (Donaldson and McNicholas, 2010).

Directly links in to research question regarding expectations.

Obtainment of background information

Ask each student to complete an anonymous form that asks them for the following information; nationality, age, gender, mode of study (full or part time), previous qualifications, current programme of study.

Focus groups will need to be organised according to gender, age, nationality, and mode of study in order that the differences in expectations can be identified in the research.

Appendix 8 - Focus Group Questions

	Posson	
<u>Question</u>	<u>Reason</u>	
How did you find out what a Masters degree in the UK involved? How much time did you spend researching and investigating?	This relates to the literature regarding consumer expectations, and how do customers with little or no prior experience of a product or service realistically form expectations? The information gained from the question will be useful when comparing student expectations with the perceptions of expectations from staff.	
What motivated you to study for a Masters degree in the UK?	This will be important for answering the research question about student expectations. It also relates to the literature regarding student motivation, and that students' need to identify precisely what their motives for study are (Martin,T 2003). Also, (Lightfoot,L 2012) suggested that students need to think hard about their reasons for undertaking postgraduate study and how it will help their future careers. In addition (Donaldson and McNicholas, 2010) said that researching the factors that motivate students helps to define the universities messages to potential students.	
What type of skills (not subject specific) do you expect to gain from studying on a Masters degree?	This again will be important for answering the research question about student expectations. However, it also relates to the (Donaldson and McNicholas, 2010) suggestion that students may have no prior experience of higher education but very high expectations of what it is going to provide for them.	
4) How do you think studying for a Masters degree will help you in developing your career in the future?	This relates to the literature regarding how students will have formed expectations about the benefits that the qualification will bring them in the future (Donaldson and McNicholas, 2010). Again, it will provide useful insight for answering the research question about student expectations.	

<u>Appendix 9 – Focus Group Content Analysis</u>

Focus Group Content Analysis

Focus group 1 Focus group 2 Focus Group 3

Time spent on research	3 months
	5 months
	5 months
	1 month
	Couple of weeks
	"Don't have too much time to research master degree in UK"
	"To be honest I did little research". It's not very expensive and I can afford it".
	"I don't have much time to research master degree in UK"
Did you know what a Masters would involve? /	No, not until I enrolled
Where did you collect information from?	
	"I know you can just take one year, so I took this degree"
	"It just higher level to education – get some knowledge and skill"
	"I have to change my plans, I want to go to Australia, but tuition fees less in the UK" It takes 2 years in Australia but one year in UK".
	"Study in the UK only 1 year, so I choose here"
	"I actually know somebody who'd completed an MBA, I asked them for their experience".
	Website of the university
	"Search online"
	Friends – done the course before

	Teacher
	Agent
	Internet forum
Motivations/Expectations - Themes	
Employment	"give me an advantage or an edge in
	the market place for jobs"
	"My main motivation was employment"
	"Make me more attractive to a wider audience"
	"Taking charge of my own destiny rather than just letting things happen"
	"Help me have more choice in my career"
	"Promotion"
	"Get a job more easily than before"
	"Future career prospects – higher level salaries"
	"I can get to a senior position in organisation"
	"Get more knowledge and skills in the future for better career"
	"It will give a clearer direction of the future career, of what job and what position I might want to go in".
	"Find better job"
	"Want promotion"
Transferable Skills	"I find it difficult to have transferable skills"
	"Learn many other skills"
	"Not only the specific knowledge but also other skills"
	"It's a way of thinking rather than

	specifically training you for a job".
	"Masters provides me with the best skills for me to use in the future, lifelong skills"
Which Skills?	
Independence	"I learn to depend on myself"
	"How to suffer from loneliness"
	"Independent skills"
	"Think independently"
Confidence	"More confident"
	"More confident to work anywhere"
	"Improve my social ability"
	"Socialising skills" – different people
	from different backgrounds
Time Management	"How to make our time useful"
	"Time manager – class is not so much, we have a lot of time to wait".
	"Masters course don't have too much classes so we have many time"
Leadership	"Leadership skills"
	"The ability to look at a problem"
Communication/Group work	"Share some different ideas with other people"
	"How to manage relationships"
	"How to communicate with my client"
Stress Management	"Big stress on myself"
Country	"Different experience in a different country"
	"Learn about a different subject in a different country"
	"It's the language because I like English language, because an

	international language".
	"Study in a different country"
	"Open my mind and make friends from different cultures"
	"Experience of studying in another country"
	"We can do our English, it's very important"
	"The education system in England is quite strong"
	"It's more quality than the master's in our country"
	"Take some time travelling"
	"Speak to people from other countries"
	"I think sometimes it doesn't matter what you have learnt, what matters is that you have been to UK to learn"
Future Studies	"Basic knowledge for my future studies"
	"Learn other subject"
	"Research skills"
	"Helping me through to my Phd"
	"I want to know more about my knowledge – know why to do it, not just how to do it".
	"Understanding more useful information from the literature".
	"Better research"
	"Better knowledge - channel good ideas"
	"Learn something new" Get more knowledge

Appendix 10 – Course Leader Interview Schedule

Course Leader Interview Schedule

- 1) How important do you think it is to know what the expectations of your students are?
- 2) How do you find out what student expectations are?
- 3) Why do you think students enrol to study on a postgraduate taught programme? What do they expect to gain by studying at this level?
- 4) How/where do you think these expectations have developed? How realistic do you think their expectations are?
- 5) What do you expect students to be able to do by the time they graduate? Which of these (skills) are most important and why?
- 6) Where have your thoughts/feelings on students expectations developed from? Who/What has influenced your thoughts?
- 7) Do you believe that the QAA quality framework (benchmark statements etc) and your own programme and module specifications currently meet the expectations of your students? Why/Why not?
- 8) Have you at any time adapted your programme/teaching away from these specifications in order to try and meet the expectations of students more closely? How important do you think it is to work closely to these specifications?

<u>Appendix 11 – Course Leader Questions compared to Research Questions</u>

Course Leader Interview Questions

Question	Research Question	Literature		
How important do you think it is to know what the expectations of your students are?	Question 2: What are the staff perceptions of student expectations for studying on a taught postgraduate programme?	Parasuraman et al (1991) "understanding customer expectations will achieve business goals"		
		Zeithaml et al (1990) Need to know the expectations of customers.		
Do you find out what your students expectations are? How? When? Do you think their	Question 2: What are staff perceptions of student expectations for studying on a postgraduate taught	Parasuraman et al (1991) as above		
expectations change as the programme develops? Why?	programme?	Higgs et al (2005) Expectations change as experience accrues.		
		Hill (1995) Service Quality		
3. Why do you think students enrol to study on a postgraduate taught programme? What do they expect to gain by studying at this level?	Question 2: What are staff perceptions of student expectations for studying on a taught postgraduate programme?	Parasuraman et al (1985) Gap 1 – customer expectations and management perceptions.		
4. How/where do you think their expectations have developed? How realistic do you think their	Question 4: How are student expectations developed?	Higgs et al (2005) Novices forming expectations.		
expectations are?		Hill (1995) Perceived service quality		
		Licata (2008) factors that influence expecttions.		
What do you expect students to be able to do	Question 3: How do staff and student expectations	Parasuraman et al (1985) Gap 1 – customer		

by the time they graduate? Which of these (skills) are most important and why?	compare to the quality specifications?	expectations and management perceptions.
6. Where/how have your thoughts/feelings on student expectations developed from? Who/what has influenced your thoughts?	Question 2: What are staff perceptions of student expectations for studying on a taught postgraduate programme?	
7. Do you believe that the QAA quality framework and your own programme and module specifications currently meet the expectations of your students? Why/why not?	Question 3: How do staff and student expectations compare to the quality specifications?	Parasuraman et al (1985) gap 2 – Management perception and the service quality specification.
8. Have you at any time adapted your programme/teaching away from these specifications in order to try and meet the expectations of your students more closely? How important do you think it is to work closely to these specifications?	Question 3: How do staff and student expectations compare to the quality specifications?	Parasuraman et al (1985) gap 3 Service quality specifications and the service actually delivered. Luk and Layton (2002) customer satisfaction. Discrepancies between prior expectations and actual performance.
		Arambewela (2005) student satisfaction

<u>Appendix 12 – Course Leader Content Analysis</u>

Staff Interviews Content Analysis

Black = Interview 1 Red = Interview 3 Purple = Interview 5

Blue = Interview 2 Green = Interview 4 Yellow = Interview 6

Importance

really important because how else can we meet their expectations if we don't know what they are and how can we help them understand whether or not their expectations are realistic asked them why they are here

I think it is very important, I think it's difficult to do, but I think it is very important for us to......to know or at least to have thought it through

Incredibly important to know what the expectations of the students are. If we don't know what the students expect then we could interpret what happens incorrectly. I don't think enough attention is paid to it

it's important for marketing courses, for getting students on courses, it's important for keeping students on courses

in all the years of been teaching I have never asked what their expectations or thought about it so I suppose if I'm being honest I don't really think it's important

I've never really sat down and thought what do they expect to get out of it

I have only ever really thought of it in the context of what do they expect while they are here

Well the expectations of the students at the start of the programme are absolutely essential, there expectations as well as our expectations of them so I think a two-way process

important to some degree, it's important to some degree because it makes a difference in some ways as how you position the course and how you pitch a course

the extent more to the point of what you know is probably fairly small

Development of Expectations

I think a lot of their expectations may be based upon their previous experience of education

we have no way of knowing what is motivating that individual student to actually come on that course other than what the marketing materials are parental pressure

induction periods are incredibly important

learn what they are expecting from you and if their perceptions are wrong then you can sort of inform them and stop any gap we need to tell students what our course is and what they can achieve and what they need to get out of it

peer group

parents

agents - I think that is harming the expectations because I think they are promising the students things that are not part of our role as Masters educators

induction

students with different expectations within that same class

There is lot of chunter about "yes we know what the students want", but we don't know what students want and what is my suspect is that students don't know what they want.

Are expectations realistic

No, not always, I think sometimes they are totally ill informed

I think the students want more than QAA is perhaps telling us to deliver

interview - what they want to get out of it

At induction we usually do some activities that involve them talking to each other about what they wanted to get out the course

fairly realistic

expect an awful lot more from doing the course than they realistically can get from the amount of effort they put in

criticise us - when in fact it is their perception that is perhaps incorrect

we have to market what we are actually delivering

overseas students do not know what to expect

international students might have very different views to UK students

loads of those Chinese students are going back to China and they haven't got jobs yet, they are going to be going back and they are going to be looking for a job and whether actually having that British Masters will help them get a job I don't know, and you know it might be that it doesn't make a huge difference and they are being unrealistic about their expectations

I don't think they know what they want

expectations aren't always the same as what ours are

always that expectation that they want something that we are not able to give them

How realistic, I think their expectations aren't, it depends on each student of

	course				
	expectations are driven by family				
	students didn't have quite enough humility				
	that they have expectations of the Masters qualification and they going to go on and rule the world and of course and the extent to which they are going to do that is actually very limited				
Are students customers	it's difficult to see a student has a customer because you are not really a customer because I don't always think that customers are informed, I don't always think students are informed				
Knowledge	acknowledge that gap between knowledge that they have and knowledge that they should have				
	want a qualification				
Employment	advancement in their particular career				
	professional qualification -for somebody to help them realise that they can actually do the job they are currently doing				
	I think students just want to be better at doing their job				
	UK student I think they are expecting something that will give them a distinguisher in the employment market or enhance their subject area				
	think that will give them a really fantastic career				
	I would have thought that most students who come on a Master's programme usually would be looking to get a qualification which could further their career prospects				
	getting a job or a better job or promotion back home because there is still a view that studying in the UK and getting a UK qualification is a very good qualification and therefore they probably would improve their career prospects at home				
	career development				
	career enhancement				
	academic life and those who want a job -we probably deliver towards the former, actually I suspect the expectations are more towards the latter				
	putting themselves in a better position of getting a job				
	Chinese market the job situation is extremely competitive				
Transferable skills	some are expecting just to come here and study in the UK just to develop better English language skills				

it's not really about increasing your English language skills, you need that level of skill in the first place

students want to get something that is a vehicle for them to be able to use it in their everyday life

Adaptability to meet expectations

I would adapt it to the needs of the students

I am mindful of what I'm supposed to do although I can't tell you verbatim what the regs say in terms of QAA but, I think I would bend more with the students really, in terms of I would explore what their expectations were and if they were realistic

we do have to be able to demonstrate that we are working to the specs and generally speaking the specs are written so generic way that you can do that whilst at the same time adapting sufficiently to meet the needs of particular groups of students

I'm not convinced any of them are set up with expectations of students in mind, I mean certainly, when we set programs up, we set programs are based on what we think we can deliver with the staff that we have got and as you know that often means borrowing modules already exist, because if that already exists

so I don't think the student expectations are key in that at all, and I don't think we ever ask students what their expectations are of what they want

I don't think you could change a master's program to meet the expectations of students

cannot meet all of their expectations at the same time

British Masters programme that should meet certain standards set and requirements and, you know, what students expect might not meet those requirements

I am not saying that we should just ignore what students want and expect what they want out of it but the students are not always the best judge of what will give them that

I think there are issues about clarity and understanding what they want

is it needed, not really even sure that it is

does it matter, maybe, maybe not in a way the systems worked imperfectly but it's worked for many many years we have a long tradition of this and they do seem to be some sort of positive outcomes from it for some of the students

Appendix 13 – Letter to Dean showing Key Findings

Dear

I am currently in the final stages of completing research and writing up my EdD qualification. I have been investigating the student expectations of the outcome of a postgraduate taught qualification in the Business School and the University. I hope that the findings of this study will have important implications for improving our competitiveness in recruiting postgraduate taught students in the future.

My research objectives are as follows:

- To provide a greater understanding of postgraduate taught students expectations of outcome
- Identify any differences in the expectations of students and the perception of those expectations by the course leaders influencing the development of the programmes.
- Identify the implications of any differences for the future strategy of postgraduate taught programmes at the university.

I have key findings for the first two research objectives and am now considering the implications of these findings for the Business School and the University. I am writing to ask if you could spend 30 minutes for a short interview with regard to these implications.

Key Findings

- Postgraduate taught students spend little time investigating universities and programmes before enrolment.
- The main influencers for students enrolling on to a programme are parents, friends, employers and educational establishments. The university website and prospectus has little influence.
- The key expectations that students expect to gain from studying on a postgraduate taught programme are the development of transferable skills, particularly, talent, communication and decision making skills.
- Student expectations are influenced by background characteristics. The study considered nationality, age, gender and programme of study. Differences in expectations were found for all these characteristics.
- Some conflict of opinion between course leaders as to whether a knowledge of student expectations is important or not.
- A significant proportion of course leaders felt that resource availability and staff expertise
 were more important in programme development than student expectations. This conflicts
 with the guidelines provided by the QAA.
- Staff perceptions of student expectations were that access to better employment, developing opportunities for promotion and career development and enhancing achievement at work were the most important expectations for the outcome of a postgraduate taught programme.
- Overall, the key difference is that transferable skills are seen to be a much more important expectation of the outcome of the programme than is perceived by staff.

Based on these key findings the areas I would like to discuss with you regarding the implications are:

1. Marketing of postgraduate taught programmes

- What is the current postgraduate marketing strategy in terms of the techniques used for recruiting mew students?
- How do you think this strategy could be changed in the future if the findings of this study were to be taken in to consideration ie the importance of influencers other than prospectus and website.
- How important is current student satisfaction in the marketing strategy/successful recruitment of future intakes of students?

2. Implications about knowledge of staff expectations

- Findings suggest that course leaders have little knowledge of student expectations.
 How can we collect information on student expectations more effectively, and regularly find out about their expectations in order to see if they are realistic and achievable?
- What can course leaders, the Business School, or the university do differently in order to have more influence on student expectations?
- How can/should student expectations be included in programme design and development?

3. Staff awareness

- There is a lack of staff awareness regarding the need for knowledge of student expectations and the development of transferable skills in the QAA guidelines. Is staff development needed to raise awareness and how should this be conducted?
- Are QAA guidelines/requirements included as part of the induction process for new members of academic staff?
- Do we need to raise awareness of the importance of student expectations? How?
 Why?
- Do current systems/procedures/QAA requirements and other regulations (eg CMA)
 make it more difficult to adapt programmes to meet the changing student
 expectations? What could be done differently?
- What could be done to raise awareness of the importance of transferable skills for postgraduate taught students?
- What strategies could be used to develop transferable skills on a university or Business School scale for postgraduate taught students to help to ensure that these expectations are achieved?

<u>Appendix 14 – Dean Interview Schedule</u>

- 1) What is the current postgraduate marketing strategy in terms of the techniques used for recruiting mew students?
- 2) How do you think this strategy could be changed in the future if the findings of this study were to be taken in to consideration ie the importance of influencers other than prospectus and website.
- 3) How important is current student satisfaction in the marketing strategy/successful recruitment of future intakes of students?
- 4) What can course leaders, the Business School, or the university do differently in order to have more influence on student expectations?
- 5) How can/should student expectations be included in programme design and development?
- 6) Do we need to raise awareness of the importance of student expectations? How? Why?
- 7) Do current systems/procedures/QAA requirements and other regulations (eg CMA) make it more difficult to adapt programmes to meet the changing student expectations? What could be done differently?
- 8) What could be done to raise awareness of the importance of transferable skills for postgraduate taught students?
- 9) What strategies could be used to develop transferable skills on a university or Business School scale for postgraduate taught students to help to ensure that these expectations are achieved?

<u>Appendix 15 – Thesis Bootcamp Application Form</u>

Graduate School

Thesis Boot Camp 2015

Friday 8 May to Sunday 10 May
The Researcher Hub, University of Huddersfield

APPLICATION FORM

To be completed by the applicant and then submitted via **both** formats as follows. Please note, if you do not complete **both** steps we cannot guarantee that your application will be considered:

- 1. Email an *unsigned* copy of the completed Application Form in **MS Word** format to: pgrskills@hud.ac.uk
- 2. Email a *signed* copy as a scanned PDF document to the same address (if you do not have access to a scanner you may submit signed hard copy via mail or in person to The Research Environment Team, The Researcher Hub, 1/09a).

CLOSING DATE - 13th of April ***No Late Applications Accepted***

Applicants will be notified of the outcome to their application during the week of 20th April 2015

Applicant Details Kay Title First Name Last Name Mrs Smith Preferred name to appear on name tag (if different to above) F-mail Telephone 01484 472689 (work) k.l.smith@hud.ac.uk Do you have any dietary Full or requirements? Please FdD Part-time Degree (PhD, MPhil etc) p/t None Specify. (p/t) School Education Department How many words of If applicable to your your thesis have you 15,000 words approximately. Introduction /Literature review thesis, have you x Yes □ No already drafted? How collected all your data? many chapters does this constitute? (approx.) When do you expect to When did you September 2016 (Deadline) submit your thesis? commence your September 2009 (month/year) degree? (month/year) Applicant Research Profile Humanities & Social Sciences **Creative & Performing Arts** Check any/all of the Science, Engineering & Technology following that apply Medical, Dental & Health Sciences to your research x Interdisciplinary List the disciplines: Business and Education Cross-faculty List the faculties: History & Philosophy of Science and Human Computer Interaction.....

Please provide a description of your Research Area/Interests as relevant to your thesis (max. 150 words). *Please note that this description will be shared with other Thesis Boot Camp participants.*

Study Title: The expectations of postgraduate taught students in the Business School.					
A study that examines the relationship between the background of students and their expectations of the outcome of the programme in the context of taught postgraduate study in the Business School. A customer service gap model will also be used to compare these expectations with the perceptions of Course Leaders and with the quality specifications.					
There is literature regarding expectations and students, however, a lot of the research is concentrated around undergraduate students. Any postgraduate research tends to concentrate on expectations around teaching, learning and assessment rather than the outcomes of the programme. The focus on postgraduate students recognises the rapid growth in student numbers in this area, and its growing importance in university provision. However, there is also a growing diversity as students enroll from a variety of educational backgrounds, cultures, and age groups.					
Brief Statement: Why would you like to participate in Thesis Boot Camp? (max. 150 words)					
I have written the majority of my Introduction and Literature Review chapters. However, having recently completed my data collection, I am finding it difficult to know where to start in writing my Methodology and Findings chapter. The scale of the task ahead feels so large that it seems difficult to know where to start. I hope that the Boot Camp will give me support in terms of the structure of my workload and the motivation to keep going, so that I can make the best use of the summer months when my work load at the university gives me time to concentrate on this task. I am finding the writing up stage a very lonely experience. I hope that the Boot Camp will also give me the opportunity to talk to other students who are at a similar stage in the thesis/PhD cycle.					
What do you hope to achieve during Thesis Boot Camp? (max. 150 words). Please be specific. For example, you may wish to complete a draft of one or more results chapters. Bear in mind that chapters such as findings, results, discussions and conclusions are better suited to being written at Thesis Boot Camp than heavily referenced sections of your thesis such as the Literature Review.					
Having recently completed my data collection and analysis I would like to spend the time at the Boot Camp writing a major part of my findings chapter. If this could be achieved at the Boot Camp it would give me a significant boost to continue working over the summer and work towards my target of completing a first complete draft of my thesis by September 2015.					
Do you want assistance with your academic English? Yes x No					
Applicant Statement and Signature					

x I would like to participate in Thesis Boot Camp, which I acknowledge is an intensive and dedicated writing environment.								
x \square I agree to attend all sessions of the program (4-8:30pm Friday 8th, 10-8:00pm Saturday 9th, 10-8:00pm Sunday 10 th)								
x I agree to complete prescribed preparatory tasks in order to gain the most benefit from Thesis Boot Camp. I acknowledge that failing to complete preparatory tasks will result in the cancellation of my place at Thesis Boot Camp.								
Applicant Signatu	re	2		Date				
Academic Referee								
There are a maximum of 30 places available at Thesis Boot Camp. Your academic referee may be consulted if there are not enough places for all eligible applicants and a selection process is required.								
Please provide details of an academic referee at Huddersfield who can support your Thesis Boot Camp application. For example, this may be your supervisor or a senior colleague in the research team to which you belong, etc								
Referee Name	Wilma Teviotda	ale	Position		Department Incy and Finance			
Telephone	01484 472390		Email	w.w.tevio	otdale@hud.ac.uk			